Steve Sabella

MEEM GALLERY
Umm Suqeim Road, PO Box 290
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If Steve Sabella’s 2013 series “Independence” were music, it would be trip-hop—a suave, steady beat wrapped in a sullen, ethereal pall, at once spirited and weighty. The eighteen photographs mounted on Diasec-coated panels in this exhibition draw us into the depths of a murky, uncertain realm, wherein faceless figures cavort in inky suspension, each composition lit from a corner or the side, revealing a mealy, moss-colored ground. The ambivalent, distended bodies depicted are themselves textured by scales of light and shown as if in free fall or blurred by nebulous fluid. The tug-of-war between two plump forms in Independence 6 at once resembles a scene of rescue, a struggle, or some submerged dance. The liquid darkness cloaking the child in Independence 12 forecloses any concrete read, leaving the viewer as uncertain as the figures are ambiguous.

Discerning the intent of these figures’ actions, whether they be flight, frolic, or a scuffle, becomes the viewer’s paramount task, as if it held the key to the meaning of both the images and their titles. Ultimately, this group of works recalls the portent of a sonogram—the image as harbinger of something yet to be fully realized. As a Palestinian artist whose work confronts questions of mobility, exile, and a certain bankruptcy of the image in light of political struggle, Sabella deftly reframes within this series a preoccupation recurring throughout his practice—fathoming freedom.

— Kevin Jones

Steve Sabella, Independence 6, 2013, lambda print on diasec, 32 x 18".