

STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD

January 31, 2018

Interviewed by Sarah Dziezic
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Interview with Ursula von Rydingsvard
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
January 31, 2018

Von Rydingsvard studio in Brooklyn, NY
4 audio files and video files
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Audio File 1

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Today is January 31st, 2018, and this is an oral history interview for Storm King Art Center with Ursula von Rydingsvard. Could you start just by introducing yourself and saying the names of the sculptures that are in Storm King's collection?

Von Rydingsvard: I'm Ursula von Rydingsvard. And the two pieces that I have at Storm King—the first that I made is *For Paul* (1990–92/2001) and the second one is called *Luba* (2009–10). And *Luba* is [01:00] actually the first piece that I have ever done in bronze. Except no sooner do I say this but 20 years before, I did do another piece in bronze. And then, 10 years before that, I did another piece in bronze. But this was special, in that that bronze was made so that it could be woven into the cedar that the rest of the piece was made of.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about those other pieces and the ways that you used bronze, the other, earlier pieces?

Von Rydingsvard: The earlier pieces, we had a way of cutting the cedar that seemed less lyrical than the way we're cutting now. It seemed more aggressive, in that sometimes [02:00] the cedar was cut. And they're four-by-four cedar beams. And they're almost sometimes cut into only two or three times. Now we seem to nibble more frequently into the surfaces. Because it seems like that kind of detail is more important to me than it was then.

Dziedzic: Can you tell me more about the earlier works that you did using bronze, before the ways in which you used it in *Luba*?

Von Rydingsvard: I like what happens when I cast that in bronze, when I cast the more detailed surface [03:00] in bronze. And I also love putting the patinas on all of the crevices. Because it gives me so much of a choice as to having very complicated color mixes that I can put on, because there are so many interesting surfaces.

[Side conversation]

Audio File 2

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: I'd love to hear about your first introduction to Storm King, and the curators there, and the staff, and how that led to the exhibition of your work in 1992 [*Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture*].

Von Rydingsvard: Ann Hatch started the Capp Street Project. She provided an experimental art space starting in the 1980's at 65 Capp Street, San Francisco. Ann created the first visual arts residency in the U.S. dedicated solely to the creation and presentation of new art installations and conceptual art, having artists like Ann Hamilton, Bill Viola, Janine Antoni, James Lee Byers, Jim Campbell, James Turrell, and many others. She invited very creative people.

And she invited me, first, for 1990. And because my husband had a heart attack then, I told her I couldn't go that year. But I got to go in 1991 and I brought some of my team with me. I brought three cutters with me. And I had one person helping me, that was local, who had tremendous energy. But this person was mentally really not fit, so that later on there were [04:00] problems.

I'm not even sure who it is that asked me, but it must have been David Collens, to have an exhibition at Storm King. And the actual exhibition happened in 1992 to '94. So it was two entire years. And David came all the way to California, where I was making a piece in San Francisco, that was enormous.

But the amazing thing is that David spent a number of days—and watched us work at the Capp Street Project. I worked in a huge—what used to be a garage for detailing cars. And he also came to Steve Oliver's ranch, which is [05:00] about an hour and a half north of San Francisco. Beautiful land! He had about 150 acres. Steve let me wander it and I think I was the third person that he commissioned. So it was really at the beginning of his sculpture commission accumulation. And I—with Steve Oliver, I just said to him, "Look, I brought a few catalogs for you. And in the piece that you're going to get, there's going to be some of this," and I pointed, "there's going to be some of this and some—" I really didn't know what it was going to be. But I figured he had to see something.

He came to my studio a couple of times and he [06:00] loved the process of helping me get the materials I needed. I think he crossed the border of the States to get some of my materials. And he picked me up from the airport each time I flew in. So he was all enthusiasm. Because he himself not only loves art; I think that there's a way in which he really understands the kind of freedom that the artist needs. So he didn't ask for a drawing. He didn't ask. It was trust. So I chose the space that I wanted and it was kind of a

hilly, beautiful piece of property, that had a [07:00] gorgeous, gorgeous view. And you could see the sun setting there. So I proceeded to build my piece there.

David came there as well. I was so happy to have him see. And, you know, there were no bathrooms. We didn't want to mess up Steve's home because we were all dirty with whatever we were working with, and especially when we were graphiting. Everybody had to just take a shovel with them and go behind a tree somewhere. Because we were in the middle of the forest. David complied with ease. He just cared so much about being [08:00] kind to the artist but cared even more about the work that he was going to get. And he knew that he wouldn't get the work that was at Oliver Ranch. That's still there. But he wanted to see it, just to inform himself more about my work process because it was my latest piece.

David did get the piece that we did at the Capp Street Project [*Ene Due Rabe*, 1990]. I loved the way it looked on that front lawn. And I loved the way it looked onto the *For Paul* piece. The position that it had, the placement that it had was just great. And there was an emotional thing with the way that it stood and the height that it was, [09:00] so that, when that same piece, the *For Paul* piece—when David decided to put it down below the museum, it tore into me. I needed to make it bigger. It felt really big when it was up on the higher level, but not big enough, when it was lower. So I remember getting my team, and adding onto the top of it, on days that were so hot—one of my people got blisters on their back. But it all worked. It all worked.

Dziedzic: How much did you add to it? [10:00]

[Side conversation]

Von Rydingsvard: I raised it three feet. And wonderfully, I was able to keep looking at it. "Well, are six inches enough?" "No," and so on. So I was able to look at it, to see what fit, what worked.

Dziedzic: Is it common for you to go back to older works and decide that they're actually unfinished?

Von Rydingsvard: It's very unusual for me to go back to a work to rework it. [11:00] It's unusual. I loved doing that, as much as I liked building the piece from the bottom.

Dziedzic: So the exhibition at Storm King was the first museum exhibition of your work, full-scale exhibition. I wanted to ask about how that exhibition functioned for you. Did it feel like a retrospective? Did it feel like a particular point in your career? Was it older work? Was it a jumping-off point for new work? How did it function for you?

Von Rydingsvard: I think it was an extraordinarily important exhibition for me, [12:00] first of all, that I had the place to put the outdoor works that you really can't fit indoors, almost anywhere, and that I had the opportunity to put something outdoors. I know at least one piece, on a levee, that I did before that. But it was not what Storm King was. I think that show got me to make outdoor works, that I thought [13:00] that I felt proud of. And the *Land Rollers* (1992) was the last one that I did. And that one surprised David a lot—he didn't expect that. But the *Land Rollers* were placed above the colonnade of trees, so that they could pretend like they're doing something that's active. But I think the *For Paul* was a wonderful piece. And obviously, I wouldn't have done it if I didn't have an outdoor place to show it.

And I loved—and I still do—what Storm King stands for. It's a family. [14:00] And they treat the artist like the artist is a part of that family. I know that they really pay attention in helping the artist with the sculpture. I got help with the installations. There was a real conscientious effort to try to get the work to look its very best. And, of course, that's what I want, as well. But David is so dedicated, in terms of the hours that he spends at Storm King. And there's no grudging. There's no "hurry up." I remember staying in the motels for many nights. In the mornings, [15:00] he had breakfast ready for us. He cares so deeply. And he's very good at making determinations of where the pieces should be installed, which is, obviously, a really consequential thing. He's just a sweetheart. He used to have a way—and he's too shy now to do it. Maybe it's age. But he had this way of saying, "Uuuurrrrsulaaa!" when he saw me, from a great distance, when I would be coming out of a car. And it was so loving. It was such a great greeting. I couldn't have had a more endearing welcome. It was really loud and sweet. David also [16:00] had a terror of people getting hurt. At Storm King, there are places one could get hurt. So he was always on the watch for that—and trying to avoid accidents.

Dziedzic: I can hear him calling your name, in his voice. [laughs] Did he help with the siting of the sculptures in that exhibition in 1992?

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. David definitely helped, with the siting of all of the works that Storm King has. Well, they only have two now. But—yes.

Dziedzic: So the *Land Rollers* potentially rolling down the hill, that was a discussion that—

Von Rydingsvard: David.

Dziedzic: —both of [17:00] you had?

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. I mean, I had that idea too. I just feel a lot of gratitude to David, for a lot of things, that made for success at Storm King.

There's one other incident with David, that has nothing to do with Storm King. But I was driving on Delancey Street, just after I crossed the Williamsburg Bridge and there was a woman who rammed into my car, which is a Volvo. And they're built like Sherman tanks. So she didn't even put a dent in my back bumper. But her whole front[18:00]—the top portion of the car, under which the motor is, bent like this and the front of her car also bent. So David and I went to her, "Oh, my God!" you know. And she was puffing, puffing a cigarette, breath was insane. "This isn't even my car. And I just came to New York City yesterday! This is my second day!" So David said, "Well," you know, "we're going to have to call the police." Because he does things in the proper way. So I called the police, really hesitating. Because I feel, "Oh, my God! This poor girl." And the police [19:00] didn't come and they didn't come—because nobody was dead, I guess. So I said, "David, let's just go to her and say that we're going to go so she can go," for which she was extremely grateful. But, yes, he's very conscientious about people getting hurt.

Dziedzic: You already talked a little bit about *For Paul*. Am I right that you were saying that *For Paul* was commissioned by Storm King? Or was it something that they acquired after the exhibition?

Von Rydingsvard: They acquired it after the exhibition. I made it without being commissioned.

Dziedzic: And you also talked a little bit about this, in terms of making [20:00] some adjustments to the sculpture when you brought it to Storm King. But I'm curious if you could talk a little bit more about how—

Von Rydingsvard: I made the adjustments on *For Paul* at Storm King. Yes. It was already in the space below the level of the museum, the lawn.

Dziedzic: I don't recall when they moved it down there.

Von Rydingsvard: I don't know what year it was. But they kept it up on the upper level, for a long time.

Dziedzic: The works that you made, knowing that they would be shown at Storm King, did the space and the landscape at Storm King influence the form of the sculptures that you made? If not the form, then some of the, kind of, energy behind them?

Von Rydingsvard: I think the only one that was really [21:00] site-specific was the *Land Rollers*. I think *For Paul* would have worked in a lot of sites, just as I think that *Luba* could work for a lot of places. Steve Oliver's was really, really site-specific—you couldn't rip it out of where it was. And I think that, though, the siting is extraordinarily important. In a way, one then tailors it into a site, that gives that piece more power, more visual interest. So in some ways it's sort of site-specific.

Dziedzic: [22:00] Did you end up having any conversations with Bill Rutherford, who was—?

Von Rydingsvard: I did have conversations with Bill Rutherford. He's still alive, right? No, he's dead.

Dziedzic: No. But he was the landscape architect—

Von Rydingsvard: Yes, I know that.

Dziedzic: I know he was—just like what you were saying, he has on occasion made a kind of a special hill for certain sculptures.

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. But the Noguchi hill was already there, right?

Dziedzic: I think it was enhanced a little.

Von Rydingsvard: Yes.

Dziedzic: [23:00] And the same with the place where *Pyramidian* (1987/1998) is now—

Von Rydingsvard: Yes.

Dziedzic: —Mark di Suvero's sculpture, I think was a little bit of an addition. It looks very natural but—

Von Rydingsvard: Right. Well, he was obviously brilliant with what he did. I mean, the horror at Storm King is that elevator. That's really an interference with everything else that Storm King does and stands for.

Dziedzic: Yes. I don't know the backstory for the elevator. But it's come up quite a few times.

Von Rydingsvard: I think, in time, they probably will take it down, yes. But I think they were trying to be kind to older people that couldn't climb a hill.

Dziedzic: Yes. [24:00] So I guess I want to fast-forward a little bit, to the *5+5: New Perspectives* (2011) exhibition.

Von Rydingsvard: Sure.

Dziedzic: So that was Storm King's 50th anniversary, where five artists who'd had major exhibitions were invited to make new work. So that's how *Luba* came about. Do you recall the conversations around inviting you to be part of that exhibition?

Von Rydingsvard: David came, again, to the studio. I think he's been in my studio six or seven times. He's just so thorough, but thorough in a very caring way. So, yes. He's the one that—there was no talk about what it was that I was going to make. He just wanted to commission [25:00] a piece. And I was really pretty happy with the way that *Luba* came out. And she had a beautiful place, for a long while, three years or something like that. But she loved being there.

Dziedzic: And you're talking about in front of that colonnade, again.

Von Rydingsvard: In front of the colonnade of trees. Yes. She loved looking down at that whole space.

Dziedzic: Well, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—since you're calling her "she," I guess—not necessarily what it means or what it is but [26:00] some of what went into that sculpture. Some of the energy or thoughts or influences. I know that's not necessarily what your process is like. But what was the process of making *Luba*?

Von Rydingsvard: I don't know what to say about the influences. But I wanted to make a kind of frame that one has under one's arm—armpit—and I wanted also to have the bottom be delicate as it touches the ground. It's not as though I thought of this ahead of time. It's not as though I knew it so clearly. But as I built the piece, [27:00] it then spoke to me, in terms of what else it needed. And then, as I built more, it again implies a certain need. And I had in my head, somehow, that this would frame that colonnade of trees below and frame not in any formal way but in an organic way. And, of course, the frame could cheat and be at different positions. But I positioned her in a way so that she looked really, really gorgeous from the second-floor window, when I would look down on her. And that there is something intimate, as [28:00] in an embrace, to have something going toward the ground and that something gets more and more delicate, as it goes toward the ground. There is something intimate about that space. There is something intimate about that gesture. I felt pleased with that piece.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about your decision or discovery to use bronze the way that you did, in that most delicate way?

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. I had no choice but to use the bronze. Because if you have cedar or any kind of wood that is that slender and that delicate, placing its tip onto the ground, there's no way that wood's

[29:00] going to last. So I had to. And it's a good thing, because I knew how to patina it, so that I could make that transition a credible one, that nobody really even has to know that it's bronze. But I like it that it's bronze. And I like it that it will be there for 2000 years. [laughs] Bronze really lasts. So it was very delicate. The movements on it also the detours—they're very gentle, very delicate, and really slender as they go down. So I had no choice.

Dziedzic: We interviewed Mark di Suvero in November. And he said something about balance, that, when you're working with these heavy materials, [30:00] you have to learn the materials in order to learn where the center of gravity is, basically. And I think, in another interview that you did, you said that you have a kind of innate sense of balance, with your sculptures. I wondered if you could talk about that a little bit.

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. I have a great, great deal of respect for gravity. And I feel like I'm constantly aware of it. For every four-by-four I put onto my piece, I'm aware of the effect of gravity on it. But especially with the pieces that I cast in bronze, I can now really fool around with it. I can make a piece in bronze that bends, in a very dramatic way, to one side, which I could not do with wood—because [31:00] whatever it is—however you hold up that wood, it's still going to be more vulnerable. Whereas, the bronze, you can have the engineer design something that attaches itself to the bottom. And then you can put that mechanism onto a cement structure, that goes three feet under the earth. So it is stable.

Dziedzic: I wanted to ask about the kinds of connections that you might identify between some of the other works in Storm King's collection, or if you see your sculptures [32:00] in dialog with other sculptures, or being part of a lineage there. Is there a way that you think about your works in that context?

Von Rydingsvard: I don't know. I just think that the two pieces that I have there are so happy there. And I don't know whether I necessarily have a dialog with everyone. But I have to say that I really like many of the works that are there. And I especially like the Grovesnor. And then I'm crazy about that large black piece, as soon as you come into—that is made by Calder.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Yes. Can we talk a little bit more about your use of patina and color, kind of leading from your work with bronze?

Von Rydingsvard: [35:00] I've had a lifetime of using nothing but black. And I've had a lifetime of wearing nothing but black. When you open my closet—I think there's one white shirt. Everything else is black. So it surprised me that, once I faced the body of the bronze pieces, it surprised me that I was able

to burn the chemicals of all these different colors on, and sometimes using really sort of happy tones, like yellows and oranges and reds and—it amazed me. And I used to be a painter. But this was decades ago. So [36:00] it brought me back to those days but that this is a little bit different, because it goes outdoors. The patina does not last forever. But the bronze, you know, seems to me to beg for the colors that I put on it, you know. It also tells me what transitions these shades need and sometimes they're shockingly bright. So here it is.

Dziedzic: I noticed that particularly with the copper piece that you made.

Von Rydingsvard: Yes, but the copper piece has taken its own course because it's copper. It has to do what it has [37:00] to do. So it turns to something like the copper on the Statue of Liberty. And our copper—this is a piece at Princeton, is the only copper piece I have made. And I will never make another one. We spent two years hand-pounding that copper into the forms for every four-by-four. And it's turned green. But it's a white-green. Copper has to do what it has to do. But I did patina all of it to try to give it the gaiety, for its beginning moments. And she's a she, as well. Because she has a huge, huge window [38:00] that she looks upon. It's at the Andlinger Center in Princeton. And she is very self-absorbed, especially when the sun sets on that window. And the sunset on that window looks just stunning. She looks at it as though it's her mirror to reflect her own beauty. So in time, [laughs] I am hoping she gets more and more sober.

Dziedzic: Do you have, I guess, stories about the sculptures at Storm King—

Von Rydingsvard: I don't know.

Dziedzic: At least they're there together. They're close to each other on Museum Hill.

Von Rydingsvard: Well, they're not that far apart. [39:00] But the word "luba," in Polish and in Russian, means a female that you have a closeness to, that you feel close to. But there's no story. I don't have stories about any pieces, and when people ask me to explain my work, there is really no way of explaining it. Because I really don't know. I really don't know what it is or what it's supposed to be. Because it's not the way my mind works.

Dziedzic: It is a challenge to put words to the works themselves?

Von Rydingsvard: It is. And [40:00] sometimes I really get pissed at myself for naming things bowls. Because they're not bowls. You can't eat out of them. You can't wash your feet in it. But you have to name them. You can't just say "untitled," for every piece that you make. And there's something about a

bowl that feels to me—there's an intimacy in a bowl, the way that it's formed. And just when I call those perforations at the top lace, I always want to like bite my tongue, not to say that. But you have to make some references to it. But as soon as you make a reference, "It's like a bowl," "Oh, that's a bowl. Oh, yes, I know." You know what I mean? [41:00] That the discoveries of what it's about get cut, often.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Can I ask what kind of considerations go into making public art if that's a distinction that you consider, I suppose, as opposed to outdoor art?

Von Rydingsvard: I have to consider that, yes. Oh, as opposed to outdoor. I think all outdoor art needs [44:00] very careful consideration, just so it doesn't kill anybody or nobody can crawl up into it. All of my bowl pieces have these structures inside, so that nobody can fall in. It's safety. But what else? You have to consider that they can't climb your piece. But that's another safety measure. But most of all, you want to entice people because the public art is not in the holy grounds of a museum. And many people don't want to walk those grounds. They don't want to pay \$20, as you have to at MoMA, to go in. But it's not only the [45:00] \$20. There's a whole elitism that's associated with it. So to just be there near the sculpture, when walking by, or be there when having lunch. One of the pieces that I had had a number of marriages that took place in it—that that brought about that kind of mentality, that you would want to get married inside that piece because of the sun's translucent light that permeated the resin. But I didn't intend that to necessarily lure the married couples, though I was happy it did.

Dziedzic: I wondered if some of those public art commissions, it seemed as though—[46:00] maybe I'm wrong in this but that it introduced the idea of lighting your pieces in a different way, or lighting them period. What was the relationship of that to using resin or a different kind of material like that?

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. The lighting of resin is something that we worked a long time on figuring out. And the first time that we lit it up, it didn't work. But we have learned what to put into it, in order to disperse and reflect all of the light that this one tube, that's 17 feet high—[47:00] how it can project light throughout the entire piece. And, of course, it's still going to come out differently in various places of its body, because the thickness of the resin varies. And this is what I want, what I like. This is important. But we did get it figured out.

Dziedzic: Just thinking very far in the long-term, in terms of maintaining your works outdoors at Storm King, are there any situations where you would feel okay about lighting those works in some way? I suppose from the outside, not from the inside?

Von Rydingsvard: Just lighting them from the outside.

Dziedzic: Yes.

Von Rydingsvard: Sure. But I don't think many people go at night to Storm King.

Dziedzic: I'm imagining some [48:00] possible scenarios.

Von Rydingsvard: All of my pieces have lighting outside, that are outside. But they're bronze. And many of them have lighting inside. Because they have perforations, through which the light comes. And that has to have very careful considerations, in terms of how intense it is at the beginning and how it lets go some of its potency as it goes up and what it does in the fog and what it does at what time at night or when the sun sets. So we've learned how to calibrate it. We learn. I never like those cans popping up from the ground and shining on the pieces. I hate it. Because the cans really interfere with one's looking [49:00] at the work. So I have things that are very flat to the ground, that have mechanisms on the inside to direct the light where you need it. And then I put it in different positions. I practice that in the foundry first, with the piece and then we go to the site. The lighting is very important. All my outdoor works have outdoor lighting.

Dziedzic: I also wanted to ask about the kind of influence of vernacular objects on some of the forms that your work takes.

Von Rydingsvard: Because I come from [50:00] Polish peasant farmers and for centuries, my ancestors were farmers that came from the southeastern part of Poland and Ukraine. So I have an instinctive feel for tools that were used by farmers, old tools, for the kinds of homes that they lived in, for the kinds of barns. [51:00] I can't tell you how many barns I have visited, all over Europe, and how many basements I've been in, just to see the tools that were used—the old tools. I also have a big collection of these tools. So there is something that runs deep inside of me, that feels those structures, that architecture, those implements—they feel familiar. Hence, I can aggrandize them. I can sprinkle them with holy water. I can make them proud. I can make them into a legacy. Because they were, indeed, very [52:00] important to those whose survival depended on them. They were as important as the Holy Eucharist that the priest—I'm not religious, haven't been religious for decades—but the Holy Eucharist that the priest goes to the altar with, that has all of these—the gold rays of the sun coming from it. But, of course, I don't do it that way. I don't use gold. I use the wood. I use the cedar. And I think that there's something about my using the wood—that seems to be the material that I can most successfully work with, [53:00] that there is something about that that's related to my background—wood is more humble than gold.

[Side conversation]

Audio File 3

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: I'm not sure if there are things that you want to read and then respond to. I'd be curious to hear if you still feel in agreement, I suppose, with your earlier statements.

Von Rydingsvard: I'm going to be reading from Michael Brenson's catalog [essay in "Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture"]. It's really a good catalog and it's just this little [01:00] thing. It's really good, because he is such a good writer. He has such a good mind. He understands artists. And he understands art. Ok, so here are some of the things that he got me to say. This is him talking now. [reading] "The words von Rydingsvard uses to describe her process of working reveal her highly personal and active relationship to her materials. As she cuts and scars her four-by-four cedar beams with a circular saw, she talks about being able to 'choke in on it' and to 'rip out with it.' At another point, she talks about 'pushing out more.'" This is 1992, maybe the beginning of 1992, maybe even 1991. [02:00] And another paragraph, "She is guided by an 'image she's trying to find and create.'" He weaves into it all the right things, all the right thoughts. "'The pleasure is really cutting in and letting go,' she says. She wants to 'keep it moving in an organic way.' The method is largely improvisational." And my words again. "'I'm not that consciously aware of what I'm doing, while I'm doing it.'"

This—all true! It's all so true. It's all the same.

Then, again, I say, "I don't want to self-consciously [03:00] analyze what effects these pieces are having.'...When speaking about her work, she repeats a word few artists use. 'There's this need that it has and that's what I react to.'"..."'The piece has this tremendous need. And actually, as long as it has that kind of a need, there's an anxiety on my part that really connects me to that piece, until that need is removed, on the part of the piece and on the part of my anxiety.' That anxiety, as well as the faith in art and [04:00] revelatory pleasure in working, are essential to the experience and performance of her work." It's all true now.

[Rereads]

This little thing, cheap as it was, is so, so good, just as I feel about that show. That show at Storm King was kind of a springboard. I had a show 1986, that was at Exit Art, that Jeanette Ingberman ran, and Papa Colo. And I had a great review that Michael gave me. And it was actually a great show. I hadn't

shown for four years before or maybe even six years. I forget what it was. I [06:00] had no gallery. So I showed in this place and it was a show that was a huge springboard for me, on the indoors, on the inside. And then Storm King was a huge springboard for the outdoors. And their land is so beautiful. It's so well cared for.

[Side conversation]

Von Rydingsvard: There's Mike Seaman, who I respect enormously, who works incredibly hard to maintain the pieces. And you don't see this that often, especially people that own the work privately. [07:00] But to have my work that well cared for. And Mike is just extraordinary. He has a huge range of knowledge of what these pieces need, what all of these different artists need. And he's on it—and he's kind, as well, and very, very smart, very knowledgeable. And he runs a good team. His father works with him.

Dziedzic: I didn't know that. He was explaining parts of *Luba* to me, and talking about how there were some days where you could see between all of the pieces of wood and that they have that room to grow. And that was really surprising to me.

Von Rydingsvard: The wood expands and contracts all the time.

Dziedzic: Right, yes. And as you said, that's a [08:00] big consideration for all of the works of different materials outdoors.

I'm glad that you brought up some of the things that you read from the catalog, because I always wonder if people agree with what they've said in the past, or what's been written about them, and whether that changes over time. And it seems like you've been on this strong trajectory, as you said, since the Storm King exhibition, and that the way that you were describing your work, and the way that Michael Brenson was writing about your work, was accurate then, as it is now.

Von Rydingsvard: And it's rare that a critic gets your work. It's rare.

Dziedzic: Yes. I'll take your word for it. [laughter] You know, but I'd taken some notes [09:00] about some of those kinds of things, some of the kind of psychological aspects that you had talked about, across different interviews that were informing your work. Then a lot of things that you said in the beginning of the interview were so filled with joy about your work, in a sense, and joy about its placement. So, I wouldn't say it's at odds—the tension, and the need, and the anxiety—with the satisfaction of your work at its completion. But it is an interesting tension, I guess, or part of a universe that you must experience.

Von Rydingsvard: I feel very, very, very lucky about the universe that I've created for myself. I feel very lucky with the conditions under which I work. I feel very lucky with the assistance [10:00] that I have. So that, if my work isn't doing what it's supposed to, it's all my fault. And as long as it's my fault, I can try to do something about it. But there are pieces that simply fail that I can't save, that I've tried to save. I can't. So that I have big fires Upstate. You know about that? Okay. So I have big fires that take care of the pieces that I no longer want.

Dziedzic: I wondered if you could talk about the kinds of objects that are in this room that we're in now. Whether they're sources of inspiration or kind of works in progress or smaller works.

Von Rydingsvard: I have a wall of little nothings. And that's going to be a part of the [11:00] exhibition at the Fabric Workshop Museum in Philadelphia. And I'm going to have a show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. So this is all going to be Philadelphia. But I'm going to have a lot of indoor pieces at the Fabric Workshop Museum. And at the Philadelphia Museum, I'm going to have two huge outdoor pieces.

But also, I have a lot of Dieu Donn  pieces, all over the place. They're prints. But they only bear one of a kind that I can do. [12:00] And they're different, because I work on wet pulp. It's kind of a wet paper, where nothing clings to it. So, you put your finger in it and it makes a big hole. But I put things on top of it. I put fabric. I put lace. I put silk. I put things on top of it that I want to put on. And then there's this enormous press that comes down on it, that has all of these accidental squirting blacks—because I use black pigment a lot—and they press that black wherever it needs to be pressed. And it comes out of all of the sides of that press. But it's an enormously heavy, heavy press. So there are a lot of accidents that happen that are great. In fact, the accidents make for most of the [13:00] pieces. But you have to be a little clever about what might bring these accidents about. So, I can make five or six of these prints in one day. It's not like making one of my huge pieces, like your *Luba*, which takes seven or eight or nine months to make. And so there's a pleasure in being able to execute something that feels different to what I normally do.

Dziedzic: Is that sense of discovery through an informed accident something that happens with your wood pieces? Or is that very different?

Von Rydingsvard: It's the same mind that's working. But it's certainly very, very different [14:00] methodology of expressing yourself—very different options.

Dziedzic: And do they inform each other?

Von Rydingsvard: I don't know. When I travel, people say, "Oh! What are you going to do now that you've seen the north of Sweden?" Or, "the archipelago? What are you going to do?" It doesn't work that way. It's not like, because you're given this, then this has to happen. It's not that clear, not that simple. It's not a formula.

Dziedzic: Yes. It seems like the inputs come from some parts of your personal history and then also the knowledge of [15:00] the materials that you work with.

Well, I guess I would ask if there's anything that we haven't talked about, that you think is significant to add.

[Side conversation]

Audio File 4

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. I just wanted to say that John Stern is a wonderful addition to Storm King. And he's all good things, handsome, smart, really involved, really cares. And then there's a woman by the name of Mary Ann Carter, that I've known forever, I've known since 1992. I've lived through her dogs dying and her mother dying and so on. So she is very special, very dedicated, and really, really sweet. So [01:00] it is a kind of family. Except it's functional. [laughs] They all care a lot.

Dziedzic: That's great. I'm glad that you feel that too. So if that's it, then I think we're done.

Von Rydingsvard: Good.

Dziedzic: All right. Thank you.

Von Rydingsvard: Yes. Thank you. And thanks to the people at Storm King.

[End of interview]