



**ARTIST**

Keren Shavit

**TITLE**

Untitled

**DATE**

2014

**DIMENSIONS**

9 in H x 9 in W

**MEDIUM**

Inkjet Prints

**IMAGE NOTES**

Paper size 11X17 Archival Pigment Print

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2014.103

**CURRENT LOCATION**

1620-7D

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**KEREN SHAVIT**

**BORN**

1977

**BIRTHPLACE**

Israel

**GENDER**

Female

**CITIZENSHIP**

Israel

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Israeli

## LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2014

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 182

## BIOGRAPHY

Keren Shavit is a mixed media artist and curator, living and working in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem and was a selected participant in the documentary workshop at the Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film in Lodz and Sam Spiegel Film School, Jerusalem. Shavit has exhibited, published and screened her work in Israel, New York, Poland, Germany, China, Norway, and Iceland.

[www.kerenshavit.com](http://www.kerenshavit.com)

## ESSAYS

Keren Shavit's forthcoming publication *Broken Kayfabe* will defy casual interpretative reading of its challenging assembly of images and text. Culled from her extensive archive of self-produced photography and video, *Broken Kayfabe* constitutes a metafictional tale centered on a cast of characters inhabiting a clique of young people working in a greasy, fast-food chain in Haifa, Israel. The ravaged individuals that populate Shavit's images are not directed in any imposed *mis en scene* but function as puzzle pieces moving within a dense narrative concerning the group's fixations on the Von Erich professional wrestling dynasty, which they fantasize joining. Peti, ("gullible" in Hebrew) the central female character, is the haunted peg this morphing story is hung upon. Her initial goal to attend the Von Erich match in Israel (an actual event) is thwarted, and she emerges as a mutable, tragic figure in a maelstrom of lurid and often distressing photographic content. The symbols (fast-food employee cap) and markers (eating, food) dispensed throughout *Broken Kayfabe* are highly unstable signifiers exemplified by the Von Erichs themselves, their history fraught with deception, suicide, and internal struggles over legitimate use of the Von Erich name. Shavit has built an array of oblique documentation into a construct that, despite the seriality of any page, will deflect narrative by radically dissociating image and text. Attracted to hermetic clans, Shavit courts acceptance and inserts herself into family units and social groups that often exhibit unusual behavior or militant disregard for conventional norms. Once within, Shavit documents and mediates events captured on a battery of cameras: moving, still, and iPhone. Shavit's project originates more from cinema than still photography, threading through the documentaries such as Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's *Brother's Keeper* (1992) and primitivists like the Kuchar brothers, early John Waters, Harmony Korine's *Gummo*, and the unsettling oeuvre of David Lynch. Lynch's sumptuous dream film *Mulholland Drive* (2001) corresponds with the glamor-deprived *Broken Kayfabe* with its embedding of symbols like a blue key, an empty sign that, when proffered, returns the labyrinthian plotting back to mystery genre with its (false) promise of final revelations and a restoration of visual order. Shavit's still photographs, produced by a range of amateur technologies, are blunt and harrowing. Favoring raw texture and high contrast color, her reflexive in-camera compositions appear organized around our discomfort. While coy or voyeuristic portraiture often maintains a self-preserving distance from its subjects, Shavit situates herself in the action located in unspecified claustrophobic settings. Unlike the supine addicted families of emaciated beautiful losers in Corrine Day's or Jessica Dimmock's photography, Shavit's people, when not in repose, engage in hectic activities where aging bodies crowd into a frame awash in garish patterns amid accumulations of clutter. In both content and lurid coloration a resemblance exists between Shavit's images and British photographer Richard Billingham's notorious 1996 body of work around his troubled working-class family. Billingham's pictures cruelly recall a grotesque Monty Python skit depicting "the worst family in Britain," with Mum ironing a cat with the son, played by fantasy director Terry Gilliam, screaming for baked beans from a couch. Shavit's pursuit and integration with perceived outsiders is primarily source material gathering repurposed, for the artist, into the unwinding tale of Peti and her circle. Scavenging her own corpus and deleting any explanatory back story precedes an image's enlistment into *Broken Kayfabe* performing a surrealist act of *détournement* upon her own production, and in this Shavit emerges as highly original. Shavit's pageant of glistening bearded men, cavorting seniors, wrestlers, monstrous rabbits, and haggard fast-food employees may be interpreted as a dream world or alternative universe. Indeed, *Broken Kayfabe* is an amalgam of *doppelgängers*, tangential distractions (Hitchcock's "MacGuffins"), and enough recurring symbols to hold us in paranoid thrall. Employing multiple perspectives and imaging formats can suggest *avant-garde* cinema at its most hallucinatory, but I propose that *Broken Kayfabe*, in its structure, relates closely to the autism or Asperger's condition, where the slippage between what is seen and what is named resists even temporal registration into textual narrative. Individuals with these disorders may construct densely plotted, hand-rendered epics resembling storyboards or pictograph friezes not to express or communicate, but to slow reception of a delirious exterior world where language and appearance never align. *Kayfabe* (pronounced *kay-fabe*) is a term pro wrestling insiders use for fictive plot, storyline, and events inside the ring. A broken *kayfabe* applies to an incident in the match that temporarily ruptures the fourth wall between the wrestlers and an audience that expects a continuation of the agreed fiction that the sport's emotional and physical content is real. Aficionados of wrestling have detected a growing trend of these, perhaps, intentional lapses within the ring and speculate online how it will alter the future of the industry. Keren Shavit's *Broken Kayfabe* project occupies a similar, convulsive space between the documented fact and the elaborate fiction it purports to illustrate. Tim Maul  
Tim Maul is an artist and art writer who lives in New York, NY. — Keren Shavit lives in Brooklyn, NY, and completed her residency at Light Work in October 2014. [www.kerenshavit.com](http://www.kerenshavit.com)