

# ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

**AUGUST 26, 2018 BY ETTY YANIV**

## Keren Anavy and Tal Frank – Collaborative Breeding Grounds

Ever since the Israeli born artists [Keren Anavy](#) and [Tal Frank](#) started working in their nearby studios in Tel Aviv, they have developed a unique artistic collaborative process in addition to their individual thriving art practices. Their collaboration has resulted in multiple imaginative and rigorous installations that have been exhibited internationally. For Art Spiel, each of the duo sheds light on their collaboration, individual art, and upcoming plans. They also share their recent formative experience at the [Everglades National Park residency in Florida \(AIRIE\)](#), where they have further perfected their work process dynamics.



Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, *Compositions for Stones of Gold*, 2018, Installation view, site-specific installation, wood, The Gallery of the Cultural Institute Mexico-Israel, Mexico City, oil on linen, each painting 76.7X37.4", wood, Pyrite stones, video animation screening. Photo credit: Zony Maya.

**Let's start by introducing yourselves. You are both Israeli artists who reside in America- Keren Anavy in NYC and Tal Frank in Mexico City. How did you meet and what can you share about your experience after your move?**

**Tal:** Keren and I met during our MFA program at Haifa University, Israel. We had an initial click and many things in common: we were both women artists at a similar age, mothers, very focused on art and our artistic career, art educators, and we also both moved from Israel to new places within a year.

We just started groping our way in the big world and the prism becomes very broad. Moving to another country and culture affects our work directly; we are both interested in the notions of sites and nature as perceived in different cultures.

**AS: Keren, can you tell me a bit on your experience in NYC?**

**Keren:** As I came to NYC, I attended an International Residency Program for six months at NARS Foundation. Then I participate in the NYFA IAP Mentoring Program, where I met other immigrant artists from all over the world. The past year has been fascinating. Among other new projects, I collaborate with Valerie Green/Dance Entropy – we created *Utopia*, an interdisciplinary piece that refers to the perception of place.

For me, the place is always a starting point for metaphors that deal with universal subjects. I find that America, and New York in particular, are places that provide a very fruitful basis for ideas that I have always developed. Since I moved, I started creating a body of work that looks more escapist, less political in appearance and representation, but still embodies political and social significance.

**Keren and Tal:** After moving from Israel we were very active in our cooperation. We created and showed two exhibitions in Mexico: *Compositions for Stones of Gold* (2018) and *Between Beauty, Memory and Form* (2017). Recently we were Artists-in-Residence-in-Everglades, National Park, Florida, the AIRIE Program (May, 2018).



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, Hothouse, 2012, installation view, part, site-specific installation, Dan Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv. Photo Credit: Yigal Pardo.*

**AS: Tell me a bit about your individual practices – your medium, process, thought process.**

**Keren:** My artistic background has always evolved around nature and organic forms. I often look at nature through historical and social lenses. I see culture as a reflection of nature and vice versa.

My works often contain imagery and subject matter that are disconnected from their previous context, and as a result, transform into a visual abstracted experience that addresses distress and beauty.

I tend to manipulate and reconfigure forms that have cultural and political significance; continuously examining the power that exists in the shapes around us – be it architecture or nature.

**Tal:** I am also very interested in the environment, specifically in objects related to the culture that can be found in everyday life. My practice is very material oriented – I simulate materials and objects, while creating them from different materials and manipulating them differently from what they are supposed to be, out of their cultural, historical, and social contexts.

My installations look like sets, and there can be humor in them. Environment for me is a place that contains a cultural history or a memory of culture in relation to nature; they all influence each other.

I am interested in sculpture and large scale installation. Recently I also succeeded in thinking and creating new works in terms of 2D. Still, I consider them as sculptures.



*Keren Anavy, Written in Water, 2018, installation view, site specific installation for Times Square, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, 2018, ink and colored pencils on transparent mylar, tanks with ink, ink and colored pencils on paper, plexiglas circles, dimensions variable. Photo credit: Samuel Morgan Photography.*



*Tal Frank, First Set, 2015, installation view site-specific installation, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel, mixed media, variable dimensions. Photo credit: Shahar Tamir*

**AS: Each of you is an accomplished artist with an impressive resume of her own. There is also a fascinating history of collaborative work which I would like to highlight here. Tell me about the genesis of your collaboration.**

**Keren**– We have established a collaborative practice for the past seven years, when we started by working in nearby studios in Tel Aviv. Our daily observation of each other's processes in the studio, brought us closer and created a fruitful dialogue based mainly on creative responses to each other -less discussions and more direct artistic response.

We have perfected this practice later on when we moved to a huge space together, which we divided into painting and sculpture studios.

**Tal:** The collaboration was always intuitive and natural, especially since we are very good friends, so the pleasure is twofold. The artistic processes that each of us undergoes are similar, but after the most unusual joint experience we have just had at the Everglades residency, I also discovered many differences, especially in the point of departure.

Keren does more research, reads a lot and gets into a project more conceptually. I, on the other hand, start working with the materials. The beauty of it is that the final products may appear to be the opposite – Keren's works are very material oriented, large scale and abstract, while mine can look very minimalistic and conceptual with a focused theme.

I think that is what makes our joint projects complementary and interesting.

**Keren and Tal:** Our first joint project and exhibition *Hothouse* (2012) highlights the genesis of our collaboration. In *Hothouse* we have constructed a kind of fictive breeding ground for gems and artifacts – such as diamonds, a recurrent theme in our work. The hothouse was expropriated from its original use, while the gallery space became an arena of research, an experimental site for social and artistic research. Our hothouse, was a site of alchemy, of trial and error. We were and still are concerned with the role of coincidence within this process, the creative process, and notions of beauty.

**AS: While it seems that you are coming from slightly different practices – Tal from sculpture and Keren from painting, your art intersects in multi-disciplinary installation work. Can you give me an idea on the “anatomy” of your collaboration ?**

**Keren:** We both reference in our individual work geometric and architectural structures, offering a new ecological order, proposed as seductive and enchanting; fictive places

where beauty and death co-exist. This practice also permeates our common course of action.

After we realize what interests us, we carefully choose meaningful images related to that phenomenon. Following this, each of us starts to create on her own, and a dialogue between the works begins.

**Tal:** Usually we start from where we find natural phenomena that often involve sociological and cultural aspects. Each of us brings her work to the desktop as a point of departure.

When we started working together there was a more hierarchical division of media and technique, but slowly this practice has changed. The more we work together, it gets hard to discern who started what. Since our transition to different countries, I have discovered that our joint work is even closer, because it is more intermingled.



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, Crossover, 2013, part, site-specific installation, Feinberg Projects Contemporary Art Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel, water-color, graphite and ink*

on paper, each 38.5X19", etched mirrors, dimensions variable. Photo credit: Ami Erlich.



Tal Frank, *Crossover*, 2013, detail, site specific installation, Feinberg Projects Contemporary Art Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel, wood, Tumbleweed bush, dimensions variable. Photo credit: Shahar Tamir

**AS: Let's pick a specific collaborative project you see as an important milestone.**

**Keren:** The exhibition *Compositions for Stones of Gold* (2018) at The Gallery of The Institute Culture Mexico-Israel, Mexico City was defiantly a milestone in our collaborative work. We also received the Asylum Arts grant for this project, an achievement that for us means far beyond the financial support. This was our fifth exhibition and second collaboration outside Israel, and proved to us that despite the geographical distance and working separately in different parts of the world, we can maintain our artistic relationship and create a complex installation.

The exhibition was a site-specific installation located in a historic building. In this show, we used stones both as material and as subject matter; questioning its durability and fragility. We investigated archaeological sites and ruins both in Mexico and Israel in order to scrutinize the relationship between place and identity.

The exhibition also reflected our personal and artistic changes in the last two years.

**Tal:** I agree, for variety of reasons: For a long time I have been thinking about Keren's great *stones* paintings series, inspired by Ben Shemen Forest in Israel. I am very attached to

these works – they reflect different conflicts alongside beauty, and they also question the medium of painting – like pattern, composition and color.

When I arrived in Mexico I realized that stone is a significant image in Mexico City's dynamic streets, which are most of the time under construction and constant change. I started to investigate the phenomena of large holes in the roads and piles of stones that are everywhere. This, of course, reminded me of Keren's stones paintings to which I have wanted to respond for a while.

In fact we responded to them together through the sculptural installation, which related to historical and archaeological sites on the one hand, and the construction of something new, on the other hand.



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, Beauty and Other Forms, 2016, installation view, part, site-specific installation, Mane'-Katz Museum, Haifa, Israel, oil on linen, etched mirrors, dimensions variable. Photo credit: Shahar Tamir.*





*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, Crossover, 2013, installation view, part, site-specific installation, Feinberg Projects Contemporary Art Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel, water-color, graphite and ink on paper, each 38.5X19", etched mirrors, wood, dimensions variable, video animation by Quayola. Photo credit: Ami Erlich.*

**AS: I am particularly curious about your recent residency in AIRIE, quite a unique art residency in FL. Can you tell me about it – art, life?**

**Keren and Tal:** It's a very unique month-long residency for one artist resident per month in the Everglades National Park in Florida. It is the only subtropical wilderness in North America, and known for its rich wildlife.

We lived in a live-work space inside the reserve, spent our time exploring the American wilderness, and responding to the dynamic nature of the park and Florida Bay area.

**Keren:** I wouldn't exaggerate to say that it was a shaking experience both in the personal sense of being together alone for a month and also from the artistic point of view of exploring something so intensively and closely.

**Tal:** By living and working isolated in the reserve, we discovered new artistic processes, as if we met for the first time. The Everglades is such a rich and fascinating place that at first we felt overwhelmed. So much visual and conceptual information, everything looked interesting. We started exploring, while learning the place through painting, printing and sculpture. It was very intuitive for us to concentrate and discover the connections between nature and the diverse communities that make up the Everglades.

**Keren and Tal:** We noticed four major communities: the farmers, the homeowners, the Indians and the rangers. We slowly realized that the wild reserve we perceived as uncontrolled is actually a swamp where each of these groups have different interests and ways to control it. We were curious about a typical mass produced sculptures depicting marine creatures, which are very popular among the Everglades communities as a front home/entrance decoration.

We decided to sculpt our own mermaid, which functioned as a prop, symbolizing the complex relationship between man and nature. She represents water, which is one of the biggest conflicts in the Everglades; she represents fantasy; and she is a tragic figure who needs to give up her unique voice in order to get legs and be with a human. We pictured our mermaid in significant places in the reserve, places that reflect the conflict of control.

The idea of connection between the natural and the artificial has always been in our work, but in the Everglades project it becomes more central.

**Keren:** Usually we are used to deal with the representations of the reality, whether from photography, story or a memory. In the Everglades we were dealing directly with the reality, the nature, being part of it and created from within.



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, The Nature of Things, work in progress, during a residency at Everglades National Park, May 2018, AIRIE. Photo Credit: courtesy of the artist.*



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank, The Nature of Things, work in progress, during a residency at Everglades National Park, May 2018, AIRIE. Photo Credit: courtesy of the artist.*

### **AS: What are you working on together?**

**Keren and Tal:** We are working on our new project based on our Everglades experience (AIRIE Program), we hope to present it in the USA alongside *Compositions for Stones of Gold* (Mexico City, 2018),

We are also working on two Artist's books – the first will be a comprehensive catalog that will illuminate our collaborative projects to this day, including the two exhibitions we had in Mexico, *Beauty and Other Forms* at the Mane'-Katz Museum in Haifa, *Crossover* at the Feinberg Projects Contemporary Art Gallery in Tel Aviv, and *Hothouse* at Dan Gallery for Contemporary Art in Tel-Aviv.

The second is an Artist book in a sketch book format that will include paintings, drawings, and photos that reflect a sense of a research and creativity we experienced while being at the Everglades.



*Tal Frank and Project Assistant Lisa Basch at Everglades national Park, Florida, during Keren Anavy & Tal Frank residency at Everglades National Park, May 2018, AIRIE. Photo Credit: courtesy of the artist*

**AS: What are you both working on now individually?**

**Keren:** I'm working on my upcoming solo exhibition in October, 2018 at The Sunroom Project-Space in Wave Hill Public Garden, Bronx. In response to the late fall landscape of Wave Hill, I'll create a conservatory from man-made materials which include painting installation inspired by Chinese scroll paintings and Wave Hill flora stripped down to abstracted form.

I continue to work on *Utopia*, my collaboration project with Valerie Green/Dance Entropy which will show at Danspace Project, St.Mark's Church in New York during December, 2018.

**Tal:** I work on a number of things at the same time, without a specific target at the moment including a new installation influenced by the Everglades program, which had started before. Recently I have been working with a sound artist who explore the environment in relation to the sound it produces.



*Keren Anavy, Utopia, 2018, in collaboration with Valerie Green/Dance Entropy, Documentation of performance at Queens Museum, New York, five dancers, prints, adjustable tubes, each tube 10 feet, . Photo credit: Nomi H.Rave*



*Tal Frank, Sol Nuevo, 2018, Castings of bronze and metal, variable dimensions. Photo credit: Shir Lusky.*

### **AS: Is there anything else you would like to share about your art experience?**

**Keren and Tal:** As visual artists, art education is a discipline we have always considered part of our career, often working closely with the community. The connection between art

and community is very important to both of us and we always strive to integrate between them. We believe that art should create a dialogue in the society.

The past two years have been very intense for us and make us think in new terms on our long cooperation. We feel that we are in constant development, and hope for many more years of creativity and adventures together.



*Keren Anavy & Tal Frank during a residency at Everglades National Park, May 2018, AIRIE. Photo Credit: courtesy of the artist.*

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