

Right: Ursula von Rydingsvard, installation view of "TORN," 2018. Below right: Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Book with no words*, 2018. Cedar and linen, 8 x 68 x 38 in.

valid? The abstraction of *Shanghai Black #8* feels like 20th-century Western painterly abstraction, but there is an aura, absurdly difficult to specify, that suggests the sensibility of Eastern origins. Here, the top plane is occupied by areas of tan and reddish-orange, along with a bit of blue. The lower plane is much more darkly painted, a near black on its top half and a dark brown on the bottom. A small projection at the very bottom of the assemblage emphasizes its sculptural attack. *Shanghai Black #10* returns to a deeper depth, with three planes of plywood layered on each other. We see only the red edge of the bottom piece, an expanse of untouched brown wood from the middle element, and the full red- and black-painted surface of the final, top element. Two small green additions contribute additional depth. This work, like the other two, indicates a middle ground in which sculptural expression appropriates painterly surface to highly successful effect.

—Jonathan Goodman

NEW YORK
Ursula von Rydingsvard
Galerie Lelong & Co.

Ursula von Rydingsvard is finding new ways to deepen her three-dimensional spaces: the cavities and protuberances in her recent works recall beaks, balls, mouths, and armpits—irregular human and animal body parts that nevertheless seem familiar. Niches and caverns open out or suck you in; appendages curve precipitously around the main body. These forms could be portraits of myths we're in the middle of living.

The large-scale, rough-hewn cedar forms featured in her recent exhibi-



tion "TORN" nod to her Polish-Ukrainian heritage and to histories of suffering worldwide. von Rydingsvard gives her works mostly Polish names and leaves it to viewers to decode what they have to say. The bronze *Z BOKU* memorializes her labor-intensive cedar construction process. Its back area has a kind of tail and hind legs; many sharp ridges ride up its sides; a top ridge is laced with small irregular openings that let in light. The bronze patina has hues of gold, copper, and red

that add to the depth of its faceted surface. *NESTER* and *DWA*, large, top-heavy, wall-mounted cedar works, jut out from and then lean back into the wall. Seen head on, *DWA* resembles two sides of a body bending over, with an open area where the spine would be, while *NESTER* seems like the lower half of a kneeling body. From other perspectives, these abstract forms suggest other emotions or postures. The abstract openings in the rectangular wall

pieces *Oziksien* and *floating shy* could remind viewers of anything from hungry open mouths to bowls. The concave spaces decrease in size as they climb the wall; their irregular grid-like structure has its own kind of flow. *Roaming Rudia* has different profiles from each direction. *Elegantka II*, a cloud-gray urethane resin piece is lit from inside with blue light; its curving silhouette turns into a beacon of light.

Book with no words (2018) is similar to *Tome* (2017), a work featured

in von Rydingsvard's concurrent retrospective at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. Flat cedar slats are pieced onto linen pages that can be turned. The idea of the wood and linen as living histories that have been sliced from a tree or woven from a plant speaks for itself and directly represents nature and environmental issues. Each linen page has a kite-like torn tail or fabric strip hanging over the handmade cedar table on which the book rests. Another tribute to von Rydingsvard's connection to cedar can be found in the monumental bronzes *Now* and *She*, which remain on view in the sculpture garden at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through April 2019.

—Jan Garden Castro

HELSINKI
Matthew Cowan

Photographic Gallery Hippolyte
 In "para field notes," Matthew Cowan expands on a highly intriguing program that examines regional customs and folklore through art. His previous projects have included "Walk on Roses and Forget-me-nots," a survey of courtship rituals mounted in Braunschweig, Germany, and *Wude-wasa*, an exploration of the wild-man archetype that he encountered while investigating European carnival traditions in England. Here, in what has been described as a notebook of artistic research, he induced consideration of the past and present, rural and urban spheres; and by underscoring the significance of butter, he linked Finland, Ireland, and Germany with his native New Zealand.

Stepping into the exhibition subjected city-dwelling viewers to a potent sense of disjuncture. Electric fencing encircled the space and its centerpiece—a mound of hay bales that suggested a parade float or massive decorated cake, adorned with portable aluminum gates, blue synthetic mesh, red extruded plastic



fence posts, an image of *Hexenbutter* (*para vomit/shit*), and a series of performance videos. A ribald and ghostly white ring of *para*, or milk-stealers, was suspended overhead, their shadows dancing across the room's buttery yellow walls. These beings are never seen because their existence hinges on magic. A solitary and imposing figure, garbed head-to-foot in a suit of butter wrappers, doubled as a sentinel and a manifestation of this historically valuable commodity. References to plowing and male snakes, who

emerge first to prepare for mating, affirmed the presence of spring and its accompanying risks. A song presented by the Mynämäki men's choir underscored this fact, petitioning the Honey Paw, Lord Jesus, and Virgin Mary to keep the cows safe while grazing.

A second, smaller, flesh-colored gallery included objects from the Tavastila Local History Museum that not only revealed how people have responded to their environment and used the resources available to them, but also related to Cowan's

Left and below: Matthew Cowan, installation views of "para field notes," 2018.

installation in the main space. Thus, the introduction of electrical gadgetry, both on the farm and as medical instruments, evoked *para*, because electricity's imperceptibility, like *para*, implies a kind of magic. Seeing the resemblance between one of Minna Hokka's coiled birch bark shepherds' horns (inspired by Finnish and Karelian instruments) and a snake also caught one off guard. Who could have predicted that this object, used to warn of danger, would also emulate the shape of the creature posing a threat?

Though Cowan's background in folk dancing distinguishes his approach to art, he sidesteps incorporating live performance into his exhibitions. Still, a distinct sense of movement pervaded this presentation—in part because all of the objects he makes or chooses to present are performance related, and it is from such use that their meaning as art objects derives. Cowan, when asked, makes a significant distinction. As a



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