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18 Questions for Sculptor Ursula von Rydingsvard

What project are you working on now? I am making new sculptures in the studio — some freestanding, others appended to the wall. I will be working on a permanent piece for an old stone quarry at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, England. Also, I will be installing the three additional venues of the traveling museum show that is currently at SculptureCenter.

What's your favorite place to see art? As there are too many places to see art, I will give some of my favorites for large scale art that can be experienced from the outside and inside: Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, Shirakawa-go in Japan (especially during a snowfall), and Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio? My brain



Photo by Jason Mandella

An installation view of "Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture 1991-2009" at SculptureCenter

What's the worst injury you've ever suffered making a sculpture?

The dents I have on my cheeks because of the rubber masks I wore for 27 years.

What's your favorite wood to work with and why? Cedar, as it is soft, sensuous, and has little grain.

Where are you finding ideas for your work these days? In bed, from images that go through my head right before I fall asleep.

Do you collect anything? I scour flea markets all over the world for cast iron teapots, fabrics, and objects — many from Japan and China — African masks and bowls, Kuba cloth hangings, Russian icons, and anything else that is a visual turn-on.

What's the last artwork you purchased? An 18th-century Japanese shovel with a beautifully arched stem that joins the elongated spade with the handle.



Courtesy Ursula von Rydingsvard
Artist Ursula von Rydingsvard

What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery? In the basement of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, I saw, on the inside door of a locker belonging to an art installer, a photograph of a man sitting on the top-most bleacher watching the Indianapolis 500 with a car tire flying about a foot away from his head. The installer told me later that this man was decapitated by the tire, which flew off a car during that race.

What's your art-world pet peeve? I've noticed, again in museum basements, one or fewer sculptures to every 1,000 or more paintings.

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant? M Wells diner in Long Island City... excellent food, reasonably priced, near PS1 and SculptureCenter

Do you have a gallery/museum-going routine? I spend a lot of time in the African wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the medieval sections of the many museums all over Europe and in the basements of many Polish and French museums where folk art, along with old farming and cooking implements, are exhibited.



Courtesy Wikimedia Commons
The ruins of Machu Picchu in Peru

What's the last great book you read? Rainer Maria Rilke's "Duino Elegies," which I have just finished reading for the 11th time, hoping to grasp more of its beauty.

What work of art do you wish you owned? Giotto's "The Lamentation" (1304-1306)

What would you do to get it? Due to the large scale of my sculpture, having spent a third of my life on scaffolding already, I suppose I could do more scaffolding time.

What international art destination do you most want to visit? Peru — Machu Picchu

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about? Charles Juhasz-Alvarado, who can make politically charged work that is also sexy and poetic.

What are your hobbies? Sleeping under the stars upstate, my Bernese Mountain Dog, sweeping my studio floor