

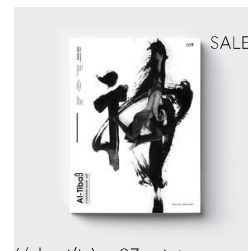
## 10 Questions with Ronit Keret

Ronit Keret is a Multidisciplinary artist, mainly engaged in installations and video in recent years. Graduated from Hamidrasha Beit-Berl (2005-2009) and have a MA in Arts Education at Leeds University, England (1998-2001). Her work from recent years deals with the ecological crisis, the melting glaciers that have been changing due to the nature of the human activity. The Installations that Keret creates are formed as a reaction to the given display space and the nature of the material she uses itself (such as Styrofoam, cardboard, etc.) Keret describes the transitions between good and evil in looking at human and nature relations and the gap between childhood dreams and catastrophic reality.

[ronitkeret.com](http://ronitkeret.com/) (<http://ronitkeret.com/>)



Ronit Keret portrait | Photo Inbal marmari©



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## Tears | DESCRIPTION

One and a half degrees is all that lies between us and the total disappearance of the earth's glaciers. A disappearance would lead to complete flooding of the planet and bring an end to life on earth as we know it today. The pace of global warming in recent years demonstrates unequivocally: Without a significant change in our lifestyle, we'll reach the point of no return sooner than we thought. We tend to think that it is not a "real" problem, that it's a problem for our children's children.

However, in Patagonia, Chile, minute by minute, the ecological disaster is becoming tangible. The Perito Moreno Glacier, about 250 square kilometers of thick ice, erodes into the sea at an inconceivable speed. Ice "buildings" slide powerfully into the sea below them, telling the story of the painful phenomenon.

When I stood facing this fearful sight, surrounded by the astonished shrieks of those around me, I felt that the end of the world was near. The sight has haunted me for a long time. Months afterward, in a hypnotic state, I painted those giant glaciers. Only years later, after I studied the meaning of the phenomenon, I understood the way to represent it in the most challenging way: Styrofoam. Starting with the contrast of its lightweight versus the power and mass of the frozen water, to the simple and chilling fact that, unlike those glaciers, the Styrofoam will never decompose. Moreover, this is one of the characteristics responsible for the disappearance of the glaciers as part of a broader environmental phenomenon. Styrofoam is the most appropriate and stinging analogy. The ultimate insulation material, used to protect valuable things – is harming this valuable resource. I started with this insight when I decided to reproduce the giant glacier to give its presence in an unlimited physical space. My installation lacks clear borders. It aims to enwrap whatever encounters it, to embrace it – whether it's a small space or an endless wall, it stands against in amazement. It's even more relevant for a "passage" space because, like those passing alongside it, we pass our lives without paying attention to the disaster occurring alongside us, under our responsibility, "under our watch."

I plan to build a huge "Styrofoam glacier," layered and complex, stretching three to five meters high at different points, and spreading across 55 meters, encircling the viewer from all sides. This will be accompanied by the mighty sounds of shattering that will resonate in the space. With the help of the Styrofoam's shiny and bright white color, it will create an element whose presence is impossible to ignore – in complete contrast to the way we close our eyes to the real disappearance of the glaciers.

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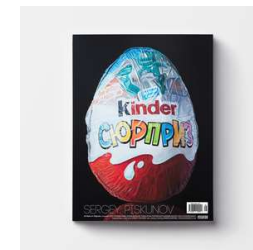


  
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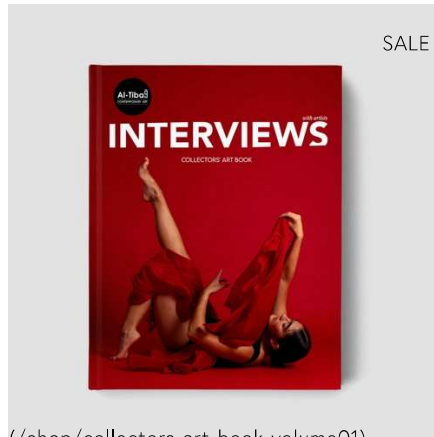
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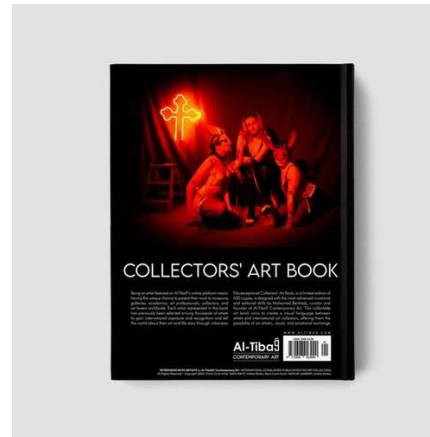
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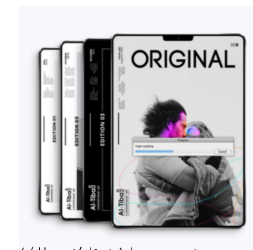


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**INTERVIEW**

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**First of all, tell us about your background. When did you start getting involved with visual arts, and how?**

I remember that from the time I was a young girl, people around me noticed my strong attraction to all forms of art – music, dance, sculpture, painting, poetry, and fiction. My mother, who taught photography and splash retouching at a college of art, always tried to steer me in other directions, explaining that it was impossible to make a living from art.

Over the years, I earned degrees in education, language, literature, and Middle Eastern history. The turning point came while studying for a master's degree in "Art in Education" at the University of Leeds, England.

After spending my days studying theories in psychology, I would feel a tremendous impulse to paint at night. For about twenty years, I was very busy with studies, parenthood, and painting at night. I didn't show anyone my drawings and paintings, except for my husband. Only years later, I began studying painting and art in various schools. The paintings marked the beginning of my artistic and visual art journey, indicating my search for the fragility of human existence via symbolist-expressive landscapes.

I created my first objects and sculptures during my studies at the Faculty of Arts – Hamidrasha, Beit Berl College, in Israel, where I worked with (and without) their permission. I used to come in on weekends when the place was empty and create installations on the external walls. The installations were made from parts of Styrofoam packaging that I collected. After an entire day's work on-site, I would dismantle the wall installations. Only the nails remained on the wall as evidence of the clandestine work.

Since that time, I have not ceased to make installations and videos that address global warming and the climate crisis of planet Earth. In 2010, a fire broke out on Mt. Carmel, which is considered the largest, deadliest catastrophe of its kind in Israel's history. It claimed the lives of 44 people, forced the evacuation of almost 20,000 people from their homes, and consumed approximately 6,000 acres of forest and brushland.

As a resident of Haifa, I was motivated to respond immediately with a series of paintings and, most conspicuously—with two sculptures/installations. One of these was created from palm fronds, which were transformed into human masks, and presented as a testimony and as a theatrical act at the same time.

Another work, *Fire* (2011), was created from the material most identified with me, Styrofoam. It consisted of 44 sculpted robot-like combatant figures, which created an array at once aggressive and carnivalesque, echoing both the forest and its destroyers. This work was the opening for two large-scale installations: *After All* (2014) and *Tears* (2017–18). Together they formed three chapters that make up a central trajectory in oeuvre, addressing man's destructive impact on nature and on the future of planet Earth.

As noted, I chose to create the new spaces from Styrofoam, a material devoid of history, in itself functionless, used only as a material from which packaging forms are created to protect products. Unlike clay, it lacks all flexibility, and unlike marble, it lacks sculptural density, breaking easily, crumbling, and tearing. I explored Styrofoam's unique qualities: a material with

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thermal and acoustic insulation abilities, unaffected by changing weather conditions such as rain or extreme heat, resistant to external influences, and therefore able to save energy. Ironically, Styrofoam, a human-made material, will survive catastrophes and be preserved even after humanity disappears. In a sense, one may say that I paint with the Styrofoam, and the site-specific installations become canvases on which video works are projected, responding, in turn, to the ground on which they evolve. They become aquatic environments, fusing lost moments of man and nature.



Tears, Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©

### **And what role does the artist have in society?**

Art as a "wakeup call" instrument: this is a world in which human actions have created a new layer of earth with visible traces and signs of plastic, radioactive materials, CO<sub>2</sub>, and smog. We are living in the Anthropocene – an era characterized by the destructive impact of humans' actions on flora and fauna.

This is an era of global warming, the greenhouse effect, warming of oceans, melting of the polar icecaps, and desertification – factors leading to the extinction of all sorts of animals and increasing the frequency of heatwaves, droughts, and forest fires, hurricanes, and tropical storms.

I am currently working on a large-scale installation addressing the increasing drought on our planet. The world is facing a horrific water disaster. Over two million people on this earth live in areas where groundwater is in decline; about a third of the world's largest aquifers are drying up. Only a quarter of the world's water is potable, and a quarter of the world's population is in a situation where a few periods of drought will result in extreme water shortages. The water supply is threatened by many different factors: climate change (polar

warming), waste and pollution of water sources, declining groundwater level, and poor water management. According to UN estimates, by 2025, about 1.8 billion people are expected to experience water shortages. We are facing a terrible catastrophe!

I feel that through my artwork, I call upon the people of the world to listen.

**PAY ATTENTION!**



Tears (detail), Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©



Tears (detail) Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©

**How would you define yourself as an artist, and what is your aim?**

Art was a deep need for me. Sometimes I think that I could have had a more peaceful life without art. But art is beyond my volition. Artwork is a force that I cannot live without. For years, I was painting almost every night for my pleasure, with no need for anyone else to see it. It was years before I decided to start professional studies in this field.

But I regard art as my major means of self-expression and communication. My personal aim is to continue working forever and to pursue my truth and ideas.

**Your work has a keen interest in environmental issues and climate changes. How much do you think art can raise awareness on these issues?**

Although we are all involved in life's highs and lows, difficulties in making a living, and illnesses, we must pay attention to nature all around us because without it we would die.

I believe that if I succeed in disseminating my artwork throughout the world, perhaps I might cause people to stop – if only for a moment – and think about what is happening and how each and every one of us could act to stop the ecological disaster that threatens the world as we know it, sooner than we think. It is our duty to preserve the Earth for future generations.

I am calling out to artists in every country in the world to join me in protecting the globe in our own unique way.



Tears, Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©

**Your work Tears is a powerful visual example of the future that awaits us. How did you develop the idea for this work, and how did you choose the media to use?**

The idea began developing about a decade ago, when I traveled around Patagonia, Chile, to the Perito Moreno Glacier. The glacier, about 250 square kilometers of thick ice, is eroding into the sea at an inconceivable speed. Ice "buildings" slide powerfully into the sea below them, telling the story of the painful phenomenon.

When I stood facing this fearful sight, surrounded by the astonished shrieks of those around me, I felt that the end of the world was near. The sight has haunted me for a long time. Around 2015, I started the Tears installation and video. First, I drew pictures of the glacier. After studying the meaning of the phenomenon, I understood how to represent it in the most challenging way: Styrofoam.

I use Styrofoam because of the contrast between its light mass and the power and gravity of the frozen water. I collect the pieces of Styrofoam at garbage canisters throughout Israel, wash them with soap and water, making them ready for me to take into the studio. Each piece of Styrofoam has a different density, texture, and odor.

The material is used for insulation due to its thermal properties, the contrast of its lightweight versus the power and mass of the frozen water, and the simple and chilling fact that, unlike those glaciers, the Styrofoam will never decompose. Moreover, this is one of the characteristics responsible for the disappearance of the glaciers as part of a broader environmental phenomenon.

I thought that Styrofoam is the most appropriate and stinging analogy. It is the ultimate insulation material used to protect valuable things but harms our precious natural resources. I started with this insight when I decided to reproduce the giant glacier to give it presence in an unlimited physical space.







Tears (detail), Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©



Tears (detail), Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©

My installation lacks clear borders. It aims to enwrap whatever encounters it, to embrace it – whether it's a small space or an endless wall, it stands against in amazement. It's even more relevant for a "passage" space because, like those passing alongside it, we pass our lives without paying attention to the disaster occurring alongside us, under our responsibility, under our watch.

I began to cover my studio walls with innumerable pieces of Styrofoam, shaped like the unique chunks of ice from the Perito Moreno Glacier in Chile.

I also started working on videos that the Styrofoam inhabits as part of environments I created and then filmed. In 2018, I exhibited Tears. I created white Styrofoam walls in the gallery space that generated a dual feeling: spoiled beauty, industrialization, and nature, familiar and imaginary. The installation illustrated the danger to human existence posed by the erosion of nature.

This property is one of the qualities responsible for the continuing pollution of the Earth and the disappearance of the glaciers, which is part of a broader environmental phenomenon.

#### **What was the most challenging part of your project?**

I had some challenging stages. I tried to make my installation look like the Perito Moreno Glacier. Since I decided that only Styrofoam could "save" the glacier, I had to cut thousands of pieces of Styrofoam. I decided to use the only Styrofoam that I collect from the streets, recycle it, and not get new pieces from factories.

A few years ago, when I was working on the installation and the videos, I was on my way home when I saw very nice pieces of white Styrofoam floating in a puddle. It was a night, and it was raining. I stepped out of my car straight into the puddle. I didn't pay attention to the dirty water. A few days later, I became very ill. For two months, I had a very high fever. The doctors were sure that I got the bacteria from the dirty puddle. That didn't stop me from seeking Styrofoam all over again.

Another constant challenge is to communicate my feelings to the video viewers. I work with a video editor. Second, by a second, I have to express and convey my ideas and feelings to him so he can help with the editing. I have to communicate my vision. It is a very challenging situation. These works have evolved and are a manifestation of fantasy, both threatening and appealing.





Tears (detail), Installation, Styrofoam and video, 150x50 cm, 2017. Ronit Keret©



Tears (still from the video), 2017. Ronit Keret©

### **What is your creative process like?**

Late-night visions provide the source for most of my work. The oscillation between the conscious and unconscious; the quest for novel and alternative worlds and the unraveling of the connections between them; the marriage of the imaginative and the autobiographical - it all nourishes my sculptures, installations, paintings, and lately, also my video pieces, and create a meditative and aesthetic experience.

Among them are human figures and strange monstrous creatures, all seem to symbolize and to be facing our fragile human existence. The creatures are entangled within themselves. My

sculptures and installations are made of scraps of white Styrofoam packaging that have been tossed in the garbage after completing their original mission. I collect them and give them a new life, recycling them into large-scale installations and into separate smaller sculptures.

Styrofoam is an emblematic artificial man-made non-biodegradable material. It is anti-sculptural in essence because of its non-elasticity, its tendency to break down into endless parts, and its textural surface. The usage of white Styrofoam creates stillness and a sense of the sublime in my sculptures and movement and possible disintegration at any given moment. They resonate with geometrical-architectural forms as well as the human body while dealing with the whole and the fragments coinciding. The sculptures are neo-futuristic, intertwining archaic primordial motifs. Thus, the sculptures raise questions regarding the human condition vis-à-vis nature and in nature through matter and form.

...ret - 'Tears' - Venice Biennale 2022 - Palazzo Mora - ECC - Personal Structures



**What do you hope the public takes away from your work?**

I hope that everybody will stop for a moment and will think about the environment. In order to enchant the viewers, my insulations are mostly a closed universe in which they can become immersed and forget the reality that awaits outside of the white cube. The other purpose is to bring to awareness ecological, environmental issues that should concern all of us.

In a few weeks, I will exhibit in a gallery in northern Israel, in a town that has suffered from flooding during the last few winters. I intend to involve the town's residents in the exhibition. If one of those people talks for a second about my art, I will be happy.

**And lastly, what advice would you give to beginning artists?**

I call upon young artists to work and keep on working. Don't be afraid of getting dirty or the physical labor of so many hours of the day and night. Be bold.

Don't try to be like someone else. Fight for your ideas, and do not try to make people like you. Do not make art to succeed, but work with your truth, even if it feels a bit strange, and even if

art critics and others don't fully understand the materials you use or the themes you choose.  
Do not be afraid to show yourselves in your unique way.

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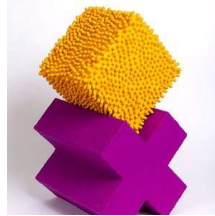
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