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ARTS & CULTURE

## “Topographies of Wonder” highlights beautiful aesthetics, multiculturalism

New watercolor exhibit at Granoff instills messages of multilingualism, change in viewers

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KAITLYN LEW / HERALD

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Dynamic, effusive and vibrant, watercolorist Keren Kroul's exhibition "Topographies of Wonder" first made its home at Granoff Center for the Creative Arts last Thursday. The exhibition is one of a lucky select few chosen from nearly 300 submissions to be housed in the Atrium and Cohen Galleries for the Brown Arts Initiative's inaugural 2017-18 season, said Program Manager Sophia LaCava-Bohanan. After the Initiative issued an open call nationwide for exhibitions last December, the review committee unanimously decided to include Kroul's show, LaCava-Bohanan added. "Everyone came to the table with Keren as one of their top choices."

For those visiting the exhibit, it's not difficult to see why "Topographies of Wonder" survived the scrutiny of the committee. Upon first glance, the viewer experiences a visceral reaction to the four paneled works on display. The vibrant color palettes — each a mosaic of warm and cool tones — are intensified by the works' massive scale, evoking sensations of playful joy in the audience.

For some, the exhibition may be reminiscent of the giant, geometric, now-ubiquitous murals that Keith Haring painted around the world in the '80s. But rather than painting the side of a building that pedestrians will simply pass by, Kroul paints watercolors on paper for gallery walls that demand a scrupulous eye for detail from its viewers. She said she hopes for audiences to experience the dichotomy of space, between close and far, just as she does while painting the pieces.

"When I work on these pieces, physically, I'm standing really, really close; I'm working with tiny brushes, and it's all watercolor," Kroul said. "To really see it, I have to step back. So there's this constant push-and-pull."

Kroul's art is the logical fruition of her remarkably colorful and global life. Born in Israel and of Israeli and Argentinian descent, the artist lived in Israel, Mexico and later Costa Rica before attending college in the United States, where she has resided since.

With its seemingly infinite amount of smaller shapes that create a coherent whole, “Topographies of Wonder” takes on the story of Kroul’s unique, kaleidoscopic identity that comes from the multiculturalism and multilingualism of her upbringing, where she switched between English, Spanish and Hebrew to effectively communicate with her family. “I grew up always feeling like wherever I was, I really wasn’t from there,” Kroul said. “So when I started making this work, I was very consciously thinking about ... how I’m always trying to (bring) together all these different parts of who I think I am into one.”

This theme of unity composed of disparate pieces echoes the goal of the arts initiative, which aims to invite various groups to view “Topographies of Wonder” and the other exhibits it has planned. While the initiative primarily exists to benefit students through an engagement with the arts, Managing Director Anne Bergeron said she desires to see its audience expand beyond the University and act as a cultural resource for anyone to use.

“For the first time we are being very intentional about reaching out and letting the campus and local community know when these exhibitions are on view,” she said. Bergeron and LaCava-Bohanan agree that the change has already begun to take place, as LaCava-Bohanan said she has “seen so many community members walk in and just see the work.”

While “Topographies of Wonder” might appear sufficiently pleasing at a distance, viewers should move up close to unearth the meticulous detail produced by the hand of the artist. “Topographies of Wonder” is on view until Nov. 5 at the Atrium Gallery.

**Topics: arts and culture, Granoff Center, topographies of wonder**