

gothamist

Giant Bonnet in Madison Square Park

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With the unseasonably mild weather we've been having, it's a great week to check out the sculptures nestled in Madison Square Park's outdoor gallery before they are taken down after the holidays. The four large sculptures, created by internationally renowned Ursula von Rydingsvard, are abstract works primarily expanding upon her established vessel theme. Or, in less erudite terms, the odd-shaped wood and plastic-looking forms make for a really good excuse to take an extended lunch break in the name of Art.

Although the majority of the pieces—*Czara z Babelkami* (this one looks like a giant [Jenga](http://www.hasbro.com/default.cfm?page=ci_history_jenga) (http://www.hasbro.com/default.cfm?page=ci_history_jenga) game), *Ted's Desert Reigns*, and *Bowl with Fins*—are created out of cedar, Von Rydingsvard's apparent masterpiece is a twelve-to-fourteen-foot polyurethane-resin work entitled *Damski Czepek*. Abstract art tends to become more beautiful when you understand the deeper, hidden message the artist is trying to convey. In this case, *Damski Czepek* looks like a lady's bonnet, and that's what the Polish title translates into. The deeper meaning? The bonnet is a household object from the artist's childhood. The image [reportedly "haunted"](http://www.madisonsquarepark.org/whatsahead.asp) (<http://www.madisonsquarepark.org/whatsahead.asp>) her.

The idea that the bonnet image haunted her seems a bit odd till you learn that Ursula von Rydingsvard's parents fled Poland during World War II, and the German-born artist spent her childhood in refugee camps. The family later moved to Connecticut in 1950, and Von Rydingsvard now resides in New York. Her studio is in Williamsburg, and she is part of the [faculty at the School of Visual Arts](http://www.schoolofvisualarts.edu/index.jsp?page_id=313&FID=2337) (http://www.schoolofvisualarts.edu/index.jsp?page_id=313&FID=2337).

Friendly park squirrels aren't the only ones who love Von Rydingsvard's art: large corporations like Bloomberg and Microsoft have her work in their permanent collections, as do more than thirty museums. So next time you grab a bite at the [Shake Shack](http://www.shakeshacknyc.com) (<http://www.shakeshacknyc.com>), take a stroll through the park to see the sculpture.