

Shows and Exhibitions

Ursula von Rydingsvard's new directions highlighted in Bruce Museum exhibit

The show traces how the sculptor's work has evolved over the past two decades.



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Nov 22, 2025 - 4 min read



Ursula von Rydingsvard. *Exploding Bowl*. (2005–2006). Photo courtesy of Galerie Lelong

Ursula von Rydingsvard, long celebrated for the abstract cedar sculptures she has carved for five decades, is the subject of a new exhibition at the Bruce Museum spotlighting where the artist has pushed her work over the past 20 years—including into the unexpected realm of hand-papermaking.

The Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut, will showcase 15 freestanding sculptures and wall reliefs, along with a selection of works on paper, in "Ursula von Rydingsvard: states of becoming" from December 4 to May 10. It marks her first New York-area exhibition since 2011, and the first ever in Connecticut.

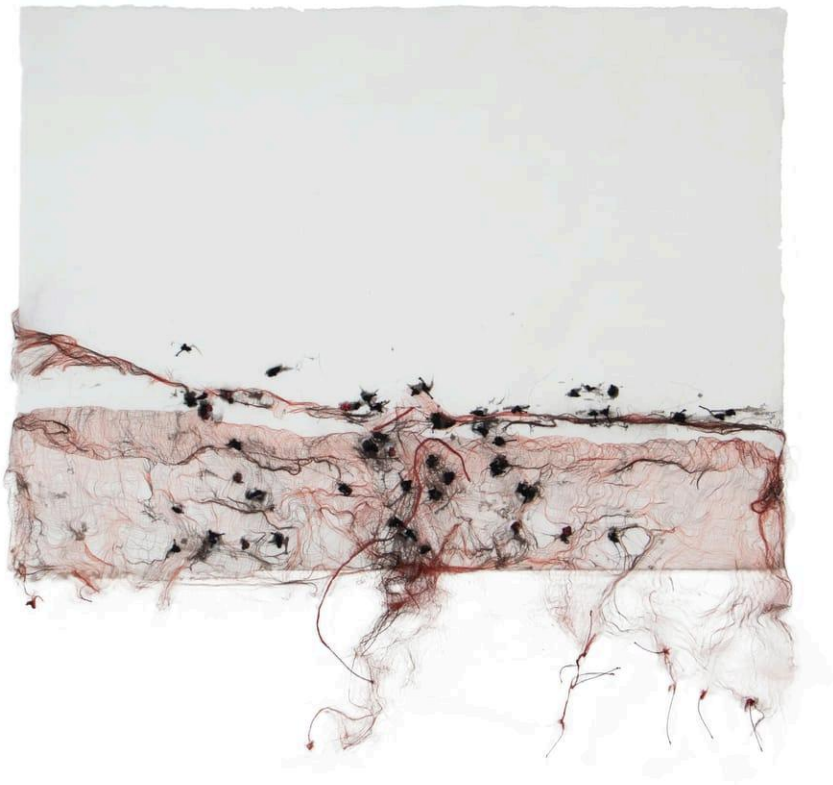
Curator Margarita Karasoulas said the exhibition grew out of a 2022 studio visit, where she saw not only new cedar sculptures but also the artist's recent forays into paper pulp—works that felt "surprising" despite von Rydingsvard's decades of consistency in materials and process.

"It was the first time I experienced her dynamic paper pulp works in person, and these were a real discovery for me," Karasoulas said. "Even before the exhibition's concept took shape, I knew I wanted to display the cedar sculptures together with the paper pulp works to demonstrate the importance of intuition and open-endedness in her practice."

Von Rydingsvard began working at Dieu Donné, a New York organization to support artists experimenting with hand papermaking, in 2007. Karasoulas said von Rydingsvard has "enthusiastically embraced" the papermaking process and has also collaborated with master papermakers there for over a decade.

"At first, she experimented with a direct casting process in which sheets of abaca, a fiber used in papermaking, were moistened and pressed onto a carved cedar relief. The wet abaca paper became soft and malleable, absorbing the wood's warm brown tonalities and pod-like surface texture," Karasoulas said.

Von Rydingsvard then moved into making sheets of linen and cotton infused with fabric, graphite and carbon black. Karasoulas said the artist leaned into chance, running the paper quickly through a hydraulic press so pigments and fibers could shift as the water was forced out—a process that opened up unexpected textures and pushed her work in new directions.



Ursula von Rydingsvard. *Untitled*. (2019). Photo courtesy of Galerie Lelong

"In contrast with the monumental cedar sculptures, the paper works might be seen as more deeply personal," Karasoulas said. Von Rydingsvard often embedded meaningful textiles into the sheets—her late husband's scarf, a sweater she wore as a child—materials she described to Karasoulas as "things I cared about."

Born in 1942 to a Polish mother and Ukrainian father, von Rydingsvard spent her early childhood in refugee camps after the German occupation of Poland. The Bruce Museum notes that her use of cedar evokes memories of the wooden barracks from that period.

After immigrating to the United States, she and her family settled in Plainville, Connecticut. In the early 1970s, she moved to New York City, where she has lived since. Her work is now in the collections of 40 museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art.

But the works in the exhibit have not been widely seen or featured in any recent exhibitions, with the exception of two shows in the U.K. in 2014. Karasoulas added that the show is unique in that it unites von Rydingsvard's monumental cedar sculptures and "intimate" paper pulp creations, "and puts them on equal footing."



Ursula von Rydingsvard. *Untitled*. (2016-2019). Photo by Maya Meissner.

"I made the decision to focus on the last 20 years because I feel that von Rydingsvard is continually redefining her practice and has reached the height of her creative powers," Karasoulas said.

"Von Rydingsvard's work is still unmistakably hers, but she has evolved her materials and forms in new ways. I hope visitors will be able to see these visual and material resonances across her practice."

She particularly pointed to the 2024 work *DO CIAŁA*, which is one of von Rydingsvard's most recent works to debut in the exhibition.

"It is vaguely reminiscent of the body, resembling a heart or a pair of lungs," Karasoulas said. In an interview Karasoulas conducted with the artist, von Rydingsvard herself had noted that *DO CIAŁA* embodied a new direction in her practice.



Ursula von Rydingsvard. *Heart in Hand* (wood model). (2014). Photo by Michael Bodycomb

"The work is becoming open, vulnerable," von Rydingsvard told the curator. "It's not as anchored; I don't feel the need to make a direct statement. I want the work to get better, and one of the most important things in my life is evolving my work so that it feels more interesting to me."

The exhibition also features cedar sculptures that have been modified in recent years, including *Bowl with Shims*, a piece she returned to over the course of 17 years between 2006 and 2023. It sat for some time untouched until von Rydingsvard decided to cut it up with a chainsaw and reassemble it with shims.

"Von Rydingsvard's experience in the camps likely inspired, however unconsciously, her deep feeling and sensitivity for the materials she uses, whether cedar—her signature medium for over five decades—or fabric, which she explores in her paper pulp works," Karasoulas said.

"With that said, her compelling life story can sometimes risk overshadowing the painstaking technique and almost medieval form of craftsmanship and labor that goes into making her work. With this exhibition, I also wanted to focus on the temporal aspects of her practice."

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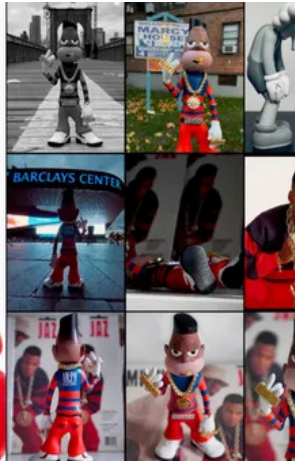
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