

episode

Keren Benbenisty: ***Portakal***

January 24–March 28, 2025

episode gallery is pleased to present *Portakal*, a solo exhibition by Keren Benbenisty, opening on January 24, and running through March 28, 2025. Through the gallery's two windows, envisioned as metaphors for departure and arrival, Benbenisty delves into the intersections of migration, language, and agriculture, linking the 15th and 16th-century introduction of sweet oranges to the Mediterranean with contemporary narratives of displacement.

The term "portakal" (orange) originates from the Portuguese word for Portugal, reflecting a linguistic journey that traces the impact of Portuguese maritime trade during the Age of Exploration. From Arabic (برتقال / burtuqal) to Turkish, Persian, and beyond, the word mirrors the movement of citrus fruits across oceans. Portuguese merchants introduced sweet orange varieties from China and India, supplanting the bitter citrus that had previously dominated the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Portakal presents a new body of work, including a vintage maritime signal flag and an expansive work on paper. The "P (Papa)" signal flag, historically used to command personnel to return to their ships before departure, symbolizes imminent movement. Its geometric design and historical function echo the cyclical nature of departure and return, from Portuguese traders charting new citrus routes to today's stories of migration and displacement.

Building upon Benbenisty's earlier work, *Tristeza*, where she explored floating oranges in the Mediterranean Sea, she was captivated by the orange's buoyancy. The porous peel, with its air pockets, allows the fruit to float—until the peel is removed, causing it to sink. This physical property serves as a metaphor for the uncertainty of arrival and the constant motion of departure, while the floating oranges create a visual dialogue with the deep blue sea, evoking themes of displacement.

The exhibition questions movement not as a singular trajectory but as a series of intertwined motions, where departure and arrival often blur into one another. Her work invites reflection on the ways in which movement shapes, fragments, and redefines our sense of place. By weaving together historical narratives and personal reflections, Benbenisty encourages viewers to consider how these forces continue to influence our understanding of belonging.

Keren Benbenisty (b.Israel, 1977) moved to Paris in 1998, and currently lives and works in New York, NY. In 2004 she graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris and attended California Institute of the Arts. Benbenisty was an artist-in-residence at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2009 and has been the recipient of numerous international grants and residences, including the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors

Grant in 2019. Recent exhibitions include: *Tristeza II*, Ulterior Gallery, New York, NY (2024); *Errata*, PATRON Gallery, Chicago, IL (2024); *Memories in Threads*, Arts Maebashi, Gunma, Japan (2020); *Point of Departure*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY (2019); *Fajja*, Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Israel (2018); *Apparatus for a Utopian Image 2.0*, Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague, Czech Republic (2018); *Unexpected Encounter*, Arts Maebashi, Gunma, Japan (2018); and *Under Erasure*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel (2014).