

Steve Sabella, born in Jerusalem in 1975, is a Palestinian artist currently based in London. He studied Art Photography at the Jerusalem School of Photography and New Media, and later took a degree in Visual Arts at the State University of New York. Sabella also earned a Master's degree with a Caparo Award of distinction in Photographic Studies from the University of Westminster, and is currently pursuing a second Master's degree, in Art Business, at the Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. He has won the Ellen Auerbach Award, granted by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, has been shortlisted for the Terry O'Neil Award of Contemporary Photography in the UK, and was a prizewinner in the 2002 A. M. Qattan Foundation Young Artist Award in Palestine. He has exhibited widely in Palestine, and has participated in several international group exhibitions in Europe, Canada and the United States, most notably 'The Gates of the

Mediterranean' in Italy, and 'Neighbours in Dialogue' in Istanbul and Sarajevo.

One of the most important themes running throughout all of Sabella's work is the concept of exile, the result of growing up in a divided city such as Jerusalem: 'As far as I remember I always felt out of place in my city of birth. Alienation was surrounding me. Kamal Boullata [another Jerusalem artist] remarked...how I function like an artist in exile even though I lived in my city of birth. It took me a few years to understand the meaning of his words. *I was not "physically" in exile*. It was Jerusalem that was exiled and hence...all those who lived in it were in exile.'

The result of these reflections was the *Jerusalem in Exile* project, which Sabella ran with the poet Najwan Darwish. Launched in 2005, it encouraged Palestinians everywhere to document their thoughts, ideas and mental images relating to Jerusalem – an attempt to

'liberate' the city using people's minds. At its launch, Sabella said of the project: 'Jerusalem needs visual liberation. This can only be achieved if a new dimension is added to the photographs. This dimension exists in us – deep in the imagination. Reaching that dimension requires a deep look, a journey into the minds of many people; where they will all unite to "rebuild" and "reconstruct" Jerusalem.' After running the project for several years Sabella comments that, 'just like identities, which are constructed, cities too are a construct of the brain. Cities can live in a space of exile, and most importantly, Jerusalem has been transformed into an image.... A thought: are Israelis and Palestinians fighting for an image of the city of Jerusalem?'

To a large extent *Jerusalem in Exile* was born out of earlier works, particularly *Till the End – Spirit of the Place* (2004). Sabella explains: 'In fear of the continuing erasure of the city's

memory, I started wandering around the places that I felt connected to mentally. At each place I visited, images started to emerge on surfaces of stones. It was as if they were revealing distant memories. I picked up a stone from every place, and at the same time I photographed an image of the place. Later on I printed that image on the stone; in effect each place had its image on it.'

More recently Sabella has explored the concept of 'exile' from a different perspective: his daughter. As he touchingly explains: 'When Cécile was born...it was only a question of time until we had difficulties communicating. She speaks Swiss German [the language of Sabella's wife], I speak Arabic, and neither of us understands what the other is talking about. She is simply foreign to me.' Sabella's response was a series of photographs of the material of his daughter's clothes, from outside and inside. 'This work attempts to establish a relationship between us by photographing her clothes from

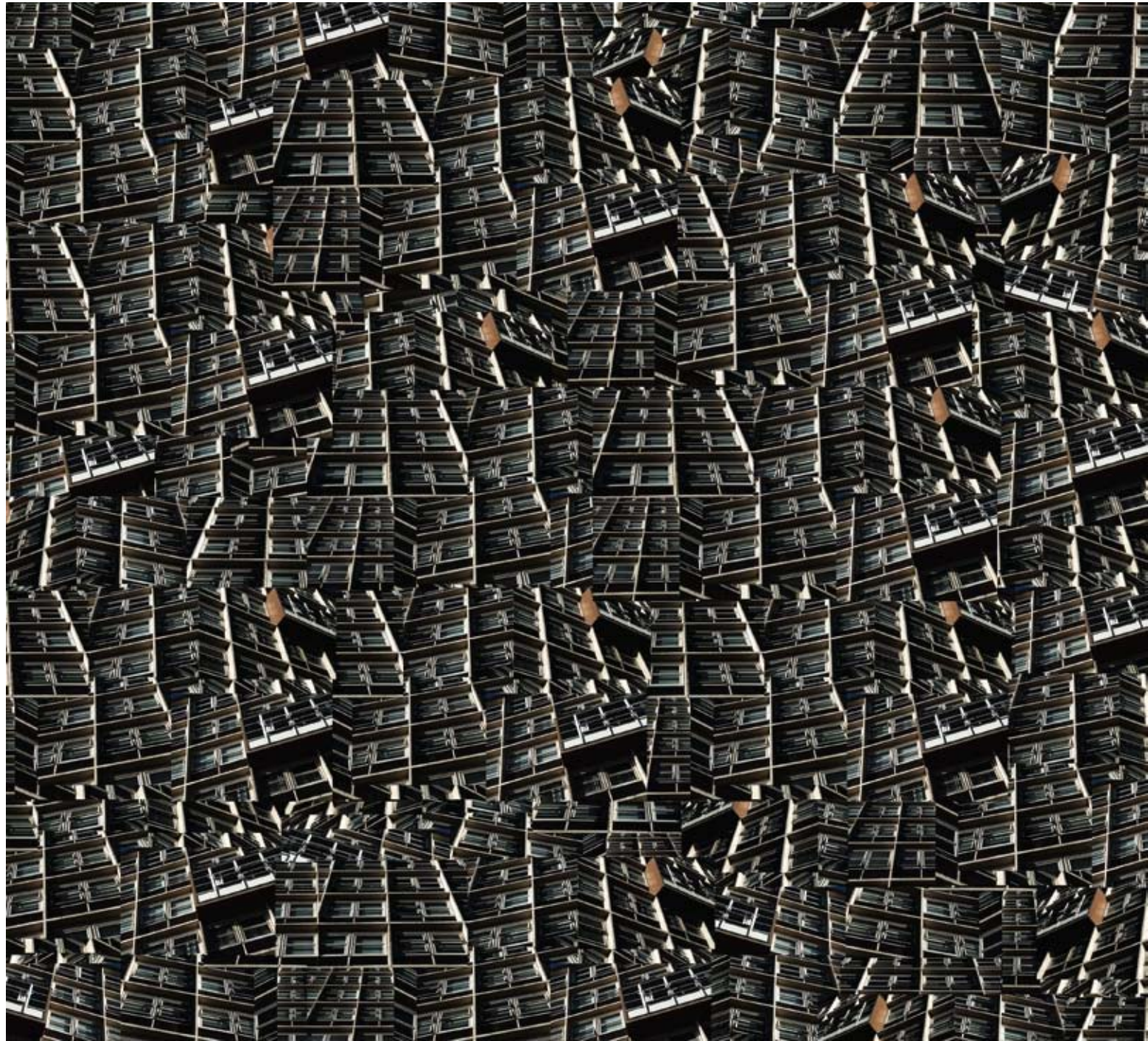
both sides – inside and outside. A cloth, no matter what, will always have its other side. This mirrors the basic fact that in essence, Cécile and I will always have a connection.' This project culminated in the artist's book *Cécile Elise Sabella* (2008), which offers the chance to 'notice and sense similarities, differences and contrasts among many other nuances.'

To a certain extent, all of these themes and projects have led up to the most recent project, *In Exile*. This project takes the form of a series of striking images that are actually photomontages, each built from repeating a single image, treated in such a way that they describe abstract patterns. 'The images...are all formed or constructed from windows. Why windows? Windows have this unique attribute of the duality of exile [original place and new place]. You look from the inside out and from the outside in.' As with *Jerusalem in Exile*, these works at once deconstruct and reconstruct,

and search deeper into the meaning of fragmentation of memory, identity and exile.

For Sabella, this remains a highly personal project, one that goes back to his childhood: 'The keywords for my work are "disorientation" and "dislocation". The latter should be understood in terms of disorder, disturbance and confusion. Living in a constant state of "mental exile", I have become more conscious that the state of fragmentation and alienation I have been going through can never turn into a whole or take me back to a fixed point of "origin". Consequently, the work is showing "states of mind". I am assembling my own constructions – creating a new structure or a new "impossible reality" of common shapes and forms that exist in my immediate monotonous surroundings. However, I am not sure whether my ambivalent reconstructions are making the world or my perception of it any simpler.'

above and opposite
All from the 'In Exile' series, 2008
 128 x 136 cm each
 Lambda prints mounted on aluminium
 with a 5 cm aluminium edge
 Edition of 6 each
 © Steve Sabella
 Courtesy of Steve Sabella



above
From the 'In Exile' series, 2008
 128 x 136 cm
 Lambda prints mounted on aluminium
 with a 5 cm aluminium edge
 Edition of 6
 © Steve Sabella
 Courtesy of Steve Sabella

opposite
Cécile Elise Sabella, 2008
 Limited edition of 10 signed art books
 © Steve Sabella
 Courtesy of Steve Sabella

