

UP NOW

Ursula von Rydingsvard

Madison Square Park
Through December 31, 2006
Galerie Lelong

The strength of Ursula von Rydingsvard's sculpture has always resided in the tension between its gruff, masculine grandeur and its feminine concern with the elements and implements of life, living, and death. Humble, functional objects (bonnets, cooking implements, vessels) are subsumed into abstract configurations that only loosely allude to specific subject matter, but those ambiguous associations are granted powerful heft by virtue of the sculptures' weight and construction. Everything symbolizes, everything initiates a narrative, everything boldly proclaims its contradictory nature: masculine/feminine, abstract/figurative, static/mobile.

Four sculptures (three of them from this year, the other from 2004), are in Madison Square Park, where they have ample space to demonstrate their relation to nature and urbanity. All reveal aspects of the way von Rydingsvard makes her own myths. In the cedar-and-graphite *Bowl with Fins* (2004), the connection with an aquatic animal implied in the title is only subtly apparent, but the sculpture, which alters shape depending on the angle from which it is perceived, implies the continual mutability of nature and elaborates on the inextricable link between the organic and the inorganic.

Among the new works are the gargantuan cedar monument *Czara z Babelkami*, covered with protruding knobs that play in rhythmic contrast to the sculpture's hacked surface. The rounded elements animate what would be a static construction. Similarly, *Ted's Desert Reigns*, composed of three boxy shapes of graduating size, suggests motion, with the tallest part looking like a ship's figurehead, or a chariot drawn by two horses. The hint of narrative action comes as a surprise.

More surprising is the installation's centerpiece, *Damski Czepek*, a bonnet cast in translucent resin with two long tendrils stretched out like umbilical



Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Damski Czepek*, 2006, polyurethane resin, installation view. Madison Square Park.

cords that might serve as seating for the mini-amphitheater that the shape of the hat also evokes. The material, which reflects and absorbs light and changes throughout the day, represents an interesting change of direction for the artist—an opening out and lightening up.

The works at Lelong were mostly familiar vessels—womb-like enclosures and other body-embracing structures, ranging from capacious bowls to the 13-foot-tall *Wall Pocket* (2003–4), with its hacked-out cavity, calling to mind a mythic birth-and/or resting place. Other

pieces included a pair of large plates trimmed with almost decorative carvings. It's an interesting effect, but one had to get used to it.

The name of the show, "Sylwetka," "silhouette" in Polish, goes to the heart of von Rydingsvard's work. The silhouette, a mere outline, defines the sculptures' space in the world, but requires the viewer to fill in the content.

Von Rydingsvard's ease and fluency with her powerful circular saw can easily be likened to Jackson Pollock's ability to throw paint and control spills. Unwieldy tools and materials are turned into finely crafted poetry. —Barbara A. MacAdam