

ARTFORUM

Diane Simpson

JTT

191 Chrystie St

November 13–January 15

Diane Simpson's sculptures are part translation, part fantasy, and pure pleasure. The octogenarian artist begins each work by creating isometric drawings on graph paper. She uses the drawings, with handwritten instructions for assembly, as blueprints for artworks with interlocking components. While they reference articles of clothing, the sculptures are constructed from hard angles, often in materials with an architectural heft. Simpson's efforts result in a sophisticated, homespun modernism that channels the Midwestern cosmopolitanism of her hometown, Chicago.

Her second show with this gallery showcases seven sculptures and two drawings from her "Samurai" series, 1981–83. This was only her second body of work after finishing her MFA in 1978, at age forty-three. Simpson took inspiration from a scene in Akira Kurosawa's film *Kagemusha* (1980), in which she observed the intricate folds of seated samurais' skirts. In her works, the skirt's function switches from modesty to protection; feminine concealment of the body becomes masculine containment. Her highly photogenic and life-size warriors, made from MDF and wood, project a squat, robotic, almost flat image of power. And yet the objects beg to be encountered in their rich dimensionality. Here, surprising details of their hardware-less construction emerge.

Samurai 9, 1983, references Art Deco architecture in its stepped peaks and frontal solidity, while its sides reveal elegant, sloping planes. Simpson also indulges her painterly sense of color. *Samurai 10*, 1983, and *Samurai 5*, 1982, nod to Agnes Martin with their delicate grids, both incised and drawn, in pale red, salmon, and white. *Samurai 6*, 1982, features a dramatic enamel gradient that goes from white to gray. Conceived more than thirty years ago, Simpson's work feels newly conversant with recent sculpture that refuses to pit structural concerns against beauty.



View of "Diane Simpson: Samurai," 2016–17.