

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

Souter, Ann. "Veronica Ryan's Botanical Musings on Migration," *Hyperallergic*, June 30, 2021; <https://hyperallergic.com/658416/veronica-ryan-botanical-musings-on-migration-spike-island/>

## HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews**

### Veronica Ryan's Botanical Musings on Migration

For the Montserrat-born artist, seeds are both a metaphor for and a physical continuation of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.



by Anna Souter  
June 30, 2021



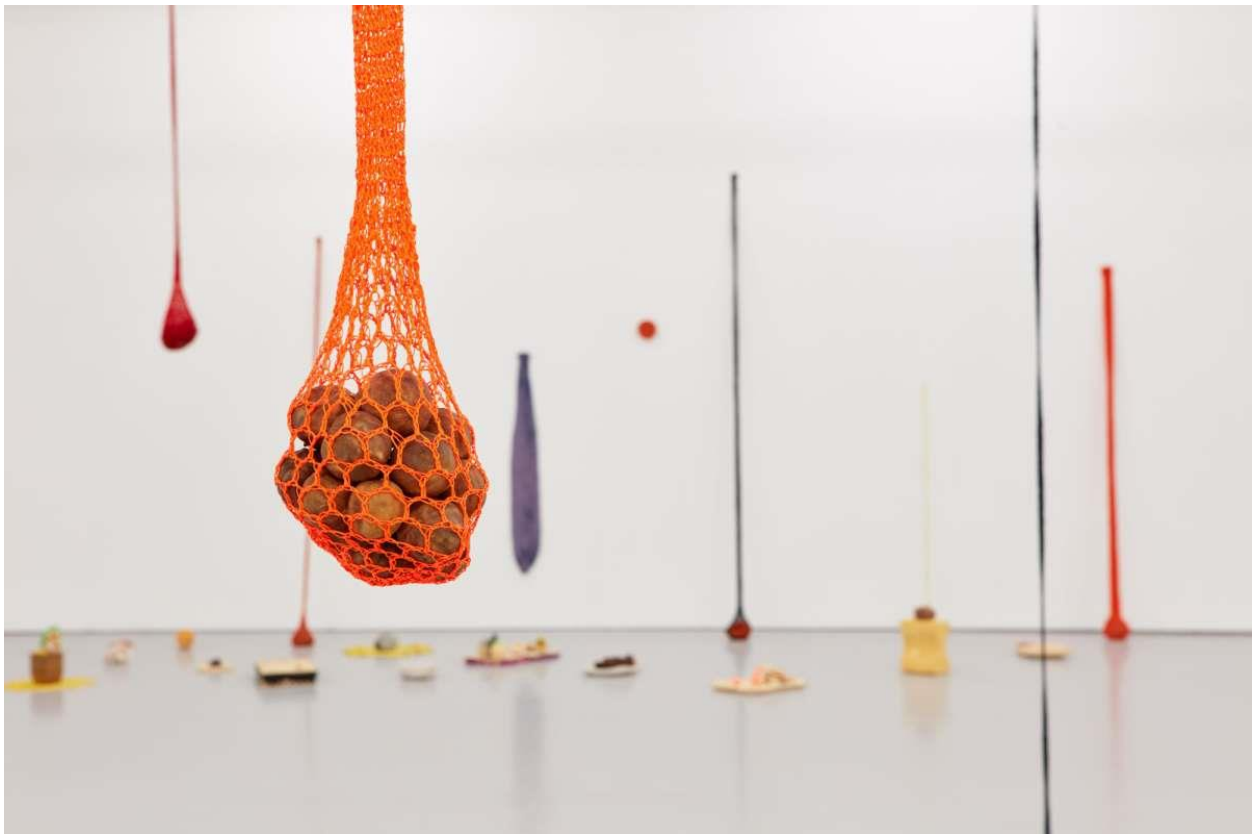
Veronica Ryan working in her studio at Spike Island (2020) (photo by Max McClure; image courtesy Spike Island, Bristol)

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BRISTOL, UK — Punctuated by beans, kernels, pods, and stones, *Along a Spectrum* is filled with disruptive presences carrying power and potential in tiny, unassuming packages. In this major solo show of Veronica Ryan's work, viewers are left uncertain whether the seeds are real or cast in clay or bronze. Sometimes they are hidden altogether, sewn into fabric hangings, their presence indicated only by embroidered bumps and accompanying wall labels.

Ryan is interested in how and where seeds migrate and germinate. The largest installation in the exhibition, "Drift Seeds" (2019–2021), is inspired by fruits that have evolved to disperse their seeds on floating ocean currents until they land at sites suitable for germination. In botanical terms, these plants (such as the coconut) are diasporic species; for Montserrat-born Ryan, seeds are both a metaphor for and a physical continuation of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.



Installation view of *Veronica Ryan, Along a Spectrum*, Spike Island, Bristol, 2021; commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freelands Foundation. (photo by Max McClure; copyright Veronica Ryan; image courtesy Spike Island, Bristol, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Alison Jacques, London)

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Veronica Ryan, "Tidal" (2020), fabric, avocado stones, thread; commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freelands Foundation (photo by Max McClure; copyright Veronica Ryan; image courtesy Spike Island, Bristol, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Alison Jacques, London)



Veronica Ryan, "Pouch" (2020), net, orange peels, thread; commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freelands Foundation (photo by Max McClure; copyright Veronica Ryan; image courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Alison Jacques, London)



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In this installation, handfuls of seeds (dried or reproduced in clay) are suspended in brightly colored hand-crocheted tubes that resemble fishing nets, stockings, or the webbing used to transport fruit and vegetables around the world. The structures bulge under their own weight, ripe with layers of meaning. Like a number of other works in the show, "Drift Seeds" hints at how both bodies and plants are moved by the entwined cultural and ecological forces of colonialism, capitalism, and the related climate crisis.

In "Tidal" (2020), avocado stones are sewn inside a blue duvet cover, evoking seeds lying on the ocean floor, ready to germinate given the right conditions. The piece is one of several references in the exhibition to duvets, weighted blankets, and cushions, suggesting themes of care, comfort, and therapy. "Its Own Cushion" (2020) is a collection of medical pillows, both as found objects and as versions cast in plaster, heaped together like giant bean pods. Hard and brittle, the cast cushions are devoid of their original function, disrupting simplistic notions of healing and restoration.

*Along a Spectrum* is full of interwoven visual and conceptual references, creating an open-ended and generous dialogue between people and seeds. This is an exhibition that treads lightly, touching on narratives of growth and nurture, capitalism and climate, drift and diaspora, in a way that is both allusive and captivating.

Veronica Ryan: Along a Spectrum continues through September 5 at Spike Island (133 Cumberland Road, Bristol, UK). The exhibition is curated by Carmen Juliá.