

Foreword

Meagan Kelly Horsman

I first encountered Steve Sabella's art when consigning works for the Bonhams Photographs auction in 2011, the first Photographs auction to take place in the Middle East. I remember seeing his *Euphoria* (2010) at The Empty Quarter Gallery in Dubai and marveling at the beauty of the work, the high gloss finish from the Diasec mount and the overall feeling of quality that the piece gave. I still recall the buzz in the room when the work came up for sale during the auction, an energy I still note when discussing Sabella's work.

Steve Sabella is renowned throughout the Middle East and Europe for his large-scale abstract photographs. Taking images and reproducing them in a collage-like style, he creates sharp and clear images; this clarity and precision are reflected in his choice media: Diasec mount with an aluminium edge.

In the *Independence* series, we see a departure from Sabella's usual oeuvre of collage, although glimpses of it are still visible from time to time. The first thing you note upon seeing these works is their size—at 81 x 45 cm they are far smaller in scale than Sabella's recent works, yet perhaps more powerful. Figures are immersed in a dark void, seemingly suspended in space, or floating on water. The slightly diffused image adds to the sense of timelessness—making the works appear almost dreamlike. The title invites the viewer to question the works: Independence as a state of being; are these figures independent, or do they lean on one another? Can one be both independent and dependent? This recalls Sabella's *Settlement: Six Israelis and One Palestinian* (2008–10), exhibited at the inaugural Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Told / Untold / Retold* (2010), where the image of six standing Israeli men face the sole image of Sabella, demonstrating how the images and sets of figures can be interpreted as simultaneously oppositional and interdependent.

Sabella's heritage is often discussed in conjunction with his work. As a Palestinian artist living and working in Berlin, many may see his work without considering his nationality in the way we seem to do in the Middle East. It seems we have a pre-occupation with identity, particularly when viewing works of art. In the case of Sabella and his *Independence* series, it is hard not to reflect upon the most recent turmoil in his native Palestine and the suffering of the people still living there. Madeline Yale Preston touches on this idea in more detail in her insightful interview with Steve in this catalogue.

2014 has been a particularly busy year for Sabella. *Independence* at Meem Gallery closes a cycle of four solo exhibitions that began with *Fragments* at Berloni Gallery in London. *Layers* at Contemporary Art Platform, Kuwait, saw Sabella showcase the *Independence* series in a larger format, via projected installation of the images on floating screens in a darkened space; and his exhibition at the International Center for Photography Scavi Scaligeri opened in early October in Verona. Describing these exhibitions as 'constellations', Sabella sees them fitting together in order to bring forth new readings of his work. Steve continues to describe this process as non-curatorial, but in essence it seems to be accidentally so—carefully selecting works for different locations, separate but part of an overall whole, seems rather curatorial.

In February 2014 Charles Pocock, Managing Director of Meem Gallery, and Steve met in Berlin and discussed showing his work at Meem in Fall 2014, and *Independence* came into fruition. Steve had just finished the series but had not planned to show it as yet, so the timing could not have been more perfect. Working with Steve on this exhibition has been enjoyable, surprising and fun. The collaboration has proved to be most rewarding and exciting, and I look forward to the opening of the exhibition to see the fruits of our labour.

I would like to thank Steve Sabella for his enthusiasm, drive and of course, his beautiful photographs. Amanda Ribas Tugwell, Steve's assistant, has been invaluable to the team, helping Meem to prepare for this exciting exhibition. I would also like to thank Madeline Yale Preston for her written contribution to the catalogue, which sheds light on Sabella's art practice through an in-depth conversation with the artist. Thanks must be extended, as always, to the Meem Gallery team: Samar Faruqi for her wonderful editorial skills, Noura Haggag for her wonderful catalogue design, Vinosh Hameed for great multitasking and of course to Charles Pocock, for arranging this exhibition with Steve and making it happen.

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