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Ursula von Rydingsvard Takes the Spotlight at Barclays Center

By Benjamin Sutton



Courtesy the Artist / Photo by Jeff Mermelstein

“She gets more voluptuous as she goes up,” Ursula von Rydingsvard said of her new commission for the plaza outside Brooklyn’s Barclays Center, “Ona,” which was lifted into place last week. “In Polish it means ‘her,’” she added, explaining the title. “I do really want the piece to be welcoming.”

Back in May, von Rydingsvard was overseeing the pouring of the 50 individually-cast bronze sections that eventually made up “Ona” at the Polich Tallix Fine Art Foundry north of New York City. For an artist who has been working with wood — cedar beams that are carved and sliced to create enormous, organic, and at times vaguely occult-looking sculptures — for decades, the alternate choice of bronze for her most high-profile public commission to date was a logical one.

“I wanted to make something stable and durable,” she explained. “I wanted to do something

smoother. It's more mellow, it's more conducive to bronze.”



Ursula von Rydingsvard — Courtesy the Artist / Photo by Jeff Mermelstein

Nevertheless, she began by making a full-scale cedar version of “Ona,” which, at 20 feet tall and, at its widest, over 10 feet across, was no small task.

“I don’t work from models; that’s like being in a jail, it’s no fun,” she said. “It took a lot to build the wooden version; when you get used to something you almost can’t believe it’s so complex. It’s so labor-intensive, it keeps me on track.”

The sculpture now stands outside the arena, between its main doors and the entrance to the Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center subway stop, nearer the Flatbush Avenue side of the bustling triangular plaza. In this techno-futurist setting, sitting beneath the arena’s circular outdoor screen, “Ona” seems ancient, though its notched and grooved surface of patina-coated bronze nicely compliments the stadium’s own carapace of rust-hued steel.

The 12,000-pound bronze is the Barclays Center’s latest contemporary art commission, marking the stadium’s first anniversary. It joins large-scale works by Mickalene Thomas and José Parla inside the arena. Like those, “Ona” is highly produced, yet it retains a ruggedness befitting its setting at the intersection of two highway-like avenues. Solemn and tree-like from certain angles, sharp and jagged like a comic book lightning bolt from others, it already commands a great deal of charisma.

“I want it to feel active,” she said. “I want it to feel charged.”

SLIDESHOW:

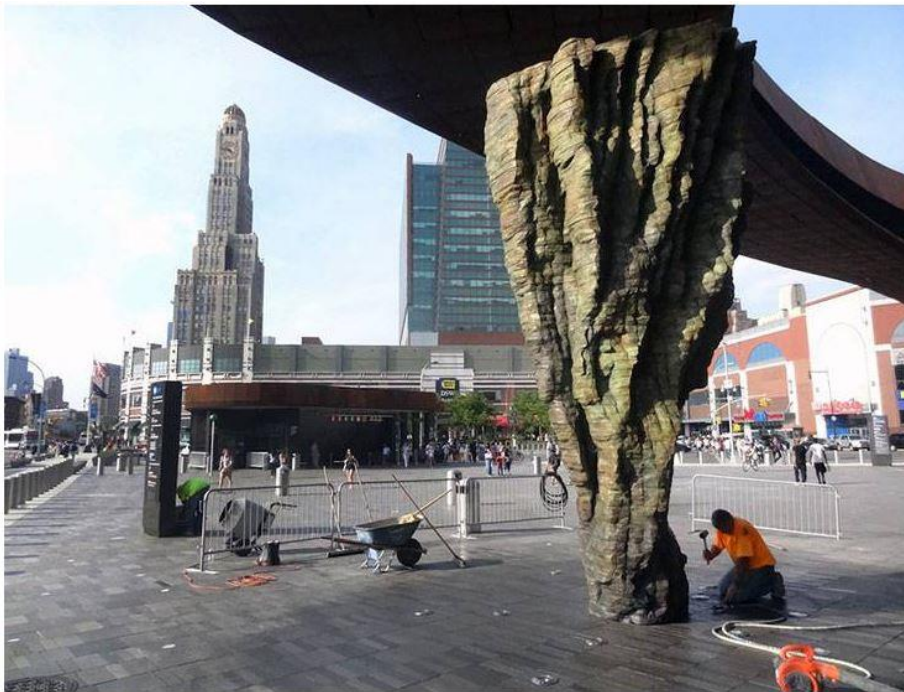


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