

## Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations

1 April – 14 June 2026

**Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations** is a major exhibition dedicated to the award-winning British artist Veronica Ryan (b.1956, Plymouth, Montserrat). Encompassing more than 100 works, the exhibition draws on every aspect of her practice, revealing her multifaceted work across sculpture, textiles and works on paper. Significantly, it includes recently rediscovered works from the 1980s – large-scale sculptures made from plaster and beaten lead, as well as vivid drawings – which reveal enduring artistic interests across her career.

The exhibition begins in Whitechapel Gallery's largest exhibition space (Gallery 1) with Ryan's most recent works, including several newly conceived for this presentation. These include *Totem* (2025–26), a striking white clay and plaster sculpture derived from casts of stacked plastic bottles. This tower-like work echoes the gallery's architectural columns, punctuating an otherwise open space. Ryan also intervenes with a series of crocheted works that hang from a tall structure. She first developed these during a residency at Porthmeor Studios in St Ives, Cornwall, in 2018. While there, she noticed traditional fishing nets stored in the workshops below and was struck by how their construction echoed the knitting and crochet techniques taught to her by her mother. She responded by making extruded and bulbous stocking-like structures, concealing inside clusters of crystal rocks, drift seeds, shrivelled mango stones, crushed plastic bottles or yoghurt pots. Her reuse and recombination of these materials connects with timely concerns for the environment and ecology but also derives from personal narratives. She explains, “my mother was always recycling things, not that she called it that... I've grown up repurposing things when I didn't have any resources.”

Running the entire length of the gallery is a shelf featuring a selection of works including *Multiple Conversations* (2019–present), the series from which the exhibition takes its title. The pieces vary significantly in material approach: tightly wound spindles of upholstery tape pierced by coloured clay pods; clusters of teabags carefully threaded together; stacks of plaster cast leaves bound with vibrant green thread, each small enough to hold in the palm of a hand. Some works incorporate commodities such as tea, oranges, or vanilla pods that connect to hidden legacies of colonial trade. Others incorporate ‘drift seeds’ or ‘sea beans’ – the distinctive seeds of tropical trees that have evolved to disperse via ocean currents, often travelling for thousands of miles before germinating on far-flung islands. While they allude to experiences of diaspora and migration, seeds also hold significance in Ryan’s work as containers associated with confinement, or as latent vessels for new life. Ryan brings her materials together using embroidery, winding, or stitching that evoke domestic crafts, or makeshift repairs. By using such nuanced and layered visual strategies, Ryan opens up space for multiple readings.

Contrasting in size is the 1.5-metre bronze sculpture *Untitled (Magnolia Pod)* (2024), a giant cast of a magnolia bulb. The work reflects the possibilities of scale and material offered by her recent public commissions. Ryan received the Turner Prize in 2022, in recognition of her permanent public artwork *Custard Apple (Annonaceae), Breadfruit (Moraceae), and Soursop (Annonaceae)* unveiled in Hackney the previous year. The sculpture was commissioned by Create London and honours the postwar Windrush generation who migrated from the Caribbean to the UK.

Elsewhere are a series of works incorporating warehouse racking. Among them is *Particles* (2017), which features plaster casts and cushions that Ryan has arranged on each shelf. Instead of using conventional plinths, Ryan often situates her sculptures within broader architectural frameworks. This approach dates to her earliest works, when she constructed shelves and structures that explored the relationship between inside and outside, the container and what it holds. In recent years, these architectural components have become increasingly prominent in her practice, serving both protective and organisational functions.

On view upstairs, in Gallery 2, are a selection of the many drawings, photo-collages and other works on paper that Ryan has developed alongside her sculptural practice, and which reveal recurring preoccupations. A large patchwork quilt titled *Safe Spaces* (1988–2019) is shown near a series of small gouache paintings on paper depicting cushions and pillows. Also on view are rarely displayed collages incorporating family photographs overpainted with dense black clouds that obscure personal features. The works have a psychological intensity, alluding to repressed desires and traumas that shape personal realities as well as dynamics hidden within wider society.

Opening Gallery 3 are works which exemplify Ryan's ongoing engagement with her birthplace of Montserrat, including a series of gouache and pastel drawings which depict the aftermath of the devastating Soufrière Hills volcanic eruption on the island in the 1990s. *Quoit Montserrat* (1998) is made from a Carrara marble slab with casts of soursop fruit which grow on the Island but which, like many tropical fruits, are also indigenous to other regions. Ryan created this work during her first residency in St Ives, Cornwall, between 1998 and 2000, where she worked with materials used by modernist sculptor Barbara Hepworth.

The final two sections of the exhibition bring together Ryan's earliest works, which reflect her broader engagement with histories of sculpture. Ryan studied extensively at a range of arts institutions including the Slade School of Fine Art (1978–80), and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, 1981–83). While at the Slade, she visited the 1979 Eva Hesse exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, which she cites as a significant influence on her approach to materials and organic forms. At SOAS, she became interested in artistic traditions in West Africa, particularly the Bangwa culture of Western Cameroon. She also came across the work of artists such as Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui.

The exhibition features some of Ryan's most significant sculptures from the 1980s. The floor-based work *Relics in the Pillow of Dreams* (1985) comprises a plaster 'pillow' onto which a series of bronze pod-like forms are carefully placed like 'relics', demonstrating her tactile material sensibility. *Attempts to Fill Vacant Spaces* (1986) is a series of plaster bean-shaped pods, which each support a small bronze object. Until recently, the work was thought to be lost; it has not been displayed since the year that it was created.

Visitors can also see a selection of works that Ryan completed for a residency and exhibitions at Kettles Yard and Jesus College in Cambridge in 1987–88. These include a series of works that Ryan made from lead foil. She explained 'lead foil is like a fabric; when it's first rolled out, it's like a satin and when it is exposed to heat, some of the colours become blue or purple'. *Material Seduction* (mid-1980s) comprises a lead pouch covered in kiss prints, alluding to the luscious but toxic properties of the material. Alongside is the work *Residue* (1988), a crumpled and undulating bronze form with a vivid blue patina. Ryan presents this with one of her most recent hanging works titled *The End of All Things* (2025), a deep Indigo-dyed duvet cover that she has shaped and gathered with elastic hairbands. The juxtaposition reveals Ryan's exploration of nurturing and protective forms, as well as the processes of wrinkling, folding and creasing that recur in her work.

This special presentation at Whitechapel Gallery surveys four decades of the artist's groundbreaking creative output, bringing together work that defies any singular or linear narrative, while weaving together environmental concerns, personal narratives, as well as the psychological implications of history, trauma and recovery.

***Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations*** has been principally and generously supported by The Colwinston Charitable Trust.

A comprehensive publication will be produced for the presentation at Whitechapel Gallery, featuring contributions from the exhibition curators as well as scholars including Jo Applin, Darby English, Catherine Spencer, Tamara Schenkenberg and Amy Tobin.

#### **Press Contacts:**

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#### **Notes to Editors**

- ***Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations*** runs 1 April – 14 June 2026.
- 2026 marks Whitechapel Gallery's 125th anniversary.
- Anniversary highlights include: **Backyard Biennial** (Summer 2026) - a new arts festival; a special 125-anniversary **Summer Party; Art Futures** (throughout 2026) –

a major new talks series; **Whitechapel Gallery Young Associates** (launches Spring 2026) – a new initiative for 18-to-30-year-olds; a **new visual identity** for Whitechapel Gallery's 125th year designed by leading creative agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty (BBH).

- *Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations* is curated by Cameron Foote, Leila Hasham and Hannah Woods.

### **Listing information**

*Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations*

1 April – 14 June 2026

Gallery 1, 2 & 3

Admission: £15 (Standard ticket) / £9.50 (Concessions)

### **Visitor Information**

General Gallery Admission: Free

Ticketed shows: £15/£9.50 concessions

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm

Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

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### **About Veronica Ryan**

Veronica Ryan (b.1956, Plymouth, Montserrat) 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, London (1995), Aldrich Museum, Connecticut (1996), Salena Gallery, Brooklyn (2005), Tate St Ives (2000, 2005 and 2017), The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh (2011), The Art House, Wakefield, (2017) and Spike Island, Bristol (2021). Ryan's exhibition *Unruly Objects* was presented at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St Louis and Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio (2025-26). Her work is in many private and public collections such as the Tate, the Brooklyn Museum, the Arts Council Collection, Contemporary Art Society, Sainsbury's Collection, the Hepworth Wakefield, and the Weltkunst Collection at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Ryan currently lives and works both in New York and in the U.K.

### **About Whitechapel Gallery**

Whitechapel Gallery was founded in 1901 with the aim to bring 'the finest art of the world to the people of East London'. From the outset, the Gallery exemplified a bold programme of exhibitions and educational activities, driven by the desire to enrich the cultural offer

for local communities and provide unique opportunities for extraordinary artists from across the globe to showcase their works to UK audiences - often for the first time.

From ground-breaking solo shows from artists as diverse as **Barbara Hepworth** (1954), **Jackson Pollock** (1958), **Helio Oiticica** (1969), **Gilbert & George** (1971), **Eva Hesse** (1979), **Frida Kahlo** (1982), **Sonia Boyce DBE RA** (1988), **Sophie Calle** (2010), **Zarina Bhimji** (2012), **Emily Jacir** (2015), **William Kentridge** (2016), **Theaster Gates** (2021), **Nicole Eisenman** (2023), **Zineb Sedira** (2024), **Gavin Jantjes** (2024), **Peter Kennard** (2024), **Lygia Clark** (2024), **Sonia Boyce** (2024), **Donald Rodney** (2025), **Hamad Butt** (2025) and **Joy Gregory** (2025) to thought-provoking group and thematic exhibitions that reflect key artistic and cultural concerns, the Gallery's focus on bringing artists, ideas, and audiences together, remains as important today as it did over a century ago and has helped to cement the East End, as one of the world's most exciting and diverse cultural quarters.

We are proud to be a Gallery that is locally embedded and globally connected. Our vision is to ensure Whitechapel Gallery claims a distinctive and radical position in the wider social and cultural landscape, building on its pioneering history while translating and animating it for our time.

[www.whitechapelgallery.org](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org)

#### **About The Colwinston Charitable Trust 30th Anniversary Fund**

Established in 1995 by its Founder and Chairman, Mathew Prichard CBE, The Colwinston Charitable Trust distributes grants to UK Registered Charities delivering high quality work in the Live Performing Arts and the Visual Arts. The Trust derives its main income from royalties from *The Mousetrap*, the murder mystery written by Mathew's grandmother Agatha Christie, and since 1995 the Trust has supported more than 180 arts organisations across the UK awarding grants totalling £11,776,735.

To celebrate their 30th Anniversary and more than 30,000 performances of *The Mousetrap* since the play opened on the 8th of June 1952, The Colwinston Charitable Trust launched a special £1,000,000 fund to celebrate creative expression and the art of storytelling, innovation and excellence in the Arts, and to support projects designed to achieve ultimate impact and enjoyment for audiences.

"My grandmother spent her life being enthralled by the Arts. She wrote to entertain and loved being entertained by so many different art forms. I remain grateful to all the Arts practitioners who continue to bring her work to life and have enabled The Colwinston Trust to be involved with projects that I think would have been close to her heart. The Colwinston Trust is delighted to celebrate 30 years of working with many high-quality arts organisations across the UK by awarding a special Anniversary Grant to Whitechapel Gallery to support *Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations* during Whitechapel Gallery's 125th anniversary year in 2026." - Mathew Prichard CBE, Chair of The Colwinston Charitable Trust.

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*Veronica Ryan: Multiple Conversations* is generously supported by:

Principal supporter:



The Colwinston Charitable Trust 30th Anniversary Fund

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