

Diane Simpson at JTT

By Andrew Russeth | 11/26 11:21am



'Formal Wear,' 1998.
(Courtesy the artist and JTT)

Seeing Diane Simpson's 2010 sculpture *Vest (Scalloped)* for the first time, as a photo, I wasn't sure it was real. It looked like the pristine weirdness of some whiz-bang 22-year-old, who had perhaps sampled the variegated green-yellow-olive pattern of a late Ken Price sculpture in Photoshop and then digitally pasted it onto the long vest that is draped over the T-shaped seafoam stand. Incorrect. The work is very real (the pattern is linoleum paneling) and is on view now in her knockout one-person show at JTT, her first New York solo in 33 years.

Like Chicago's Harry Who and Imagist artists, who have also enjoyed long-overdue revivals in New York of late, Ms. Simpson, 78, takes everyday stuff on wild trips into abstract territory, by morphing shapes, tweaking colors and exaggerating angles. Clothing is her specialty. She starts with the outline of a baseball catcher's rugged bib and transforms it into what could be an elegant medieval crest, with richly quilted silver, once mounted on the wall. She finds a lady's formal shirt cuffs in a

Lucas Cranach the Elder painting and fashions them into tall, black polyester chambers, alien forms with cavernous openings hung on wide hangar. Think Rita McBride with a bit more ornamental verve, B. Wurtz with sturdier materials or a more nuanced Patrick Hill.

Two preparatory drawings on graph paper reveal that Ms. Simpson carefully plots her sculptures in perspective, so that, when we stand in front of them, they seem to be surreally receding into space, or compressed within it. They disorient and charm, with a subtle but enlivening equanimity. My only complaint is that there are only six sculptures here, from the past 20 years. We need a full-dress museum show. (*Through Dec. 15*)
