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The New York Times

Art in Review: Diane Simpson

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"Armor's undermining modesty" is a phrase by the poet Marianne Moore that could easily describe the work of the Chicago artist Diane Simpson who, at 78, is having her first New York solo in 33 years. Ms. Simpson's crisp, rigorous, body-scale sculptures conflate the design principles of architecture and apparel. They refer to — but do not distinguish between — art, historical monuments and Macy's. They make soft and hard, bulky and flat, interchangeable, even interdependent, conditions.

The six pieces in the show all appear to be based on wearable items that have had three-dimensionality steam-pressed out, but that still retain a sense of volume and, additionally, assume new functional identities. A brand new work, "Collar (Pagoda)," appears to be the enlarged version of a clerical collar spread open horizontally atop a slender stand. Constructed from painted aluminum, linoleum and rivets, it suggests a roof, a set of shoulder pads and an open book. A wall sculpture, "Bib"(Quilted)," which dates from 2006 and is made from vinyl, felt and thread, could be a) an umpire's padding; b) a cathedral floor plan; c) an X-ray shield; d) a priest's chasuble; or e) other. So it goes: an Amish bonnet is a Brünnhilde helmet upside-down; a black formal coat, a carapace.

Each piece begins with a meticulous drawing of its basic form in a sort of foreshortened perspective. This image is translated into sculpture with spectacularly unfussy care. Finally, each piece is equipped with a distinctive stand or wall mount. Walk into the gallery and you see clothes, buildings, armor and art changing places. "What is more precise than precision? Illusion," said Moore, as if having Ms. Simpson's work in mind.