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New York, NY, United States

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An Artist Examines the Israel-Palestine Conflict in Dark, Ambiguous Photographs

ARTSY EDITORIAL

4 DAYS AGO

In his first solo show at Dubai's [Meem Gallery](#), Palestinian-born, Berlin-based artist [Steve Sabella](#) presents a series of new photographic work. Titled "Independence" (2013), the series is a radical departure from the artist's previous work. Having used abstract collage as his primary medium for several years, Sabella here displays figurative photographic images, indirectly addressing historical, social, and geographic issues, which he intends (in part) as a meditation on the state of Palestine and its people.

In an interview with a German magazine, Sabella [said](#), "I believe solving the Palestinian Israeli conflict is very far [away] because the parties no [longer] discuss the essence of the problem. There is more focus on the side effects of it. This is a major question in my work, as there is no clear indication of who the winner is in this visual tension or settlement—just like the recent war on Gaza." These fraught dynamics come to the fore in Sabella's new series of photographs, which depicts people swimming at night. Their bodies are displaced, blurry, sometimes nearly formless. There is beauty in the distortions of their bodies in the refracted water, but they are also made to appear fractured and incomplete by the warping ripples. Many of the images are oriented vertically, so that bodies appear to be falling or

flying. In one, a woman reaches upward, while another ambiguous person—they are so obscured that we cannot be sure of their age or gender—reaches down to them through the inky blackness. They seem peaceful, but nonetheless straining for connection.

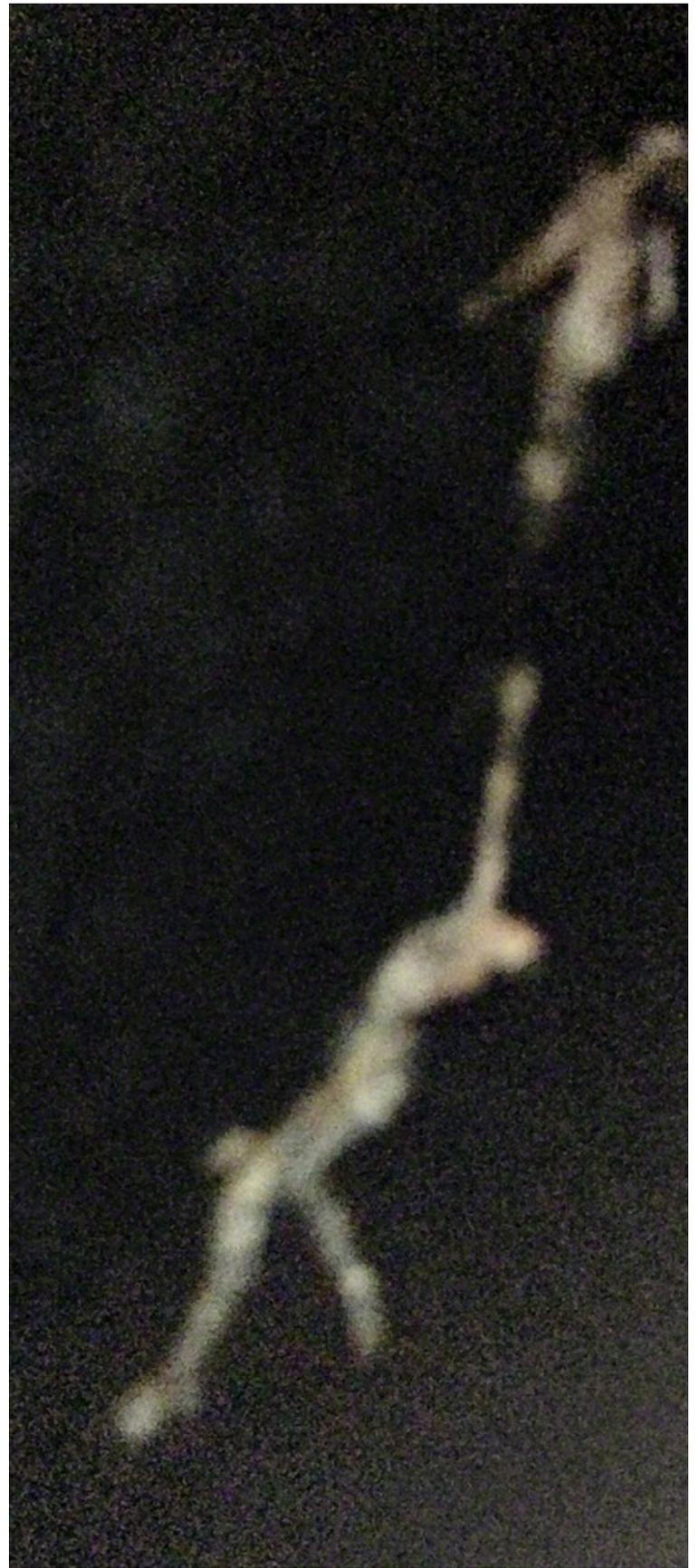
In another image, a woman floats, weightless, her face blurred with swirls of light over her skin. The solitude of the image is comforting, bathing the viewer in a sense of peace and reassurance. But at the same time, the void in which she is suspended feels uncertain, even menacing. The people pictured here, possibly a family, are never shown as an entire group: they are isolated, with at most two people inhabiting the frame at a given time.

Sabella also conveys hope in his images. Despite the dark depths into which he plunges them, his subjects also convey levity. A girl and a man swim together in one picture. In another, a woman floats languidly as a girl moves to pass by her, the girl's gestures looking like she is either swimming joyously or running—legs kicking, arms swinging. In these pictures of a family at leisure, Sabella's deep, abiding humanity surfaces.

—Stephen Dillon

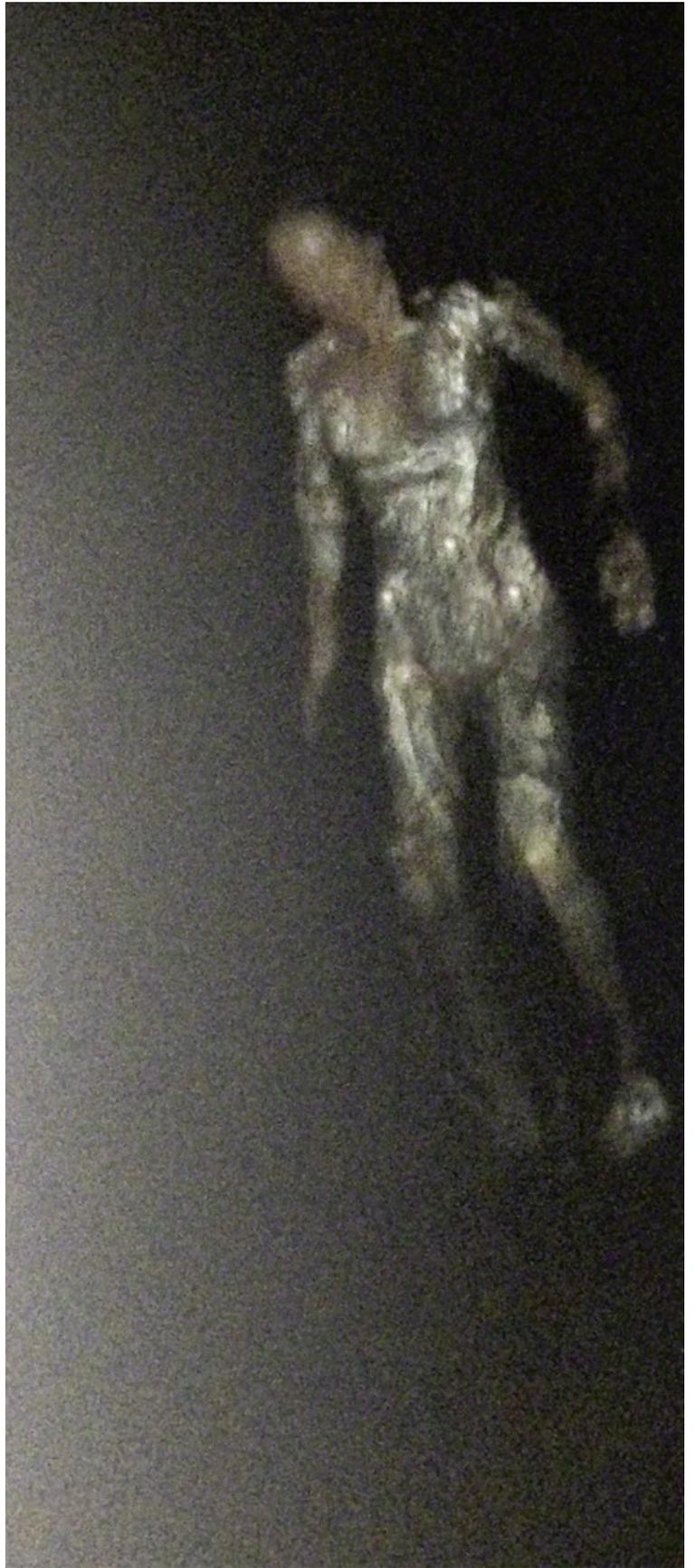
"Steve Sabella: Independence" is on view at Meem Gallery, Dubai, Oct. 28–Dec. 6, 2014.

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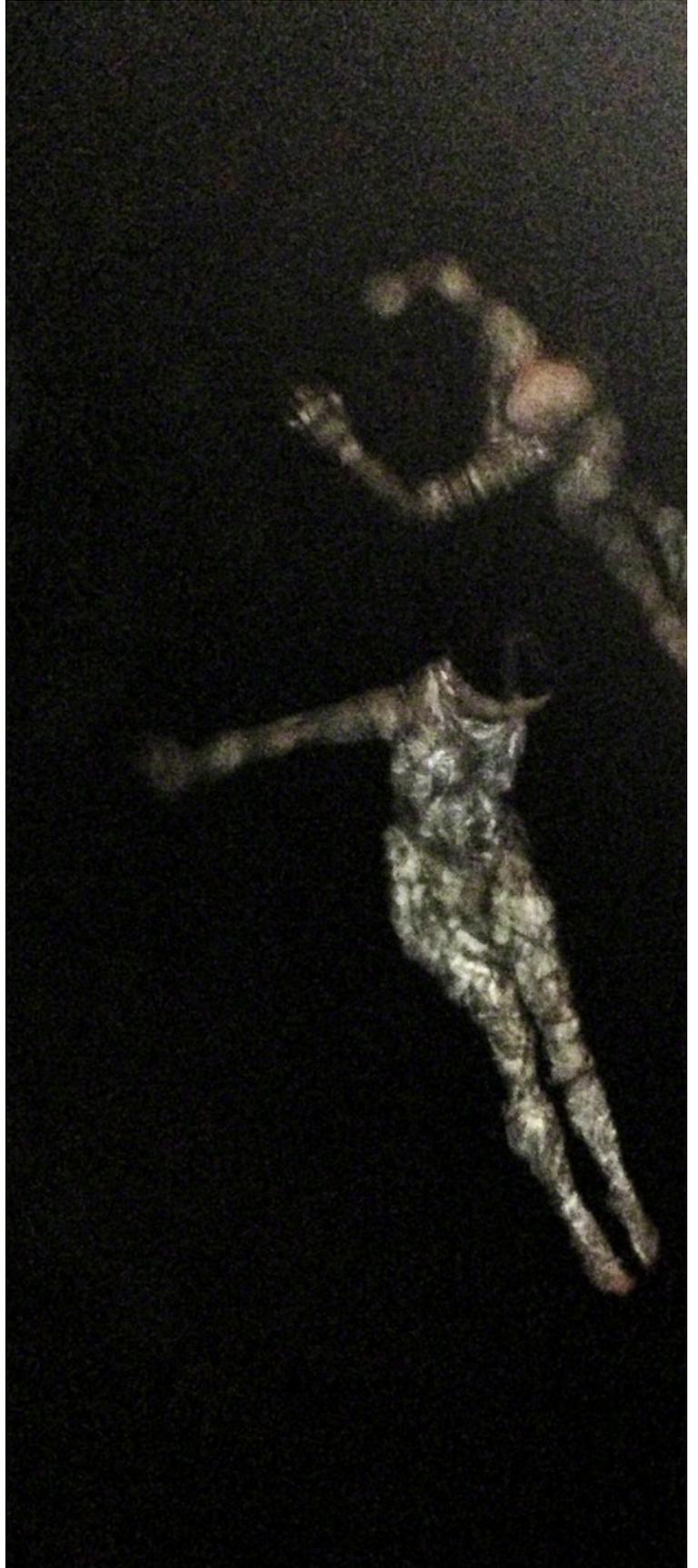


Steve Sabella
Independence 3, 2013
Meem Gallery
\$7,000

CONTACT GALLERY



Steve Sabella
Independence, 2013
Meem Gallery



Steve Sabella

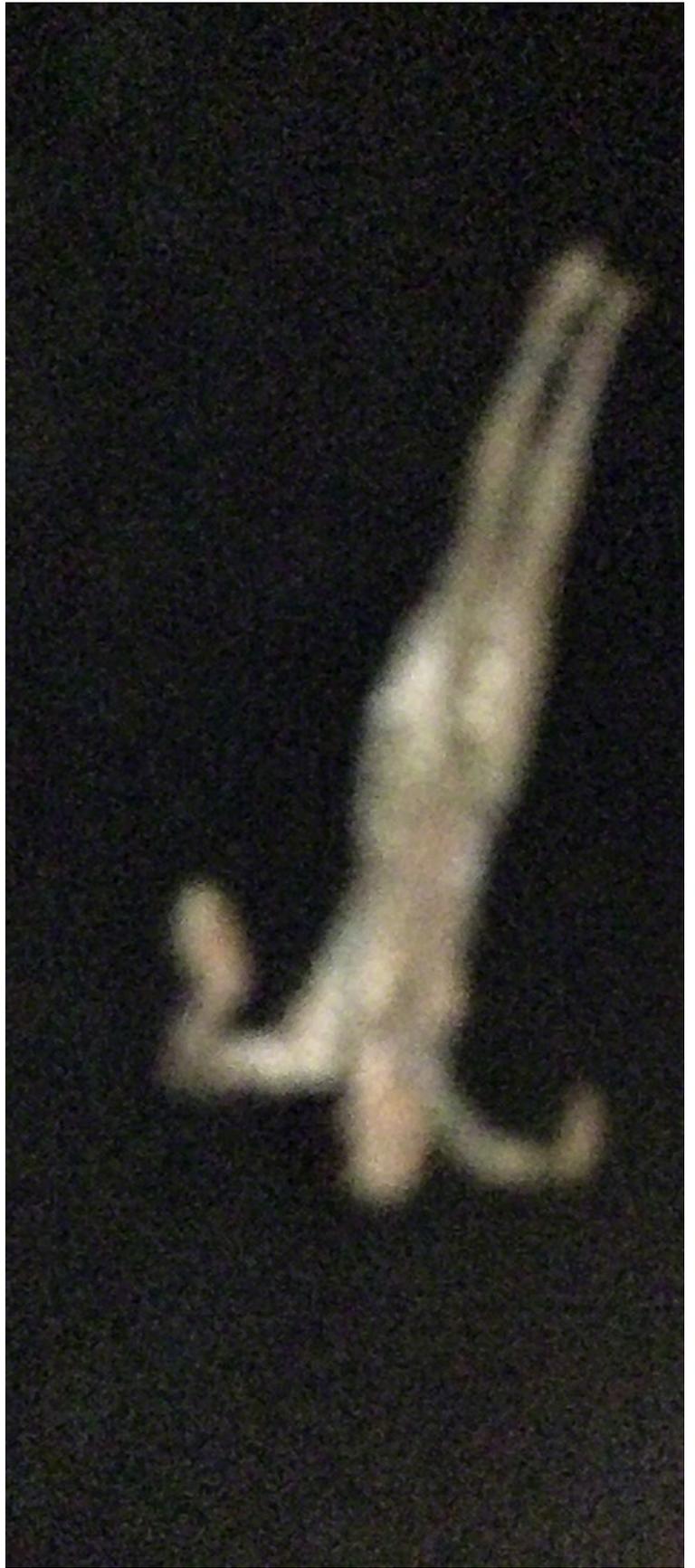
Independence 11, 2013
Meem Gallery

CONTACT GALLERY

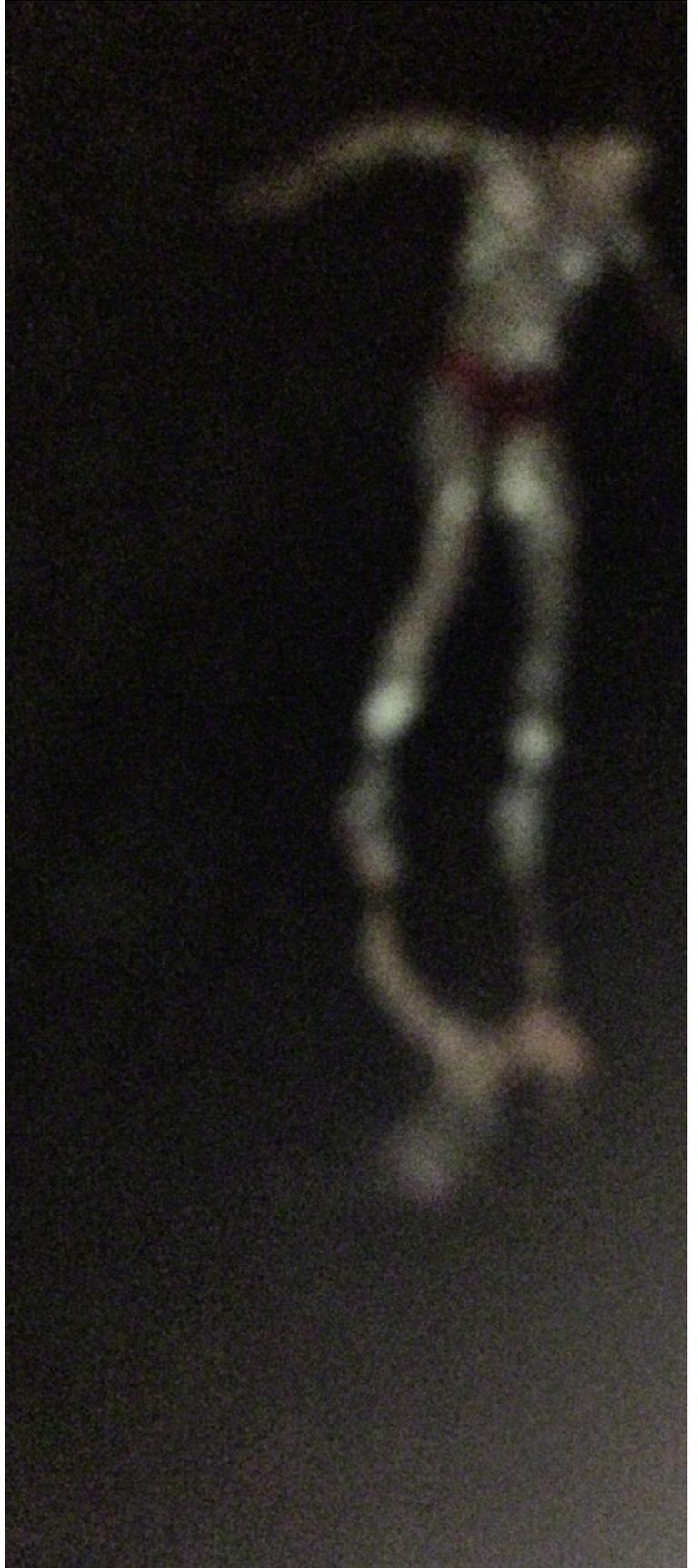


Steve Sabella
Independence 12, 2013
Meem Gallery
SOLD

SOLD



Steve Sabella
Independence 2, 2013
Meem Gallery
\$7,000



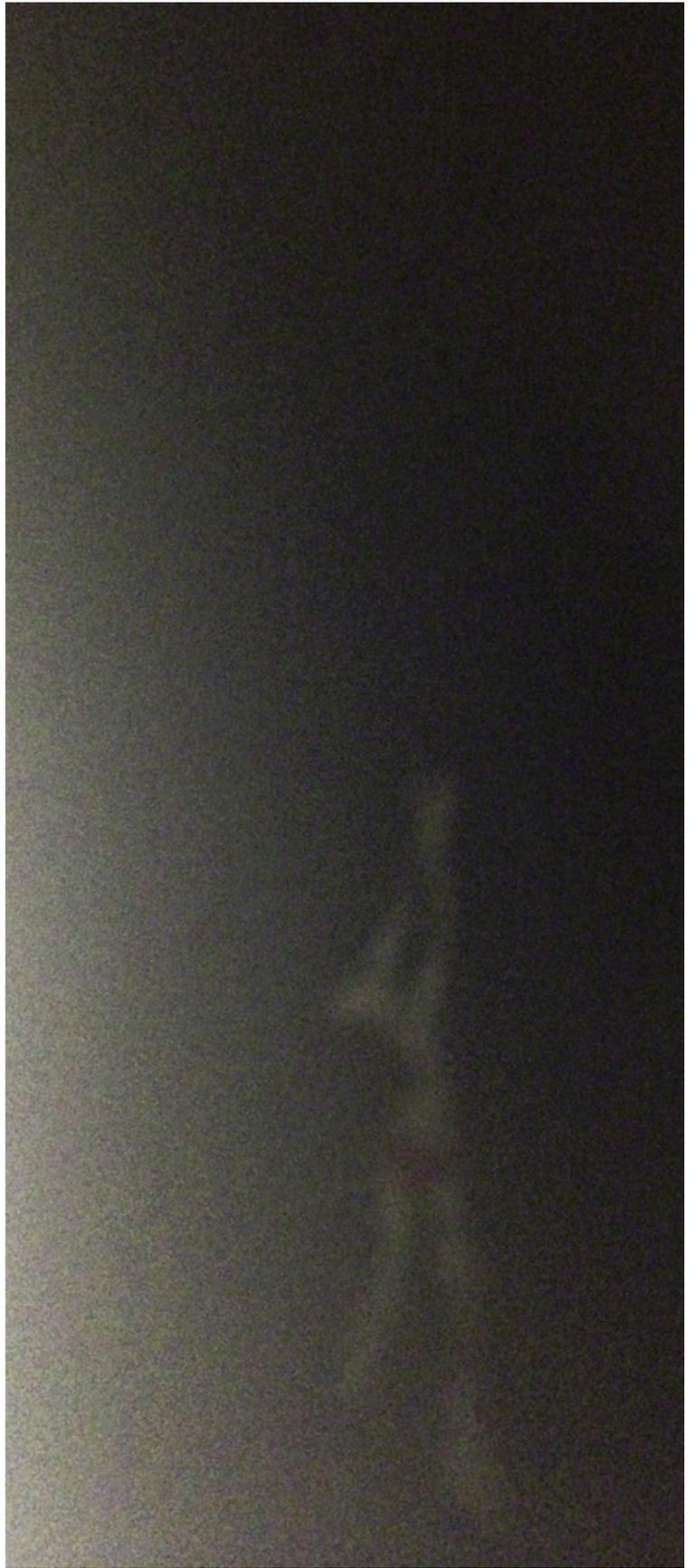
Steve Sabella

Independence 1, 2013

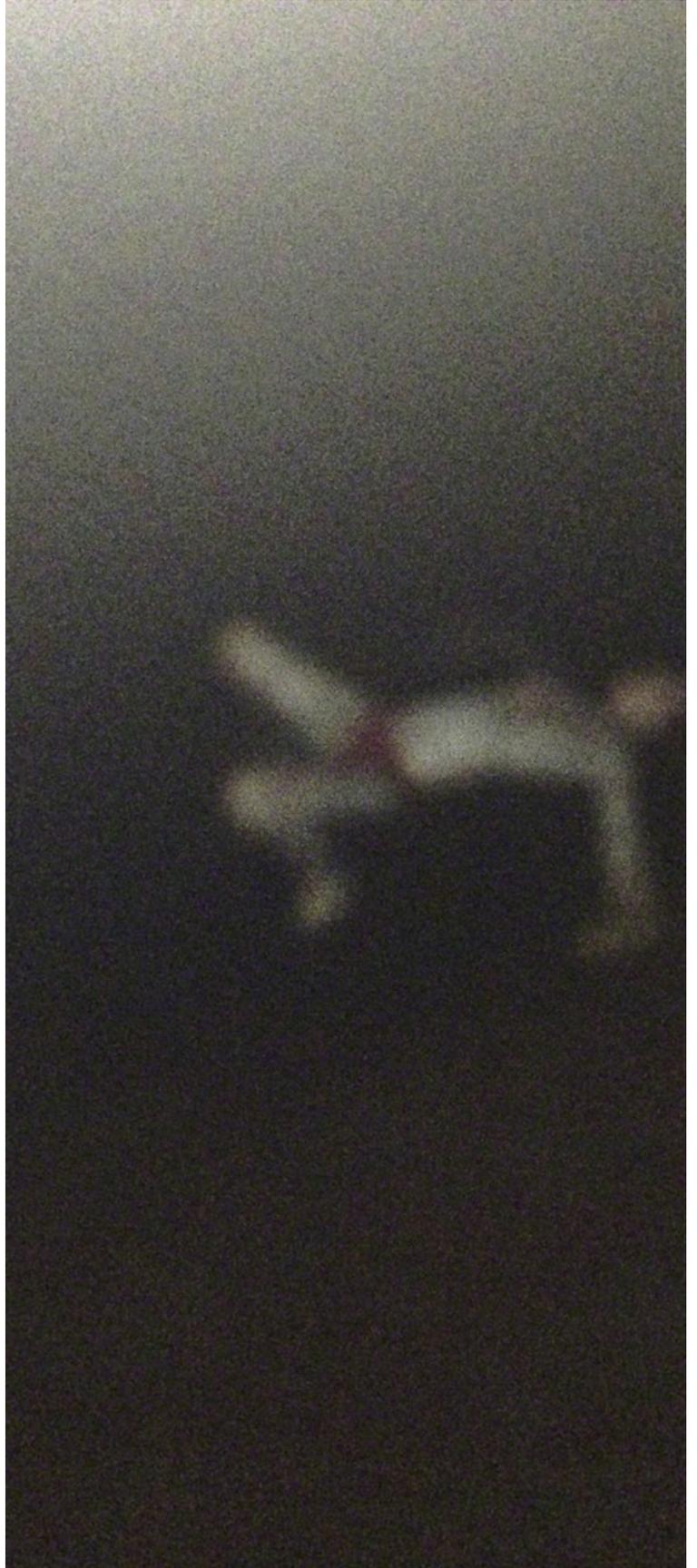
Meem Gallery

\$7,000

CONTACT GALLERY



Steve Sabella
Independence 7, 2013
Meem Gallery
\$7,000



Steve Sabella

Independence 5, 2013
Meem Gallery
\$7,000

CONTACT GALLERY



Steve Sabella
Independence 14, 2013
Meem Gallery
\$7,000

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STEVE SABELLA

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