



KEREN KROUL: TOPOGRAPHIES OF LOSS AND LONGING

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emerging

Artist Exhibition Series

ROCHESTERARTCENTER

KEREN KROUL'S TOPOGRAPHIES OF LOSS AND LONGING

BY JOANNA INGLOT

Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.

--Marianne Hirsh

Memories have the power to establish connections between a collective and an individual, private and public history, the present and the past. Diasporic people, who were exiled or left their places of origin to live elsewhere, often rely on the shreds of memory and stories passed from previous generations to define their own personal histories and entangled narratives.

Keren Kroul is a visual artist who explores issues of identity and the Jewish diaspora. Born in Israel, to a German-Romanian mother and an Argentinean father, Kroul grew up in Mexico and Costa Rica; later she moved to the United States to study at Brandeis University and the Parsons School of Design. In the exhibition, *Topographies of Loss and Longing* (2017), Kroul unfolds a layered psychological and historical investigation of her immigrant Jewish family, registering its countless relocations, displacements, and sufferings during the Holocaust, while at the same time trying to come to terms with her own transnational identity.

Consisting of a suite of somber, lavender-blue watercolor paintings and an imposing white hanging made of semi-transparent paper cutouts evocative of lace window curtains that both conceal and reveal, the installation takes us to the Kroul family's ancestral town of Suceava, in Bukovina (Romania). Her great-grandparents, Yitzhak and Sally Rones, moved there from Vienna in the late nineteenth century when the town was part of Austria-Hungary. During World War II, Romanian authorities deported Yitzhak to the Vapniarka concentration camp (Ukraine), while his wife and their twin daughters, Judith and Thea, were sent to a nearby labor camp in Dzhuryn. In 1944, just a few months before the camp was liberated, Judith contracted typhus and died at the age of nineteen. Kroul's grandmother, Thea, kept her deceased sister's braids wrapped in a silk handkerchief for the rest of her life and was buried with them in 2010.

Coils of twisted, branch-like forms that reference the braids wind across the surface of the central, multi-paneled composition, creating a sense of mourning for a lost life and opening up space for the exploration of memory. The braids and the pale blue washes of color meander like a river among the imaginary hills and meadows of Suceava. Vaguely reminiscent of Marc Chagall's poetic renderings of his native Vitebsk, Kroul's works are populated with abstract images of old streets, houses, and synagogues as if to retrieve the richness of the Jewish culture of her ancestors. She dramatizes this dream-like landscape, however, by inserting more direct symbols of the Jews' tragic fate; the Star of David and the grayish-yellow areas of paint bring to mind explicit forms of oppression and extermination by the Nazis such as the mandatory wearing of armbands and the extraction and melting of the victims' gold teeth.

The maze of embroiled and entangled forms in Kroul's largest watercolor also expresses her own psychological condition. It conveys her sense of displacement and distrust in linear conceptions of time and space. Moving back and forth and in and out of the composition, she constantly shifts directions and fields of vision, building spaces that are reminiscent of the Borgesian labyrinth. Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinean writer whose stories she read since childhood, Kroul embraced his fluid, fragmented, and kaleidoscopic process of construction to comment on her own open-ended and transient identity. Kroul's aesthetic also shows close affinity with the elusive, postmodern prose of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), in which the magic cities the main characters of the novel visit are never fixed or stable, but in a process of constant mobility and redefinition, just like Keren Kroul's own "town of postmemory," Suceava, where the artist takes us on her moving and imaginative journey.



Keren Kroul. Detail of *Topographies of Loss and Longing*, 2017.
Watercolor on paper. 30" x 22".
Photograph by Rik Sferra.

Keren Kroul was born in Haifa, Israel, to an Argentinean father and Israeli mother, and raised in Mexico and Costa Rica. She holds an MFA in Painting from Parsons School of Design and a BA in Fine Arts from Brandeis University. Kroul is a 2015 and 2017 recipient of the MN State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant. She was featured in MN Original (Twin Cities PBS), was a 2016 ArtPrize Finalist, and will exhibit at Brown University's Granoff Center in fall 2017. Kroul is an Adjunct Professor of Painting and Drawing at Augsburg University in Minneapolis.

Joanna Inglot is Edith M. Kelso Associate Professor of Art History at Macalester College in St. Paul. She completed her PhD in art history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with an expertise in Modern and Contemporary Art. She has been writing and lecturing extensively on the subject of contemporary art in Europe and the United States. She is author of *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press) and *WARM: Feminist Art Movement in Minnesota, 1970s-1990s* (Minneapolis: Frederick R. Weisman and University of Minnesota Press).



ABOUT THE EMERGING ARTIST EXHIBITION SERIES

In 2004, the Rochester Art Center initiated the 3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series, an exhibition focused program to feature promising artists in the state of Minnesota. Supported by the Jerome Foundation, this series today supports four exhibitions a year, providing a materials stipend and artist honorarium, and focuses curatorial and professional guidance with RAC staff.

Keren Kroul is a fiscal year 2017 recipient of an Artist Initiative Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Front:

Keren Kroul. *Topographies of Loss and Longing*, 2017. Watercolor on paper. 96" x 144".
Photograph by Rik Sferra.



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