

The New York Times

'Into Her Own' Review: A Sculptor's Monumental Achievements

For Ursula von Rydingsvard, it essentially takes a village to create a sculpture.



The artist Ursula von Rydingsvard with her work in "Into Her Own." Daniel Traub/Icarus Films



By **Glenn Kenny**

May 28, 2020



Ursula von Rydingsvard: Into Her Own Directed by Daniel Traub | Documentary, Biography
57 minutes

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This documentary portrait of the formidable sculptor Ursula von Rydingsvard is, by dint of its brevity, more tantalizing than satiating. But it's still a welcome cinematic account of her work.

Her sculptures, carved or molded from cedar, are towering, surprising mammoths that seem like organic growths bursting from the ground. They intertwine the abstract with the figurative.



Unlike the giant steel statements of Richard Serra, they don't intimidate; rather, they invite close examination and even physical touch. In "Ursula von Rydingsvard: Into Her Own," this artist, now in her mid-'70s, lean and filled with a youthful energy and concentration, says she wants the people around her art — which is mostly exhibited in public spaces — to put their mark on it.

“There’s acid on the tips of your fingers that can eventually eat away at the patina, and I like that look. It’s like the look of the Buddha’s belly that gets rubbed, and that part shines from all the rubbing,” von Rydingsvard says.

The work requires the help of many assistants, the expertise of many subcontractors. The director, Daniel Traub, intersperses a biography of the New York-based artist — whose childhood in war-torn Germany informs her work — with a chronicle of her process, following her through the creation of several large works and showing her interactions with her assistants. “I like them all so much. We have lunch together every day,” she says.

Like many documentaries about the art world, this one is disinclined to talk money — except when mentioning the ’70s real estate steals on SoHo studio/living space. A further exploration of that aspect of her process, and maybe fewer banal pronouncements from art critics (von Rydingsvard “makes things that unsettle us a little bit,” one of them chin-strokes) might have made a more illuminating picture.

Ursula von Rydingsvard: Into Her Own

Not rated. Running time: 57 minutes. Watch on [Film Forum's virtual cinema](#).

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