



A dark cloud hovers inside the Israeli pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale.

Claudio Franzini

A Miami Curator Staged a Moldy Postapocalypse at the Venice Biennale

ANTONIA WRIGHT, RUBEN MILLARES | MAY 22, 2017 | 10:00AM

Although the Israeli pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale is covered in mold and rust, time seems like its true medium. The exhibition "Sun Stand Still," by Gal Weinstein, curated by Israeli-born and Miami-based curator Tami Katz-Freiman, is one of the more poetic and political statements at this year's biennale.

Miami dwellers know a thing or two about mold. They say the Magic City is so humid mold can grow on you walking from your car to your house. Mold implies death but is also a living thing. It represents too much of something and a passing of time. They say if you dream about mold, it symbolizes transformation.

New Times spoke with Katz-Freiman about Wednesday's opening in the Giardini, the project, and the artist, whom she first met in 1999.

"It's a very sad and melancholic pavilion. As you can see, it's all moldy, as if the original Bauhaus building that was opened in 1952, symbolizing the modernist hope for progress for the young state of Israel, [which] was only 4 years old, turned to be a neglected, deserted building for some reason. As you can see, the floors, the entire walls, all is covered with mold and dirt."



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There are two types of mold in the installation. The first is an artificial kind made with steel wool glued to paneling, which has been oxidized by agents such as balsamic vinegar and cola to rust into different colors. The artist made the panels in his studio in Tel Aviv, which were then transported to Venice and reassembled one by one in the space.

The second type is seen in the work *Jezreel Valley in the Dark*, a bird's-eye-view floor installation similar to that of farming tracts observed from the sky. Each puzzle-shaped container is filled with molding brewed coffee, which explains the musty smell when you walk in. By the time of the opening, the coffee had begun to develop a white, brown, and green mold, the only truly living organism in the space.

The central work in the show is an enormous valley landscape that covers the entirety of

the back wall. At the upper left of the scene, a perfectly white sun stands still above the striations of rusted sky, clouds, and fields. The scene depicts the story of the ancient Israelite leader Joshua Bin-Nun, who requested the sun to stand still to arrest the passage of time and prolong the daylight so he and his army could defeat the kings of Canaan. According to the biblical tale, God granted his request and the sun did not set, which is where the pavilion derives its name. Ancient rabbinic scholars interpreted the miracle literally, but modern scholars debunked this as a natural phenomenon: It was actually a full solar eclipse lasting several minutes.



Antonia Wright and Ruben Millares

The second floor is engulfed by a gigantic cloud, a large nebulous shape made from Acrilan, the material used to stuff pillows, covered with a thin layer of stretched steel wool to give a shadowed and textured effect. The cloud and landscape feel quite peaceful until you see that the end of the form is twisted into a deliberate thin stream of smoke and realize the cloud is not natural, but made from a missile moments after takeoff. You are standing on a launch pad in a battlefield and realize you are in Israel. This is not one of the pavilions that is succumbing to the commercial tendencies of the art market, but striving to reflect the reality of our world today.

"One can interpret the entire installation as a metaphoric exploration of the human desire to stop time," Katz-Freiman explains. "It can be read as an allegorical expression

of the Israeli story: a story that changes from megalomaniac heights and miraculous moments to a resounding crash. But it can also be read as a postapocalyptic vision for the entire world."

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