

## Stefan St-Laurent

HAVING ORGANIZED MANY EXHIBITIONS and events, I have come to realize the importance of producing politically engaged projects that allude to or address some of the poignant issues of our time. In my opinion, contemporary art exhibitions should not be too dissociated from societal and political realities—it is precisely why we call this production the “art of our time.” In stark opposition to radical or political art, apolitical art aligns itself with the neoliberal project, giving little space to ideas that unsettle the status quo. For the 2018 exhibition *Live in Palestine*, which I co-curated with Anna Khimasia and Rehab Nazzal, following our participation at the *Art & Resistance Conference* (2016) in Bethlehem, it became clear to the three of us that we would focus on Palestinian artists living in Gaza and the West Bank, to offer a more nuanced look at life in Palestine today. It was undeniable that there were many parallels to be made about life in Palestine and life for the Indigenous peoples of Canada, including access to water, occupied territories, and the right to self-govern. These links were put into focus by presenter Wanda Nambush and other Indigenous attendees. As Palestinian artists living in Palestine do not fit

so neatly in the Western-art canon, galleries and museums rarely present their work. We therefore felt compelled to produce a major group exhibition at AXENÉ07 that would tour internationally beginning in 2019, so that this lesser-known work would be seen by a large and engaged audience. Given how often artistic institutions self-censor in order to maintain donor funding, artist-run centres like AXENÉ07 have a duty to defend artistic work that other institutions choose to ignore for political reasons. Many audiences are actively seeking politicized exhibitions like *Live in Palestine*. Oftentimes, these exhibitions attract the most visitors, demonstrating how art institutions sometimes fail their audiences because of cowardice and greed. If cultural workers purport to be defenders of artistic freedom and freedom of expression, then they must also muster political courage. As the world crumbles before us, the art community cannot remain silent. ¶

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*Live in Palestine*, July 11–August 11, 2018, curated by Anna Khimasia, Rehab Nazzal, and Stefan St-Laurent, organized by AXENÉ07 (Gatineau) in partnership with δΑΙΜΩΝ (Gatineau), A Space Gallery (Toronto), and Dar al-Kalima University (Bethlehem).  
Photo: Justin Wonnacott.

