

## Kathleen Ryan: Cultivator

February 8, 2019 – April 21, 2019



LEFT: *Diana*, 2017, rose quartz, brass, cast iron, 88 × 24 × 24 inches (detail)

RIGHT: *Barbed Wire*, 2017, bowling balls, brass, 8.5 × 8.5 × 310 inches

All courtesy the artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

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Working primarily in sculpture, Kathleen Ryan's work is distinguished by her virtuosic grasp of materials, ranging from poured concrete, cast iron, carved marble, and precious stones to found objects including granite manufacturing blocks, satellite dishes, and bowling balls. She engages with formal sculptural concerns such as volume, weight, balance, and line, while subtly referencing the materials' historical and economic underpinnings. Much of Ryan's *oeuvre* pivots on the application of a meticulously assembled visual language to her preoccupation with natural forms. Through carefully enmeshed paradoxes, her sculptures also engage questions of gender, production, and reproduction.

For her first US institutional solo exhibition, Ryan presents a group of three works that hold in tension products of nature with those of industry. In *Cultivator* (2019), a large cast-iron armature resembling the fruit of a palm tree, is suspended by an oxidized iron anchor chain. From within the cleaved husk, seeds, each a sphere of polished black onyx, burst forth in a teeming abundance. Evoking a meat-hook in an *abattoir*, the exposed clasp joining sculpture to support chain connects the implied fecundity of the fruit to its inevitable decay.

Ryan frequently references ancient iconography and historical sculpture. Her allusions to such motifs nimbly upend classical notions of harmony between scale, size, and idealized form, and frequently aim to reconstruct conventional representations of femininity. *Mother of Pearl* (2019) comprises a pair of parts from a defunct radiator. Stacked atop one another, their semi-spherical interior cavities are encrusted with a mosaic of abalone shell. This enigmatic relic of industry recalls the exaggerated curves of a maternal form, connecting mechanical production with acts of reproduction and creation. The towering figure, with its luminous interior and hulking mechanical exterior, blurs the gendered connotations of industry, craft, and nature.

The artist's interest in alluding to the personal and historical narratives embedded in the materials she employs is most clearly observed in her use of found objects. Sourced from eBay and thrift stores, Ryan has collected dozens of black and white bowling balls and linked them together into long strands using brass chandelier parts. The mass-produced sports gear in *Galaxie 300* (2019) reveals traces of a previous life; some are engraved with names like "Karen" or "Duane" and bear the scuffs of extended use. Polished like precious stones, the white balls are reminiscent of giant pearls made from swirling urethane. By contrast, the black balls echo the onyx seeds in *Cultivator* like exaggerated shadows. These outsize necklaces give form to a set of contradictory associations, most immediately the intimacy of jewelry recalibrated to an impossible scale and weight. Here, and throughout her work, Ryan renders her mundane and industrial materials novel and unfamiliar, wresting a kind of poetry and a sense of humor from her unwieldy sources.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kathleen Ryan (b. 1984, United States) lives and works in New York.

*Kathleen Ryan: Cultivator* is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions & Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

### Opening Reception

Thursday, February 7, 6-8 PM

### Sketch Session: Hidden Life of Inanimate Objects

Wednesday, February 27, 12:30 PM

### Slow Art Day Gallery Tour

Saturday, April 6, 2 PM

### Sketch Session: Playing with Scale

Wednesday, April 10, 12:30 PM

**All programs are free and open to the general public. RSVPs are required.**

For more information about these events and to RSVP visit: [listart.mit.edu/events-programs](http://listart.mit.edu/events-programs).



## SUPPORT

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