

SOPHIE CALLE

MATRIMONI, ROTTURE E FUNERALI INCLUSI

curated by Simona Antonacci

16 October 2026 > 7 February 2027
MAXXI, Galleria 2

Press Kit and images | <https://www.maxxi.art/area-riservata/>

Rome, 15 October 2026 – What shape does an ending take? What happens before it, and after? How can we pass through it – and how might we hold on to it?

These are some of the questions behind **Sophie Calle. Matrimoni, Rotture e Funerali inclusi**, the major exhibition that MAXXI National Museum of 21st Century Arts is devoting to one of the most original and influential figures in international contemporary art.

Curated by **Simona Antonacci**, the exhibition runs **from 16 October 2026 to 7 February 2027**.

It is the largest solo exhibition of the French artist's work ever held in Italy. It brings together eight projects created between 1978 and 2026, along with a new permanent installation at Rome's Non-Catholic Cemetery for Foreigners.

Photographs, texts, videos, installations and autobiographical stories form a circular route through more than forty years of work. Together they explore the boundaries between public and private, reality and fiction, art and life. At its heart are life's great themes: love and separation, grief and memory, desire and absence, failure and the chance to begin again.

Calle works in a spare, rigorous language. She turns personal and shared experiences into art through a method entirely her own, built on precise rules, gestures and rituals. Her works include a countdown to the end of a relationship, an attempt to capture her mother's last breath, an inventory of unfinished projects and encounters with people seeing the sea for the first time. Each one becomes a way of asking what ends, what remains and what might still begin.

The exhibition shows how consistent her practice has been. Loss, absence, and even failure become the raw material of her work, and through it they find a new form, meaning, and place.

The exhibition extends beyond the museum's walls with MAXXI's new permanent public artwork, created in collaboration with the Non-Catholic Cemetery for Foreigners in Rome. ***Here lie the secrets of the passerby of the cemetery of the artists and poets*** is an installation by Sophie Calle that guards the secrets of visitors, buried beneath a gravestone in the cemetery. The work was unveiled on 11 October with a participatory performance in which people were invited to confide their secrets and symbolically bury them.

'Sophie Calle's exhibition makes us proud on two counts,' says Maria Emanuela Bruni, President of Fondazione MAXXI. 'First, because it is through projects like this that MAXXI fully lives up to its mission as Italy's first national museum of contemporary art: it brings to Rome and to Italy, for the first time, such a wide-ranging survey of the work of a major international artist. Second, it has led to the museum's first permanent work outside its building. It is a new piece conceived specifically for the city and created in collaboration with the Non-Catholic Cemetery for Foreigners in Rome. The tomb, which holds "the secrets of the passerby", was unveiled with a moving performance by the artist. The project underlines MAXXI's determination to extend its presence beyond its galleries and into the fabric of the city, fostering new relationships between contemporary art, places and communities.'

'The exhibition marks the culmination of work that began two years ago with the acquisition of *L'Hôtel*, made possible thanks to the support of the Friends of MAXXI,' says Lorenza Baroncelli, Director of MAXXI Architecture and Contemporary Design. 'Alongside *L'Hôtel*, six new works are entering the museum's collection: a piece from *Reasoned Catalogue of the Unfinished* and five works from the

Because series. Together they reflect MAXXI's aim to build a collection that captures the diversity of contemporary photography – from landscape documentation to conceptual practice, from photojournalism to the most intimate and autobiographical forms, in which memory, fiction and storytelling become the very material of the work.'

The exhibition

The exhibition's story begins in 1978. That year, Sophie Calle, still far from the art world, photographed several gravestones in the cemetery at Bolinas, California. Their inscriptions are simple, reduced to family roles such as *Brother* and *Sister*. These were her first photographs, and they already point to themes that would run through all her later work: identity, absence, loss and the effort to preserve what disappears. The series **The Graves** is one of the exhibition's core sections.

Visitors entering the first part of the gallery are greeted by **Exquisite Pain**, one of the artist's best-known works. In 1984, Calle left for Japan, leaving the man she loved behind in Paris. At the end of her journey, a message waiting for her at a hotel in New Delhi ended the relationship. From this experience, she created a work of more than two hundred elements, combining photographs and texts. They are arranged around a countdown to the day of the break-up, followed by a second sequence, 'after the pain'. In this second part, Calle retells her own story again and again. Alongside it, she sets the testimonies of others, each asked to recall the most painful moment of their life.

In **Catalogue Raisonné of the Unfinished**, by contrast, the artist gathers everything she never managed to complete. Abandoned projects, interrupted ideas, failed attempts and works that never went beyond intention are brought together and ordered into a systematic inventory of the possible. Each project appears as a group of framed photographs or documents, with a short text explaining why it was left unfinished. At the centre of the exhibition is **Funerali inclusi**, from the *Autobiographies* series. It comprises short stories that pair photographs with text. Personal episodes, family memories, and small rituals form a biography in fragments, and the line between truth and storytelling remains deliberately uncertain.

One of the most powerful works on display is **Couldn't Capture Death**, a video filmed bedside the artist's mother in the last moments of her life. Calle tries to record the exact moment of her death, but the final breath escapes her. Next to it, **North Pole** describes a later act of farewell. On a journey to the Arctic, the artist buried a photograph of her mother and some of her jewellery in a glacier, symbolically fulfilling her mother's wish to go there.

After exploring endings, the exhibition gradually opens up to the possibility of a new beginning. In **Because**, photographs are hidden behind embroidered curtains, and visitors reveal them with a simple gesture: lifting the fabric to uncover the image. The words do not describe what is shown. Instead, they explain why the artist felt the need to photograph it, and in doing so they question the relationship between image, language and imagination. The exhibition closes with **Voir la mer**, a video installation made in Istanbul in 2011. For it, Sophie Calle took people to the sea who had never seen it, even though they lived only a short distance from the coast. The camera records their experience without intruding on the moment's privacy. The focus shifts from the artist's experience to others', opening the work to participation and sharing. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue edited by Simona Antonacci and Pippo Ciorra. It includes texts by Simona Antonacci, Sophie Calle, Pippo Ciorra, Yvonne A. Mazurek and Riccardo Venturi, and is published by Skira in separate Italian and English editions.

Sophie Calle (b. 1953, Paris) is a French conceptual artist, photographer and filmmaker. Since the late 1970s, she has explored the boundaries between private and public life, reality and fiction, art and lived experience. Her actions investigate intimacy, love, absence and grief, and constantly question the relationship between observer and participant. In 2003, the Centre Pompidou held a retrospective of her work, which later travelled to Berlin and Dublin. She represented France at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and received the Hasselblad Award in 2010 and the Praemium Imperiale in 2024. Her recent projects include *Sophie Calle: Overshare* at the Walker Art Center, later shown at the Orange County Museum of Art; *Sophie Calle. Chasse gardée* at Château La Coste; and, in 2026, *Something Missing?* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

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