

# Steve Sabella. Fragments

7 March - 10 May 2014 at Berloni  
Gallery, London

Berloni is delighted to present the first UK solo exhibition by Palestinian artist Steve Sabella.

As an artist who has lived in constant 'mental exile', Sabella seeks to photographically record and stabilise the very dislocation, that a Jerusalem born individual seemingly eternally 'on the road' has encountered.

The work investigates the fragmentation and disorientation of unwitting nomadism. Sabella gives a visual form to the exile & alienation that are at the core of his life and accordingly his art. He slowly glues his visual fragments together to create something more complete. While these pieces were once torn fractured and torn in every direction, they are now unified.

Sabella gives a visual form to the 'state of mind' created by this exile. Sabella deconstructs his surroundings and rebuilds them by assembling hundreds of images together until a 'new form' or 'impossible reality' is created.

Early works from the Euphoria series use countless trees presented as rhizomatic strands of thoughts, once

arranged and set, becoming an ecstatic resolution.

Beyond Euphoria was created at a time when Sabella was absorbing the dramatic changes in the Arab World, specifically the Tunisian-Egyptian conflict. The unfolding events influenced this artwork and shifted it from its original conception and prior state of mind, evident in previous artworks.

The consequent Metamorphosis series harnessed an inevitable shift from ecstasy and euphoria to an evident 'disturbia', rattled and stoked by events surrounding the artist. Conflict zones both politically within the Arab world, and indeed his own psyche, prompt Sabella to transcend these obstacles, and use them as the building blocks for a still ongoing series of images. Sabella writes: "If I manage to create a form that is dazzling from pieces of barbed wire, then the barbed wire will cease to be what it is. It will settle or become part of my building blocks. It will be muted. In brief, Through metamorphosis I will transcend my 'Disturbia'"

More recently, Fragments see the artist return to his native Jerusalem. Since 1948 many Palestinians have been removed from their houses into a never ending Diaspora. Their homes with their belongings are now occupied by Israelis. Sabella subleased one such home from an Israeli family who was renting the house from an Israeli 'landlord' who lived next door. He lived there for 38

days, and became an obsessed visual investigator. He looked at every small object and corner, trying to make sense of history. There were few clues left from the time before the Israelis occupied the house. Eventually, the landlord heard Sabella speaking Arabic in the garden and became suspicious. He approached him with anxiety and asked where he came from. He answered, "I come from Jerusalem".

On leaving the occupied house and reflecting on the experience, Sabella, unsettled by the violation, went in search of a way to come to terms with those 38 days, and so journeyed to the Old City of Jerusalem to go the house he was born in. From its arches and walls, he collected thin, fragile, and multi layered fragments of paint. The slow and delicate process of peeling revealed many layers that went back in time - an archeological palimpsest.

Sabella printed on these fragments the images captured within the occupied house. They appear not as photographs developed upon the medium of paint, but moreover as artefacts found in this condition untouched.

In 2008 Sabella was awarded Ellen Auerbach Award granted by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and was one of the commissioned artists for the inauguration of MATHAF Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha. Steve Sabella's artworks have been collected by the British Museum in London, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

in Doha, Ars Aevi museum in Sarajevo and leading collectors in the Middle East including Cuadro Fine Art in Dubai, Salsali Private Museum and Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah.

A monograph is currently being prepared in collaboration with the Akademie der Künste in Berlin that will review his life and artistic career from the early 1990s.

## **Berloni Gallery**

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## **Opening hours**

Tuesday - Friday from 11am to 6pm

Saturday from 12pm to 4pm

## **Related images**

- 1. 2. & 3. Steve Sabella, 38 days of re-collection, 2014, size varies, unique, Black & White Photo Emulsion on Paint Fragments, Collected from Jerusalem's Old City house walls