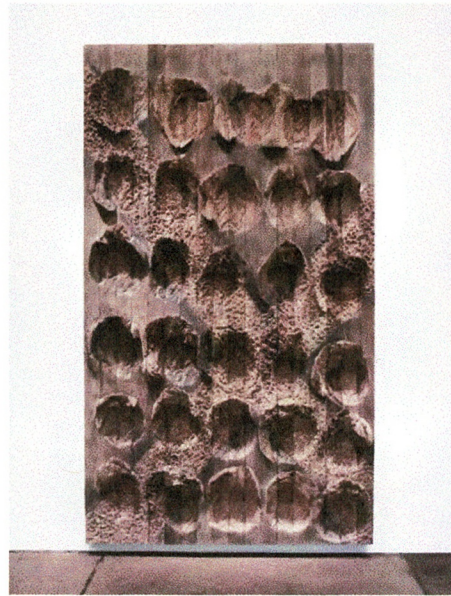


Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Ursula von Rydingsvard:
Quarter Moon Crazies, 2014, cedar and graphite, 108 by 59 by 7 inches; at Lelong.

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD

Lelong

Ursula von Rydingsvard has created sculptures out of cedarwood for the past 35 years. In a 2010 interview in the *Brooklyn Rail*, the artist (b. 1942) tied her longstanding use of wood to memories of the makeshift structures that her Ukrainian-Polish family inhabited while moving from one displaced-persons camp to the next across postwar Germany. For her recent exhibition at Lelong, however, von Rydingsvard employed a more heterogeneous mix of materials and methods, evincing a subtle loosening of her tightly ordered approach to art-making. Here, in addition to cedar sculptures, one found a cast-paper wall relief, a bronze sculpture and works on paper.

In *Quarter Moon Crazies* (2014), 18 cedar four-by-fours have been joined to produce a single panel. Six rows of bowl-like indentations are cut into the panel, and an off-kilter, chiseled “X,” serving as a kind of graphic element, spans the composition. Von Rydingsvard’s carving technique becomes almost painterly here, the panel—with its various incisions and protuberances—suggesting impastoed canvas. This work, as well as the cast-paper relief *Blood Geography* (2014), which resembles a Babylonian tablet or an animal hide, calls to mind Jason Middlebrook’s idiosyncratic sculptural paintings and Aaron Spangler’s carved basswood tableaux.

The surface character of von Rydingsvard’s sculptures is perhaps their most recognizable aspect. Although the pieces take various forms, evoking spoons, plates or pillars, they consistently have warm, weathered and knotty skins. *Rebirth* (2012) is a 12-foot-high primitive-looking spoon-type object (von Rydingsvard has

worked with variations on this form since the 1970s) whose entire surface is covered in feathery carvings accented with rubbed-in powdered graphite. The piece suggests a talismanic emblem to both utility and labor.

Standing 9 feet tall, the bronze *Bent Lace* (2014) appears as a tower of stacked irregular modules whose upper portion has disintegrated into lacelike patterning and curled over. One can peer into the cutouts of the lace and see the dark interior cavity. The sculpture’s surface resembles that of abalone shells (references to marine biology abound in this work), its faintly iridescent patina ranging from a pale oxidized green to dusty pink to gold.

In the side gallery were four works on paper and three sculptures. Each of the works on paper—made in collaboration with New York’s Dieu Donn  papermill, where the artist was in residence in 2010—features a mass of silk threads that were laid onto sheets of bone-colored handmade linen paper while wet with pigment, staining the supports. In three of these “drawings,” von Rydingsvard has created striated, primarily black-colored rectangles with the threads, while in the fourth—which presents bands of burnt orange amid the black—the shape is almost fanlike. Each of von Rydingsvard’s sculptures and works on paper combines methodical production with intuitive gesture. Her forms, at once well rehearsed and improvisational, demonstrate a canny mixture of skill, ambiguity and sheer physicality.

—Eric Sutphin