

For Immediate Release

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John Jurayj, *WHAT'S LEFT*

13 April – 25 May 2013

Opening Reception: Saturday, April 13th, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present a new exhibition entitled *WHAT'S LEFT* by New York based artist John Jurayj. This is his fourth solo show with the gallery. For the past decade Jurayj has been producing work in response to the destruction and displacement of the Civil War in Lebanon where his father was born and raised before immigrating to the US. Jurayj explores his experiences as an Arab-American artist, straddling vast cultural and continental divides. Notions of nationalism, exile, familial expectations, trauma and the fluidity of personal identity are fundamental to his practice.

The focal piece of the show is a single channel video entitled *Untitled (Ferris Wheel Beirut)* that captures the artist's experience in the urban landscape of Beirut. The video is projected as a large vertical format with mirrored imagery much like a Rorschach test blot. Using footage from his final visit with his late father to Lebanon, Jurayj documents his experience riding the world famous Ferris wheel at Beirut's Luna Park. Constructed in the mid-twentieth century, the iconic Ferris wheel survived the Lebanese civil war and was in near continuous operation throughout the strife and chaos, a rusting and collapsing symbol of perseverance and strength. The sound captures both the cacophony of the city as well as the piercing grind of the vintage ride. The work speaks to both the monstrous and the personal.

Accompanying the video are three new series of work that present both beauty and overwhelming destruction much like the intriguing equilibrium of Beirut and Jurayj's personal life. The first series displays photographic images of Beirut sunsets printed on watercolor paper marked with distinct burnt areas and similarly sized circles of colored plexiglass. The sunsets symbolize the closure of the day and become signifiers for the welcomed calm after periods of civil disorder. The use of plexiglass has been incorporated in Jurayj's practice for many years and represents his use of materials that allow for reflection and therefore self awareness. In contrast a second series of manipulated drawings with areas of burnt stains, fragments of images of Beirut, gunpowder and smudges on transparent paper will be shown floated in white frames. Some of the marks have been singed through the surface and seem to mimic shrapnel wounds or bullet holes, piercing the skin of the delicate surface. Both series intentional blur the formal (and possibly outmoded) boundaries between a photograph, drawing, painting and sculpture; manifesting an exiled state. Jurayj has stated, "My interest is to crack or shatter the image, to disrupt its accepted passivity. Thus the holes, the mirrors, the turning the image on its side into a Rorschach, the negative inversion of the original image, are all strategies of rupture and recovery to activate that which has become passive. These actions introduce radical subjectivity (locating the self and its contingencies) into a field that is masquerading as objective or fact." The third series includes a group of small format abstract paintings cast from gun powder. This material was previously explored in a series of cast luggage sculptures modeled after the luggage used by Jurayj's parents to travel through the Middle East when they were courting. For this new work the material process of casting the quotidian blank canvases in gunpowder produces the unstable condition of ghost images or simulations where the previous blankness is now loaded with the random flaws and marks, traces of the lost image.

John Jurayj lives and works in Brooklyn, New York and currently teaches at The School of Visual Art and Cornell University in New York City. He received his MFA from Bard College in 2005 and BFA in architecture from Washington University. Recent solo shows include: *No Paradises*, Alberto Peola Gallery, Turin; *Undead*; Participant Inc., New York, NY; *Untitled Lebanon (Fragments)*, The Third Line in Dubai. Recent group shows include: *Light from the Middle East: New Photography*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London; *(Space): Constructing the Intangible*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; *Translation/Tarjama* at the Herbert Johnson Museum at Cornell University and the Queens Museum of Art, New York; *Noise* at Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut; *Exposure 2009*, Beirut Art Center. Jurayj is represented in a variety of public and private collections including the Hirshhorn Museum of Art, the British Museum of Art and Harvard's Schwartz Collection.

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.waltermaciellgallery.com.