

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK

Ursula von Rydingsvard at Galerie Lelong

Using a deceptively limited vocabulary—chiseled cedar, a few traces of graphite—Ursula von Rydingsvard engages line, surface, mass and even motion, all at considerable scale, and all with well-practiced grace. *Hej-duk* is a broad stairway of roughly assembled beams, the risers a shade high and the treads a little narrow, like the daunting processional steps of Mayan pyramids. Rippling down the steps is a ribbonlike relief that suggests, subtly, the shadow of a phantom

incised pattern of sketchy cuts that seem to depict, repeatedly, a running horse, surmounted by a roughly wreath- or horseshoe-shaped relief—also thwart any simple reading. Its title helps associate *Lace Medallion* with decorative textiles, or even intimate apparel. On the other hand, *River Bowl* could hardly be more grand. A tall conical mass of carved cedar poised on its narrow end, it has the hauteur of a formal portrait, its subject drawn up to full height, head thrust high. The play of light and shadow across its constituent beam-ends, modulated by chiseling, creates a surface that is both rigidly gridded and maddeningly fluid. Together

rise, just slightly, and then immediately fall, with a shamelessly dramatic creak and thud. Ghoulish to the brink of comedy, *pod pacha* (which translates from Polish as “something you carry under your arm”) suggests some freshly excavated Babylonian temple. The piece is a risky undertaking for von Rydingsvard, whose stately work only rarely, and then rather mischievously, tempts melodrama. For instance, her first venture into kinetic sculpture, *Mama, your legs* (2001), was a massive, brooding, proto-industrial mortar-and-pestle machine that looked as if it made use of carousel mechanics. *Pod pacha*, like the other work shown here, partakes of some of the dark theater of Louise Nevelson’s assemblages, and also the kind of mythopoetic architectural design for which the late John Hejduk was best known. But it is, unmistakably, von Rydingsvard’s own: big, darkly sumptuous and ferociously embracing.

—Nancy Princenthal



Ursula von Rydingsvard: *pod pacha*, 2003, cedar, graphite, motor, 80 by 89 by 140 inches; at Galerie Lelong.

tower, or the track of a just-ascended supplicant. Positioned rather humbly in the corner at Lelong, the massive *Hej-duk* was first encountered in profile, where the ends of its constituent four-by-fours form a pixelated pattern of architecture in the making: monumental form just coming into focus.

Leaning side by side against the wall, the upright cedar planks that constitute *Lace Medallion* also move away from strict resolution. There is something provisional in the way they’re assembled, and the forms that take shape across their abutted surfaces—an

with *Lace Medallion* and *Hej-duk* (both 2003), *River Bowl* (2001-02) demonstrates just how versatile this medium has become for von Rydingsvard, who has worked with it since the mid-’70s and made it virtually her own.

The show-stealer, though, was *pod pacha* (2003), a rectangular mass formed by the convergence of some 15 cones, resting on their points, the entire group topped with a single ponderous rooflike lid. The weight and formality of this sculpture would command attention even if its lid weren’t continually pushed up from below by a motorized arm to