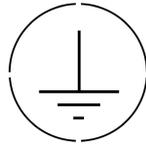


GROUND  
N I N E T Y - N I N E



S E N G L E A  
L - I S L A

## STEFANO CAGOL



Stefano Cagol confronts the encroaching realities of climate collapse through his artistic practice of durational video performances that transform environmental crisis into symbolic action. Cagol stages interventions in fragile landscapes, using the human body as both signal and sensor of ecological unraveling. His work is a meditation on prophetic warnings long ignored, where once-hypothetical futures now saturate the present. Cagol's recurring motif - a burning flare - becomes an urgent gesture of alarm, where past scientific forecasts, present disasters, and fears for the future, collapse into one performative act.

Within GROUND 99, the works of Stefano Cagol introduce an elemental register that reframes the exhibition's ecological concerns beyond representation and into direct confrontation with planetary time and force. Positioned within the Malta Biennale 2026's call to *clean, clear, cut*, Cagol's work is at once a stark warning signal and cleansing ritual for our beleaguered planet. Across video and live action, his work displaces the human from the center of meaning, situating it instead as a fleeting presence within geological, climatic, and historical continuums. Fire is neither spectacle nor metaphor alone, but a real, unstable force that exposes the limits of control. Activated between Arctic solitude and Mediterranean fortification, Cagol's works bind distant geographies into a shared condition of vulnerability, reminding viewers that ecological imbalance is not localized but planetary - registered most acutely where human agency meets elemental resistance.

Using warning flares designed to signal danger, Cagol's interventions within these diverse landscapes are a clarion call to combat climate change; an SOS signal for a planet in crisis. What were predictions of future climate disaster in past decades, have manifested themselves as lived reality within our lifetimes: rising seas, burning forests, vanishing glaciers - rendering the once-speculative into urgent, visible truth. With his flaming red flare raised high, Cagol plays the role of a contemporary shaman. In his ubiquitous black suit, he travels from landscape to distant landscape enacting a ritual performance bringing fire to the ice, sending smoke signals from mountaintops, and igniting warnings upon ancient fortifications. His performative actions, transformed into video artworks, are both poetic metaphors of the cleansing of an ailing planet, and an all too urgent cry for help – help which must arrive before the many warnings of the past turn into irreversible futures.



**Stefano Cagol, *Far Before and After Us. Golta* (2022), 4K video, color, sound, 10 min.**

ARTIST STATEMENT:

Stefano Cagol's video work, "*Far Before and After Us. Golta*" (2022), sought a confrontation with the most ancient geological eras of the Earth, reflecting the transience of the human and shifting the anthropocentric look to an ecological balance.

The artist reached the Golta island, located along the rugged western coastal area of Norway, where metamorphic rocks of magmatic origin emerged from the Earth's crust from great depths, dating back to the Precambrian, and the initial formation and evolution of continents.

There, on the limit between the island and the sea at the time of the summer solstice with the late-night sun, the artist staged a fire ritual as a shaman, being alone on the island. He ignited the dark rocks with the light of an SOS red flare, like incandescent lava in his hands, before returning to the tiny human presence in the face of the grandeur of nature.

The artist's solitude marks also the technical realization of the work as he performed and filmed by himself, managing a drone remote control with one hand and a flare with the other.

The video is part of Stefano Cagol's ongoing Arctic research around the balance between humans and the environment, which started in 2010, and responds to his method of working in mystical solitude.

- Stefano Cagol



**Stefano Cagol, *The Fire Horizon* (2026), Site-specific performance for the opening of GROUND 99, Satellite Event of the Malta Biennale 2026**

ARTIST STATEMENT:

*The Fire Horizon* is conceived as a performative threshold for the opening of the Malta Biennale 2026. Presented in Senglea (L-Isla), within the layered maritime architecture of the Maltese fortifications, the work activates a site historically shaped by navigation, defense, colonial crossings and climatic exposure. Here, the horizon is geographical, political and historical.

Since 2010, fire has functioned as Stefano Cagol's central medium. First activated in the Arctic — beyond the Polar Circle, near the Norwegian–Russian border — flame emerged as an existential sign: energy, warning, political and poetic gesture in extreme geography. From the Arctic to the Mediterranean, the work traverses latitudes, climates and historical tensions while maintaining a radical formal economy.

In Malta, the flame enters a fortified coastal landscape. The gesture remains minimal: a single controlled combustion element activated in direct relation to architecture, wind, stone and collective presence. There is no theatrical excess. The intensity derives from spatial confrontation and environmental exposure.

As an opening gesture of the Malta Biennale, *The Fire Horizon* establishes a liminal condition — between land and sea, memory and anticipation, human agency and elemental force.

*The Fire Horizon* is part of a research trajectory in which fire has served as Stefano Cagol's central medium since 2010. Its origin lies in the Arctic region — at and beyond the Polar Circle, near the Norwegian–Russian border. There, fire became an existential sign: energy, signal, and a political as well as poetic gesture within an extreme territory. From that experience emerged series such as *Evoke Provoke*, *The Border*, and the Arctic works, one of which entered the collection of Museion and was presented in 2011 as a Solo Project within a Collateral Event of the Biennale di Venezia at the Chiesa di San Gallo. The work is also part of the public collection of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment.

Fire reappears in different configurations — in works involving ignited aerosols, in public actions, and in historically sensitive contexts. The form may appear similar, yet each location alters posture, movement, and intensity. It is never the same performance.

During the pandemic, *Signal to the Future* emerged, realized only in selected and symbolically charged contexts, including *Macht Licht* at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. With *We own the Futures*, the work expanded through the introduction of a robotic system and artificial intelligence, opening a new relationship between human, machine, and fire, which will continue in June 2026 during the Gallery Weekend at ETH Zurich.

The monograph *Signal to the Future (Stefano Cagol)*, forthcoming from Kerber Verlag Berlin, is conceived as a case study of this evolution. Within this trajectory, *Fire Horizon*, in the context of Malta, marks a significant passage, assuming a symbolically decisive role within the volume.

- Stefano Cagol

**ARTIST BIO:**                    [www.stefanocagol.com](http://www.stefanocagol.com)                    |                    [@stefano\\_cagol](https://www.instagram.com/stefano_cagol)

**Stefano Cagol (born 1969 in Trento, Italy. Lives and works in Trento.)**

Stefano Cagol studied at the Brera Academy in Milan and Ryerson University in Toronto with a post-doctoral fellowship from the Government of Canada. His multidisciplinary practice spans video, performance, photography, installation, and curation. Addressing pressing global issues, Cagol operates at the intersection of conceptual and environmental art, Eco-Art and Land Art. He often employs natural elements, such as ice, fire, and wind, to highlight anthropogenic transformations of nature. His approach embraces time-specificity, creating site-responsive, ritualistic performances and installations that provoke reflection on global emergencies and our place within natural systems. Cagol's work embodies a sustained investigation into the intertwining of environment, energy flows, human bodies and politicized borders, executed through poetic, high-impact interventions. Making visible the often invisible, Cagol brings climate, ecology and geography into everyday public consciousness.

Stefano Cagol is participating in the Venice Biennale 2026 in the first National Pavilion of the Republic of Nauru, the world's smallest island nation. Recipient of prestigious awards, such as the Italian Council (2019) the Visit Award of E.on Stiftung, and the Terna Prize for Contemporary Art, he works in the fields of Conceptual Art, Environmental Art, Eco-Art and Land Art, reflecting for years on borders, viruses, flags and climate issues. He participated in biennials, such as the Venice Biennale (in 2011, 2013, 2022), Manifesta 11, 14th Curitiba Biennale, 2nd OFF Cairo Biennale, 1st Xinjiang Biennale, Barents Art Triennale 2013 and 1st Singapore Biennale. He held solo exhibitions at museums such as the CCA Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv (2021), MA\*GA in Gallarate (2019), Galleria Civica di Trento/Mart (2016), ZKM Karlsruhe (2012) and Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (2000). In 2022, he participated in the Malaysia pavilion at the Venice Biennale; in "The State-of-the-art Science" series by the IBSA Foundation at MASI museum in Lugano (Switzerland); and he initiated and continues to curate the ongoing project "We are the Flood. Liquid platform on the climate crisis, anthropogenic interactions and ecological transition" of MUSE Science Museum in Trento (Italy).