

ART WEEK

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Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Untitled*, 1990, cedar and graphite, 27' x 57' x 3', at Capp Street Project, San Francisco.

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Ursula von Rydingsvard

*Through December 22 at Capp
Street Project, 270-14th St.,
San Francisco.*

New York-based Ursula von Rydingsvard is originally from Poland, but she spent her childhood in the refugee camps of World War II Germany. That her massive installation at Capp Street Project/AVT exudes a dark, brooding, introspective atmosphere of an eerie, enchanted forest should not, perhaps, be so surprising. Von Rydingsvard's installation consists of ninety-eight large cup-like cedar forms, laid out in a rectangle, site-specific to the Capp Street Project's converted auto-garage space. Sawed, carved and chiseled, these objects also are aligned with the floor plan of the site as it extends along a series of columns.

Perhaps the most apparent aspect of the piece is its quality of process—that is, its sheer physicality, and the obsessive character of its repetition—since it doesn't have an immediacy that lends itself to direct psychological involvement with the viewer. And yet, despite that, it does provoke an urge to interact physically. Each of the ninety-eight small cedar vessels—which suggest craters or cavities—are a perfect size in which to curl oneself up. And each possesses a rugged sensuality that is nevertheless smooth to the touch—the artist has rubbed graphite into the sculpted surfaces, producing a time-eroded quality.

But perhaps the best way to plunge into this installation is from the balcony, which encircles the floor. From an elevated perspective, the viewer is drawn into the meditative quietude of a severed and open world that exposes successive layers of primordial time, echoing from one hallowed vessel to the next. This initiates a hypnotic descent into the installation, a descent that is both personal and universal. But this requires a giving-up of ourselves and a cessation of the questioning process: then the work begins to speak the language of some darkened continent.

Although first associated with minimalism, von Rydingsvard found that style too cool and austere. And the piece at Capp Street Project does have an intensely human quality. This also marks the first occasion for San Francisco to view this sculptor's work.

—Frances Leventhal