



# Steve Sabella

## *Euphoria and Beyond*

Steve Sabella's oeuvre unfolds like a book. Its chapters chronicle the artist's journey towards visual and intellectual maturation and bravely investigate his shifting psychological states, narrating a deeply personal individuation process.

Christa Paula

In *Exile* artwork (2008) was about the state of mind of living in permanent mental exile. It was about fragmentation, disorientation, confusion and dislocation. I tried to give a visual form to my life as exile and alienation are at the core of my life and accordingly my art. It seems that I have been managing to slowly glue my fragments so that they appear complete in a healthier way. Before, they were torn apart in every direction, where now they make some form of a unity. Hence, 'I am more stable'.

I think at this stage of my life, I managed to 'transcend temporarily' the exile state

of mind. Just like my journey to penetrate my psyche to give a visual form to my fragmented state of mind, it occurred to me that I should journey to the beautiful side of my brain and unlock the aesthetic and beauty buried there and give these a visual form.

I feel I am in transition - in a new state of mind – euphoria.

Steve Sabella

Light shines through the branches of trees, caught in floating movements, ephemeral and fragile like the first rays of morning light after a long and dark night. Here, a cautious hope enters Sabella's universe, a hope that gains in momentum in "Euphoria", a triptych celebrating the euphoric deliverance from the mental bonds of anxiety in what might be called a "mental heterotopia". Through the use of a similar technique of multi-angled photomontages as in "In Exile", each of the three single pieces shows a kaleido-



scope of up-rooted trees. But their up-rootedness does not make them appear doomed, rather they seem to stretch out their branches, circling around each other in a light-hearted dance.

Charlotte Bank

In contrast, the *Euphoria* triptych is a joyous retinal explosion. Cut and assembled from hundreds of fragments of trees, like those shown *In Transition*, the resulting image of organic fluidity signifies cathartic relief, emanating a sense of the ecstatic and the sublime. Anthropomorphised shapes dance against the softly pattered background forming ever-new aesthetic possibilities in the promise of limitless expansion.

Christa Paula

“...These contorted passageways through his own psyche led the artist to the roots of his wounds and gave him an inkling

of the possibility of healing. While the destructiveness of being uprooted was at the center of *In Exile*, Sabella’s newest works move, release and liberation into the foreground. *Euphoria* (2010) alludes to the blissful feeling of being freed of mental fetters. This feeling – possibly short-lived, as the artist himself concedes – is expressed in playful-seeming, uprooted trees...”

Charlotte Bank

There are two voices that have penetrated and shook me during the creation of *Beyond Euphoria*. Both are Tunisian and have become iconic. The first one is the voice of the man who went in a dramatic scene shouting in the street the moment he heard that Ben Ali ‘fled away’ (Ben Ali Hrab). The other is the voice of an older man with white hair (Harimna, Harimna), who was speaking with a voice, which like the first voice condensed one hundred years of Arab history. Both of their voices recapitulated the agony, the



Beyond Euphoria, 2011  
205 / 117 cm, lambda print + diasec mount  
Limited edition of 6 + 2 AP

pain, the anticipation, the frustration, the joy, the sadness, the revelation and the euphoria of how every Arab felt. In Paris, I had the utmost honor of having dinner in the most astonishing and unforeseen manner with the first voice. His name is Abdennaceur Aouini.

My state of transition and Euphoria preceded the Arab revolts. My journey of interrogation and introspection has been leading me to liberation. To achieve it, I had to confront myself, journey to my core and question my 'beliefs' and everything in my 'reality'. The journey starts from within and once it starts change is inevitable. It is possible that this is what people in many different countries realized. Beyond Euphoria was created at a time when I was absorbing the dramatic changes in the Arab World. The unfolding events influenced this artwork and shifted it from its original conception.

Steve Sabella

It is also relevant that the production period of Sabella's first post-Euphoria

works coincided with the demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt. Beyond Euphoria relishes in a freedom never seen before in Sabella's oeuvre, a freedom where possibilities are limitless and new fictional spaces beckon to be explored.

Christa Paula

This newfound freedom is further explored in Beyond Euphoria, the series Sabella was working on when demonstrations erupted in Tunisia and Egypt. Beyond Euphoria invites the viewer into multi-layered landscapes, indefinable, yet attractive, stretching toward a far horizon.

Charlotte Bank

His new photographs and photomontages ... offer a more joyful, vigorous viewpoint - challenging by pure coincidence the region's new energy engendered by what has become as the Arab Spring.

The National Newspaper



Euphoria, 2010  
155 / 127 cm  
lambda print + diasec mount  
Limited edition of 6 + 2 AP