

ART

Sculptures of Wood In a Wooden Setting

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

MOUNTAINVILLE

STORM KING is almost a medieval fantasy. An art center named for a mountain, it has a chateau that is a 1930's mansion with a touch of Hollywood and 400 beautifully landscaped acres. But instead of flocks, herds and peasants, the estate abounds in sculptures — most of them done after World War II.

The sculptures range from the 36-foot-tall Calder stabile that acts as a landmark at the center's entrance to a recent installation by Richard Serra that involves four long blades of Cor-Ten steel driven horizontally into a large hummock.

There are works by David Smith and Mark di Suvero, Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, Isamu Noguchi and Sol LeWitt and about 100 others.

The smallest items are the so-called dwellings left by Charles Simonds's "little people" on two of the chateau's window sills.

Among other things, Storm King demonstrates the world's acceptance of the Surrealist doctrine: how else could every sculpture, regardless of medium or design, seem so at home in such pastoral surroundings?

Still, the visiting show by Ursula von Rydingsvard enjoys a special rapport with the setting, partly because everything in it is made of wood. And because the wood is cedar, visitors can locate 13 pieces displayed in the building simply by following their noses.

Nowhere is the marriage between art and location more effective than in the upstairs gallery, with its rafter roof supported by substantial trusses and paneling reaching a third of the way down the wall. At that level, the wood facing meets a sculpture that is as wide as it is tall — almost 10 feet — and deserves a more dignified title than "Girlie Girl."

In this as in several other pieces, Ms. von Rydingsvard is something of an obsessive-compulsive, piling up 4-by-4-inch beams that are chipped and hacked at either end.

There are seven or eight of these laminated stacks, each presenting its own profile. But to itemize the parts is to get nowhere near the sum, which from one angle suggests a series of

amphoras and from another a densely packed chorus line, which may explain the title.

Another possible explanation for the successful blend between the work of Ms. von Rydingsvard and the mise en scene may be the way the sculpture evokes the tradition that produced Viking ships and stave churches in Scandinavia, Russia and other northern countries.

The artist was born in 1942 to a Ukrainian father and a Polish mother who were living on a farm in Germany. Later she lived with her family in refugee camps until 1950, the year they emigrated to the United States, settling in Plainfield, Conn.

Though the compression and repetition in Ms. von Rydingsvard's art has been attributed to her early collective life, it may also reflect Slavic folk art.

Then there are the allusions to Catholic ritual like "Confessor's Chair" and to Gothic architecture, as in "Zakopane." This 22-foot-long screen of verticals topped by a canopy of short diagonals and edged along the bottom by a series of carved pouches could easily be a metaphor for choir stalls.

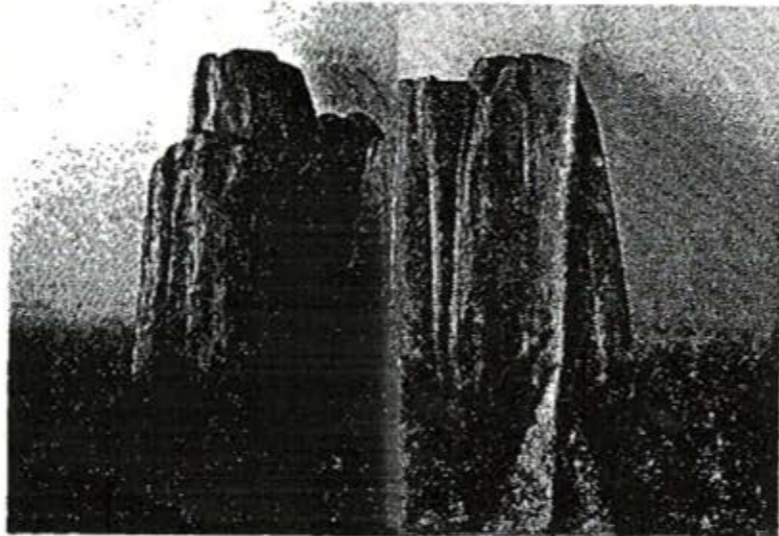
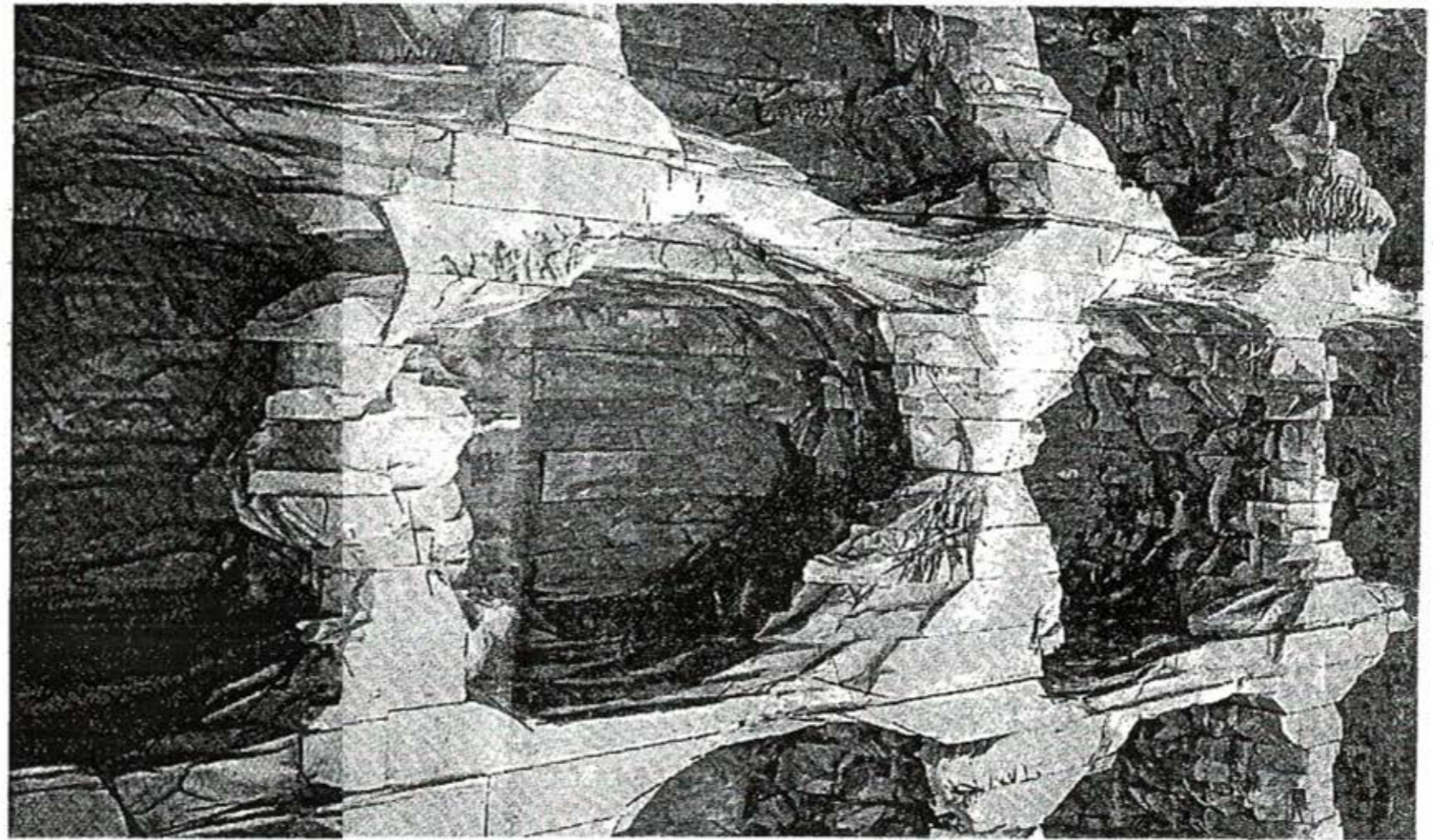
A pleasing touch that evokes 17th-century Dutch art is a carved bonnet shape sprouting a sheaf of dowels at the back. During my visit a little girl "modeled" this by standing with her head in the opening.

Earlier in her career, Ms. von Rydingsvard was a more conventional carver, producing works like the cluster of shields entitled "For Weston" and the four stretcherlike shapes gouged with the word "Urzulka" (presumably a diminutive of her own name).

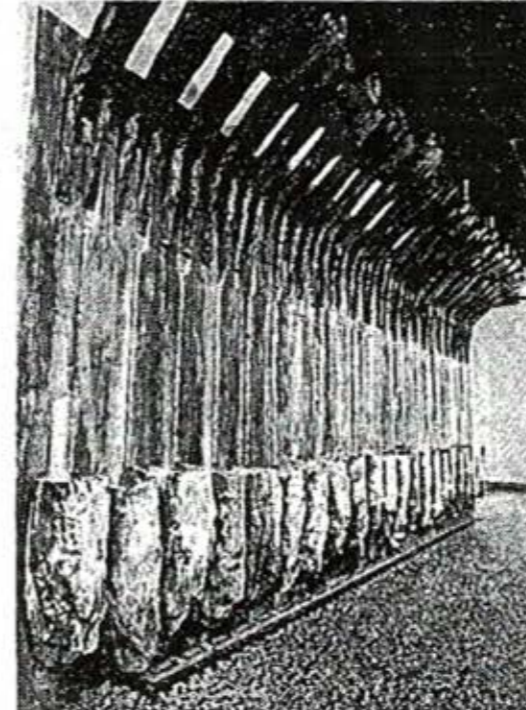
But the obsessive element seems always to have been present and in recent years has grown more pronounced.

The show's magnum opus, displayed outside, is "Ene Due Rabe," a plateau of woods 43 feet long, 17 feet wide and 2 feet high. It is composed of close to 100 laminated blocks, each gouged by an irregular hole. When viewed from above, the surface of "Ene Due Rabe," glistening with graphite, looks like a wet road with potholes.

Also outside is the 56-foot-long "Land Rollers," from which a boat might be launched, although the 17 cylinders incised with patterns appear to be fixed to ramps. Both of



Ursula von Rydingsvard



Cedar sculptures by Ursula von Rydingsvard include her recent "Ene Due Rabe," above, "For Weston" (1978), far left, and "Zakopane" (1987).

these giants are recent efforts.

Like most of her generation, Ms. von Rydingsvard is heir to Abstract Expressionism as well as Minimalism, but she seems temperamentally more attuned to the first of these movements and, unlike many of her contemporaries, shows not the slightest interest in Pop. Hers is labor-intensive art delivered with tremen-

ous conviction. Nevertheless, it is not hard to imagine her carving an environment that would eclipse the titled "Merzbau" produced by the great Dadaist, Kurt Schwitters. While it is ideally suited to the chateau and its grounds, this 14-year survey contradicts its neo-ness by suggesting that a true sense of history comes from within and is not

something to be acquired. Ms. von Rydingsvard is one of the most prominent sculptors at work today, but whether she knows it or not she brings with her a great deal of the

past. The show remains on view through Oct. 31. The number to call for driving directions is 534-3115; the number for other information is 534-3190.