

Creative Living

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Cedar sculptures leave impression of beauty, protection and foreboding

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

If you told Ursula Von Rydingsvard that you felt secure and protected in the shadow of her large cedar sculptures, she'd be pleased. They're part of "Sculptural Contrasts," an exhibition at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum through April 8.

There's something comforting about some of these large works of wood with the pale interior flesh exposed and the exterior lightly toned with graphite or washed with paint.

One exception is the three large cedar boxes with narrow openings in the top. They are intimidating in their suggestion of container-like holding places with barely room to move and no way out. Rydingsvard came from her home in New York City to supervise the installation of her four works in one of the largest galleries in the Museum.

It looked like enough lumber to build a log house except that each piece of wood is carefully numbered, shaped, marked with cuts from her circular saw, toned or painted.

She said she likes to work with 2 by 4s which she glues together and then cuts, chisels and coaxes into becoming part of a large rugged sculpture that is reminiscent of some form or structure from the past, but not readily identifiable.

SHE WAS BORN in 1942 to a Polish farm family who were quickly swept up and forced to live in forced-labor and refugee camps in Germany. They managed to come to the United States when she was 10 and settled in Plainville, Conn., a name she said aptly described the community as she knew it.

"I come from Slavic peasant farmers for many generations," she said with an air of pride.

It's possible to draw parallels between her background and her art.

The purposeful rough edges, the constant suggestions of strength and durability, the organic material, the respect for the medium, the earth colors and the sheltering, protective attitudes which some of her works have. Yet, there are those boxes — those strange, unsettling boxes.

While she comes out of a mid-



Large boxes with openings at the top illustrate the beauty of the cedar and the sculptor's fine eye for surface texture, but they have an intimidating presence.

malist art background, her works have human relationships, they are part of a world occupied by people and this occupation is suggested in many ways.

She stood beside a long triangular, floor piece that was about to have large semisculpted and painted pieces laid on one side and some different pieces placed in corresponding positions along the other side. Each viewer brings a different point of view to this sculptural Rorschach — fortress, stockade, sod shanty or ominous line of prisoners before a firing squad.

"I have a tremendous liking for vernacular architecture — what these people needed and felt about the earth," she said.

She quickly passes through the years she studied painting at University of Miami (Coral Gables) and University of California and her first marriage to make her strongest statement, "My life began in 1973 in New York City."

THAT WAS when she went to Columbia to get her MFA and began to work as a sculptor. At first she worked with steel, but wasn't comfortable with it. Then a friend at the university found some cedar on sale and brought it to her.

The attachment was immediate. "Cedar keeps still," she said a hand resting on a piece of it. "The

dark on the outside contrasts with the inside almost like an open wound or an open mouth. It's easy to cut. It doesn't resist. There's no grain to detract."

But why does a person so inherently linked to the land by her ancestors and so conscious of that link in her art live in New York City and have a studio in Brooklyn?

"It is extremely important that I live in the city," she said with startling intensity. I keep reacting to it — It's tough, relentless. . . .

It is those strident, jarring city forces which move her to build the softer, wood forms. She questioned whether she would continue to work in the same way if she moved out of the city, "I need it so much."

HER LARGEST work in the exhibition, which occupies a sizeable part of one very long wall, has a long line of tall cedar stanchions against the wall which support arcs made of blocks from 2 by 4s that bow out into the room. It is massive, unrefined, captivating and strangely, almost irresistibly graceful.

She is adamant when explaining why she glues the 2 by 4s together, often into log size pieces rather than simply starting with a log in the first place.

Being able to manipulate and arrange the elements is a major rea-



Ursula von Rydingsvard touches up a section of a three-sided sculpture that visitors may shape her large works of art. She uses chisels, mallets, grinders

son and the most pragmatic. But there is an emotional reason as well, "I would feel impotent in the face of this wondrous thing," she said quietly.

Her works are in the collections

of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. She was formerly on the Yale University faculty and now teaches at the School of Visual Arts of New York. She had a National Endowment for

the Arts grant in 1986-87 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1983.

Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 500 Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills. Is open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. Admission is charged.

London, Paris audiences love our orchestra

This is the last of three articles on the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's European tour by Ervin Monroe, principal flutist with the orchestra. He is consulting editor for The Flute Quarterly, president of Little Piper and is affiliated with Wayne State and Oakland universities. The Orchestra returned home Sunday and will be performing at 8 p.m. Friday at Orchestra Hall with Emanielle Bolvart, concertmaster, making her DSO solo debut.



EuroTour '89
Ervin Monroe

Day 13, Thursday, Feb. 2 —Baggage has to be out in the halls at 9 a.m. We are flying from Munich to Hannover following a much needed day off. Our buses to the airport don't leave until 11 a.m., so many of the orchestra are gathered in the lobby chatting.

Emanielle Bolvart of Detroit, our new concertmaster, stops by to tell of her skiing trip on our previous day off. "It was great fun," she said, "but I do admit that some skiing was on grass and rocks because of this year's lack of snow." The Maestro had expressed some concern over the danger with this just back to the Alps, but eight members had gone anyway.

At this point I begin teasing Emanielle about the crowd reaction when she appears on stage at the beginning of each concert. "The Swiss audience was a little surprised, but the Austrian and German audiences are really stunned," she admits.

I relate a conversation I had in Germany with three others during the intermission of the Munich concert. The ladies wanted to know more about Emanielle and were very impressed when they learned she was just 25 years of age.

"This can never happen in Germa-

ny," one of the excited young ladies told me. I explained our behind-the-scenes audition policy and pointed out that everyone has a chance for the job. "Grossartig!" they all said, which means splendid, wonderful. At the end of my story I chided Emanielle for possibly starting a militant women's movement in Bavaria. She laughed and departed with a rather proud, smug grin.

I am still waiting to be joined for breakfast by a Hungarian flutist and longtime friend who lives in Munich. John Thurmond, cellist, of Ferndale, stops by to inform me that he spent most of his day-off recovering from the mysterious clear liquid (in the unmarked bottle) that was being passed around by our German musician's friends at the reception following the previous concert.

"I've got a name for that stuff!" he growls, "Liquid German Shepherd. If we ever see that schnapps at another reception, let's call in a stunt man to do our drinking."

My flute-playing friend arrives and we go to the hotel. I just read a rave review of our concert in the largest paper in southern Germany, The Sueddeutsche Zeitung. "It is unusually fine," he says.

Our flight to Hannover is unevent-

ful. Very small hockey rink and we are the skaters. Even the applause doesn't carry in this hall, but the audience responds enthusiastically to our playing, perhaps a bit more than they did to our performance here 10 years ago.

Important concert ahead

Day 14, Friday, Feb. 3, 8:30 a.m. luggage call, 10:10 a.m. buses to the train station. The routine is awful. Some musicians can be heard moaning and bleating every time we form a line now. Nevertheless, our schedules go like clockwork, very smoothly.

This is an exciting day and a very important concert. We are going to Hamburg, the key industrial city in Germany. Not only is this city the home of many of Germany's most distinguished citizens, it is reputed to have an excellent concert hall.

Our arrival is on time and our dreams of having good weather quickly vanish. We're hardly seen the sun on the entire trip, except when flying. The city is pretty though, built around a large and

small lake separated by several bridges. Susan and I take a nice stroll along the water. There are many parks here.

The concert hall is simply called Tonhalle, like the one where we played in Zurich. (That now seems like ages ago.) It is all that it is reported to be and perhaps more, not overly ornate, but quite attractive. It is built on the most classic of lines, twice as long as it is wide, stage as part of the rectangular and composition of wood and plaster. It sounds great and so does the orchestra.

Our concert here is one of the best I can recall in my 21 years with the symphony. It is a great feeling and one senses that the orchestra has really become a cohesive unit as we approach the truly big concerts of the tour.

The audience response is overwhelming and one young man in the right balcony waited until the applause was over to stand up and yell, "Go Tigers!" Those of us still on stage gestured "yeah" and the departing audience started clapping again.

That night we went to eat and drink at a little pub near the hotel. The owner had agreed to hold the kitchen open for us following the concert and a large group of musicians stopped by.

As the evening progressed, a gentleman who was sitting with a lady near our table called me over. He had heard me speaking German with the owner and inquired who we were. Upon learning we were with the Detroit Symphony he became most excited.



Even on a grueling tour there was time to relax. Pictured at a party in Austria are, from left, Gunther Herbig, music director; Tom Gulick, the Orchestra's vice president of marketing; and Deborah Bords, executive director. With their backs to the camera are Edwin S. Kiefer, managing director, QM Austria, and Mrs. Herbig.

"I have several of your records" he explained, "and they are wonderful." He insisted on buying me a drink and I joined him and his lady friend at their table. He apparently was Czechoslovakian and was returning home from a business trip.

"Do you live nearby?" I asked and a round of confusing explanations was forthcoming. I skirted the issue and complimented the lady on the beautiful bouquet of flowers sitting on the seat next to her.

"They're for his wife," sighed the lady, "you obviously have figured out we're not married."

"So I have," I replied. At this point Hart Holmann, violist, of Birmingham, a free day.

ham was preparing to take a photo of our group seated behind us. When the flash went off, the Czechoslovakian Casanova leaped several feet off his chair. "It's okay," I explained, but he quickly ran over to pay his bill while his lady friend chuckled.

Day 15, Saturday, Feb. 4, —Hamburg, a free day.

The concert management has arranged the tour nicely. As the final week approaches we have more free days to rest and it is needed. There are more flying days now and these travel days are more strenuous and demanding than the short train trips.

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