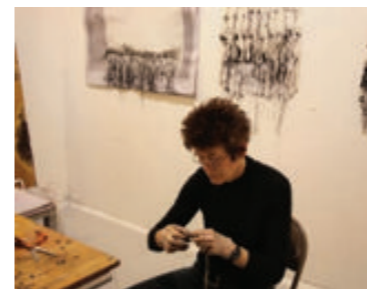


DIEU /
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DIEU DONNÉ LAB GRANT PROGRAM
PUBLICATION SERIES NO. 14

Ursula von Rydingsvard
Deckle Deckle

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Deckle Deckle

by Faye Hirsch

Ursula von Rydingsvard has produced more than 65 works during her Lab Grant at Dieu Donn — her first collaborative venture in paper, spread out over three years. Although undertaken in a medium hitherto unfamiliar to her, in many ways these works extend, in both form and content, concerns that she has developed in her monumental sculpture over a 40-year career. Dore Ashton suggested that, in her sculpture, von Rydingsvard operates through “conjugation,” incorporating “different moods and tenses within a single multipartite work and [achieving] what a musician might call consonance.”¹ The artist’s Dieu Donn  series, in which she extended the boundary of the paper’s edge by means of pulp and collaged materials, applied either around the entire periphery or more usually at the bottom of the sheet, constitutes a “conjugation” of the single idea of giving the two-dimensional work a sculptural presence by toying with its physical limitations.

As if to alert visitors to this salient feature of her efforts, she titled her exhibition of these works “Deckle Deckle,” an insistent doubling that—apart from its descriptive underpinnings—suggests a game, or at least a playful impulse, a resistance to staying put. Nancy Princenthal has written that a fundamental characteristic of von Rydingsvard’s work is “the incremental departure from regularity that also characterizes organic and even geological form.”² Princenthal, like Ashton, was addressing von Rydingsvard’s sculptural drift, but in submitting a finite set of materials and procedures to the accidental effects of the press (to “all the drama that can happen when that press comes down,” as von Rydingsvard puts it³), the artist inflected the basics of her series—pulp, thread, lace, grids—in off-kilter compositions and atmospheric pyrotechnics that speak to the organic nature of her process, not to mention her roots in the eccentric abstraction of Post-Minimalism.

Von Rydingsvard began her collaboration with Paul Wong at Dieu Donn  cautiously and grew more adventurous over time. The earliest works are white-on-white grids of cloudlike blots of pulp, or larger rectangles with an all-around deckle made by squeezing pulp into extravagant curls and loops around the edges, something like the excrescent forms around the peripheries of her Weeping Plate cedar sculptures of 2005. After they dried, she rubbed the larger rectangular works with graphite (a technique she has long employed in her sculptures), which picked up, almost like frottage, the irregularities in the paper, so that the pieces suggest murky mirrors that refuse to reflect. Wong then visited her studio to demonstrate what might be accomplished by actually casting paper pieces from her sculptures. She responded by bringing in a cedar sculptural fragment whose surface, carved in a popcorn-stitch-like motif that she had developed a few years earlier, was then cast in abaca. This resulted in the largest work in the series (and the only one of its kind), a 66-inch-tall, off-angle brownish rectangle, its bubbled surface darkened with marks that the abaca had picked up from the graphite-rubbed cedar—a memory, of sorts, in work that, as we shall see, taps such metaphorical residues in more ways than one.

Von Rydingsvard was now bringing materials regularly to the studio—an old “favorite” scarf, which she proceeded to unravel, scraps of lace with “personal significance,” and thread she had collected from a defunct sack factory near her longtime home in Williamsburg—all of which she incorporated into her new work.⁴ One can see the delicately colored threads of the scarf in a number of pieces; they are adhered through the application of bottled pulp in cotton or abaca, under which they look like delicate veins or arteries in skinlike surfaces. The lace and sack thread were dipped into black pigment and similarly incorporated by means of bottling; von Rydingsvard reports she particularly relished

the manner in which the black pigment splashed, oozed in moody stains or flowed riverine within the piece once the press came down. Sometimes she tightly wadded the thread into little balls that she placed in rows, which tended to list off-axis under pressure; in the latest works ink-soaked lace fragments shifted downward in a second pressing, leaving a printed, stamped image above and black, torn, fabric circles below, hanging off the bottom edge like forlorn blooms. (One is reminded in this circular motif of works like *Lace Medallions* from 2002, with its great necklace of cedar loops, at once somber and decorative.) Most often throughout the series, as here, the drama is at the bottom of the sheet. Threads clotted beneath the pulp constitute stalactite-like excrescences or narrow strips of scorched and pitted landscape beneath low horizons.⁵ Above is the bare stretch of paper, at times buckling from the effects of water, weight and drift—geological, indeed.

As always with Rydingsvard, who remains resolutely abstract in these works, resemblances—to mirrors, landscapes, flowers—exist mostly by chance. Yet one feels that memory, fragile and unnamable in its particulars, is embedded in these works, particularly in their allusions to and incorporation of cloth in one way or another. That the artist has been willing to identify her incorporated materials as connected in one way or another with her own biography (though details were neither supplied nor called for) suggests that the work indeed resonates with a particularly personal quality. Certainly, she often refers to clothing in her sculpture—women's clothing in particular. There were, for example, two large pieces installed in Madison Square Park, New York, in 2006-07: the resin *Damski Czepek* (Polish for “lady's cap”), shaped roughly like a girl's bonnet, and a cedar bowl, *Czara z Babelkami* (“babelkami” means “popcorn

stitch”), whose texture, recurring at *Dieu Donn * in the large abaca relief, refers to the knitted stitch of a “favorite childhood sweater.”⁶ She has said, in several contexts, that her earliest memories are of fabric—of linen against the skin,⁷ for instance, or of working at softening coarse linen in a German camp for displaced Poles, where as a child she lived for a time with her family.⁸ To the medium of handmade paper, itself often made of macerated fabric, von Rydingsvard brought her own dismantled textiles. Without reading too much into it, one can't help but feel that this material history contributes to the work's refulgent quality of nonprogrammatic content.

Faye Hirsch, senior editor at Art in America, has written extensively about contemporary art. Among her recent publications are: "Victoria Civera's Intimate Circle," in Victoria Civera: Atando el cielo, exh. cat., CAC Mlaga, Spain, 2010; "In the Studio: Roland Flexner," Art in America, Oct. 2010; and "See what a life!" The Prints of Joan Snyder, "Dancing with the Dark: Joan Snyder Prints, 1963-2010, Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers and Prestel (forthcoming).

¹ Dore Ashton, in Ashton, Marek Bartelik and Matti Megged, *The Sculpture of Ursula von Rydingsvard* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996), p. 16.

² Nancy Princenthal, “Ursula von Rydingsvard: At Home in the World,” *Mad. Sq. Art 2006: Ursula von Rydingsvard* (New York: Madison Square Park Conservancy, 2006), n.p.

³ Conversation with the author at Dieu Donn , Sept. 8, 2010.

⁴ See note 3.

⁵ A work like *Untitled (Steel and Thread)*, from 1974, is an early relief sculpture in which the artist used dangling thread in a formally similar manner.

⁶ “The most prized piece of clothing I owned as a child,” Princenthal, n.p.

⁷ “I remember something about unbleached, coarse linen. It would almost take on its own form. I remember its being on me, almost like a nightgown—something about light on my body. Maybe I was three or four...outdoors, on a step.” Ashton, p. 11.

⁸ Princenthal, n.p.



*Untitled (Inventory # 5449), 2009
thread and linen handmade paper
35.5 × 38.5 inches*



Untitled (Inventory # 5466), 2009
pigment and laminate cast abaca
66 × 22.5 × 1.5 inches

Exhibition

Ursula von Rydingsvard
Deckle Deckle
October 21–December 4, 2010
Reception: Thursday, Oct. 21

About the artist

Ursula von Rydingsvard (b. 1942, Deensen, Germany) lives and works in New York City, and is best known for her monumental cedar sculptures. The artist is represented by Galerie Lelong, which hosted its 6th solo show of her work in the spring of 2010. A major retrospective of von Rydingsvard's work will open in January 2011 at SculptureCenter, New York, and will then travel to the deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, Massachusetts, the Patricia and Philip Frost Museum, Miami, Florida, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Ohio. The artist's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; and the Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York in addition to many other public and private collections.



Untitled (Inventory # 5983), 2009
thread, pigment, and linen
handmade paper
44 × 22.5 inches

Design

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Photography

Etienne Frossard

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Cover

Detail of the artist working with threads dipped in pigment on handmade linen paper

Inside cover

Untitled (Inventory # 5455), 2009
thread, pigment, and linen handmade paper
40 × 22.5 inches

Dieu Donn e

Founded in 1976, Dieu Donn e is a nonprofit artist workspace dedicated to the creation, promotion, and preservation of contemporary art in the hand-papermaking process. In support of this mission, Dieu Donn e collaborates with artists and partners with the professional visual arts community.

The Lab Grant Program, initiated in 2000, provides mid-career artists with a twelve-day residency to collaborate in hand papermaking at Dieu Donn e. Through this program, Dieu Donn e intends to produce exciting new work with artists who have a mature vision and long-standing commitment to artistic practice, thereby raising the profile of hand papermaking as an artmaking process and breaking new ground in the field. Participants in the program include: Melvin Edwards, Dorthea Rockburne, (2000); Jane Hammond, Jim Hodges, (2001); Robert Cottingham, Polly Apfelbaum, (2002); Glenn Ligon, Kiki Smith (2003); Jessica Stockholder, Arturo Herrera, (2004); Mel Kendrick, Kate Shepherd, (2005); Tony Fitzpatrick, Do-ho Suh, (2006); Jon Kessler, Ursula von Rydingsvard, (2007); E.V. Day (2008); and Ann Hamilton (2009).

This is issue number 14 of the Dieu Donn e Lab Grant Program publication series documenting the residency program for mid-career artists.

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