

GEOGRAPHY AND MYSTERY

Marina Ballo Charmet and Stefano Cagol

1 – 20 September 2025
Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, Egypt

The Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, with the support of the Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture and in collaboration with Art d'Égypte present *Geography and Mystery*, an exhibition curated by Alessandro Castiglioni and hosted at the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. The exhibition is dedicated to the photographic work of Marina Ballo Charmet and Stefano Cagol.

The exhibition is part of the second edition of *Tales of Two Cities* project, a cultural dialogue initiative that included a screening program held at the MA*GA Museum in Gallarate, Italy, in July 2025.

The project, developed following a research phase carried out in Italy and at the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* in Egypt, places two key figures of contemporary Italian photography—Marina Ballo Charmet and Stefano Cagol—in dialogue with physical geography, the traces of the past, and archaeological discoveries that link the history and future of the Mediterranean. The setting is a major museum institution, founded in 1891 by the Italian Egyptologist Giuseppe Botti, devoted entirely to Mediterranean dialogue and to Alexandria's role as a crucial crossroads of the Greek and later Roman worlds, culminating in the rise of Coptic Christianity. Drawing from this unique historical context, the exhibition presents photography as a medium that bridges time and interweaves historical questions with environmental and climatic dynamics.

As curator Alessandro Castiglioni notes:

"A distinctive feature of the work of Ballo and Cagol is their ability to investigate places—their history, identity, and nature. This project stems from that consideration, expanding into a broader geographic analysis. In our present time, geographic sciences and practices take on an entirely new significance. It's not merely a matter of representation and documentation: geographic practice becomes an act of awareness, of knowledge—it is a gesture of discovery and of love. We are not speaking of a positivistic, assertive geography, but rather of a project that explores the boundaries of knowing and unknowing. A sense of wonder before history, nature, the visible and the invisible. Hence the title Geography and Mystery."

The exhibition, promoted by The Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, is made possible through the support of the *Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture*, as part of the public initiative for the *Promotion of Italian Contemporary Photography Abroad* and it is organized with the collaboration of the Honorary Consulate of Italy in Alexandria, Egypt.

Biographies

Marina Ballo Charmet is one of the most significant living Italian photographers. After earning a degree in philosophy, she specialized in child psychology and psychoanalysis and worked as a psychotherapist in her lifelong home city of Milan. Since the mid-1980s, she has focused on photographic and artistic research. Her favored subject is the everyday—the "always seen," which she defines as "the background noise of our minds." Her approach is marked by perceptual mobility and off-focus perspectives—lateral or from below—reminiscent of a child's point of view. This results in a fluctuating vision, a peripheral perception tied to our preconscious. Her work has been exhibited in institutions such as Castello Sforzesco in Milan, Museo degli Innocenti in Florence, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation in Venice, La Triennale di Milano, Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, MAXXI in Rome, CCCB in Barcelona, Fotomuseum Winterthur, and the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal. She took part in the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale (2010) and the 47th Venice Art Biennale (1997). She is currently represented by Galleria Il Ponte in Florence.

Stefano Cagol is an artist, researcher, and curator. His work is characterized by long-term investigations in which travel, performative practices, and photographic and video languages contribute to geopolitical narratives of places and experiences. Throughout his career, across artworks, research projects, and exhibitions, he has explored movement, politics, and the meaning of physical and political geography—addressing issues such as borders, energy, water, and the broader relationship between nature and culture. He has collaborated with artists, curators, and theorists such as Jan Hoet, Veit Loers, and Timothy Morton. He has curated research projects for institutions like MUSE (Science Museum) in Trento and serves as artistic director of Castel Belasi, a center for ecological thought in the Alps. He is a recipient of the Italian Council grant and awards such as the Visit Prize by E.on Stiftung and the Terna Prize. He has participated in several Venice Biennales: in 2022 and 2011, and in 2013 as part of the Maldives National Pavilion. His solo exhibitions include shows at institutions such as MA*GA Gallarate, ZKM Karlsruhe, MAC Lissone, and the Civic Gallery of Trento – Mart.

Alessandro Castiglioni is Senior Curator and Deputy Director at the MA*GA Museum in Gallarate. He teaches Multimedia Languages at Istituto Marangoni in Milan. His research into the relationship between geography and photography has led him to curate exhibitions and research projects for institutions such as BJCEM – Biennale des jeunes créateurs de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, for which he co-directed the XIX Biennale of the Mediterranean and the research platform *A Natural Oasis?* He has also collaborated with Ca' Pesaro – International Gallery of Modern Art in Venice, Villa Croce Museum in Genoa, the Italian Cultural Institute in London, the National Gallery of Iceland, and the National Gallery of San Marino. Together with Rita Canarezza and Pier Paolo Coro, he established the first contemporary art space in Gibraltar. Alongside Emma Zanella, he co-curated the San Marino Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale.

Art D'Égypte, founded by French-Egyptian curator Nadine Abdel Ghaffar, is a multidisciplinary cultural platform that supports Egyptian arts and heritage. It has become a major player in Egypt's cultural scene, known for its flagship annual exhibition held at historic locations to bridge Egypt's past with

contemporary art. Notable exhibitions include *Eternal Light* (2017), *Nothing Vanishes, Everything Transforms* (2018), *Reimagined Narratives* (2019), and *Forever Is Now* (2021–2024), with the 5th edition set for 2025. Since 2019, Art D'Égypte has expanded internationally, showcasing Egyptian artists at global art fairs, organizing exhibitions abroad, and launching podcasts and lecture series. Its mission is to preserve Egyptian heritage, elevate modern and contemporary Egyptian art globally, and foster sustainability and community engagement. The organization operates under UNESCO patronage, emphasizing inclusivity and cultural preservation.