

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in February

Published Feb. 1, 2024 | Updated Feb. 21, 2024

This week in Newly Reviewed, Will Heinrich covers David Smith's feats of steel, Diane Simpson's complex cuts and Adrienne Rubenstein's colorful still-life paintings.

Diane Simpson

Through March 23. James Cohan, 48 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-714-9500, jamescohan.com



In these large-scale works, which are part of her current installation, Diane Simpson makes the pieces far too complex to take in at a glance. Credit...Diane Simpson, via James Cohan, New York and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago; Photo by Phoebe d'Heurle.

Diane Simpson was doing graduate work at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago when a professor suggested making her blueprint-like drawings three dimensional. She started cutting cardboard with a jigsaw in her dining room, slotting together intricate sculptures that pour down from the wall like airplane wings or rise from the floor like minarets. Being able to dismantle her work and pack it flat made it easier to transport to class for critiques; it also gave it a transfixing spatial ambiguity. The four small gray pieces in the front room of "Diane Simpson: 1977-1980" at James Cohan may lean too heavily in the direction of design. But in the four larger pieces in the back, all from 1978, Simpson's technique finds its perfection. They look like drawings come to life, or sculptures reduced to diagrams, or apparitions of some not quite comprehensible geometry of the future. They're simple — just plain brown cardboard, rubbed with gray crayon to reveal the rhythm of its subtle ridges, and held in place, where necessary, with a few discreet wooden dowels. But by repeating shapes, making long incisions parallel to the edges and, most of all, by cutting at a 45 degree angle so that all three layers of corrugation are consistently exposed, Simpson makes the pieces far too complex to take in at a glance. They allude to all sorts of household and industrial structures — dams, water towers, coffee makers, grain silos — but in the end, unmistakably, are nothing but themselves.