

THE SCULPTURE OF KATHLEEN RYAN: THOUSANDS OF GEMSTONES + DECAYING FRUIT

by David Behringer



Bad Lemon (Sour Blush), 2020 Aventurine, smokey quartz, rhodonite, calcite, quartz, labradorite, green line jasper, kambaba jasper, pink opal, citrine, amethyst, rose quartz, agate, serpentine, pink lep-idolite, malachite, mother of pearl, freshwater pearl, bone, glass, acrylic, steel pins on coated polystyrene

New York-based sculptor Kathleen Ryan captures the surprising beauty of decaying fruit by perfectly pinning thousands of individual minerals, gemstones and glass beads. Her work is a universe where white mold is made from pearls and fishing rods become cherry stems. Ten of her oversized sculptures are on view at Karma in New York City through June 19th.

Each work comes with an incredible list of materials used to make it: turquoise, amber, rose quartz, amethyst, fresh water pearls and pink opal.

Ryan's work is a thrill of contradictions. There's a visual vibration between the repulsion to mold and the magnetic beauty of precious stones (the magnetism wins). She's also playing between the opposites of biological organisms and solid rock, and illusions of fuzz or moisture using only dry hard stone. Most overwhelming may be the evidence of the MONTHS of painstaking skill to locate, position and pin each sculpture contrasted with the idea that a real rotting piece of fruit is achieved primarily through neglect. It's extreme intentionality applied to a process that occurs without our aid.

Karma spans two locations on the same block: In the larger space (188 East 2nd St), a massive “Daisy Chain” at the entrance sets the scale, constructed from funnels, agricultural hose and vinyl. It’s connected with the same “split the stem and weave” technique as it’s real-life natural counterpart.

“Bad Cherries” is the centerpiece, a “box” of dozens of cherries in various states of decay that seems to press or ooze against the metal frame. Fishing rods with lead sinkers act as stems, creating a porcupine-like defense for visitors who inevitably want to creep closer – another enjoyable contrast of tension.

On my visit, I heard other guests audibly gasp when they rounded the corner to greet the nearly 6-foot-tall jack-o’-lantern titled “Jackie”. But the REAL surprise is peering inside to explore the geode-like fantasy-landscape of precious stones in every color, that perfectly capture the post-Halloween microbial universe.

Karma’s second location is a few steps away at 172 East 2nd Street and welcomes a closer look at large individual fruits.

Kathleen Ryan’s work pulls you closer, tempts you to stay longer than you planned, and sparks as many ideas and observations as there are materials. And beyond your exit from the gallery, it’ll change how you see and appreciate expired fruit forever.