

# Sculpture

November 1992

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## Ursula von Rydingsvard

### Storm King Art Center, Mountainville

Ursula von Rydingsvard's scored and chiseled wood sculptures have challenged the industrially fabricated look of Minimalism for more than a decade, but never has the artist found a better arena for staging her psychological dramas than the Storm King Art Center this past year. This was the first full-scale museum exhibition for von Rydingsvard, and her works were shown to their greatest advantage in the stately museum building and on the adjacent emerald lawns. Known primarily for indoor pieces of rough-hewn wood like those audaciously installed here, von Rydingsvard transformed the outdoor setting, building monumental pieces that became powerful presences in the landscape.

*Ene Dae Rabe* (1990) is a vast horizontal work stretching over the ground beneath the museum building. The work's holes and hollows echo agricultural labor: its troughs or graves bespeak the human struggle for survival. *Land Rollers* (1992), a group of wooden logs arranged horizontally, defines a sight line from the hilltop terrace to an *allée* of trees in the fields beyond. This work visually unifies her massive outdoor constructions with the broad vistas and rolling hills of the 400-acre sculpture park. *For Paul* (1990-92), more than 14 feet high, is redolent of the simple, hewn-beam architecture of medieval Europe and reminds us that von Rydingsvard was born in Nazi Germany of Polish émigré parents. She

spent most of her childhood in refugee camps, and the textures and colors of these places continue to inspire her art.

Inside the museum building were earlier works, including two impressive "walls," *Dreadful Sorry* (1987-88) and *Zakopane* (1987), which physically dominate the space. In their massiveness and their repetition of rough-cut forms, both constructions make reference to von Rydingsvard's large family and its interdependency as it endured many hardships. These clustered elements can also be viewed as images of kerchiefed women in prayer, sacks of grain in a stable or gravemarkers in a rustic cemetery.

Despite their monumental proportions, these works are built without drawings or models. Von Rydingsvard mentions the "organic" quality of her work, the "growth" of these forms. Yet they could not be more removed from wood in its natural state: she prefers to animate processed or "neutralized" cedar planks. Her outdoor works charge their natural surroundings, disturbing the idyllic setting with their suggestion of confinement and foreboding—their edgy presence.

—Joan Marter

Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Fire Cones*, 1990-92. Cedar and graphite, 98 x 108 x 60 in. Photo: Jerry L. Thompson, courtesy Storm King Art Center.

