

# 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.



Scan for the digital exhibition guide on the free Bloomberg Connects app.

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Life Cycles and Relationships

1. **Sans**, 1983

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

2. **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

3. **Obliterated**, 2000

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

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



Scan for a reverse view  
of *Pins and Needles*

6. **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)* (#6), 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.

7. **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.

8. **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
9. **Seed Capsules**, 1995–96  
Acrylic on brown paper envelope  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
10. **Leave**, late 1980s  
Lead  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
11. **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.

12. **Weather Report**, 2019  
Fabric, thread, and mango seeds  
Collection of Shane Akeroyd  
  
In *Weather Report* (#12), 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* (#13), 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.
13. **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

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Architecture and Interior Spaces

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* (#14). 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* (#16), 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-four bronze sculptures cast from stones that line the bottom of the pool (#15). These works are the latest in Ryan's extended practice of engaging directly with architecture through site-specific installations.

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

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

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

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

*Cavities* (#17) 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*.

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

This group of works (#18–29) 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 (#22) 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 (#18–21 and 23–24) and sculptures made from everyday domestic objects and industrial parts such as saltshakers (#28), cotton swabs (#25), and kitchen tools (#27) extend this conversation about architectural space. The rectilinear forms of apartment buildings are suggested by a stack of matchboxes (#29), while pierced lead foil (#26) 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.

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

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

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

**22. *Cladding*, mid-2000s**  
Fabric, wood, plaster, plastic scrim,  
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 this work.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Containers and Materials

**30. *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 (#31–32 and 34–36), 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 (#37–40), bottles are crumpled together inside netting. This open mesh allows light to pass through their transparent plastic. In #30, for instance, blue bottles act almost like stained glass that adorns sacred spaces. In #33, 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.

**31. *Collective Moments XIV*, 2022**

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

**32. *Water Bottle Flower*, 2022**

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

**33. *In Silent Rest*, 2024**

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

**34. *Multiple Conversations X*, 2021**

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

**35. *Collective Moments V*, 2022**

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

**36. *Garden of Your Mind III*, 2021**

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

**37. *Pouch*, 2020**

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

**38. *Systems & Microbes I*, 2022**

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

**39. *Systems & Microbes III*, 2022**

Bottle tops, polyester thread, and hairnet  
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. *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.”

42. **Shack Shack**, 2018  
Pods and fishing line  
Collection of Amy Cappellazzo

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 these shelves (#42–58), 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. Ryan was already familiar with votive traditions in the Afro-Caribbean context, such as 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 (#52) and soursop skins (#57), as well as clay braided to resemble marshmallow candy (#54).

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.

43. **Untitled**, 2020  
Plaster, thread, microcable, and brass ferrules  
Collection of Shane Akeroyd
44. **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
45. **Signs After Words**, 2023  
Bronze, thread, and netting  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
46. **Red Cube**, mid-2000s/2024  
Fabric, light bulb, plaster, and plywood  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
47. **Multiple Conversations XXVI**, 2020  
Coral, plaster, and cotton thread  
Collection of Alexis Johnson and Jorge Pardo
48. **Pathways**, ca. mid-2000s  
Cushion and embroidery  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
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. **Multiple Entry Points**, 2022  
Upholstery tape, pins, and Sculpey  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
51. **Collective Moments XVIII**, 2022  
Ceramic, plastic netting, and thread  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
52. **Votives for you I**, 2023–24  
Bronze, plastic net, and cotton thread  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
53. **Completion**, 2023  
Hydrocal, thread, and ink  
Miller Meigs Collection

54. **Marshmallow Plait**, 2023  
Clay, thread, and pins  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

55. **Cushion the Blow**, 2024  
Bronze, thread, netting, and fabric  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London

56. **Orange Peel Tea Talking**, 2023  
Bronze and cable wire  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

57. **Infection IV**, 2020  
Plaster and rope  
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

58. **Collective Moments XXIV**, 2022  
Plastic containers, buttons, beads, twine, and vegetable net  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York



# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Pillows

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* (#62), where what seems like a soft pillow is actually hard plaster. The stacked pillows of *Layered, Strata* (#59) 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 (#71 and 72), 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 (#60). The soft bodily quality of the pillow is also highlighted in a series of modified medical pillows (#65–67). Used to support the body during recovery from surgery or illness, these objects are here transformed into cushions for bronze casts of fruit.

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

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Mourning and Healing

**73. *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 (#74–79) can be read through Ryan's response to this traumatic event.

**74. *Safety*, mid-2000s**

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

**75. *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

**76. *Montserrat*, 1997**

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

**77. *Collective Moments XIX*, 2022**

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

**78. *Petrified*, mid-2000s**

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

**79. *Jumbie Got You!*, 2010**

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

**80. *Infection VI*, 2020**

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

**81. *Memento Vivere for Living*, 2022**

Bronze with painted patina  
Collection of Anna Vlachochristos and Keith Morgan

**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 (#83) 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* (#80) 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. *Company with Bush Tea*, 2022**

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

**84. *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* (#84). 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 (#85–88). 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 (#92), Himalayan salt (#91 and 93), and rose quartz (#94) also evoke Ryan’s belief in the curative potential of natural elements.

**85. *Collective Moments XXII*, 2022**

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

**86. *Rescue*, 2018**

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

**87. *Stitched*, 1994–95**

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

**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. *Collective Moments X*, 2022**

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

**93. *Aiding Journey’s End*, 2024**

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

**94. *Threads for You*, 2024**

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

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## A Seed Is Never Just a Seed

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* (#96), 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. *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.

96. ***Shelves with Fragments***, 1985–86  
Plaster and pigment  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
97. ***Multiple Conversations XX (Dormant)***, 2019  
Fabric, thread, and mango stones  
Private collection, Switzerland
98. ***Infection X***, 2021  
Seed tray, plaster, thread, and found objects  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
99. ***Untitled***, 2020  
Crocheted thread pouch and clay pods  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
101. ***Untitled***, 2020  
Woven cotton and seedpods  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
102. ***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* (#102). 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* (#105) 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* (#104) features a bronze date palm hanging from electrical wire sourced from Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, where the work was first exhibited.

103. ***erase - erasure - erased - almost.***, 1995–96  
Pastel and graphite on paper  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
104. ***Hanging Palm***, 2023  
Bronze with patina  
Courtesy of the artist, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Alison Jacques, London
105. ***Cluster***, 2021  
Bronze magnolia pods and fishing line  
Wakefield Council Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield). Presented by the Contemporary Art Society through its special partnership with the Henry Moore Foundation, supported by Cathy Wills, 2022/23

106. ***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
107. ***Sweet Dreams are Made of These***, 2021  
Glazed ceramic stoneware and jute mat  
Wakefield Council Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield). Presented by the Contemporary Art Society through its special partnership with the Henry Moore Foundation, supported by Cathy Wills, 2022/23
108. ***Projections***, 2023  
Jute mat, vegetable net, bronze, and thread  
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

# Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects

## Excess and Abundance

**109. *Donut*, 2018**

Cardboard and thread  
Collection of Anne Pasternak and Mike Starn

**110. *Multiple Conversations XXIV*, 2020**

Tea bags, tea, and thread  
Collection of Shane Akeroyd

In *Multiple Conversations XXIV* (#110), artificial shoots sprout from stitched-together tea bags. In *Infection VII (Punnet I)* (#112), 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 (#116–124). 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.

**111. *Multiple Conversations IX*, 2021**

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

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

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

**113. *Passion, Passion Fruit*, 2023**

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

**114. *Gum Wraps*, mid-2000s**

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

**115. *Unwrapped*, 2022**

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

**116. *Untitled*, 2020**

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

**117. *Untitled*, 2022**

Fishing line, Hydrocal, and bronze  
Private collection, Switzerland

**118. *Sac*, 2020**

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

**119. *Untitled*, 2022**

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

**120. *Along a Spectrum*, 2022**

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

**121. *Movement of Light Extinguished II*, 2022**

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

**122. *Untitled*, 2020**

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

**123. *In Suspension*, 2022–24**

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

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

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