Diane Simpson

Window Dressing marks longtime Chicago artist Diane Simpson's first solo exhibition at the MCA. In the early 2000s, the artist encountered a little-known history, that of the pioneering window dressers of the early twentieth century. Vintage trade publications such as *Merchants Record and Show Window* (examples are on view in the display case) opened a portal into the Art Deco–influenced material culture that flourished in the 1920s, giving her the idea to create faux window designs for her sculpture. A 2007 commission from the Racine Art Museum, Wisconsin, allowed her to realize her idea. She selected existing works—such as *Pinafore* (1987), based on the apron-like garment once worn over girl's dresses—and fashioned new ones. She then designed and realized Art Deco–inspired backdrops for each. To visually connect the sculptures with their backdrops, Simpson crafted stands, platforms, hangers, and other display furniture.

Simpson has been making her distinctive sculptures since the late 1970s, drawing inspiration from garments and accessories characteristic of a variety of cultures and eras, including Shaker design, traditional Japanese architecture, the Wiener Werkstätte (an early twentieth-century, Vienna-based alliance of artists and designers), and the Arts and Crafts (roughly 1880–1910) movement. She renders in pencil drawings, playing with color, pattern, and texture. Templates for three-dimensional pieces result, in which the original forms are often flattened, schematized, or exaggerated. She then crafts the final work, the original form now abstracted but still recognizable as an apron, or a bowler hat, or collars.

Tear sheets and illustrations from various sources demonstrate the artist's creative process. In addition, sketches and working drawings for the *Window Dressing* tableaux are on view in the display table. Scale models of two of the tableaux give a further glimpse into Simpson's manner of working.

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This exhibition is organized by Lynne Warren, Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

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