

Freelands Award Year 3 Winner Announcement

Spike Island with Veronica Ryan

22 November 2018



Photograph by Jeff Moore

Today, Freelands Foundation announces Spike Island as the third recipient of the annual £100,000 Freelands Award. The Bristol-based institution will be working with the Foundation to present a solo exhibition of new work by Veronica Ryan in Autumn 2020, in addition to producing a monograph with the distinguished British sculptor.

The Freelands Award was established in 2016 by Freelands Foundation, chaired by Elisabeth Murdoch, to enable a regional arts organisation to present a large-scale exhibition, including a significant new work, by a mid-career female artist who may not have yet received the acclaim or public recognition that her work deserves. The total value of the award is £100,000, of which £25,000 is to be paid directly to the artist.

Veronica Ryan's forthcoming exhibition at Spike Island will be her largest and most ambitious solo exhibition to date. The central proposition of the exhibition is to commission significant new works and to situate them in dialogue with re-made early works that were destroyed in the 2004 Momart fire. In doing so, thematic and material connections will link earlier works to her current practice, as well as highlighting complexities around reconstruction and reinterpretation. Alongside the exhibition, Spike Island will become a vibrant hub for the production and debate of Ryan's work, with a three-month artist residency and symposium that will offer an opportunity for new audiences to engage directly with Ryan's process through participation and discussion.

Robert Leckie (Director, Spike Island) said: "My colleagues and I are thrilled that the Freelands Foundation have selected Spike Island and Veronica Ryan to work in partnership on this important project. This award presents a career-defining opportunity for Ryan, a historically important artist whose work has previously opened up new frontiers in sculpture, and who is once again on an upward trajectory. As an organisation dedicated to supporting artists' development and the production and presentation of ambitious new work, welcoming Ryan into our dynamic community of artists at this point in her career is an outstanding opportunity for Spike Island. We are also keen to share her work with audiences in Bristol and the UK through an ambitious exhibition in Spike Island's galleries, accompanied by an extensive public programme and a monographic publication. The award also provides crucial funding for a programme of learning and engagement activities, presenting a fantastic opportunity for Spike Island to grow as an organisation."

Elisabeth Murdoch, Founder and Chair of Freelands Foundation said: "The Foundation and I are thrilled to be working with Spike Island on such an important exhibition of Veronica Ryan's multidisciplinary work. The judging panel were in strong agreement that the organisation and artist were an excellent match. The upcoming exhibition opens Ryan's work up to new narratives, new voices and new writing by utilising the gallery's outstanding facilities and team resources. The project will encompass not just the exhibition but a comprehensive monograph and artist residency at Spike Island studios, allowing a wide audience to better understand the way in which Ryan's historical works relate and connect to new commissions almost three decades later." The shortlist of organisations for this year's award included: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead; Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee; Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Spike Island, Bristol; Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield.

Veronica Ryan's links with the South West region date back to the 1970s, when she studied at Bath Academy of Art. She has also realised residencies in St Ives in 1998 and 2018. Nothing could be more appropriate than to present Ryan's career-defining exhibition in the same city as her first solo show, at Arnolfini over 30 years earlier. The forthcoming exhibition at Spike Island will firmly reestablish Ryan back in the UK, where she is best known for the work she was making during the 1980s and 90s, which was included in acclaimed solo exhibitions at: Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol (1987), Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (1988) and Camden Arts Centre (1995).

Now in its third year, the first Freelands Award supported Glasgow-based artist, Jacqueline Donachie's 2017 exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery and the second winner, Nottingham Contemporary and filmmaker Lis Rhodes, whose solo exhibition will be on display from 25 May – 25 August 2019.

The selection panel for the 2018 Award was as follows: Elisabeth Murdoch (Chair); Martin Clark, Director, Camden Arts Centre; Susan Hiller, Artist; Jenni Lomax, Curator and former Director of Camden Arts Centre; and Beatrix Ruf, Curator and former Director of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

About Spike Island

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located close to Bristol's harbourside. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of exhibitions, events and activities in the central gallery spaces, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses.

Our vision is to position art as central to society, which we do in two ways: by offering a high quality, challenging programme of exhibitions and events; and by fostering a dynamic and critically engaged community of artists and designers. Spike Island collaborates with local and regional partners as well as with international institutions, museums and universities.

About Veronica Ryan

Veronica Ryan is a British artist who currently splits her time between New York and the UK. Born in 1956 in Montserrat, West Indies, she emigrated to England when she was two years old. She studied at Bath Academy of Art, the Slade School of Art and the School for Oriental and African Studies.

Ryan's first solo exhibition was at Arnolfini, Bristol in 1987. Selected solo exhibitions include: Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 1988; The Wood Street Gallery, Pittsburgh, 1993; Camden Arts Centre, London, 1994; Salena Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, 2003; The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, 2012; and The Art House, Wakefield, 2017.

Ryan has been included in a variety of group exhibitions most recently including: Virginia Woolf: Exhibition Inspired By Her Writings, Tate St Ives, 2018; The Place is Here, Nottingham Contemporary, 2017; and Arts Council Collection touring Making It: Sculpture in Britain 1977 – 1986, 2015. Ryan's work was also featured in From Two Worlds, Whitechapel Gallery, London in 1986 and the British Art Show, Hayward Gallery, London in 1990. Ryan completed a residency at Tate St Ives from 1998 to 2000, where she worked in the former studio of Barbara Hepworth. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Tate Gallery, Arts Council Collection; Contemporary Art Society; the Henry Moore Institute; and The Hepworth Wakefield to name a few.



Photograph by Jeff Moore

About Veronica Ryan (continued)

With a prolific career spanning decades, Ryan's work draws on her enquiries into ancestral history as well as collective human experiences of place, home, memory and loss. While primarily working in sculpture, she integrates a range of different media and components such as cast forms in plaster, clay, bronze and aluminium, to more ephemeral found materials such as dried flowers, fruit, feathers and dust. These material combinations create fragile propositions, unpicking tensions between container/contained, comfort/protection, absence/presence and other implicit contradictions which defy easy readings. Often exploring themes such as containment, psychology and perception, her sculptures and installations use the language of mapping, stacking, stitching and tipping to invite us to engage with the deepest levels of our psyches, our bodily relationships with the material world and the intersection of these.

About Freelands Foundation

Freelands Foundation was set up by Elisabeth Murdoch in 2015. The Foundation's mission is to support artists and cultural institutions, to broaden audiences for the visual arts and to enable all young people to engage actively with the creation and enjoyment of art. Art and culture afford immense social and economic benefits to society, and the Foundation aims to tackle the critical issues that are limiting access to these benefits; from the inequality of access to art education in schools, to the lack of sufficient support for female and emerging artists.

Freelands Foundation provokes meaningful, positive change within the visual arts sector via strategic, high-impact programmes, partnerships and activities. These include a varied portfolio of awards that enable existing visual arts organisations to promote new or under-represented talent and develop pioneering creative projects with artists, alongside a diverse range of events and programmes.

Alongside the Freelands Award announcement, the Foundation commissions an independent annual research report investigating the representation of female artists in Britain. This year's research was carried out by Marijke Steedman and is available online. These reports are important as a reliable, public source of evidence for the arts community to highlight the issue of representation.

Notes to Editors
Freelands Foundation

For further media enquiries please contact:
Laura Cook, KTW London: laura@ktwlondon.com
Alice Barnett, KTW London: alice@ktwlondon.com

