

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pulitzer Presents First Survey in U.S. of the Art of Turner Prize-Winner Veronica Ryan

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects | Mar 7 – July 27, 2025

ST. LOUIS, MO, January 7, 2025 — This spring the Pulitzer Arts Foundation surveys four decades of artmaking by Montserrat-born, British artist Veronica Ryan, known for her singular ability to convert the most common of materials and objects into revelatory works of art.

As Ryan’s first comprehensive solo exhibition in the U.S., ***Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects*** is co-organized by the Pulitzer and the Wexner Center for the Arts. The exhibition is curated by Tamara H. Schenkenberg, Curator, with Molly Moog, Curatorial Assistant, Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

Among more than a hundred sculptures, textiles, and works on paper will be objects made of traditional art materials—i.e., bronze, marble, and plaster—as well as others sourced from such unexpected everyday items as seeds, pods, mango stones, orange peels, bandages, and plastic bottles. Ryan’s thoughtful reuse of organic materials in combination with mass-produced items suggests concerns around excess and consumption while also recognizing the unrealized potential of discarded objects.



Veronica Ryan, *Untitled*, 1985

“At the Pulitzer, we aim to create exhibitions that are true to an artist’s ideas and sensibility. It has been a particularly rich experience to collaborate with Veronica, because there are so many layers and paradoxes in her work,” says Cara Starke, Executive Director, Pulitzer Arts Foundation. “Her meticulous handicraft transforms quotidian materials into precious vessels that carry her own memories, as well as evidence of such global realities as the legacies of diasporas and environmental threats.”

Says Schenkenberg, “Through her repeated engagement with organic and plant materials, Veronica often refers to the stages of human life—that is, the way a seed symbolizes life to come and an empty

pod, a life spent. Yet the intensity of her work derives in large part from the way in which her motifs invite slippages of associations, which in turn lead to open-ended conversations.”

Ryan’s sculpture is rooted in her academic training in the 1970s and 80s at London’s Slade School of Art and other institutions. However, over the course of her career, her artmaking has expanded to include crafts learned from her mother, such as embroidery, crochet, and quilting, which Ryan regards as part of an intergenerational artistic legacy.

The Exhibition

Setting the stage, *Unruly Objects’s* Entry Gallery showcases the remarkable evolution of Ryan’s practice. Here, more than a dozen artworks demonstrate how the artist has returned again and again to the

motifs of fruits, seeds, and pods as subjects that convey growth and moments of transition and change.



Veronica Ryan, *Territories*, 1986

A key work in this gallery is *Territories* (1986), an important early oil and graphite painting, in which a pod-like form appears to drift along a watery blue surface. 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. Adjacent is a hanging textile, *Collective Moments III* (2020-2022), into which the artist has

embroidered broad beans while affixing to its surface a pair of embroidery hoops—suggesting the process of its making. In a photographic collage created in 2002, the artist reimagines the pod shape as a cloud hovering over a black and white photograph of her family.

As a visitor moves from the gallery into a passageway overlooking the museum’s reflecting pool, Ryan’s *Closed Curtain* comes into view. The placement of this orange mesh textile against a large window draws our attention to the boundary between the building’s interior and exterior, revealing Ryan’s interest in transitions and thresholds where one space gives way to another.

A number of monumental, framed lead pieces are encountered upon entering the Main Gallery. The multipart work entitled *Cavities* (1988) evolved out of one of Ryan’s earliest site-specific works *Cavities in the Cloister Court*. During a 1987-1988 residence at Jesus College in Cambridge, Ryan cut lead pieces into shapes that replicate the panes of the college chapel’s rose window, which is joined together by lead. She then placed these shapes into shallow holes she dug in the ground in the outdoor court to form a sunken imprint of the rose window. After the run of the installation, Ryan flattened and mounted them onto paper to create *Cavities*. The artist’s transformation of these fragments reflects the value she places on residues and remainders as well as her interest in transformation of objects into something altogether new.



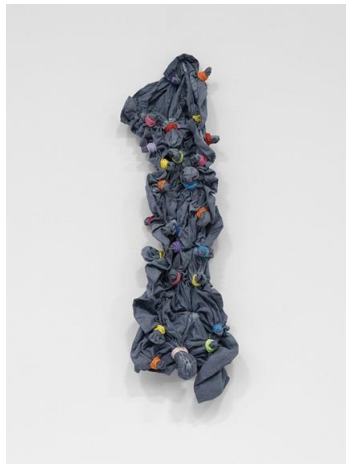
Veronica Ryan, *Collective Moments III*, 2000/2022

This gallery also highlights a number of recurring thematic threads for Ryan. One is the plastic bottle, which has been among her primary subjects for over a decade, extending her interest in containers. Here, in the Pulitzer's vast hall, on a tabletop and suspended from the ceiling, are small sculptures comprising plastic bottles submerged in plastic netting, wrapped in nets, cast in porcelain, and otherwise deconstructed. Ryan's rigorous formal experiments highlight the color, material, and proportions of the drinking bottle, giving sustained care and attention to an item that is usually discarded.



Veronica Ryan, *Collective Moments V*, 2022

Another inspiration for Ryan is her own study of West African art, particularly artworks with protective and votive functions. Schenkenberg notes that Ryan held a fellowship in Nigeria in the early 1980s and became fascinated by power objects she encountered there—objects endowed with the agency to protect, affect transformations, or intercede on behalf of their owner or maker. Over ensuing years, Ryan has continued to incorporate approaches to artmaking she saw in Nigeria into her sculpture, combining crafted, found, and organic materials into meaningful relationships through tying, bundling, braiding, and binding. *Unruly Objects* showcases some fifteen of these bold sculptures, including *Marshmallow Plait* (2023), a rope of plaited white clay, and *Votives for You I* (2023-2024), a small bundle of bronze spheres in green netting tied with hot pink string wrapped repeatedly to form a stalk at top.



Veronica Ryan, *Section (detail)*, 2017–2021

In the nearby Cube Gallery, a tall stack of indigo-stained cushions overlooks a selection of artworks also made from pillows, many of them referring to dream states or healing. In other pillow-related works Ryan makes reference to her mother—an avid quilter, sewer, and crocheter—who embroidered the family's pillow cases and made her own colorful pin cushions. Several works in this gallery reflect that history. For *Trickstify* (2022), Ryan stitched together her mother's tiny pin cushions into a brightly colored, abstract textile collage. In an adjacent grouping are three sculptures Ryan created by modifying neck and seat medical pillows, which are used to support the body during recovery from surgery or illness. She embedded each with bronzes in the shape of seeds and fruits, such as an avocado and chayote.

On the lower level, artworks speaking to mourning, healing, and repair frame one of the highlights of the exhibition, *Quoit Montserrat* (quoit being a Welsh funerary monument). This sculpture is a monumental sarcophagus-like marble upon which lie rubber casts of soursops, a fruit native to the Caribbean, South America, and parts of Asia and Africa. Embedded within white stone, these fruits speak to notions of regeneration following the end of life, a reflection brought on by the devastating volcanic eruption in Montserrat in the mid-1990s, Ryan's birthplace. Ryan made *Quoit Montserrat* during an artist residency at Tate St. Ives in Cornwall, England, from 1998-2000. Speaking to the continuity of generations, the Barbara Hepworth Estate in Cornwall provided the Carrara marble for the artist to carve.

This gallery also features works symbolic of the act of repair and nurture, including *Rescue* (2018), an assemblage of rough, craggy coral stones wrapped in a stretchy beige bandage. Nearby are a number of exquisite bouquet-like sculptures Ryan made by casting flowers in bronze, including *Momento Vivere for Living* (2022). In doing so she emphasized the fragility of the blooms, while extending their lifetime indefinitely by rendering them in durable bronze.

The last gallery returns to the motifs of fruits, seeds, and pods, exploring their many associations both personal and historical. A significant early floor sculpture shows the artist experimenting with the pod as a container as early as 1985. On loan from the Tate, the piece realistically depicts an empty pod, but one that is also clearly a container with compartments. Also here are two other floor sculptures: a monumental, green and spiky bronze *Soursop* (2021), depicting an uncannily oversized tropical fruit, and a pile of brightly colored ceramic cocoa pods at the center of a round jute mat, entitled *Sweet Dreams are Made of These* (2022). In these sculptures, seeds and fruit connote nurture and natural abundance. The gallery also sheds light on Ryan's interest in the flip side of that abundance—waste and consumerism—with sculptures made from food packaging. In this grouping, Ryan embeds precious bronze-cast seeds and



Veronica Ryan, *Sweet Dreams Are Made of These*, 2022

fruits into disposable items, such as stacked mushroom trays and takeout containers.



Veronica Ryan, *Along a Spectrum*, 2021

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects ends in a flourish in a final section where crocheted sacks resembling fishing nets, hanging foliage, and ripe fruit are suspended from the ceiling and dangled from the gallery walls. Installed in a dense thicket, they suggest organic growth patterns and hold within seeds and fruit stones as containers of growth and potential.

Exhibition Tour

After the Pulitzer, *Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects* travels to the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, where it will be on view August 22, 2025 – January 11, 2026.

The Artist

Veronica Ryan lives and works both in New York and in the U.K., where she has been designated an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) and RA (inducted into the Royal Academy of Arts). In 2022, she was awarded the Turner Prize, one the most prestigious prizes for visual arts in the United Kingdom, and included in the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Ryan was born in 1956 in Plymouth, Montserrat and raised in England. She has studied at St. Albans College of Art and Design, Bath Academy of Art in Corsham Court, The Slade School of Art at University

College, London, and The School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. Over her forty-year career, she has been the subject of numerous exhibitions and residencies within the U.K., the U.S., and abroad. Her first one-person exhibition was at Arnolfini, Bristol in 1987. Other important one-person shows have been presented at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (1988), Camden Arts Centre (1995), Aldrich Museum (1996), Salena Gallery, Brooklyn (2005), Tate St Ives (2000, 2005, and 2017), The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh (2011), and The Art House, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England (2017). Her work is in many private and public collections including those of Tate, Arts Council Collection, Contemporary Art Society, Sainsbury's Collection, and Hepworth Wakefield in Great Britain; the Irish Museum of Modern Art; the Brooklyn Museum; and the Pérez Art Museum, Miami.

Also on View—*Jess T. Dugan: I'm right here with you*

Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects runs simultaneously with *Jess T. Dugan: I'm right here with you*, featuring 25 pencil drawings from a new series of botanical drawings by the St. Louis-based artist. Although primarily known as a photographer, Dugan considers this new body of work an extension of their previous practice in its contemplative expression of the ephemerality of life.

The drawings capture the subtle changes and fleeting beauty of plants as they bloom and wither. Dugan's quest for presence is reflected in the series' title *I'm right here with you*—something they say to their daughter at bedtime—as an acknowledgement that the best thing we can offer each other, during times of difficulty as well as joy, is our presence.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

The Pulitzer Arts Foundation is an art museum devoted to presenting the art of today and works from the past within a global context. Located in the heart of St. Louis for more than 20 years, its home is an architectural landmark designed by celebrated architect Tadao Ando. Open and free to all, the Pulitzer is a cultural and civic asset to the St. Louis community and a popular destination for visitors from around the world.

The campus is located in the Grand Center Arts District of St. Louis, Missouri, and includes the museum, the Park-Like garden, a tree grove, and the Spring Church. The museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. Admission is free. For more information, visit pulitzerarts.org.

About the Wexner Center for the Arts

The Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University is devoted to commissioning new works of art, artist residencies, and the presentation of exhibitions, performing arts, film/video and learning programs. Housed in the first major public commission by architect Peter Eisenman, the Wex's iconic building reflects the center's ambitions to reimagine what a contemporary cultural space could be. The Wex serves regional, national, and international artists and communities and is supported by public funders, donors, sponsors, and members.

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MEDIA CONTACTS

National:

Ennis O'Brien

Betsy Ennis: betsy@ennisobrien.com | +1 917-783-6553

Stephanie Markovic: stephanie@ennisobrien.com | +1 347-628-4688

St. Louis:

Kaleidoscope Management Group

Amy Burger: amy@kaleidoscopemg.com | +1 314-265-1372

Also on view in St. Louis this spring:

Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

Like Water, March 7–August 10, 2025

Laumeier Sculpture Park

Monika Weiss: Metamorphosis (Sound Sculpture), through May 18, 2025

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

Seeds: Containers of a World to Come, February 21–July 28, 2025

Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection, September 12, 2025–January 5, 2026

Saint Louis Art Museum

Manuel Mathieu: Pendulum (new media series), February 28–November 30, 2025

Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery, March 21–September 14, 2025

Roaring: Art, Fashion, and the Automobile in France, 1918–1939, April 11–July 27, 2025

In Search of America: Photography and the Roadtrip, May 2–October 12, 2025

Patterns of Luxury: Islamic Textiles 11-17th Centuries, May 9–November 2, 2025

Image Captions

Veronica Ryan, *Untitled*, 1985. 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. © Veronica Ryan. Photo: © Tate

Veronica Ryan, *Territories*, 1986. Oil and graphite on paper, 540 x 740 mm [VR 1]. © Veronica Ryan. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery. Photo: Kettle's Yard

Veronica Ryan, *Collective Moments III*, 2000/2022. Fabric, broad beans, thread, embroidery hoop, 18 1/2 x 11 x 1 5/8 inches (47 x 28 x 4 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. © Veronica Ryan, OBE RA. Courtesy Alison Jacques, London

Veronica Ryan, *Collective Moments V*, 2022. Plaster, hairnet and plastic bags, 4 x 3 1/2 x 6 1/4 inches (10 x 9 x 16 cm). © Veronica Ryan, OBE RA. Courtesy Alison Jacques, London

Veronica Ryan, *Section* (detail), 2017–2021. Pillow case, hair bands, (elastic) twine, 23 1/2 x 8 x 4 inches (59.7 x 20.3 x 10.2 cm). Photo: Steven Probert. © Veronica Ryan, OBE RA. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Veronica Ryan, *Sweet Dreams Are Made of These*, 2022. Glazed ceramic stoneware, jute mat, 5 7/8 x 83 7/8 x 83 7/8 inches (14.9 x 213 x 213 cm). © Veronica Ryan. The Hepworth Wakefield. Photo: George Baggaley

Veronica Ryan, *Along a Spectrum*, 2021. Installation view, Spike Island, Bristol Commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freeland's Foundation. Photograph by Max McClure. © Veronica Ryan. Courtesy Spike Island, Bristol, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Alison Jacques, London