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## 'Humanity' in Arena's New Sculpture

By JENNIFER MALONEY

After decades in the arts world, Ursula von Rydingsvard still thinks big.

Perched on scaffolding above a towering cedar sculpture in her Bushwick studio, she bobs up and down with a graphite pencil, marking lines on individual wooden beams before an assistant tosses them, ready for cutting, to a circular saw below.

It is a process she follows for all her large-scale sculptures, including a 20-foot-high work to be installed in September at the Barclays Center's entrance.



Ursula von Rydingsvard inspects a wax mold at the Polich Tallix foundry for her Barclays Center sculpture.

For an internationally recognized artist who has worked in Brooklyn for more than 30 years—she was among the early wave of artists who found space in Williamsburg in the 1970s—the Barclays Center commission holds special meaning. It will be her first outdoor sculpture in Brooklyn.

The sculpture, named "Ona," was constructed first in cedar and now is being cast in bronze at a foundry in upstate New York. The name means "she" or "her" in Polish, the artist's first language.

"There's going to be, I hope, a kind of humanity in it,"

Ms. von Rydingsvard, 70 years old, said.

The sculptor eschews sketches and renderings, so what the final product will look like remains somewhat of a mystery. Many of her works have roughly textured, puzzle-like surfaces. This sculpture, the artist said, will have a surface that undulates like waves chasing each other in the sea.



Ursula von Rydingsvard is creating her first outdoor work in Brooklyn, a bronze sculpture called "Ona" that will be installed in front of the Barclays Center. She works regularly on cedar sculptures at her Bushwick studio.

Descended from Polish peasant farmers, Ms. von Rydingsvard was born to Polish parents in Deensen, Germany, in 1942. She grew up in a series of postwar refugee camps for displaced Polish people—nine in all. Her work is as much about the labor as it is about the final product, said her dealer, Mary Sabbatino, vice president of Galerie Lelong.

"For her, labor is almost a kind of sanctification," Ms. Sabbatino said.

Ms. von Rydingsvard earned an MFA from Columbia University in 1975, and since then has been recognized with grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Guggenheim Fellowship and induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her sculptures

are included in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum, among others.

Her large-scale sculptures sell for between \$500,000 and \$1 million, depending on the materials and the time involved, Ms. Sabbatino said. She is best known for these large-scale works, built from cedar beams.

They typically start the same way: with a shape drawn in chalk on the floor. Working from an image or an idea in her head, the artist starts to build up from that shape, stacking cedar four-by-fours into an intricate structure like a fantastical set of Lincoln Logs.

The cedar is soft and malleable, shipped from a single mill in British Columbia that knows which trees she likes. As her colleagues stack the beams, she marks in pencil the curved edges that her studio assistant, Ruben Muñoz, will cut.

The circular saw is designed to cut wood in straight lines, not to navigate complex curves. So Mr. Muñoz must make many small cuts—"hundreds of nibbles," Ms. von Rydingsvard said.

Her vast studio feels like a friendly cedar mill, with fine sawdust hanging in the air and a resident cat lounging undisturbed on a forklift seat.

Mr. Muñoz said he is awed by the artist's physical stamina. "She is so strong, she is so powerful," he said. "Some days Ursula is so focused on working. The end of the day my back—I go straight to my bed."

The wooden structure, once complete, is disassembled and then painstakingly glued together. For this process, Ona required 3,000 pony clamps. Many of Ms. von Rydingsvard's works remain as cedar sculptures. But Ona is being cast in bronze.

At the Polich Tallix foundry in Rock Tavern, N.Y., fabricators have made molds of the cedar structure in ceramic and in sand bonded with resin. Now they are pouring silicon bronze, a durable alloy heated to about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, into the molds.

David Berliner, COO of Barclays Center developer Forest City Ratner, commissioned the work. He said he hopes the sculpture will be "iconic and exuberant and hopeful," signaling that the arena isn't just a sports venue but a cultural center. Other artworks commissioned by Barclays Center include murals by Brooklyn-based artists Mickalene Thomas and José Parlá.

Ms. von Rydingsvard's work, he said, has a strength and heroicism that should complement the Barclays Center's muscular architecture, and beckon people emerging from the subway at the corner of Atlantic and Flatbush avenues. The 10,000-pound sculpture will stand in front of the arena's main entrance under the so-called oculus, a circular opening in a roof that juts over the plaza. "It will be a meeting place," he said. "I'll meet you by the sculpture."