

PRESS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****MARY ANN UNGER: ACROSS THE BERING STRAIT OPENS AT BERRY CAMPBELL*****Mary Ann Unger: Across the Bering Strait* | April 17 – May 17, 2025**

February 27, 2025, New York, NY— Berry Campbell Gallery is thrilled to announce its first exhibition of the work of Mary Ann Unger (1945 – 1998). Organized in conjunction with the Mary Ann Unger Estate, the exhibition coincides with a renewal of critical interest in the artist and will include a fully illustrated scholarly exhibition catalogue with essays by Glenn Adamson, Independent Curator and Author, and Jess Wilcox, Independent Curator. On May 1, 2025, the exhibition will feature a panel with Eve Biddle, artist, co-founder of the Wassaia Project, and daughter of Mary Ann Unger, Seph Rodney, PhD, Writer, Editor, and Curator, and Stephanie Sparling Williams, Ph.D., Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum. This panel will mark the commencement of a special three-day activation featuring a stylized lighting of Unger’s sprawling, monumental magnum opus, *Across the Bering Strait* (1992–1994). This exhibition presents the installation in its entirety for the first time in New York City.

Mary Ann Unger was a pioneering sculptor, curator, and unabashed feminist who made space for other female artists and artists of color while working through years of illness. She is remembered for works that evoke the body, bandaging, flesh, and bone, with recurring themes of growth, regeneration, care, and support. Her oeuvre includes large-scale sculpture, small bronzes, works on paper, and public art commissions. In her *New York Times* obituary, Roberta Smith wrote that “[Mary Ann Unger’s] works occupied a territory defined by Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois. But the pieces combined a sense of mythic power with a sensitivity to shape that was all their own, achieving a subtlety of expression that belied their monumental scale.”

Across the Bering Strait is the artist’s most monumental work and arguably her career masterpiece. A daring early example of installation art, the work is the culmination of over thirty years of artistic development and experimentation. Comprised of thirty-four sculptural elements, the heroic scale of the abstracted, interlocking parts fully immerses the viewer in a world entirely of Unger’s making. *Across the Bering Strait* debuted at Trans Hudson Gallery in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1994 and Vivien Raynor of *The New York Times* observed that “Any way it is viewed, the installation packs a huge punch” and that the work’s “blend of the erotic and the macabre represents a climax [in Unger’s work] that had been building since the mid-1980s.” The work deploys the signature techniques and unique visual language that have come to define Unger’s practice: expressive, modular forms that deal with structure and armature, and by extension, care and support. The installation is a powerful example of how “Unger’s sculptures [do] not allow consideration of the singular body apart from its interrelationship to other bodies,” notes Carla Harryman. A meditation on human migration in general and the American experiment in particular, *Across the Bering Strait* is Unger’s reminder that “the heaviness of the body and its suffering is lightened through the redistribution of the burden of the body into a collective and shared world” (Harryman).

Also on view, Unger’s early sculptures and works on paper establish themes and reveal interests seen throughout her career: the combination of organic forms with geometric, and a tendency for parts of works to rest against, hold, support, carry, or cradle one another. These load-bearing works are deceptively simple, but their underlying structures were finely engineered. Drawings of repeated modular forms foregrounded on networks of triangular grids from the late-1970s are where Unger, “saw and realized the possibility of using these patterned experiments to move with intention from drawings to three-dimensional forms at heroic scale,” remarked Horace D. Ballard, curator of the landmark 2022 exhibition *Mary Ann Unger: To Shape a Moon from Bone* at the Williams College Museum of Art. Later works from the mid-1980s until her death in 1998, including her patinated and smooth armatures *Maine Wishing Stones* and *Red Tooth/ Red Palm Nut*, resemble small objects one comes across in nature, such as stones and seeds. In Unger’s hands, these forms turn inwards and morph into organ or bone. The surface of works such as *Seed Pod*, *Basket Piece*, and *Ganesha* reveal visible strips of cloth coated in a gritty substance and layered with care, in a process not unlike casting broken limbs. As described by Arlene Raven in the *Village Voice* “Unger’s columns, pillars, monoliths, prehistoric skeletons are imposing. Yet [...] they are also endowed with a beautiful elegance.”

“During Mary Ann Unger’s life, critics and curators spoke of her work as primordial, mythic, the gothic element of late modernity coming to the fore in a postmodern moment,” Ballard asserted in his revelatory scholarship (Marquand Books, 2022). “I think it was futurity Unger was after, the fact that we all return to the earth, all return — through bodily translation or ash—back to the elemental, to regenerate and harbor new life.”

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am - 6 pm or by appointment. For further information please call at 212.924.2178 or visit our website at www.berrycampbell.com. Press inquiries should be made to Laurel Megalli, Sutton Communications at laurel@suttoncomms.com or 212.202.3402.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mary Ann Unger (1945 – 1998) was a celebrated sculptor best known for works that evoke the body, bandaging, flesh, and bone, with recurring themes of growth, regeneration, care, and support. Her oeuvre includes large-scale sculpture, small bronzes, works on paper, and public art commissions.

Born in New York City in 1945, Unger was raised in New Jersey and received an undergraduate degree from Mt. Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1967, where she first majored in biochemistry before transferring to the studio art program. She received an MFA from Columbia University, New York, in 1975, where she studied with Ronald Bladen and George Sugarman alongside classmates Vincent Ciniglio, Sylvia Netzer, and Ursula Von Rydingsvard. In 1975, Unger moved into a studio loft in New York City’s East Village; a community of artists was just beginning to foment there at the time. In 1980 Unger married photographer Geoffrey Biddle, whom she had met while working at the Magnum photographic library. Biddle and Unger’s daughter, the artist and Wassaic Project co-founder Eve Biddle, was born in 1982, and the loft thereby became home, workspace, nursery, and darkroom alike.

Unger’s early sculptures and works on paper establish themes and reveal interests seen throughout her career: the combination of organic forms with geometric, and a tendency for parts of works to rest against, hold, support, carry, or cradle one another. These load-bearing works were deceptively simple, but their underlying structures were finely engineered. Frequently, the pieces require no hardware and instead balanced on one another securely utilizing Unger’s meticulous, mathematical construction. Her early work was included in exhibitions at PS 1 in 1977 and the Aldrich Museum in 1978.

Mary Ann was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985, the beginning of a long entanglement with the disease that would ripple through her life and work until her death. Between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, she simultaneously worked on both publicly commissioned artworks and gallery-based solo exhibitions. Among these works was *Communion* at Sculpture Center, New York, as well as exhibitions at the New Jersey State Museum, the Klarfeld Perry, and Trans Hudson Galleries. In 1989, Unger received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant and would again in 1995; she was also a resident fellow at Yaddo in 1980 and 1994. In 1992, Unger received a Guggenheim Fellowship and mounted the solo exhibition *Dark Icons* at Klarfeld Perry Gallery, New York. These two achievements punctuated an abundantly productive period during which illness was a frequent visitor, a fact made evident by the show’s themes.

Critics often spoke of Unger’s work in this period as having two distinct voices: public works that “are volumetric, brightly colored architectural structures, rendered in a kind of geometric formalism” and private works that “are solemn, heavy abstractions rich with intimations of mortality and loss” (George Melrod, *Public Art Review*, 1993). Motherhood, too, became a theme, reflected most poignantly in *Pieta/Monument to War*. Unger was also an unabashedly feminist artist. Her name appears on the infamous “Guerrilla Girls Identities Exposed!” poster of 1990. Though Unger herself was not a member of the Guerrilla Girls, her inclusion situated her in a feminist activist role within the art world alongside a host of women artists of the age.

As her work grew in scale and deepened in significance, so too did the cancer which had first arrived in 1985. Unger died on December 27, 1998, in the loft, with her husband and daughter by her side.

As is the case with many women artists of the 20th century, interest in and appreciation for Unger's work has increased posthumously and in retrospect. A 15-year retrospective of Mary Ann Unger's work took place at the McDonough Museum of Art in Youngstown, Ohio, in 2000. Unger's works are held in numerous private and public collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York MOCA Los Angeles, California; and the High Museum of Art, Georgia among many others.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Christine Berry and Martha Campbell founded Berry Campbell Gallery in 2013 in a 1,000-square-foot gallery in Chelsea. Now housed in a custom-built, 9,000 square-foot location on one of Chelsea's most prestigious blocks, Berry Campbell Gallery has cemented its position among New York City galleries as a champion of artists historically marginalized due to gender, race, age, and geography.

Central to Berry and Campbell's collective vision is a blend of scholarly dedication and enduring desire to honor their artists' lives and work. Focusing on a selection of postwar and contemporary artists, the gallery addresses a critical gap in art history, revealing a depth within American Modernism that is only now coming to light. Notably, since its inception, Berry Campbell has elevated the profiles of postwar Abstract Expressionist women like Bernice Bing, Lynne Drexler, Perle Fine, Judith Godwin, and Ethel Schwabacher, presented alongside a growing roster of contemporary talents such as Nanette Carter, Beverly McIver, and Susan Vecsey, to name a few.

Berry Campbell's signature ability to construct new narratives for artists lost to art history has caught the attention of the wider art world, with participation in renowned fairs like Art Basel and Frieze and artist placement within prestigious institutions worldwide. Situated at 524 W 26th Street, the gallery's current location boasts 4,500 square feet of exhibition space, including a skylit main gallery, four smaller galleries, private viewing areas, a library, executive offices, and extensive on-site storage.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. or by request. For further information, visit the gallery's [website](#) and follow on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#).

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