

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

Montserrat-born British artist Veronica Ryan, OBE (b. 1956) is captivated by thresholds and transformations. In her work, motifs like pillows serve as portals to dreams, and windows provide glimpses into architecture, allowing passage between interior and exterior spaces. Similarly, flowers and fruits hover between germination, ripeness, and decay, suggesting the constant growth and changes of life. For Ryan, these transitions are both physical and psychological, reflecting the relationship between the self and the world, one culture and another, and the realms of the known and unknown. Ryan is best known for her long-standing interest in the natural world, including its intricate structures and patterns. In her work, seeds and pods hold significant but ambiguous meaning as protective vessels for new life as well as enclosed containers associated with confinement. Beyond the physical world, Ryan has also considered the inner workings of the mind and unseen forces that shape human existence—including memories, repressed desires, and traumas.

Although she explores the invisible aspects of human experience, Ryan's work is texturally rich and materially diverse. Her sculpture in traditional materials such as plaster, bronze, and marble is rooted in her academic training in the 1970s and '80s at London's Slade School of Fine Art and other institutions. Over the course of her career, Ryan's artmaking has expanded to include crafts learned from her mother, such as embroidery,

crochet, and quilting, which she regards as part of an intergenerational artistic legacy. For the last two decades, Ryan has incorporated found items into her work, including seeds, ocean corals, and product packaging. Her use of organic materials in combination with mass-produced items suggests environmental concerns around excess and consumption while also recognizing the unrealized potential of discarded objects.

Ryan's evolving, open-ended considerations are informed by shifts in the artist's own life. Born on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, a British Overseas Territory, and raised in the United Kingdom (UK), she has long been interested in issues of belonging and displacement, and loss and healing. In the 1980s, Ryan participated in artist-in-residence programs and groundbreaking group shows that sought to create greater visibility for Black and Asian British artists from historically displaced diasporic communities. Since 1990 Ryan has lived between the UK and New York. Her contribution to contemporary British art was recognized with the prestigious Turner Prize in 2022, an Order of the British Empire (OBE) award, and appointment to the Royal Academy of Arts. She is an honorary fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and an honorary doctor of arts at Bath Spa University. With over one hundred works, *Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects* surveys four decades of the artist's groundbreaking creative output, including sculpture, works on paper, and textiles.

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects is co-organized by the Pulitzer Arts Foundation and Wexner Center for the Arts. The exhibition is curated by Tamara H. Schenkenberg, Curator, with Molly Moog, Curatorial Associate, Pulitzer Arts Foundation.



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Life Cycles and Relationships

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

1. **Sans**, 1983

Graphite on paper
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

2. **Untitled**, 1985

Plaster and bronze
Tate: Presented by the American Fund
for the Tate Gallery, courtesy of Howard
Karshan to mark his term as Chairman of
the Patrons of New Art (1993–1997) 2009

Untitled is among Ryan's first sculptures and an early example of her extended engagement with fruits, seeds, and pods. Here, a plaster structure that curls at the ends like a dried-up pod contains six open compartments. Sunken inside are abstract bronze forms resembling organic elements like seeds as well as body parts. The protective shell curves around these elements, which could be emerging like growing buds or settling into dormancy. In Ryan's work, plant life appears at various stages of development, embodying life cycles, moments of transition, and mental and physical states.

Her early drawings, such as *Sans* (#1), reflect similar interests. Here, organic pink-and-white forms flecked with black smudges and outgrowths resemble microscopic views of cells, viruses, or tiny particles, conveying the close relationship between cycles of renewal and decay.

3. **Disavowal (She Follows You Around)**, 2002

Photographic print and acrylic on card stock
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Looking through old family photographs can help us remember loved ones, reexamine the past, and reconcile ourselves to change. In the 2000s, Ryan began making collages from pictures of herself, her parents, and her siblings at different ages. She painted ovoid shapes over the images in shades of black, gray, white, and pink. In some cases, the obscuring forms become almost physical presences. For instance, in *Disavowal (She Follows You Around)* (#3), an ambiguous, cloudlike apparition appears to overhang, embrace, obscure, or even silence Ryan.

Pins play a similar role in *Signs and Symbols* (#4), where they pierce a pink shape hovering over a family portrait. Ryan also used them in *Pins and Needles* (#5), where they seem to hold together a number of seedlike forms inside a pink pod. These pins pierce through to the back of the paper, leaving punctures (scan QR code for an image). In these works, Ryan references Afro-Caribbean ritual and cultural traditions in which pins or nails are affixed to objects to call on spirits or ancestors for guidance, healing, and protection. Across this series,

Ryan reexamines her past, reflecting on complex family dynamics to evoke emotions ranging from tenderness and melancholy to longing.

4. **Signs and Symbols**, 2002

Photographic print, paper, wool, and pushpins on card stock
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

5. **Pins and Needles**, 2001-2

Foam, ink, and pushpins on card stock
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York



Scan for a reverse view
of *Pins and Needles*

6. **Obliterated**, 2000

Photographic print and acrylic on card stock
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

7. **In Vacuo**, 2000

Photographic print, acrylic, ink, and thread
on card stock
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

10. *Territories*, 1986

Oil and graphite on paper
Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge

This drawing merges different types of containers—seedpods and boats—into one vessel. Here, Ryan explores her long-standing interest in drift seeds, which have evolved to float for thousands of miles along ocean currents, eventually reaching shores where they propagate new life. This process of relocation and adaptation can serve as a metaphor for Ryan's own displacement as a Caribbean-born British artist who lives between the US and the UK. Drift seeds in Ryan's work also allude to histories of global migration, including the violence of the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th to 19th centuries, as well as present-day diasporas, in which large groups of people live away from their traditional homelands.

11. *Leave*, late 1980s

Lead
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

12. *Seed Capsules*, 1995–96

Acrylic on brown paper envelope
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

13. *Collective Moments III*, 2000–22

Fabric, broad beans, thread, and embroidery hoop
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, given by Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, 2023

14. *Weather Report*, 2019

Fabric, thread, and mango seeds
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

In *Weather Report* (#14), Ryan embroidered a pillowcase, embedding mango seeds between layers of fabric to form raised volumes. The surrounding concentric rings recall the lines on a weather forecast map. In the earlier works *Weather Patterns at Safe Horizon I and II* (#15), these forecast lines encircle clouds. The slippage between seeds, clouds, and abstract forms across the works on this wall is characteristic of Ryan's practice, in which ideas recur and evolve over time. Ryan draws on clouds' associations with turbulence and changing states—whether meteorological or psychological.

15. *Weather Patterns at Safe Horizon I and II*, 2004/19

Collages with felt
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Architecture and Interior Spaces

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

Architecture has been a focus for Ryan dating back to her university studies in the late '70s, when she first began making box-, tray-, and shelflike sculptures to house smaller objects. These early works highlighted her preoccupation with the relationship between inside and outside or the container and its contents. She has said: "Capsules, divisions, compartments, are all metaphors for the wider issues of dissociation, fracture, displacement, alienation, and so on." Ryan is particularly interested in the psychology of in-between spaces, such as windows and vents, where one room connects to another.

At the Pulitzer, Ryan draws attention to a transition between two galleries with *Closed Curtain* (#17). Sewn by hand from orange mesh bags used to transport firewood, Ryan's curtain highlights one of the primary features of the Pulitzer's Tadao Ando-designed

building: large windows that let in natural light and allow views of the outdoors. The overlapping layers of mesh in *Closed Curtain* create a wavy visual effect resembling the ripples in the museum's reflecting pool. Similarly, a framework formed by the seams joining the firewood bags echoes the grid of the museum's concrete panels. This textile builds off earlier works by Ryan, such as *Curtain* (#19), a quilt-like hanging textile with a small opening at center through which light and air can pass.

Outside, next to the reflecting pool, Ryan presents twenty-seven bronze sculptures cast from stones that line the bottom of the pool (#18). These works are the latest in Ryan's extended practice of engaging directly with architecture through site-specific installations.

17. **Closed Curtain**, 2018–24
Hand-sewn firewood bags
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

18. **St. Louis Limestone**, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

19. **Curtain**, 2011
Paper, thread, and fabric
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

20. **Cavities**, 1988
Lead
IMMA Collection: Donation, 2004

Cavities (#20) evolved out of one of Ryan's earliest site-specific works, *Cavities in Cloister Court*. During a 1987–88 residency at Jesus College in Cambridge, England, Ryan cut pieces of lead foil into shapes replicating the glass panes of the college chapel's rose window, which themselves are held together by lead frames. She then placed these shapes into shallow holes that she dug in the outdoor courtyard, forming a sunken imprint of the window in the ground (scan QR code for an image of the original installation). Throughout their display at Jesus College, the lead sheets took on a natural patina of color from being out in the elements. After they were removed from the courtyard, Ryan flattened and mounted them onto paper, preserving the traces of the architecture in a new work that is partially presented here. The artist's reconfiguration of these fragments reflects the value she places on residues and remainders as well as transformation and the long life cycle of materials.



Scan for an image of
Cavities in Cloister Court.

21. **Cladding**, mid-2000s
Fabric, wood, plaster, plastic scrim, wood
slides, bandages, and wire mesh
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London



Scan for an image of *My Island (Repository)*, 1995, pictured in the photographic slides in the work.

This group of works (#21–31) highlights Ryan's ongoing interest in boundaries between outside and inside. In the 2000s, Ryan explored these ideas by creating stacked architectural systems from plywood boxes (#21) for displaying objects and placing artworks in conversation with one another.

Together, these structures recall the high-rise buildings of New York, where Ryan moved in 1990. One of the boxes is insulated with a moving blanket—a possible reference to Ryan's relocation from the UK to New York. The windows of the other two are covered with grate-like fencing and photographic slides of an outdoor installation Ryan mounted at Long Island University Brooklyn in 1995 (scan QR code for an image of the installation). These objects encourage us to peer inside while simultaneously obstructing our view.

Nearby works on paper (#22–26) and sculptures made from everyday domestic objects and industrial parts such as saltshakers (#31), cotton swabs (#27), and grates (#29) extend this conversation about architectural space. The rectilinear forms of apartment buildings are suggested by a stack of matchboxes (#30), while pierced lead foil (#28) recalls a vent or sieve—both structures that allow passage while filtering residue or contaminants.

Ryan's interest in liminal in-between spaces is partly informed by reading 20th-century theorists such as Gaston Bachelard and Julia Kristeva on barriers and boundaries. These philosophers consider both the physical and psychological ways we use these devices to create distance or maintain a sense of self.

22. **Untitled**, early 2000s
Inkjet print
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

23. **Psychosis in Foreign Places**, 2005
Mixed-media drawing
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

24. **Wall Have Ears**, 1995–2005
Ink and watercolor on paper
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

16. **Toxic Cloud**, 2005
Mixed-media drawing
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

25. **Floor Vents Breathing**, mid-2000s
Collage
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

26. **Windows to the Soul**, mid-2000s
Mixed-media drawing
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

27. **Garden of Your Mind VI**, ca. 2011
Plaster, Q-tips, hair, and thread
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

28. **Part of Something Else**, mid-1990s
Lead
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

29. **Domestic Wire Cutter**, mid-2000s
Stainless steel and Hydrocal
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

30. **Matchboxes**, mid-2000s
Wood and matches
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

31. **Herbal Shaker**, mid-2000s
Hydrocal, net, and thread
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Containers and Materials

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

32. *Untitled from the Shack series*, 2018

Plastic bottles and synthetic netting
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

The plastic bottle—one of the most humble and disposable objects—is one of Ryan’s primary subjects. At its essence, a bottle is a receptacle for water. Ryan’s engagement with the bottle expands her ongoing investigations into containers, from the seedpod to the multistory building. In some of these works (#33–37), Ryan solidifies the bottle’s empty interior by casting it in plaster. Several of these casts recall concrete architecture with arches and curves. Others take on the qualities of the reclining human body—another container for water.

In several sculptures (#32, 39, and 40), bottles are crumpled together inside netting. This open mesh allows light to pass through their transparent plastic. In #32, for instance, blue bottles act almost like stained glass that adorns sacred spaces. In #38, Ryan plays up these notions of value and worth by casting a large soda bottle in porcelain, historically a precious material used for refined drinking vessels like teacups.

Ryan’s rigorous formal experiments highlight the color, material, and

proportions of the bottle, giving sustained care and attention to an item that is usually discarded. In doing so, she expresses concern for the environment and asks us to reconsider how we interact with “single-use” objects.

33. *Garden of Your Mind III*, 2021

Plaster, fishing wire, thread, and twine
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

34. *Collective Moments XIV*, 2022

Plaster, hairnet, Sculpey, and twine
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

35. *Multiple Conversations X*, 2021

Plaster, plastic net, and string
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

36. *Collective Moments V*, 2022

Plaster, hairnet, and plastic bags
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

37. *Water Bottle Flower*, 2022

Plaster
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

38. *In Silent Rest*, 2024

Porcelain
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

9. *Pouch*, 2020

Hand-dyed crocheted pouch
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

39. *Systems & Microbes I*, 2022

Date net, polyester thread, string, and bottles
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

40. *Systems & Microbes II*, 2022

Date net, polyester thread, string, and bottles
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

41. *Systems & Microbes III*, 2022

Bottle tops, polyester thread, and hairnet
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

42. *Residue*, late 1980s

Bronze with patina
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Despite its solid material, the surface of this bronze rises and falls like sea waves. Ryan has pointed out the crumpled quality of this sculpture, noting, “this is partly to do with the fact of the work carrying its own history and signature.” Like many of Ryan’s works, it is an abstract form that nevertheless exhibits the marks of its own making and evokes personal and visual associations. Its rough texture reflects the humble material from which it was cast: creased paper covered in wax.

The vibrant blue, however, carries the residue of many memories. Per Ryan, “The blue reminded me of a number of preoccupations . . . jazz, blues music, a blue ocean.”

43. *Red Cube*, mid-2000s/2024

Fabric, light bulb, plaster, and plywood
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

In 1980, Ryan traveled to Nigeria as part of the masters degree she pursued in West African art. Her studies reaffirmed links she had noticed between West African ways of making and her own intuitive approach to art. In the works on this shelf, Ryan created meaningful connections between crafted, found, and organic materials through bronze casting, braiding, binding, tying, coiling, and bundling—all methods Ryan encountered during her visit to Nigeria.

While traveling across the country, Ryan was struck by the widely-held idea that votive objects made from everyday materials have the power and agency to protect, transform, and mediate between people and communities. Growing up, she had already absorbed some understanding of ritual votive traditions by watching her mother and aunt engage in Afro-Caribbean practices, including setting out food offerings for jumbies, or spirits of the dead. Several of the sculptures here are food related, such as casts of avocado stones (#47) and soursop skins (#45), as well as clay braided to resemble marshmallow candy (#52).

Ryan’s studies included visits to the storage rooms at museums in the UK and Nigeria, where objects were kept together on shelves. Her use of metal shelves to display her work recalls these structures, which performed a protective and organizational function. Across her work, Ryan has explored how objects on shelves can be recombined to allow multiple connections to emerge.

44. *Collective Moments XVIII*, 2022

Ceramic, plastic netting, and thread
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

45. *Infection IV*, 2020

Plaster and rope
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

46. *Multiple Conversations XXVI*, 2020

Coral, plaster, and cotton thread
Collection of Alexis Johnson and
Jorge Pardo

47. *Votives for you I*, 2023–24

Bronze, plastic net, and cotton thread
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

48. *Untitled*, 2020

Plaster, thread, microcable, and brass ferrules
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

49. *The Thread that Binds*, 2024

Mango stones, recycled plaster, and thread
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

50. *Signs After Words*, 2023

Bronze, thread, and netting
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

51. *Completion*, 2023

Hydrocal, thread, and ink
Miller Meigs Collection

52. *Marshmallow Plait*, 2023

Clay, thread, and pins
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

53. *Orange Peel Tea Talking*, 2023

Bronze and cable wire
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

54. *Shack Shack*, 2018

Pods and fishing line
Collection of Amy Cappellazzo

55. *Multiple Entry Points*, 2022

Upholstery tape, pins, and Sculpey
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Pillows

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

This gallery explores an object that has fascinated Ryan for decades: the pillow. We rest our heads on pillows, which cushion us during sleep—a vulnerable state during which we are isolated from reality. The surreal qualities of sleep are underscored in works like *Movement of Light Extinguished I* (#61), where what seems like a soft pillow is actually hard plaster. The stacked pillows of *Layered, Strata* (#56) are dyed with indigo and feature a fluid circle pattern that seems about to fade away, suggesting the stains or residue of receding dreams.

In Ryan's work, the protection and support of the cushion is extended to fruits, such as mango and pawpaw (#69 and 70), which are surrounded by

protective packaging. Ryan plays up these layered meanings by acknowledging that a fruit itself is a cushion that pads and nourishes the seed within.

In this gallery, Ryan relates pillows' associations with nourishment and care to her childhood. Her mother sewed pillowcases for the artist and her siblings. Ryan's mother also made her own pincushions—some of which Ryan has repurposed into sculptures (#58 and 59). The soft bodily quality of the pillow is also highlighted in a series of modified medical pillows (#64–66). Used to support the body during recovery from surgery or illness, these objects are here transformed into cushions for bronze casts of fruit.

- 56. *Layered, Strata*, 2017**
Cushions, thread, and linoleum
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
- 57. *Pin Cushion*, 2002**
Acrylic, collage, and pushpins on paper
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
- 58. *Cushion the Blow*, 2024**
Bronze, thread, netting, and fabric
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
- 59. *Trickstify*, 2022**
Fabric, wadding, tea, and sewn thread
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 60. *Pathways*, ca. mid-2000s**
Cushion and embroidery
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 61. *Movement of Light Extinguished I*, 2022**
Light bulb, crocheted fishing line, and plaster
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 62. *Section*, 2017-21**
Tie-dyed pillowcase, hair bands, elastic,
and twine
Private collection, Switzerland
- 63. *Material Seduction*, late 1980s**
Lead foil, steel wool, and lipstick
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 64. *Memento Mori I*, 2022**
Bronze and reconfigured medical pillow
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 65. *Memento Mori III*, 2022**
Bronze and medical pillow
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 66. *Modified Medical Pillow*, 2021**
Bronze, fabric, and wadding
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 67. *Entrapment*, 2016-22**
Pillows, pins, tie-dyed cushions, and thread
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
- 68. *Sewing Seeds 2*, 2019**
Fabric, thread, mango seeds, and plastic
Collection of Noel E.D. Kirnon
- 69. *Votives for you V*, 2023**
Bronze and crocheted fishing line
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York
- 70. *Paw Paw Good for You*, 2023**
Bronze
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York Collection of
the artist
- 71. *Infection XI*, 2020**
Bronze and doily
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

Mourning and Healing

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

72. *Quoit Montserrat*, 1998

Carrara marble and silicone rubber
Tate: Presented by the artist 2001

This sculpture was inspired by a type of ancient Welsh funerary structure made from stone, known as a *quoit*. Ryan evoked these monuments by carving a block of white marble—a material associated with tombs and memorials. She then placed silicone casts of tropical soursop fruits into its shallow depressions.

Ryan created this work in the late 1990s, a few years after the Caribbean island of Montserrat experienced a catastrophic volcanic eruption that buried the capital, Plymouth (Ryan's birthplace), and the southern half of the island in ash, displacing residents. Reflecting on the eruption, Ryan noted that, although devastating, the natural disaster also brought about the potential of organic growth: "Paradoxically this ash is very fertile and from the destruction comes the possibility of regeneration."

Although *Quoit Montserrat* reflects the loss of the island Ryan remembered, it also suggests the emergence of new life. On view in this gallery are a number of other works that feature buried or blotted images as well as materials encased in other matter. These sculptures and drawings (#73-78) can be read through Ryan's response to this traumatic event.

73. *Psychosis and the Obeah Man*, 2002

Acrylic and photographic print on card stock
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

74. *Safety*, mid-2000s

Paper, pins, thread, and photographic print
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

75. *Montserrat*, 1997

Fruit cushion, pins, and paint
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

76. *Petrified*, mid-2000s

Light fixture, lightbulb, and Hydrocal
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

77. *Collective Moments XIX*, 2022

Silicone
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

78. *Jumbie Got You!*, 2010

Graphite and gouache on paper
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

79. *Memento Vivere for Living*, 2022

Bronze with painted patina
Collection of Anna Vlachochristos and Keith Morgan

80. *Company with Bush Tea*, 2022

Bronze
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

81. *Infection VI*, 2020

Plaster and string
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

82. *Solace*, 2024

Bronze and wire
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Ryan is fascinated by flowers, which we turn to in moments of mourning as well as celebration. Their growth from seeds can appear almost miraculous, yet their beauty and vibrancy quickly fade. This has made them long-standing symbols of the fleetingness of life and inevitability of death—a concept sometimes referred to as *memento mori*.

In *Solace* (#82), a bundle of red carnations appears freshly cut and about to slip from the cord that ties them. Ryan emphasizes the fragility of the blooms, while extending their lifetime indefinitely by rendering them in durable bronze. A bronze cast of an orange peel (#80) echoes the tradition of still life paintings that

depict recently peeled or cut fruit. This gesture communicates freshness and immediacy but also impending decay.

In Ryan's memento mori, there is also potential for rescue, continuity, and rebirth. *Infection VI* (#81) is made of shards of plaster—the remains of a broken sculpture. Tied back together with pink string, these remnants take on an afterlife as a new work of art.

83. *Collective Moments XXII*, 2022

Bandages, plaster, thread, and embroidery hoop
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

84. *Stitched*, 1994–95

Paper, gauze, adhesive, and thread
Collection of Miguel Saco

85. *Repair*, mid-2000s

Acrylic on inkjet print
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

When one of Ryan's drawings of a seed became torn, she mended the rip by gluing it to a new support while leaving the original tear visible. The work is now titled *Repair* (#85). Such demonstrations of care in Ryan's practice acknowledge the preciousness and fragility of life. This way of thinking is also expressed in several works made from adhesive medical bandages, referred to as "plasters" in the UK (#83, 84, 86, and 88). Ryan regards the bandages' pink color as reminiscent of the inside of the body, revealed by a wound. By suturing Band-Aids and repurposing medical wraps and medicine cups (#89), Ryan foregrounds practices of healing and alleviating physical and psychological trauma. Adjacent sculptures on view made from the turmeric-root dye (#93), Himalayan salt (#91–92), and rose quartz (#94) also evoke Ryan's belief in the curative potential of natural elements.

86. *Plaster Bandage*, early 2000s

Elastic, Hydrocal, pins, foam, rubber, ink, and bandages
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

87. *Rescue*, 2018

Coral and bandage
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

88. *Plastered House*, mid-2000s

Bandages, plywood, and mesh
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

89. *Strategy 10*, 1995

Medicine cups and paper
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

90. *Leaving Balms*, 2024

Cotton thread, ribbon, and Himalayan salt
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

91. *With You, Where You Are*, 2024

Himalayan salt, bronze, and thread
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

92. *Aiding Journey's End*, 2024

Himalayan salt and plastic netting
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

93. *Collective Moments X*, 2022

Turmeric-stained fabric and pins
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

94. *Threads for You*, 2024

Crocheted thread and rose crystal
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

A Seed Is Never Just a Seed

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

Ryan continually highlights the life-giving abundance of the natural world—exploring seeds, pods, and fruit as subjects that convey growth, dispersal, and change. She often incorporates organic matter such as actual avocado stones, mango seeds, and tea into her sculpture. But just as often, what appears to be a squash is a bronze cast of the fruit with a rich green patina, and an orange peel is revealed to be made from vivid Sculpey clay or bronze. In other words, a seed is never just a seed, and a fruit is never just a fruit.

Early in Ryan’s career, sculpting the seedpod was a way to consider spatial relationships between inside and outside. In *Shelves with Fragments* (#95), a pod becomes a shrine-like structure to house and organize objects resembling spiritual offerings.

For Ryan, fruits have a personal resonance, evoking memories and feelings of nourishment. For example, when Ryan’s mother was pregnant with her, she found comfort in eating soursop fruits. Similarly, oranges are reminiscent of a citrus tea Ryan’s aunt served to soothe her as a young child. Across her work, Ryan channels her lived experiences while also addressing larger global histories of these plants, especially the ways in which their desirability has turned them into international commodities. Tea, coffee, avocados, and dates have figured heavily in histories of colonization as well as contemporary conflicts over land use and environmental degradation.

95. *Shelves with Fragments*, 1985–86

Plaster and pigment
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

96. *Soursop*, 2021

Bronze
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison
Jacques, London

Ryan was born in Montserrat and grew up in London. However, she lived on the island again for a brief period when she was nine or ten years old. According to the artist, “My memory of that particular time and place has a lot to do with the sensory experience of eating fruit like sugar apples and soursop. . . . The perfume of soursop is so pungent; it is both sweet and sour.” Even before her time in Montserrat, the soursop fruit was familiar to Ryan from childhood visits to a London’s Ridley Road market where she shopped with her mother. Such markets selling tropical fruits were central to the experiences of the Windrush generation—an influx of Caribbean immigrants to England between the 1940s and ’70s. In this sculpture, Ryan cast a soursop in bronze on an oversized scale. With its uncanny enlarged

soursop in bronze on an oversized scale. With its uncanny enlarged presence, the fruit becomes a monument to these shared food traditions.

97. **Untitled**, 2020
Woven cotton and seedpods
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
98. **Untitled**, 2020
Crocheted thread pouch and clay pods
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
99. **erase - erasure - erased - almost.**,
1995–96
Pastel and graphite on paper
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
101. **Multiple Conversations XX (Dormant)**,
2019
Fabric, thread, and mango stones
Private collection, Switzerland
102. **Infection X**, 2021
Seed tray, plaster, thread, and found objects
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
103. **Tidal**, 2020
Fabric, avocado stones, thread, seedpods,
and fishing wire
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

In Ryan’s work, plants and seeds often represent or commemorate the places they come from and travel to. A seedpod floats on a pleated textile resembling ocean waves in *Tidal* (#103). Ryan has expressed interest in the seeds’ ability to migrate, even floating between continents. As she has said, “Coconuts, for example, can travel across the ocean for three weeks, and then, if they find a good location, they’ll germinate. . . . So there’s something about travel and moving through history and different locations where things might find a natural habitat—or not.” Ryan’s experiences as an immigrant to the UK, and later to the US, parallel the journey of drift seeds, which float on the ocean between land masses. Ryan’s works also reflect her personal journeys as an artist. Bronze pods in *Cluster* (#104) were cast from a magnolia pod in the garden of artist Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) in Cornwall, England, where Ryan held a residency. *Hanging Palm* (#105) features a bronze date palm hanging from electrical wire sourced from Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, where the work was first exhibited.

104. **Cluster**, 2021
Bronze magnolia pods and fishing line
Wakefield Council Permanent Art
Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield).
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105. **Hanging Palm**, 2023
Bronze with patina
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London
106. **Sweet Dreams are Made of These**, 2021
Glazed ceramic stoneware and jute mat
Wakefield Council Permanent Art
Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield).
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with the Henry Moore Foundation,
supported by Cathy Wills, 2022/23
107. **Projections**, 2023
Jute mat, vegetable net, bronze, and thread
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Excess and Abundance

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

108. *Scaffold*, 2021-22

Metal shelves, bronze, zip ties, empty coffee pods, Sculpey, Hydrocal, beads, self-hardening clay, bandages, thread, fishing line, plastic net, and embroidery ring
Shah Garg Collection

109. *Collective Moments XXIV*, 2022

Plastic containers, buttons, beads, twine, and vegetable net
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

110. *Passion, Passion Fruit*, 2023

Bronze and food containers
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

111. *Infection VII (Punnet I)*, 2020

Dyed thread doily, stacked cardboard mushroom boxes, and Sculpey
Collection of Noel E.D. Kirnon

112. *Multiple Conversations IX*, 2021

Sculpey, plastic net, and string
Collection of Dorianne Hutton Samuels

113. *Gum Wraps*, mid-2000s

Gum wrappers
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

114. *Donut*, 2018

Cardboard and thread
Collection of Anne Pasternak and Mike Starn

115. *Multiple Conversations XXIV*, 2020

Tea bags, tea, and thread
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

In *Multiple Conversations XXIV* (#115), artificial shoots sprout from stitched-together tea bags. In *Infection VII (Punnet I)* (#111), stacked cartons shelter mango stones modeled in Sculpey clay. Beneath these, a yellow doily spreads like flower petals. The vivid colors and alluring textures of these sculptures recall tropical plants and suggest the wonder and bounty of nature's abundance and biodiversity. At the end of this gallery, bags crocheted by Ryan in brilliant colors and complex patterns hang together in a thicket of growth, like a dense forest (#117-125). Within them Ryan has embedded organic as well as sculptural items.

For over thirty years, Ryan has used packaging in her sculptures, repurposing everything from fruit netting and cardboard mushroom trays to tea bags and aluminum baking pans. Like a seedpod—a protective container for the vulnerable seed within—this packaging encompasses, protects, and unites seeds and other objects in Ryan's work. Recognizing the potential in single-use packaging and granting it a second life, Ryan draws attention to the proliferation of wrappings and

containers that quickly become waste. Her work explores the interconnections between bounty and excess—highlighting the effects of cultivation, production, and consumption on the environment.

116. *Unwrapped*, 2022

Bronze, exfoliating cloth, and twine
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

117. *Untitled*, 2020

Crocheted thread pouch and clay
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

118. *Untitled*, 2022

Fishing line, Hydrocal, and bronze
Private collection, Switzerland

119. *Sac*, 2020

Woven cotton, Sculpey, and seedpod
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

120. *Untitled*, 2022

Fishing line and plaster
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

121. *Along a Spectrum*, 2022

Crocheted thread and Sculpey
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

122. *Movement of Light Extinguished II*, 2022

Broken light bulb, plaster, wool, and elastic
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York

123. *Untitled*, 2020

Woven cotton and avocado stones
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

124. *In Suspension*, 2022-24

Fishing line, plastic net, coral, and clay
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York, and Alison Jacques, London

**125. *Prickly Pear Spines Stick in Your Throat*,
2022**

Bronze, crochet hairnet, and elastic
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York