

Meem Gallery

Chairman – Sultan bin Sooud Al Qassemi

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INDEPENDENCE

26 October 2014 – 27 November 2014

Opening Night: 28th October, 7-10pm

MEEM GALLERY PRESENTS A SOLO EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE WORK OF STEVE SABELLA

Meem Gallery is pleased to present *Independence*, a body of photographic works realized in 2013 by artist Steve Sabella. Born in Jerusalem, Palestine, Sabella often considers the plight and struggle of the Palestinian people in their fight for independence in his work. Sabella is well known globally for his abstracted style, showcased in series such as *In Exile* (2008), *Euphoria* (2010), *Beyond Euphoria* (2011) and *Metamorphosis* (2012). In *Independence*, we see a departure from collage, a prolific method in his work, and also the introduction of figures for the first time in some years. These figures hang in darkness, perhaps in outer space or the deep sea—yet in no place and no time—seemingly peaceful but unsettled. The bodies' fractured bones and distortions can be seen, as if through an x-ray. Are the tangled and entwined figures helping or hindering one another? The expansive darkness and dismembered bodies present ambiguous and polarizing reflections: utopia vs. dystopia, internal vs. external, and suspension vs. catharsis. As Hubertus von Amelunxen writes in the forthcoming monograph on Sabella's work, 'In Sabella's more recent work *Independence* (2013), there is a pictorial state of uncertainty that abandons the coordinates of space and therefore of history.'

Independence at Meem Gallery closes the cycle of four solo exhibitions of Sabella's work this year; including *Fragments* at Berloni Gallery, *Layers* at Contemporary Art Platform Kuwait, and *Archeology of the Future* at The International Center for Photography Scavi Scaligeri. These interconnected exhibitions mark a new approach in the presentation of the works of Steve Sabella, whereby the artist creates different constellations of his work, bringing forth new readings and interpretations, in a process that decodes the visual palimpsest at the heart of his oeuvre.

In addition to the exhibition, Meem will produce a supporting exhibition catalogue featuring an interview with Sabella by Madeline Yale Preston (independent curator and PhD candidate at Chelsea College of Arts, London). There will also be a monograph launch on 26 October, from 7 - 10pm, to coincide with the opening of the exhibition; of *Steve Sabella - Photography 1997-2014*, published by Hatje Cantz in collaboration with the Akademie der Künste Berlin, with texts by Hubertus von Amelunxen and Kamal Boullata.

Steve Sabella, born 1975 in Jerusalem, Palestine, is a Berlin-based artist who uses photography and photographic installation as his principal modes of expression. In 1997 he earned a three-year art photography degree at the Musrara School of Photography in Jerusalem. In 2007 he received a BA in Visual Studies at Empire State College of the State University of New York. Through a Chevening Scholarship he earned an MA in Photographic Studies in 2008 at the University of Westminster with a Caparo Award of Distinction, and through a Saïd Foundation Scholarship he earned his second MA in Art Business in 2009 at Sotheby's Institute of Art.

Sabella was one of the winners of the A. M. Qattan Foundation's Young Artist of the Year Award in 2002. He was a shortlisted and exhibited artist in the 2008 Independent Photographers Terry O'Neil Award in the United Kingdom. He received the 2008 Ellen Auerbach Award from the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, which included in part the publishing of Sabella's 2014 monograph.

From the late 1990s through 2007, Sabella was based in Jerusalem and exhibited internationally as well as extensively throughout Palestine, including eleven solo shows. He was one of the commissioned artists for the Istanbul Collection donated to the Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art in Sarajevo. In 2009 he was one of the commissioned artists for the inauguration of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, where he presented the installation *Settlement—Six Israelis & One Palestinian*. His work was included in the show *Keep Your Eyes on the Wall* as a part of Les rencontres d'Arles photographie, Edition 2013, and in 2014 he participated in the FotoFest Biennial exhibition *View from Inside*. In 2014 he was commissioned by the Bahrain National Museum, where he presented his photographic series *Sinopia* as part of the touring exhibition *Recreational Purpose*.

His works have been collected by the British Museum in London; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha; Contemporary Art Platform in Kuwait; Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art in Sarajevo; Cuadro Fine Art Gallery in Dubai; Salsali Private Museum in Dubai; Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah; Samawi Collection in Dubai; as well as being acquired by several private collections.

Sabella has given art talks and presentations at various institutions, including the University of Cambridge; Turin University; School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London; University of East London; Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti di Torino in Turin; Contemporary Art Platform in Kuwait; Rostock University; Akademie der Künste in Berlin; British Museum; and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas.

Among the several TV documentaries and short films on Sabella's work are *Jerusalem in Exile* and *Kan Yama Kan*, two episodes in the documentary project 'Beyond Blue & Gray' by Eyes Infinite Films (2007); *Europe through Their Eyes* by Ma'an TV Productions (2010); *Artist of the Month*, aired on IkonoMENASA (2011); *Artist of the Month* featured on IkonoTV (2013); *Arts InSight: Who is Steve Sabella?* produced by Ernie Manouse (2014); and *In the Darkroom with Steve Sabella* by Nadia J. Kaban (2014). He also appeared as an invited speaker at TEDx Marrakech (2012).

Sabella has published numerous essays, including several as a regular contributor to *Contemporary Practices* journal, such as 'Palestinian Conceptual Art, Emily Jacir Shifting to an Art that Engages the Mind of the Viewer' (2009), 'Is the United Arab Emirates Constructing its Art History? The Mechanisms that Confer Value to Art' (2009), "'Valued'" in the "West" Sold in the "East" (2010), 'Reconsidering the Value of Palestinian Art & Its Journey to the Art Market' (Part 1, 2010; Part 2, 2011), 'The Business of Looking' (2011), and 'The Colonization of the Imagination' (2012). Sabella's essay 'Hostage' (2014) was published by Phaidon in *From Galilee to Negev* by Stephen Shore, and his autobiography, titled *The Artist's Curse*, is forthcoming.

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