

Art in America

REVIEWS APR. 06, 2017

Kathleen Ryan

LOS ANGELES,
at Ghebaly

by Jennifer S. Li

Kathleen Ryan:
Between Two Bodies,
2017, granite, glazed
ceramic, and steel,
82½ by 41½ by 47½
inches; at Ghebaly.



Kathleen Ryan’s first solo exhibition flowed like a nostalgic but sobering love ballad, the seven sculptures speaking to the beauty found in the fluctuations of nature, industry, and culture. The show’s title, “Weightless Again,” played on the heft and lightness of the artworks and was borrowed from a song of the same name by the husband-and-wife duo Handsome Family. “This is why people OD on pills and jump from the Golden Gate Bridge,” the lyrics go. “Anything to feel weightless again.”

Between Two Bodies (all works 2017) features two three-ton granite blocks that are notched and angled with the severity of brutalist architecture. One block rests atop three glazed ceramic oranges placed on the other block. The sculpture poetically eulogizes formerly thriving industries that helped shape Los Angeles. The granite, which Ryan bought on eBay, originally belonged to the defense contractor Northrop Grumman. The aerospace industry, once booming in Southern California, has shrunk to a fraction of what it was at its peak in the 1990s. Commercial orange groves, which were established in the 1840s, flourished until the 1950s in what is now downtown Los Angeles but gave way to factories and homes.

Rise and Fall is a stucco sculpture of an unusually shaped palm tree, which Ryan often visited while walking through her former Pasadena neighborhood. Growing in a freeway underpass, the tree developed a coiling trunk that seemed to mirror the forms of the freeway arteries. Ryan made her twenty-foot work in the gallery, and it was destroyed at the exhibition’s end. While Charles Ray, with whom the artist

studied at UCLA, removed a decomposing California redwood and reproduced it in Japanese cypress for his sculpture *Hinoki* (2007), Ryan's palm remains where she found it.

Complementing the tree, two palm fronds (taken from another tree) cast in iron, both titled *Wisp* (*Carrie Furnace*), sat on the floor nearby. Ryan brought a rubber mold of the leaves from California to the historic Carrie Furnaces in Pennsylvania to have these works poured. Once responsible for more than 60 percent of the country's iron production, the furnaces are now open periodically for educational demonstrations. Hanging in the same room, *Pearls* convincingly approximates a necklace in giant scale using pink bowling balls strung together with rope. Procured from eBay and Craigslist, the balls bear the marks of previous owners—an engraving of "Andrea" or "Deb," a decorative pattern of mawkish swooping hearts—serving as reminders of how the items were once treasured. The necklace draped over a wall into the next gallery, where the rope was broken as if it had been ripped off a wearer's neck.

The feral parrots that fly over Southern California—a phenomenon that arose after parrots were released from the Busch Gardens theme park when it was turned into a brewery in the 1970s—were the subject of two works in the show. For these, Ryan made versions of the parrots in mottled, glazed clay, their tails drooping down, perhaps as a sign of their rough city life. A pair sit on a ledge in an untitled piece, and in *Parasol* a group rests on a steel umbrella-like object instead of a tree. As with the depictions of birds in Greek funerary memorials or Dutch *vanitas* paintings, these parrots remind us of the transformative power of time.