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James
Cohan



48 WALKER ST | FEB 15 – MAR 23, 2024

Diane Simpson: 1977-1980

James Cohan is pleased to present *Diane Simpson: 1977-1980*, a historic exhibition of the artist's foundational cardboard sculptures, on view from February 15 through March 23, 2024 at 48 Walker Street. This marks the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

For over four decades, Simpson has created rigorously constructed sculptures drawn from clothing, furniture, utilitarian objects, and architectural sources. Attentive to the formal qualities of these vernacular references, Simpson playfully alternates between two and three dimensional space by creating schematic drawings or plans of her various subjects and then, using the same tricks of pictorial illusion, translating them back into actual space. The results are curiously flattened three dimensional versions of familiar objects executed in a wide range of materials, from linoleum to perforated metal.

This exhibition celebrates Simpson's earliest sculptures, made in the late 1970s. This was a rich period of invention for the artist, exemplified by a significant shift in her practice from drawing and printmaking to sculpture – a generative leap from graphic to physical space. In the later part of her graduate studies, Simpson explored axonometric projection. In this visualization technique, a drawn shape is rotated axially away from the picture plane to reveal multiple sides of the object at once. This familiar method for depicting space dates as far back as ancient Chinese and Japanese scroll paintings, as in the 17th-century illustrations of *The Tale of Genji*, and later shows up in areas as diverse as Suprematist compositions and 19th-century architectural elevations.

Diane Simpson, *Dialogue*, 1978,
corrugated board, paper tape, crayon,
wood dowels, $73\frac{1}{2} \times 99 \times 36\frac{1}{2}$ in.,
 $186.7 \times 251.5 \times 92.7$ cm.

Simpson pushed this historical and painterly technique into new territory, seeking to “*make a duplicate in space of the object that I was drawing*” Using a jigsaw, Simpson cut corrugated cardboard at 45-degree angles to create interlocking constructions that could be easily assembled and disassembled. In liberating this pictorial illusion from its two-dimensional constraints, Simpson effectively places an idiosyncratic and imagined object within the real world, a curiosity that obfuscates any easy resolve. Simpson allows the viewer a rare opportunity to step into and walk around a drawing. Through minimal intervention, the artist pushes this experience further by exposing the corrugated interior of the cardboard by rubbing crayon and graphite on the flat exterior surfaces.

Her sculptures’ formidable, modernist presence and considerable scale lie in direct contrast to the physical characteristics of the medium: lightweight, familiar, and accessible. “*I love the idea that they suggest monuments, but they’re this ordinary material,*” says Simpson. Her visual references are similarly disparate, from a household meat grinder to the serial photography of Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose stark photographic documentation of industrial architecture spoke to an interplay between form and function, one closely mirrored in Simpson’s own close attention to everyday objects.

When circumnavigating these works, uncanny and seemingly impossible perspectives reveal themselves. The physical interaction of our bodies in relation to the sculptures enhances their rare and dynamic quality as drawings marked by volume and presence.

Diane Simpson (b. 1935, Joliet, IL) has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Nottingham Contemporary (2020), Wesleyan University (2020), MCA Chicago (2016), ICA Boston (2015), and the Chicago Cultural Center (2010), among others. Simpson has been featured in shows that include the Whitney Biennial (2019); *The Making of Husbands* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2019); *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950-2019* at The Whitney Museum, New York, NY (2019); *Objects Like Us* at The Aldrich, Redding, CT (2018); *Grey Matters* at the Wexner Art Center, Columbus, OH (2017); and *Unorthodox* at the Jewish Museum, New York, NY (2015), among others. Her artwork is in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Espoo, Finland; Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; ICA Boston, MA; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, FR; MCA Chicago, IL; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL, among others.

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