

Steve Sabella's "In Exile" and "Metamorphosis": From Alienation to Transformation

[View all posts by Tulika Bahadur](#) November 14, 2016

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Several dualities and tensions run through the work of Berlin-based Palestinian artist Steve Sabella (born 1975) – most prominently, the universal and the particular, the past and the future. In a way, his photographic projects are accessible to one and all, they seem free of direct references to a specific culture or creed and reflect the identity of a global citizen. On the other hand, they remain rooted, albeit symbolically, in the experience of growing up in a divided city. Jerusalem, for Steve, is more than a physical place. It is a psychological state that has remained within him as he has travelled the globe. The concreteness of barbed wires, walls of separation, demolition lands became intangible and invaded his mind. Steve brings his internal Jerusalem to life brilliantly in two of his projects: "In Exile" (2008) and "Metamorphosis" (2012). The first is a visualisation of what he has been through, the second what he is in the process of becoming.

The images under "In Exile" show multiplication and

monotony – of windows and doors. They speak of alienation, fragmentation, suffocation, a scattered life. There is no centre here, no pathways or exits or signs of guidance. This series could be said to represent the life of the artist in both the Jerusalem of geography and the Jerusalem of the psyche – the latter is in no way easier to bear or less real than the former. In “Metamorphosis”, there is some progress. Existence is no longer all that disorienting. The collages openly face and depict the barbed wires and the walls of separation and the demolition lands stored in memory but now new patterns are emerging. Barriers and blockages are shifting and dissolving. Perhaps wounds are being stitched, and healed.



Steve Sabella (Credit: Clementine Butler-Gallie)

The artist explains his creative journey and vision: “Can we break free from our image? I came to terms with my exile after a process of self interrogation and introspection. As [Vilém Flusser](#) writes, ‘Émigré become free, not when they deny their lost home land, but when they come to terms with it.’ I did not want my DNA to change, I would always come from Jerusalem, but what could change is consciousness and perception. By examining exile from different angles and perspectives, I was able to dig deeper into the relationship between

images and the reality they create. I freed myself.

"Decoding fixed systems that are constantly at work to entrap people in bordered spaces, led me to see the bigger picture. Each series I have created began with a visual question, which, once solved, would lead me to a new chamber with a new visual challenge. Looking back at my work, I see that I was unfolding palimpsests that explore multiple layers of my past, and the influence perception had on my 'reality'...My illusions are imagined bridges, map-like structures, that connect us to our past with an eye to the future."

Steve Sabella's latest series is [38 Days of Re-Collection](#), which was exhibited as *Fragments from our Beautiful Future* at the Bumiller Collection in Berlin until last week. The artist holds an MA in Photographic Studies from the University of Westminster and an MA in Art Business from Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. In 2008, he received the Ellen Auerbach Award from the Akademie der Künste Berlin. In September 2016, he published his award winning memoir [The Parachute Paradox](#) with Kerber Verlag.

Steve was a speaker at TEDx Marrakech (2012), and has been the subject of many [documentaries](#), including *In the Darkroom with Steve Sabella* (2014). His work has been exhibited internationally and is held in collections including the British Museum in London and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, where he was one of the

artists commissioned for the inaugural exhibition in 2010.


Links: Website (stevesabella.com) | Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Sabella) | Facebook (www.facebook.com/Steve-Sabella-Artist-Page-431231943612942) | Instagram (www.instagram.com/steve_sabella)

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IN EXILE (2008)



Steve Sabella. In Exile. 2008. Lambda print mounted on aluminium. 136 x 125 cm



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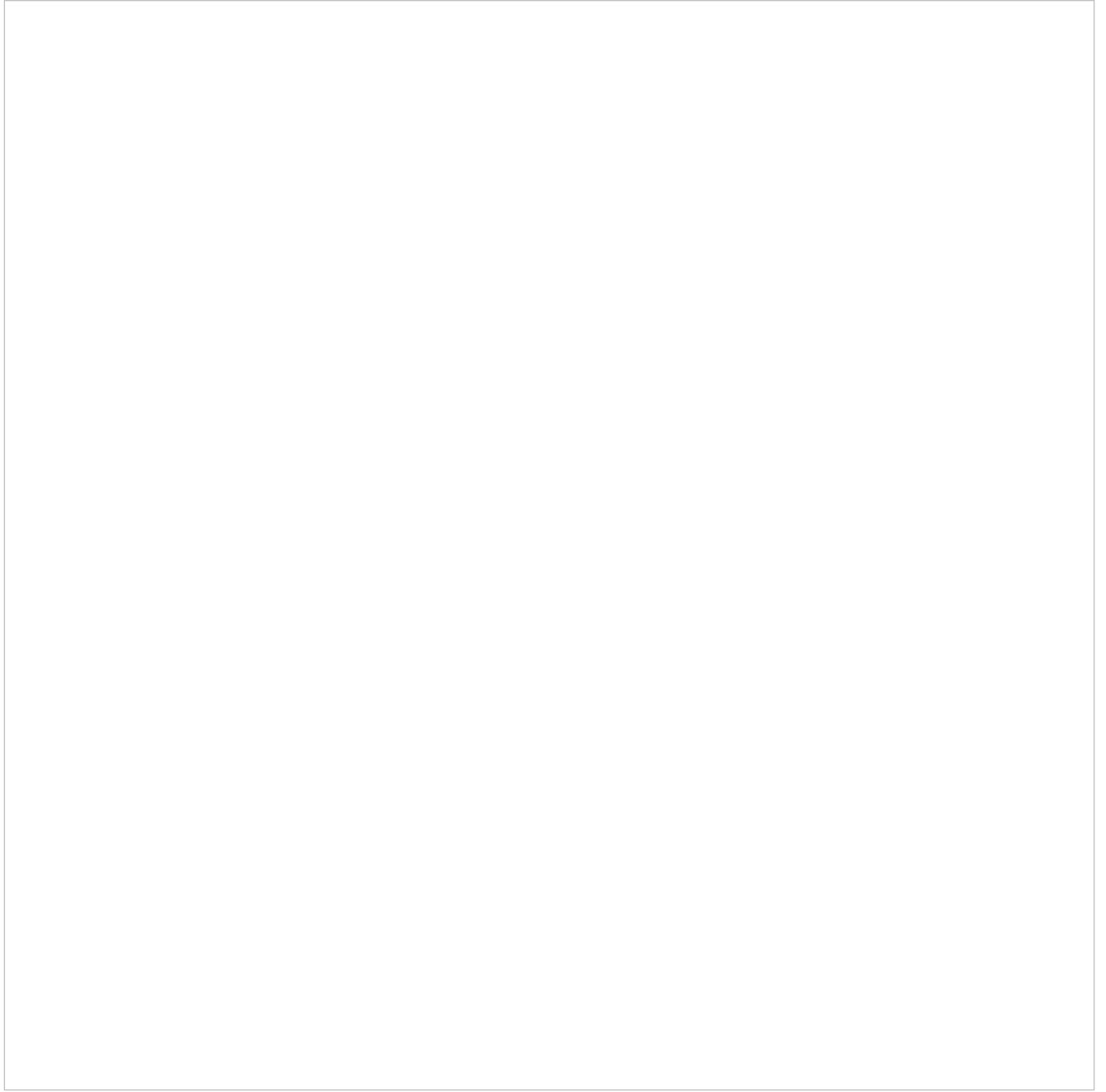


Steve Sabella. In Exile. 2008. Lambda print mounted on aluminium. 136 x 125 cm

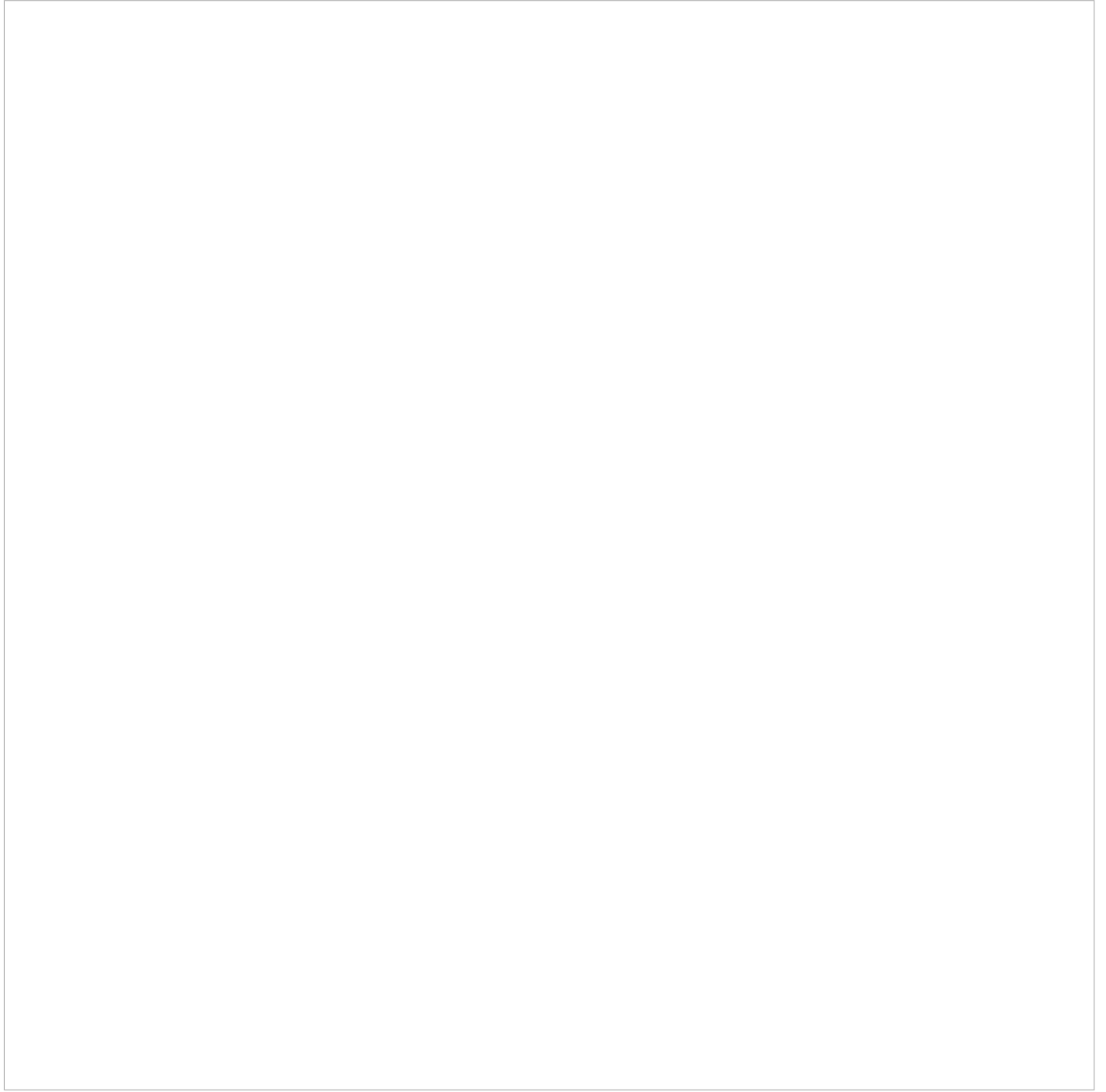


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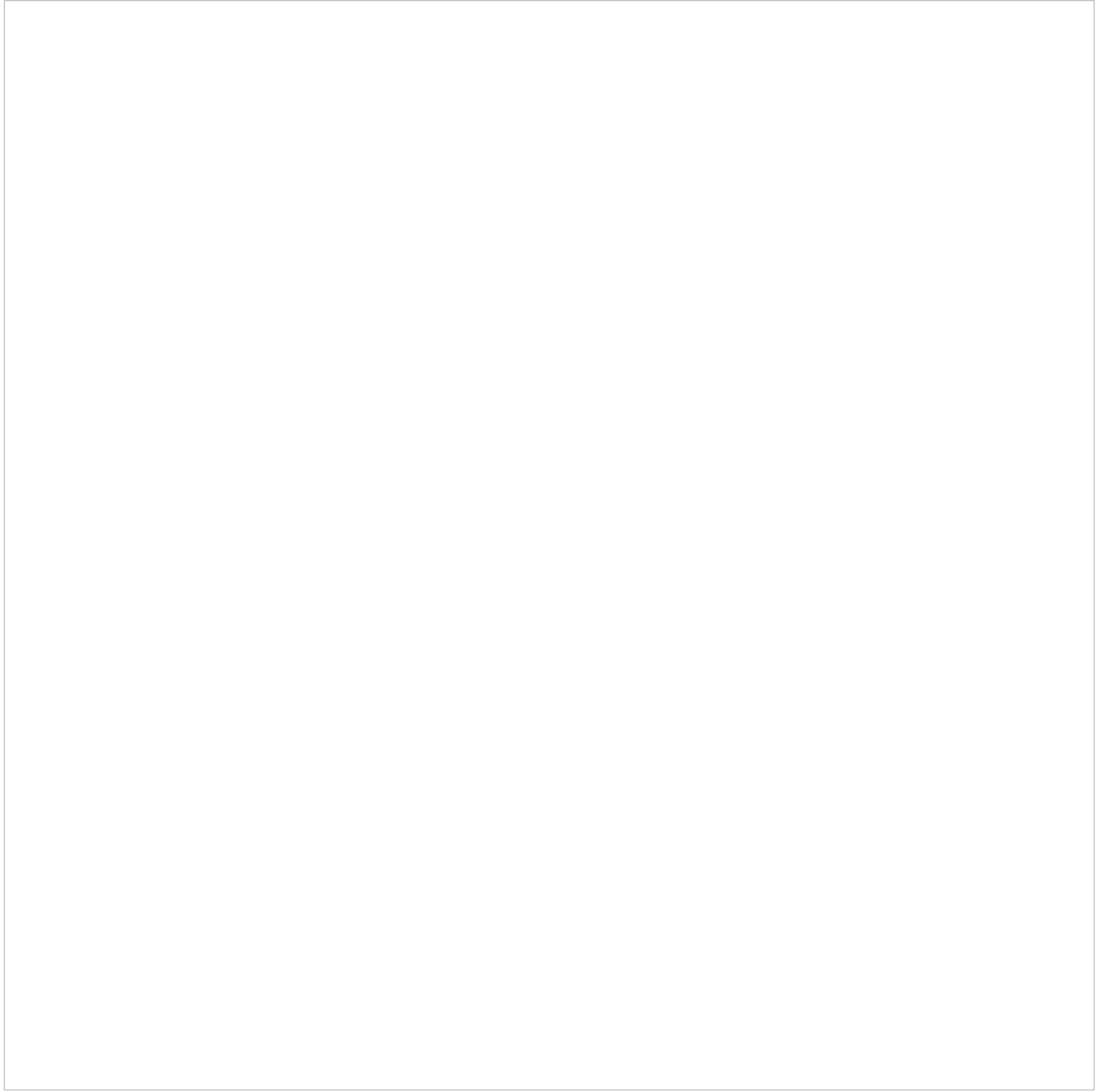
METAMORPHOSIS (2012)



Steve Sabella. Metamorphosis. 2012. Lightjet print on diasec. 160 x 160 cm



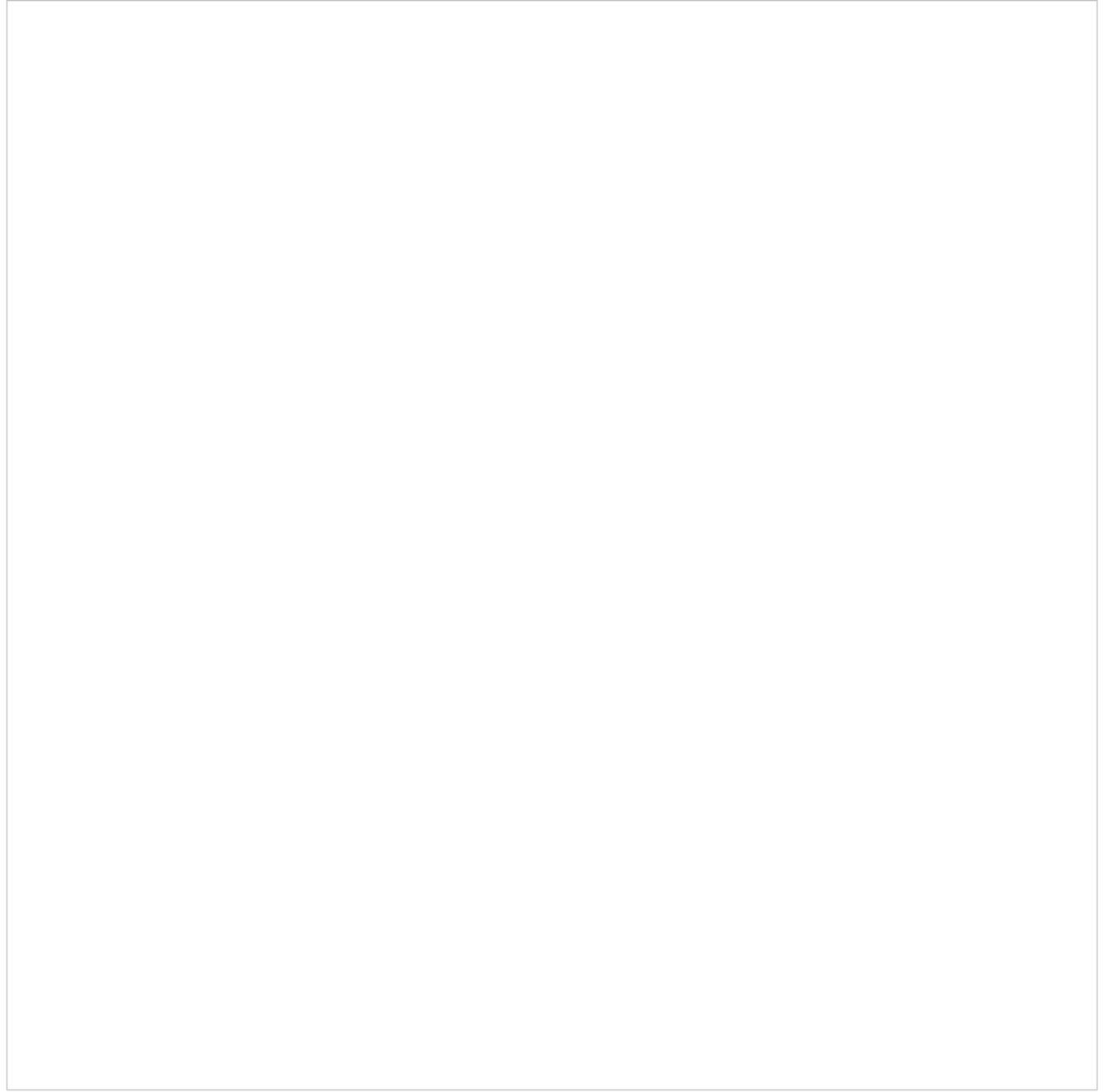
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