

We often talk about an artist's 'body of work'. Diane Simpson's work literally forms a body. It is a body of folds and creases – not in a flowing, painterly sense, but a teasing out of the architecture of fashions and interiors. It is a body of angles, at once weightless and industrial, strong and light, masculine and feminine. Structure is draped, suspended, balanced, bent, tied down – it converses with itself, undoing and remaking its own substance and form.

Simpson calls upon a particular vocabulary in her first solo show for Herald St: *jabot*, *lambrequin*, *peplum*, *valance*, *pauldrons*. These are both title and source material – referencing a circular process that sews together the works' beginnings and ends. The artist begins with specific imagery of ceremonial and old-fashioned draperies; her fascination with peplums – originally a protective overskirt for men and women, now an ornamental frill – and window 'dressing' has developed over several groups of work over the last 10 years. 1920s and 1930s shop window displays are of particular interest for Simpson: there is a theatricality of balance, symmetry and geometry that resonates in her work. Her *Valances* here emerged after research into their use by window trimmers in the late 1920s as a framing device that undulates in swags and swathes across the top of displays. In America, these particular fabrics are called 'treatments', implying a behaviour of care towards the window. It would be easy to read onto Simpson's work a comment on flouncy economics or taste, but in reality, it is this formal treatment that interests her – what the drapery might do to the shape of a window, the detail of a building, or to the city's architecture. Her structures are necessarily abstracted from this source imagery in a gradual process of reshaping, from historical photograph to drawing to model to sculpture to exhibition. The titles are therefore neither descriptive nor prescriptive, but re-anchor the works to their source.

Ornamental valances, jabots, and overskirts like peplums and aprons often waver on the brink of function and frippery – compounded by Simpson in her use of hard and harsh materials like steel, tin, aluminium and processed construction materials LDF, plywood and foam board. These are less forgiving than traditional lace, jacquard and velvet; for Simpson, her materials can be 'cumbersome' and 'unruly' – all 'little angled pieces', all exact and intricate. The artist works alone without assistants, and each work requires a different manipulation of materials that can be new to her. The drawing stage is paramount, where many of the detailed decisions that go into the making of the sculpture are worked out. With a background in painting and drawing, and never having taken a sculpture class, Simpson speaks of being 'pushed into' three dimensions – not by any kind of over-zealous teacher at art school, but purely by the necessity of her drawings, which were forming objects that were 'wanting to jump off the page'. The precision of her sculptural works – the self-professed importance of angles and edges to their construction – is a result of these linear drawings.

The two freestanding pieces in the show, *Tethered (pink)* and *Jabot (pleated)*, feature industrial iron stands found by the artist in Chicago factories. Simpson's relationship to the city – where she was born, studied, has exhibited widely, and still lives and works – and its history of machinery manufacturing is marked in the way these works are rooted to their bases. *Tethered (pink)* was exceptional for the artist as the piece developed around this base, rather than from any other source imagery. This industrial element became essential, Simpson working upwards from it, binding and shackling the sculpture to its rungs.

Three pieces here are titled *Jabot*, referring to the ceremonial collars or bibs worn by judges, politicians, academics and clerics. The Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has a collection of jabots for every occasion; the Speaker of the UK House of Commons also dons one for formal ceremonies. A ruffled structure usually of lace or cambric, the jabot is largely symbolic and decorative, worn to flaunt tradition and authority. *Jabot* is also a term used in drapery – a particular kind of vertical pleat that forms a cascade or tail along the top of a window. An elongated triangular shape is shared by both neckpiece and drapery, and recurs throughout the pieces in this show. This crossover of definitions is what interests Simpson: both uses denote a flourish, purely ornamental, that adorns structure whilst also defining it. Simpson's drawing of space defines her structures – the angles composing the frills and flounces, form reshaped into architectural object.

Text by Phoebe Cripps