

John Jurayj, *UNDEAD*
June 9 - July 17, 2011

Opening reception:
Thursday, June 9, 7-9pm



From June 9 - July 17, 2011, PARTICIPANT INC presents *UNDEAD*, a solo exhibition consisting of two recent bodies of work by John Jurayj. *Untitled (Family Baggage)* is a series of sculptures that addresses emotional loss and public anxiety, taking as its starting point pieces of luggage that the artist's parents used when traveling through the Middle East in the 1960s. Cast in black plaster and gunpowder, the method of fabrication leaves flaws suggesting passage and disruption, while the choice of material implies aggressive potential, reflective of current concerns. The same piece of luggage, a trunk, is cast numerous times, eluding mimesis in favor of a sequence of iterations. These 'ghost objects,' in their evocation of tombstones or memorials, maintain an aura that belies the optimism implicit in their original era, a time when international travel held the promise of sophistication, sex appeal, and mobility for the aspirant middle class of the '60s.

The accompanying series of paintings, *Untitled (Undead)*, maintains a very simple aim: to restore images of those killed in the Lebanese Civil War into an afterlife of painting. These works incorporate gunpowder and ink, silk-screened on polished stainless steel panels. Taking material cues from Jurayj's earlier works that utilized mirrors, charring, and gunpowder, the character and scale of these works also make reference to Michelangelo Pistoletto's mirror pieces of the late '60s and early '70s, of which Pistoletto stated, "the physical invasion of the picture in the real environment gives me the chance to introduce myself among the broken-down elements of figuration." Painting, declared dead enumerable times over the last century, has repeatedly returned as spectral presence inhabiting various afterlives.

The bodies inhabiting Jurayj's paintings, suspended in mirrors with our reflection, are modified by a number of actions taken in relation to the original source photographs, appropriated from journalistic sources. Images depicting the body sundered, unconscious, lost in deep sleep, horizontal, are returned to upright positions, re-establishing agency. Confronting viewers with a self-image in the unfettered space of the mirror, they relate back to the world of verticality: our world. They are also inverted into photographic negatives and isolated from their original context. The transformed image is otherworldly, yet the metal ground and combustible potential of gunpowder intimates violence and profound transformation.

Also presented is a companion video, *Untitled (We Could Be Heroes)* that depicts critical political leaders of the era and region. Their portraits have been defaced by burning and drilling, and the video itself is presented horizontally, manifesting an object that becomes a prop upon which a painting is supported.

John Jurayj lives and works in Brooklyn and teaches at The School of Visual Arts and Cornell University. He received his MFA from Bard College in 2005 and a BFA in architecture from Washington University. Recent solo exhibitions include *Untitled Lebanon (Fragments)*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2011); *Untitled (Undead)*, Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles (2010); as well as Alberto Peola Gallery, Turin and Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York. Recent group exhibitions include *Translation/Tarjama*, Herbert Johnson Museum, Cornell University and Queens Museum of Art; *Noise*, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut; and *Exposure 2009*, Beirut Art Center. Jurayj is represented in public and private collections including the Hirshhorn Museum of Art; British Museum of Art; and Harvard's Schwartz Collection. Jurayj's work will be featured in the upcoming solo exhibition, *No Paradises*, Alberto Peola Gallery, Turin.



Funding for this project has been made possible by the Puffin Foundation.

PARTICIPANT INC's exhibitions are made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, celebrating 50 years of building strong, creative communities in New York State's 62 counties.

Archiving and documentation projects are supported by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

PARTICIPANT INC receives generous support from the Harriett Ames Charitable Trust; Bloomberg; The Brown Foundation, Inc. of Houston; Foundation 20 21; Foundation for Contemporary Arts; Gesso Foundation; The Ruth Ivor Foundation; The Daniel M. Neidich and Brooke Garber Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; an anonymous donor of the Community Foundation of Abilene; FRIENDS of PARTICIPANT INC; numerous individuals; and Materials for the Arts, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs/NYC Department of Sanitation/NYC Department of Education.

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 253 East Houston Street, between Norfolk and Suffolk Streets on the LES. Subway: F to Second Avenue, Allen Street exit or JMZ to Essex/Delancey.

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