

# Steve Sabella

PALESTINE



I think art became interested in me and I had to conform to this reality. I have questioned my surroundings and the essence of being since I was a very young child. I guess I found in art the right platform from which to share my views on life and try to make people see things in a different way. Today, my life is about my art and my art is totally about life.

It's wrongly perceived that art is created for aesthetic purposes only. Living in a complex world, art can also be used as a critique of political and social systems. Because it's a 'language', but of a special kind, politicians often ignore the function of art or feel completely provoked by its power to influence people's perception.

I create artworks that engage the mind of the viewer, rather than his or her emotions. Many of my artworks tackle the concept of exile and alienation in different ways. I know exactly what walls mean and how they disturb daily routine life functions and thoughts. I have always tried to defy mental walls. Now physical walls also exist.

The Holy Land has been occupied by many nations. Many of them left landmarks that people valued over time. By my work on the wall I might not be able to liberate Jerusalem or Palestine, but I was hoping that my images would work on the sub-consciousness of the Israelis. They were my target audience.

There are many artists who believe that art on the wall will beautify it. I can hardly imagine that anyone can find anything beautiful about this wall. Hence, through my art, I wanted the spectator to question its need and existence. Do we really need walls to solve our problems? Hopefully some people will have realized that the source was the occupation and consequent control of the life of millions of Palestinians.

The fact that internationals come to Palestine to create art on the wall shows that contemporary artists, who function in well-developed art environments, understand that art can be used as direct political statements, reveal certain 'truths', and raise political issues to a wide audience.



The function of art today is multilayered. Palestinian artists could use the wall as a giant platform to address the world and influence its perception. Ignoring it legitimizes it. There's always the intention of the artist, but artworks are more successful if people project their own thoughts in them. Nonetheless, I was hoping that my images would make the spectator raise questions that are directly related to the fear which led in the first place to the construction of the wall.

I participated in a project called Challenging Walls, in which we contrasted the separation barrier with other separation barriers that have been constructed throughout history and that have totally failed to achieve their separation and isolation purposes. The participating countries, Germany, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Cyprus, all share

a common and bitter history of walls. If one message comes across strongly in this project, it's that all walls have a time-span.

The work I presented on the wall portrayed Palestinians in a different way from how they are constructed in the mind of many Israelis. For example, when I take a cab in Jerusalem and I make it known to the driver that I'm a Palestinian, the first remark by the driver may be: 'But you don't look Palestinian'. My answer would instantly be: 'What does a Palestinian look like?' So, I used images that challenge stereotypes and trigger the imagination.



