This paper discusses two sets of photographs produced by Franco-Lebanese photographer Fouad Elkoury between 1987 and 2005. The first, *Suite Égyptienne*, is a series of black and white photographs in which the artist retraces the voyage to Egypt undertaken by Gustave Flaubert and Maxime Du Camp in 1849/50. The second work, *Civilization, Fake = Real?*, is a set of colour photographs that depict the construction of contemporary Dubai. These two works speak directly to the 2013 theme of the Humanities Research Centre – *Cities, Imaginaries, Publics* – by exploring the creation and mediation of contemporary and ancient cities across history and socio-cultural difference. By focusing on the interplay between authorial control and chance moment, theatrical stage-setting and ungraspable reality, this paper will show how Elkoury’s works reinterpret nineteenth-century colonial imagery, question the truth-telling aspirations of photography, and function as a form of socio-historical reflection. I shall argue further that the ways in which Elkoury investigates these themes comments on the ontology of photography itself. By reflecting on the visual representation of fake, real, and imaginary cities, Elkoury’s works pose questions about what photography is and how we should conceive of it as an art form.

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