

ARTFORUM

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URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD

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Like many of Ursula von Rydingsvard's exhibitions, this show paradoxically celebrated the monumentality of the everyday. Autobiographical in content, these new sculptures also reflect the artist's process-oriented mode of working: her engagement with the wood's physical qualities.

Iconographically, these works draw on the same sources as her earlier pieces: common handmade farm tools, domestic implements, the wooden architecture of peasants' dwellings and small country churches as mythical prototypes, and the emphatically "mechanical" concerns of Minimalism and post-Minimalism. They refer to both the tenacious memory of rural life in Poland and the Ukraine—her parents' homelands conceptualized through the filter of a childhood spent in a refugee camp in Germany during World War II (refreshed but not altered by the artist's recent visits to Poland)—and to her formative years as a sculptor in the early '70s.

That von Rydingsvard's artistic vocabulary is born of a dichotomy was evident in *Dla Genei* (For Gene), 1991-93, a solid and solemn wall-like structure made of doweled and glued four-by-

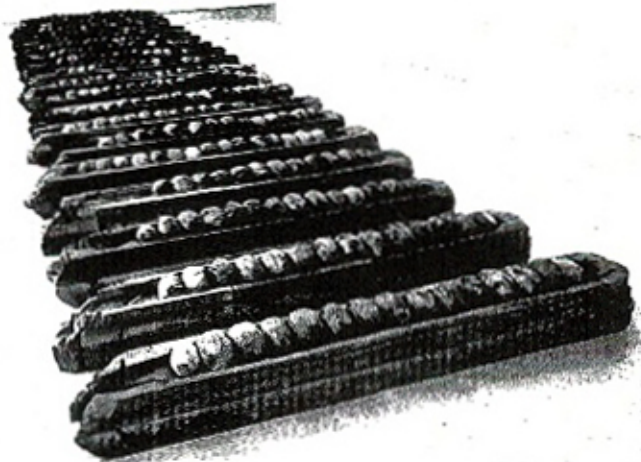
four-inch beams of lumber-yard cedar (approximately seven feet tall, five feet wide, and three feet deep). The work combines the neutrality of prefabricated elements with the unruliness of a dramatically hacked front, suggesting an ascetic altar decorated with an abstract, rhythmic relief.

The exhibition, however, consisted mainly of more visceral works, such as *Krasawica*, 1992-93, made of five linked, drapelike, monumental bowls with the buoyancy and fluidity of soft fabric and the solidity of a rock formation. Cryptic in character, their insides almost totally inaccessible due to their height, they seemed like a welcome place to hide. Also at work here was von Rydingsvard's particular use of cedar, which she chooses for its durability and lack of grain and knots, deliberately concealing its yellowish-red surface with layers of rubbed-in graphite.

In contrast to *Lipweave*, *Grzebyk III* and *Grzebyk IV* (Small comb, both 1993) were two "linear fantasies" that simultaneously convey the rigidity of a comb and the delicacy of hairs. Less convincing were five rectangular works called *Untitled*, 1993-94, and subtitled "drawing" with consecutive numbers. Four of these, marked with stripes of whitewash and heavily pronounced crudeness, looked like tablets and were pervaded by a "primitiveness" borrowed from African art that seems rather alien to the artist's sensibility.

One of the most arresting of von Rydingsvard's recent sculptures was a large floor piece, *Trilce*, 1994. Comprised of twenty elongated elements resembling halves of gigantic peas, its shell-like vessels notched with grooves made with a circular saw, it formed an extremely sensuous expressive field.

—Marek Bartelik



Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Stolen Vision*, 1993-94, cedar, 9" x 22' 3" x 6 1/2".