

For Immediate Release

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John Jurayj, *Untitled (Undead)*

9 April – 15 May 2010

Opening Reception: Friday, April 9th, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present *Untitled (Undead)*, a new set of projects by John Jurayj that continues his exploration of the aftermath and destruction created by the Lebanese Civil War. The series consists of life-size interpretations of dead bodies silkscreened onto polished stainless steel with ink and gunpowder taking cues from an earlier series entitled *15 Untitled Men*. The overall presentation references Michelangelo Pistoletto's seminal mirror pieces from the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as Cady Noland's sculptures of the early 1990s.

Using photos of dead bodies appropriated from journalistic sources, Jurayj attempts to enliven the mortality of each victim through the disposition of imagery and the process of making the image. The slain figures appear to be unconscious, lost in a deep sleep, lying with hands out to either side in a horizontal position on the ground. Jurayj attempts to free each casualty from his or her constraint by returning them to a vertical position and inverting them into photographic negatives. This process allows for the space of the positive to be created through the double negative - the black inverts to white and the white to black. The figures are freed from their worlds and silkscreened using black gunpowder ink on to the mirrored surface. A carefully chosen medium, polished stainless steel is commonly used in penal and psychiatric institutions in place of glass for safety precautions. The gunpowder with its combustible potential suggests danger and alteration while creating a symbolic awareness of the violence and profound adaptation each body has experienced. The bodies are suspended, becoming apparitions that dance, walk or float through the new space they occupy. Their confrontation within the pictorial field is intersected by the reflection of the viewer allowing for a contemplation of one's own mortality. The panels will be juxtaposed with a video that outlines portraits of influential world leaders who were responsible for the vicious outcome and overall situation of the Civil War in Lebanon. The portraits are taken from scanned transparencies from the series *15 Untitled Men* with their eyes removed by aggressive punctures. Each figure slowly fades in and out with overlays of blank transparencies that have been randomly shot. The transparencies are lit from underneath allowing the light to permeate through the holes to create an abstract pictorial field. The "wounds" on the surface act as metaphors for the gunshots of each victim seen in the metal panels.

In conjunction, a more intimate series of cast mold luggage used by Jurayj's parents to travel through the Middle East during the heady days of the 1950s and 60s will be on display. The items vary from a large suitcase to a cosmetic case and a woman's evening purse. The material process of casting the sculptures in plaster and gunpowder replicates them as life size simulation with flaws and marks that evoke passage and disruption. The blackened ghost objects in their evocation of tombstones and memorials are inoperable vessels, un-transportable baggage that play on the psychological term "family baggage." The art objects defy the optimism that was implicit in their era, a time when international travel by jet was still new and held the promise of sophistication, sex appeal, adventure and worldliness for the aspiring middle class.

John Jurayj has had two prior solo shows at Walter Maciel Gallery. His work was included in the 2009 exhibition entitled *Translation/Tarjama* at the Queens Museum of Art in New York and the most recent *Exposures* at the Beirut Art Center in Lebanon. Jurayj is included in the collections of the British Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum of Art in Washington DC and the Harvard Business School at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. He has had solo shows at Alberto Peola Arte Contemporanea in Turin, Massimo Audiello Gallery in New York and White Columns in New York. Jurayj has also been included several group exhibitions internationally and is currently an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

The gallery is located at 2642 S. La Cienega Blvd. in Los Angeles and is open from Tuesday through Saturday, 11am to 6pm. Please visit the gallery website at www.waltermacielgallery.com.