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## The mysterious ruins of Sudan light up under the lens of Juliette Agnel

PHOTOGRAPHY MAY 14, 2021



Remains of lost cities and skies dotted with stars... three years ago, Juliette Agnel traveled up the Nile to capture the poetry and mystery of the remote and arid lands of Sudan, from the ancient city of Meroe to the south Egypt. For *Numéro*, the French photographer returns to this puzzling project, between the burning hours of the day and the depths of the night.

Pictures by [Juliette Agnel](#) .  
Interview by [Matthew Jacquet](#) .



**"Taharqa and the night" (2019) by Juliette Agnel, photographed in Sudan. Matte fine art print, 80 x 120 cm. Juliet Agnel. Courtesy of Galerie Françoise Paviot**

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From the yellow sand of an arid desert emerge brick pyramids and rocks polished by time. Lit in chiaroscuro, their shapes stand out distinctly against skies dotted with twinkling stars, as sharp as their own details. These vestiges of time, confronted with the immensity of the galaxy, tell a thousand-year-old story marked by the traces of a bygone passage of human beings. It is precisely the narrative power of these Sudanese landscapes that aroused Juliette Agnel's interest. Captivated by the remote and depopulated areas of the world where nature reveals itself in its most raw light, the French photographer heard about this region of northern Sudan three years ago when she had just sailed in the heart of the icebergs of the Greenland. Through Sudanese associations and the European Union, she manages to go to this North African country for ten days,

In memory of this trip, her enthusiastic words confirm it: Juliette Agnel *"devoured"* her few days there. Traveling through the desert aboard a 4x4 with two young Sudanese, the artist immerses herself completely in the landscape to better photograph it. *"The more we go up the river, the more we go back in history, she recalls. It's really powerful."* During the day, she explores – sometimes in the company of an archaeologist – the sandy ruins of ancient Egypt buried in the hollow of the dunes: preserved almost as they are, with their irregularities and their missing fragments swallowed up by the centuries, these buildings remind her sunken worlds like Atlantis, which she immortalizes under the burning sun. At night, the photographer sets up her tent in the desert with her traveling companions and travels through the same sites that she has traveled a few hours earlier, this time lulled by the light of the stars. With her camera and tripod in hand, she arms herself with patience in order to obtain the most precise views possible of the sky, where all the stars will shine with the same intensity. From these scenes, it is essential that the human being is physically



absent, specifies *their order to best illustrate this relationship to the universe.*"



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If a supernatural aura emanates from Juliette Agnel's photos, it's because his landscapes are actually the result of an assembly after the shooting. Two images are brought together: the arid expanses captured in broad daylight, on the one hand, and on the other the starry skies that the artist immortalized throughout his Sudanese nights. In the grip of a veritable digital puzzle, the Frenchwoman studies for hours the skies that will marry best with the remains and will lead to the most striking composition, before cutting out their shapes and melting them under the same dark filter on Photoshop – a technique she had previously applied to landscapes of the Swiss Alps, Morocco and the Franco-Spanish border. Impossible to obtain in a single shot, their uniform sharpness and light then create an astonishing brilliance close to *brings reality to another world*". Now, her relentless observation of the nocturnal celestial vault even allows the photographer to perceive the movement of the stars and the rotation of the Earth with the naked eye.

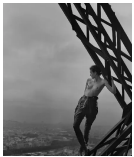
*"I always look for an aridity coupled with a certain chaos for my images , and in this Sudan was quite close to Greenland with an opposite climate, concludes Juliette Agnel. What I liked a lot there was to get so close to the human through archeology."* Marked by this trip and this photographic work, the artist made a series of it which she baptized *Taharqa and the night* – "Taharqa" for the name of a 7th century BC pharaoh who lived not far from Meroe in the region of Nubia. As for the nocturnal link, it evokes an ancient legend about the pharaohs who, upon their death, would turn into a star: poetic, the image announces how much the human being is embodied in a way that is both discreet and omnipresent in the landscapes of the artist, from their terrestrial ruins to their celestial stars. Since this project,

the photographer has not stopped exploring the corners of the world: passing through the city of Auroville in India, then by the north of Sweden in the middle of winter, she has more recently become interested in the riches of French territory by going to explore the caves of Arcy-sur-Cure, in Burgundy, decorated with cave paintings. An escapade in the heart of the mineral which, here too,

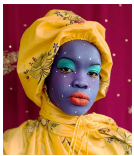
[Find the work of Juliette Agnel on her website.](#)

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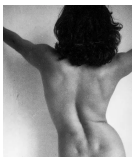
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