Hrair Sarkissian, *Background*, 2013, see also p. 16
Courtesy of the artist

Alexandria: Past Futures

Bozar Mucem *ACTES SUD* Mercatorfonds

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Alexandria. One of those names that carry so much with them.

In our collective memory, Alexandria is the legendary centre of one of the ancient world's great civilisations, a cultural jewel on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, home of one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

All this should already suffice to interest everybody in a presentation about Alexandria. *Alexandria: Past Futures*, however, goes far beyond the well-known stereotypes and looks at the many nuances and fine tonalities that usually don't find their place in legends. And it also bridges the past with our present and future as history keeps repeating itself.

For the future depends on how the present looks upon the past and what we learn from it.

I have no doubt that this exhibition will inspire visitors and challenge their perceptions of Alexandria just as much as it will give them food for thought regarding the current situation and the challenges that we are facing. And I am proud that we were able to contribute to the creation of *Alexandria: Past Futures* through Creative Europe, the EU programme for the creative and cultural sector.

Mariya Gabriel
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth

Alexandria: Past Futures is an invitation to embark on a journey via this travelling exhibition that features works from the collections of some of the most important European museums. A journey between eras, between places, between peoples. An exhibition in the spirit of the cultural world whose essence is to bring us together, to create links, to allow us to share common emotions, and to offer moments of escape.

Culture and art do not recognise borders. Everyone must have access to them, at all times, in all places, while artists must always be able to express themselves, regardless of their disciplines.

Culture embraces different roles, whether it is to impart knowledge, leave a trace, or make people think and dream. Being able to open up to others, cooperate, and enrich each other's experiences and discoveries is a strength and a resource. This is why I am particularly pleased that the exhibition *Alexandria: Past Futures* is opening at Bozar with the support of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. On the one hand, because the exhibition offers a unique experience through the presentation of hundreds of works from all over Europe; but also because it was born from the association of three major stakeholders: Bozar, which is hosting the exhibition; the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont, which is making a large part of its collection available; and the Mucem in Marseille, which will host the exhibition after it has been in Brussels.

This exhibition is part of the broader Creative Europe cooperation project to bring together a variety of European entities. It fully reflects the philosophy of the project while presenting the diversity of experiences that have shaped Alexandria's history and that are the roots of our current reality.

At a time when our society is being shaken by major unrest and faces numerous challenges and uncertainties, shedding light on certain key elements of the past, whether urban, political, religious, or scientific, helps to remind us of our common history and to project ourselves into a shared future.

I hope you enjoy everything that you discover!

Bénédicte Linard
Vice-President of the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Minister for Culture

It is with genuine joy that we present the exhibition *Alexandria: Past Futures*, a project that was born under the banner of convergence and synergy. First of all, who is this 'we'? A three-voice chorus, insofar as the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz) initially proposed the concept of this exhibition to Bozar-Centre for Fine Arts (Brussels), which then sought a travelling companion for this adventure and found one with the Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean/Mucem (Marseille). A three-headed production, therefore, for an exhibition that itself benefits from the support of the European Union as part of a project that has been established with the Creative Europe framework. This vast project, which began in 2020 and will end in 2023, is entitled *Alexandria: (Re)activating Common Urban Imaginaries* and proposes a multidisciplinary programme including artists' residencies and workshops in the cities of nine European and Egyptian partners. The Alexandrian constellation brings together the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont (Belgium), and Bozar-Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (Belgium), the Mucem (France), Leiden University (Netherlands), Kunsthal Aarhus (Denmark), Undo Point Centre for Contemporary Art (Cyprus), Onassis Stegi (Greece), Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto (Italy), CLUSTER (Egypt), the French Institute in Alexandria (Egypt), and Theatrum Mundi (UK). More than just ambitious, we would say: exhilarating!

It should also be noted that 2022 is a decidedly Egyptian year, celebrating both the bicentenary of the deciphering of hieroglyphics by Jean-François Champollion and the centenary of the discovery of the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

In this context, *Alexandria: Past Futures* seeks to explore the distinctive character of a city that was a major site in antiquity and to identify its spirit, its *genius loci*. This investigation extends from the creation of the city in 331 BC to the destruction of the great Temple of Sarapis that marked the beginning of the Christian era, and it evokes the archaeological research carried out to the east of Alexandria by the Musée royal de Mariemont. But the investigation does not stop there. Because giving voice to a city's past does not prevent it from resonating with the present, quite the contrary. To this end, a selection of roughly 20 contemporary artworks created by artists from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine are placed into dialogue with the exhibition. These artworks – which include installation, painting,

photography, sculpture, text, archival documentation, and video – pursue the exhibition's questioning and further nourish the reflections on this Mediterranean port city and its heritage within the context of the present moment. The staging of the different sections of this exhibition strives to create critical associations and poetic intersections.

Is it not the dream of an art centre to honour such a megalopolis, a place where cultures, temporalities, networks, knowledge, and plural realities converge upon and radiate from? It was ours, in any case.

We would like to thank the Ministry of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, the European Union's Creative Europe programme, the Caisse d'Épargne CEPAC, PwC, and Interxion for their generous support of this exceptional project.

How can we sufficiently thank our eminent curators, who have woven this subtle tale and orchestrated this polyphony of voices, some of which are long departed, some of which are very much alive? As far as the overall concept is concerned, we must applaud the communicative passion of Arnaud Quertinmont, the curator of Egyptian and Near Eastern Antiquities at the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont, who was assisted by Nicolas Amoroso, curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities at Mariemont. Thanks also to Sarah Rifky, curatorial advisor, and to Edwin Nasr, independent curator, for developing the concept of the contemporary art section.

Of course, we are grateful to the artists who shared their contemporary vision of Alexandria with us: Haig Aivazian, Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Céline Condorelli, Marianne Fahmy, Ellie Ga, Ahmed Ghoneimy, Malak Helmy, Iman Issa, Mahmoud Khaled, Hassan Khan, Maha Maamoun, Jumana Manna, Mona Marzouk, Jasmina Metwaly, Ahmed Morsi, Hrair Sarkissian, and Wael Shawky.

Without the objects that were loaned to us, this exhibition would hardly have been possible. We therefore express our profound gratitude to the many museums, libraries, galleries, and archaeological services for having agreed to entrust us with their works for the duration of this exhibition.

Of course, we also extend our thanks to our respective teams. In particular, for Bozar, to Maïté Smeyers and Christel Tsilibaris assisted by Marie Claes, as well as Magdalena Liskova, Frédéric Meseeuw and Tomas Van Respaille, Vera Kotaji; and for the Mucem, Laetitia Olivier assisted by Flavie Jauffret Colleter, as well as Mikaël Mohamed, Agathe Guillou and Emiel Nguyen, Laure Lane, Anne André, and Natacha Cauvin who brilliantly coordinated this exhibition and this book. We would also like to thank the technical teams of our institutions who made this magnificent project a reality, not forgetting our predecessors who initiated it, Paul Dujardin at Bozar, and Marie-Cécile Bruwier and Roland Van der Hoeven at Mariemont. Finally, the members of the scientific committee, the authors, and the co-publishers of this book have our full gratitude for their commitment to the project.

Sophie Lauwers, *in memoriam*
General and Artistic Director of the Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar), Brussels

Jean-François Chougnet,
President of the Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean (Mucem), Marseille

Richard Veymiers,
Director of the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont

Laurent Bricault and Richard Veymiers

Sarapis from Pozzuoli, late 2nd–early 3rd century AD
Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

The Temple of Sarapis in Alexandria was one of the most splendid and famous in the ancient world. As the historian Ammianus Marcellinus wrote in 380 AD, of all the temples, 'conspicuous among them was the Temple of Sarapis, which, though feeble words merely belittle it, is so adorned with extensive columned halls, with almost breathing statues, and a great number of other works of art, that next to the Capitolium, with which revered Rome elevates herself to eternity, the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent'. The historian's praise reveals the exceptional aura that this prestigious sanctuary still possessed at the end of the fourth century in an empire that was now Christian.

At that point, the monumental sanctuary had stood for seven centuries in the southwest part of Alexandria, on the hill that served as the acropolis in the neighbourhood of Rhakotis. This Greek city founded by Alexander the Great was thus endowed with a true sacred citadel. Ptolemy I left Memphis, the ancient capital of the pharaohs, and settled in Alexandria, making it the centre of his power. The arrival of numerous Greeks in the Nile Valley created a multicultural society where people and gods existed side-by-side and sometimes even intermingled. A new religious landscape took shape and it is in this context that the Alexandrian cult of Sarapis developed.

Anxious to offer a patron deity to his capital and his dynasty, the Greco-Macedonian ruler reached an agreement with Egyptian religious dignitaries to promote a bull-headed god who was venerated at the Memphite Necropolis. Known by the Egyptian name 'Osiris-Apis' (*Wsjr-Ḥp*), this god was given a Greek name, 'Sarapis' (*Σάραπις*) and a Greek image (opposite page and p. 132) of an elderly bearded man with flowing hair analogous to Zeus, Hades, or Asclepius. As the first king of Egypt, Osiris was well suited to legitimize the new dynasty by serving as a link between the old and the new capital of Egypt.

Sarapis thus replaced Osiris at the side of Isis, who was presented as his sister and wife. This new divine couple affirmed itself as the model for and the guarantor of the Ptolemaic royal couple. However, only Sarapis was mentioned on the foundation plates of the vast sanctuary that Ptolemy III Euergetes (r. 246–221 BC) built in Alexandria at the beginning of his reign, on the site of a more modest place of worship dating back to the period of Ptolemy II or Ptolemy I. These plates were made of various materials and their ritual placement was a continuation of a very ancient Egyptian tradition; they featured a bilingual text written in hieroglyphs and Greek characters that mentioned the temple and the sacred enclosure at the corners of which they were discovered.

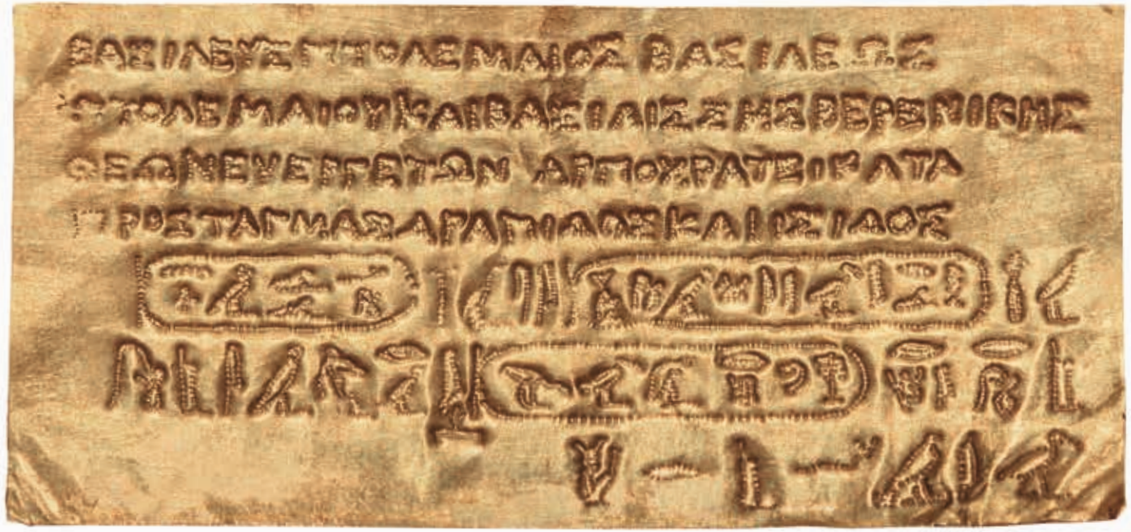
Excavations carried out on the site since the end of the nineteenth century (p. 128) have revealed a sanctuary in the Greek tradition, of which

Mike P. Sheperd, view of the site of the Temple of Sarapis in Alexandria, 2015

Axonometric reconstructions of the Temple of Sarapis in the Ptolemaic period/
in the Roman period, in J. McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, 300* BC–AD *700*,
Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2007

only a few portions of the walls, some trenches cut into the rock, and certain underground structures remain. The sanctuary occupied a vast rectangular area of about 160 × 75 metres delimited by a portico that served as a sacred enclosure (above, on the left). One could enter through two gates on the eastern side of the complex. On this same side, a staircase outside the sanctuary provided access to a nilometre, a graduated device used to measure the height of the Nile waters. Built in a classical style, with a colonnade along the facade, the temple with the revered statue of Sarapis – the precise appearance of which remains unknown – stood in the north-eastern corner of the complex and covered an area of about 10 × 20 metres. This configuration did not follow the Egyptian tradition, in which the temple was placed at the centre of the sacred space. In addition, the complex contained various structures that may have housed other deities, cult personnel, or rituals, but their exact function remains unclear.

Isis most assuredly had her place alongside her husband in the sanctuary. In fact, orders from the divine couple are cited as the reason for Ptolemy IV



Philopator (r. 221–204 BC) to offer their son and heir, Harpocrates ('Horus the Child' in Greek) a small temple that has been identified thanks to the discovery of its foundation plates, which were also bilingual (above). Adjacent to the south-eastern corner of the Temple of Sarapis, the Temple of Harpocrates gave the sanctuary a material representation of the Isis-related triad (father-mother-son), a true divine model of the royal family.

During the two centuries that followed, the Ptolemies do not seem to have made any other major additions to this complex, perhaps due to the dynasty's growing disinterest in the great god of Alexandria during this time. This could explain why the geographer Strabo noted the relative abandonment of the sanctuary during his stay in Alexandria around 20 BC, a period when Egypt had recently become a Roman province.

This Greek sanctuary, which was originally anchored in Egyptian ritual traditions, regained its full aura in Roman times. After the death of Nero, several candidates vied for the imperial mantle. Vespasian was one of them. Commanding the Roman troops engaged in Judea, he was proclaimed emperor on 1 July 69 near Alexandria, in front of the prefect of Egypt. During his stay in the Egyptian capital, the new emperor went to the Temple of Sarapis to pay his respects to the god, who granted him divine protection and thus legitimised his new power. The sacred investiture was not without its reward; the god, who now watched over the ruler and his family, regained a place of great importance. He was now recognised at the highest levels of the Roman state.

After the visit of Vespasian, which was soon followed by that of his son Titus, the Temple of Sarapis became an essential stopping place for emperors visiting Egypt and regularly featured on the coins minted in Alexandria,

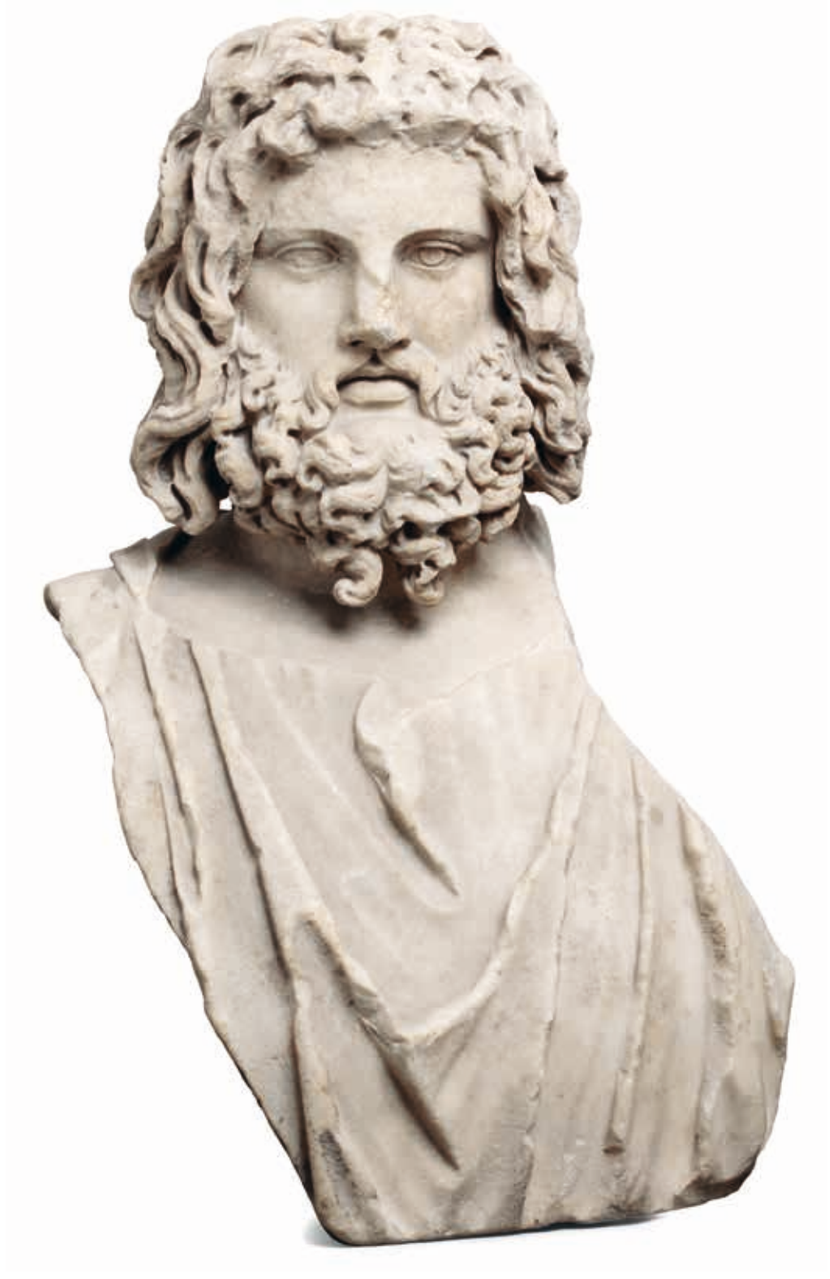
Foundation plaque from the Temple of Harpocrates within the Temple of Sarapis, under Ptolemy IV, 221–204 BC
Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum

from the reign of Trajan to that of Marcus Aurelius. Thus, on the occasion of Hadrian's famous trip to the Nile Valley in 130 AD, the city of Alexandria dedicated a large basalt statue of the bull Apis to the ruler's health in the Temple of Sarapis. Seven decades later, in 199–200, the Emperor Septimius Severus undertook a long journey to Egypt during which he 'met' the god Sarapis. His son Caracalla was present during this Nile journey and, once an emperor, he returned to Alexandria in 215–216 for many months and even stayed several days in the Temple of Sarapis. Among the many tributes he paid to the god, one of the most memorable was the offering of the sword with which he had assassinated his younger brother Geta.

The sanctuary where the emperor stayed, however, was not the same as the one founded by Ptolemy III. Ravaged by a fire in 181, the complex was extensively modified in the following decades (p. 129, on the right). The Temple of Sarapis was enlarged at the expense of the Temple of Harpocrates, which was demolished. Built on a podium in accordance with the Roman tradition, the Temple of Sarapis was now surrounded by columns more than 10 metres high on all sides, including six on the main facade. To give it a more axial position within the sacred area, the enclosure was extended to the north and east with two new entrances. The modified sanctuary, which was accessed by a large staircase over the site of the old nilometre, was larger than its predecessor, with a footprint of approximately 205 × 105 metres. The area in front of the temple retained some Ptolemaic structures, such as the underground galleries, while a pool was built on the eastern side. Various Egyptian works, including several sphinxes and two obelisks, were arranged in the sacred area. Adjacent to the shrines dedicated to certain Egyptian gods, an extensive library was housed in a series of rooms along the portico. Among the thousands of scrolls kept there, one could find – and read! – the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible produced at the time of Ptolemy II.

Probably completed during the reign of Caracalla, this sumptuous new complex was further enriched in 298 AD by a monumental red granite column that was nearly 29 metres high and is still visible today. Erected at the highest point of the acropolis, near the eastern entrance to the sanctuary, this emblematic column, known as Pompey's Pillar, commemorates the recapture of Alexandria by Diocletian after a period of secession that lasted almost two years.

Throughout the fourth century, travellers and observers lauded the rediscovered splendour of the Temple of Sarapis. The rhetorician Aphthonius did not hesitate to describe it as a 'marvel', echoing the words of Ammianus Marcellinus. Even a Christian such as Rufinus of Aquileia, who was writing at the very beginning of the fifth century, in an apologetic



Bust of Sarapis, Rome, 2nd century AD
Morlanwelz, Musée royal de Mariemont

and polemical context celebrating the victory of Christianity, could not help but recognise the magnificence of this temple with its walls covered in marble, gold, silver, and bronze and its colossal statue of Sarapis made of wood and various metals.

The exceptional fame of the sanctuary eventually caused its downfall. The imperial edicts promulgated successively by Theodosius in 391 and 392 precipitated the demise of the traditional cults. In Alexandria, the provocations of Bishop Theophilus led to violent confrontations between pagans and Christians, which culminated in the destruction of the Temple of Sarapis and its formidable statue in early 392 (p. 152). As Rufinus notes with some satisfaction, this resounding event marked, 'the end of the vain superstition and the ancient error of Sarapis'.

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Ring with Helios and Sarapis, 3rd century AD
Morlanwelz, Musée royal de Mariemont

On the left, the patron god of Alexandria, Sarapis, sits on a throne. On the right, Helios, the god of the Sun, stands before him in the form of a beardless young man with a radiate crown featuring six rays on his head. This scene, often referred to as the 'kiss of the Sun', symbolises a ritual that aimed to revive the statue of the god by linking it to the Sun.

Bracelet with a bust of a deity in a temple,
30 BC–395 AD
Athens, National Archaeological Museum

Bracelet with a bust of Sarapis,
30 BC–395 AD
Athens, National Archaeological Museum

This book was prepared on the occasion of the exhibition *Alexandria: Past Futures* that was organised by the Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont, Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, and the Mucem-Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean.

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Alexandria

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