

The Liberated Image

Steve Sabella

The Liberated Image explores how images shape perception, memory, identity and our sense of what is possible. Born in Jerusalem, Palestine, under Israeli occupation, Sabella describes the process through which imposed images enter consciousness as the colonization of the imagination. An image of who we are can become the boundary of what we believe we can become. Even after leaving Jerusalem, the image of being occupied travelled with him, as though the checkpoints had moved inside. His art becomes a series of personal checkpoints—stations in an ongoing process of self-liberation. His collages take images apart and place their fragments in new relationships, moving them beyond their assigned meanings.

The exhibition brings together five projects. In *Metamorphosis*, images of architecture, cactus forms and barbed wire enter new relationships, unsettling familiar distinctions between confinement, protection and endurance. Barbed wire passes through one image like a thread stitching wounds, retaining its history even as new visual possibilities emerge. Elsewhere returns to nineteenth-century photochromes of historic Palestine, alongside images from Syria and Lebanon. Sabella reworks these inherited views to recover a relationship with a land and a past he never directly experienced, while reshaping images made through other eyes into a visual language of his own, creating scenes that never existed.

In *The Great March of Return*, represented here by a single detail, more than one thousand photographs taken by five Palestinian photojournalists in Gaza are placed in relation to images of outer space. A sealed geography opens into infinity, without erasing the realities from which these photographs emerged. *Everland* follows Palestinian embroidery, where stitches pass between generations. These inherited stitches carry Palestine across time, linking memory and lived experience while forming patterns that resonate with cultures far beyond its borders. *The Sound of Jerusalem* transforms a 360-degree panorama of the city into a visual frequency, its skyline rising and falling like a sound wave. A familiar geography can suddenly be experienced through a different visual logic.

Sabella's practice examines how images accumulate histories and how changing their relationships can open new possibilities. The liberated image carries its origins without being confined to them. It remains open to meanings beyond the artist's intentions, and to the memories, histories and ways of seeing each viewer brings to it.

Somewhere between what Sabella makes and what viewers see, another image becomes possible.