



PHOTOGRAPHY: JAN PHILIP WELCHER

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THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY OFTEN REQUIRES AN UNCONVENTIONAL MINDSET. THE INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED ARTIST EMBARKED ON A LONG JOURNEY IN ORDER TO FIND HIS WAY TO BE HERE NOW. HE WRITES ABOUT HOW HE USED ART AS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR LIBERATION. In the vibrant atmosphere of the Sisyphos club in Berlin, I engaged in a thought-provoking conversation with a persistent gentleman who insisted on knowing where I came from, despite my preference for avoiding politics while clubbing. I agreed to answer his question on one condition: "Do you want the real answer or the fake answer?" He said, "Only the real answer." "I feel I am from everywhere and nowhere." Unexpectedly, he smiled as he replied, "Then you must be from Palestine." To him, only Palestinians could possess such a complex sentiment. A week later, a similar encounter unfolded, but this time it was an insistent woman seeking clarity. I replied that I was from: "Elsewhere." Curious, she said, "Do you mean Israel?" For her, only the Jewish people could give such a response.

But the place of one's birth is a fact of life, and if asked directly, I can only state that I was born in Jerusalem, Palestine, under the shadow of Israeli Occupation. No one wishes to live under any form of occupation, so it became natural for me,

from a young age, to embark on a journey of self-liberation. The moment we are freed or severed from the umbilical cord is the same moment we become entangled in a complex web of constructed religious, cultural, societal and political realities. When I realized that my destiny was interwoven with the occupation, I defied it. Through art I discovered that to disentangle myself, I first needed to decolonize my imagination. And once I achieved a free mind, everything else became possible. Life is as we imagine it, and in my imagination I was always born free.

There is no art without imagination, and because the imagination can transform all realities, create endless possibilities and connect us with the invisible, it was inevitable to manifest my truth and feel my freedom. Freedom is felt and not said. I never waited for external factors to change so that something could change in me. That is why art threatens political systems, for it allows for self-liberation, and one freed individual peacefully triumphs over all weapons.

Early on I learned that the universe has no wrong answers. Such awareness made me accept any situation, connecting it to the bigger picture of life. Through reconstructing reality in art, I learned how to create my own reality. I desired an identity

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When I think of Jerusalem....



When I can't stop dancing...



When I seek inner peace...

that was uniquely mine, stitched with my own threads. I chose art, or art picked me, because the universe called me to go on an adventure, to go through a hardcore process of transformation, and succeed in finding answers so that I could later return to where I started and share my learning to inspire others. Art, being a meditative process, helps me achieve the silence between my thoughts. And a silent mind is a focused mind capable of finding the way.

No wonder the titles of my first projects mirrored my wandering journey through Search, Identity, End of Days, to Jerusalem in Exile, from Exit to In Exile, to Euphoria and Beyond Euphoria, to Metamorphosis towards Independence. With every new project, I experience a sense of renewal. As an artist working with the medium of photography, I see myself as a mediator, communicating through the language of light. Life cannot exist without light, and as beings of light, constantly exposed to the ever-new light falling on the earth, I feel forever transformed by this eternal influx of illumination.

Art is a powerful tool for liberation, allowing us to perceive the invisible, the concealed forces that confine us regardless of their origin. It first liberates us from ourselves. Art is a journey of self-interrogation and introspection where honesty with

oneself is the only choice, even if the process often hurts. I stitched my wounds with barbed wire and experienced healing. In Independence I visualized the necessity of breaking my bones to become more malleable for change. That is why the visual art, the end of a process, is a celebration, a state of transcendence.

Every photograph I captured was derived from the pages of my own life. Photographing from multiple angles and later, the collage allowed me to see life through multiple perspectives, understand the Other, and encounter the Other residing within us. Collage became my method of stitching – a practice of glueing fragments together, redesigning reality and creating photo embroideries infused with cosmic light.

Spending hundreds of hours on a single collage became an opportunity for a dialogue with the soul, meditation, resolution, acceptance and, ultimately, letting go. Through art, I was able to uproot myself and root myself in the clouds – to always remain free and in transition.

Throughout my journey I have come to realize that “try” is the weakest word I know. For many, “try” implies half-hearted attempts until the point of failure. Trying lacks the willpower necessary for felt success. Instead of merely trying, one must





My daughter Cécile Elise, at 11, gave me this card once she felt I was doubtful. On the backside, she wrote, "Because I know how magical you are and how much magic you attract".



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In my memoir,
"The Parachute Paradox,"
I share the tale of a magical
ring that had found me multiple
times since 1996 when my partner
Francesca first placed it on my
finger. Despite countless forces
attempting to separate us,
the ring remains in my universe.

take action. The only way forward to embark upon a path of transformation is to take that first step. Through these actions we unlock the doors of opportunity, open the windows of possibility and move closer to our dreams. The paradox is that our dreams become a reality when we wake up and start working. Otherwise, it's a waste of time, sleep and imagination. I learned the philosophy of life, be and let be, from the be in Berlin. To just be. I became an active participant in the endless cosmic dance, adding to what already exists. It taught me how to embody the dancer of life, feeling every vibration as a creative impulse. Be the sound wave you wish to hear. The dancer of life is you! The time has come to stop drawing borders and start drawing our future. Embrace yourself. There is an Other in all of us. Each Other. We are all on different journeys and can only inspire others along the way. In the world of art reality dissipates, leaving only imagination behind. As long as one person is left who imagines a better world, life has a chance. When everything collapses, remember that zero is a great place to start. The state of nothing is the state of all creation. In life, strive to make this world a better place, doing what you can, nothing less, nothing more. And art is a great way to start. Life is where you are. Life is magic. ◀