

BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jean-Pierre Bordaz, Parkett, no. 24, 1990.

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# Logic and disruption in the work of Alighiero e Boetti



Boetti is an independent artist associated with the Arte Povera movement. Over the last twenty years he has developed a remarkably coherent body of work. His approach is formulated in logical terms and exists prior to any sensory, material action. Here, logic is a method of deductive knowledge which is applied to the world. As a result, the oeuvre does not show a linear development: rather, the artist intervenes across a wide range of themes and periods. Boetti does not hesitate to set his sense of space against other forms of measurement. Thus, the embroideries produced under his direction by Afghan craftswomen provide the module for many of his recent compositions. This practice rehabilitates manual activity while at the same time embracing a culture with century-old traditions: ultimately, it produced his installation for "Les Magiciens de la Terre" (Centre Pompidou, 1989).

However, this conception of creation is modulated by a series of disruptions capable of producing transformations of image and meaning.

## LOGIC

Logic, the starting point of the oeuvre, derives from an elaborated perception of the universe. All through his work, Boetti presents us with the extended field of his investigations as these determine the contents of his productions. Conceived as instruments of knowl-

edge, these works also reveal their poetic content. In *METTERE IL MONDO AL MONDO* (Bringing the World into the World, 1973-1979), the logical order of the cosmos appears in its reality, internalized in an analytical formula. Another variant of this picture develops a nomenclature using an alphabet that summarizes the actions and events of human beings in an organized world. In several of his photographs, Boetti uses his own image like an emblematic figure. In 1966 we see him adopting a proud stance to assert his role as artist. Later, in *GEMELLI* (Twins, 1968), *SHAMAN/SHOWMAN* (1968), and *SAN BERNARDINO* (1968), his physical presence is accompanied by a conceptual thrust using the idea of the double. Then, in 1969, the same search for the artist-subject is involved in *IO CHE PRENDO IL SOLE A TORINO* (Me, Taking the Sun in Turin), where balls of cement are used to give a summary trace of his ephemeral appearance.

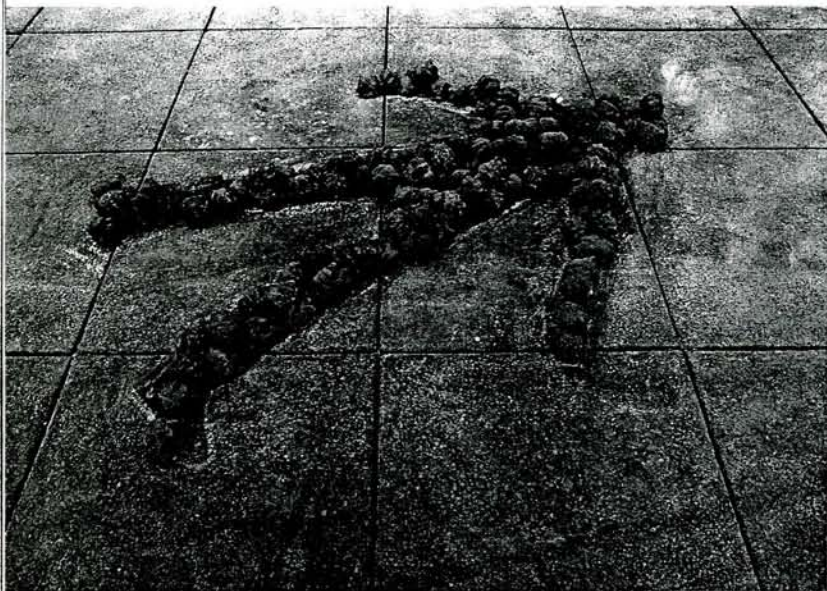
The titles of the works correspond to themes which seem to have been catalogued in advance. *GIULIO PAOLINI e A e B* (Giulio Paolini and A and B) is a photograph which sets up a *mise en scène* involving the double presence of the artists, and which takes the form of a commentary on the art of the moment. "Together, Boetti and Paolini are capable of great things: one complements the other, they are invincible," notes the artist.<sup>1</sup> In *ARTI-COLAZIONI* (Arti-culations, 1984), the image is broken into an even number of segments (four) miming the split of the title. The representation

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*Alighiero e Boetti*

evokes an organic fragmentation of numerous elements (insect bodies/writing etc...). Although in GEMELLI, the two bodies are separate, they are the tautological demonstration of their shared belonging-in-the-world.

MAPPA (Map, 1971), another form of truism, establishes the contours of a planet more true than truth. Everything, right up to the unstable zones demarcating the domination of the great powers, seems to have been invented by logic. The everyday space defined by PING PONG (1966) is more difficult



ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, *IO CHE PRENDO IL SOLE A TORINO IL 19 GENNAIO 1969*  
(*ME TAKING THE SUN IN TURIN/ICH, BEIM SONNENBADEN IN TURIN...*), 1969,  
*CEMENT AND ARTIFICIAL BUTTERFLY/ZEMENT UND KÜNSTLICHER SCHMETTERLING*, ca. 69"/ca. 175 cm.  
(*PHOTO: GIORGIO COLOMBO*)

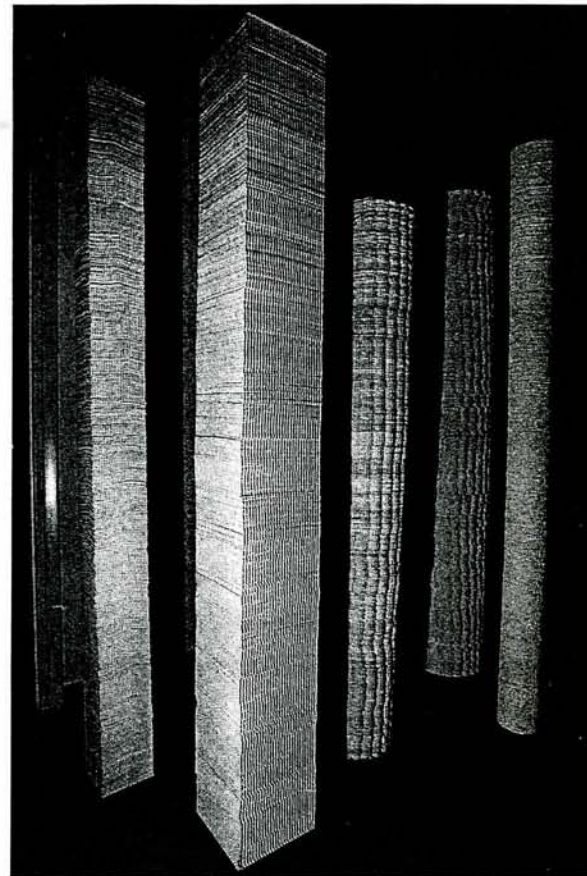
to apprehend. Two symmetrical signals fixed on either side of a partition light up alternately. They enounce a rule that corresponds to both an opening-up and a prohibition, that is itself a symbol of social conditioning.

LAVORI POSTALI (Postal Works, 1974) can be understood as a systematic invention. The colored stamps occupying the whole of a wall are arranged to yield a specific reading.

The presentation of the work from the 1970s is inspired by a concern with geometry, especially FARE QUADRARE TUTTO (Squaring things up,

ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, *COLONNE (COLUMNS/SÄULEN)*, 1968,  
*IRON AND PAPER/EISEN UND PAPIER*, ca. 98"/250 cm.

(*PHOTO: GIORGIO COLOMBO*)

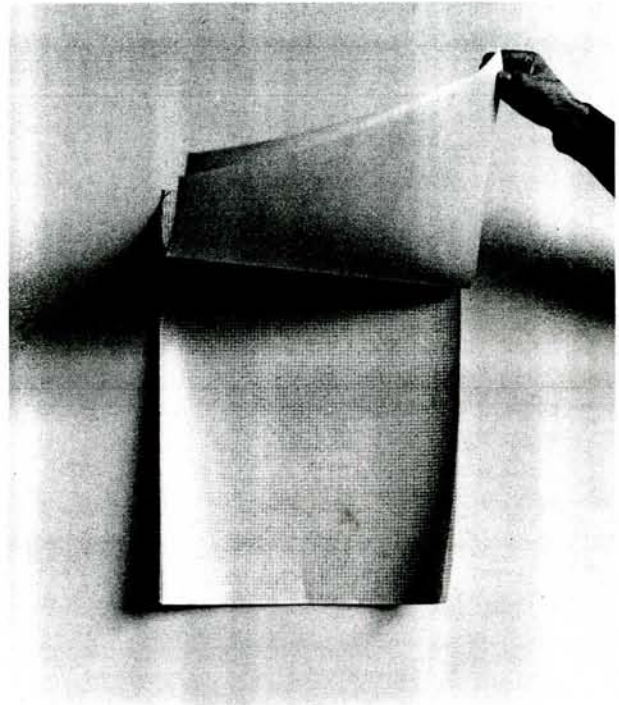


1979), where the intention declared in the title is countered by the fact that the woven squares are hung as a rectangle. Elsewhere, it is the constructive principle of the works that is sketched out (CARTONE ONDULATO/Corrugated Cardboard, 1966). This three-dimensional realization, simply made out of humble material, reveals an arbitrary geometry, whereas the imposing COLONNE (Columns, 1968), made up of cardboard plates, metaphorically assume the appearance of an ENDLESS COLUMN. Elsewhere, the system of representation is taken literally: NIENTE DA VEDERE, NIENTE DA NASCONDERE

(Nothing to See, Nothing to Hide, 1969) gives the spectator an active role to play. What these transparent, metal-framed panes do not show is to be developed beyond the realm of visibility.

Throughout his oeuvre, Boetti exercises control over the processes he generates. In the great works on paper of the 1980s, the spiritually inspired artist repeatedly inscribes his presence at the two extremities of an axis that crosses the pictorial surface. Guiding a trajectory, turning towards the center of the painting, he appears as a demiurge creating effects

ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, *IL CIMENTO DELL'ARMONIA E DELL'INVENZIONE (THE RISK OF HARMONY AND INVENTION / DAS RISIKO VON HARMONIE UND ERFINDUNG)*, 1969, PENCIL ON GRAPH PAPER/BLEISTIFT AUF KARIERTES PAPIER, 27 1/2 x 19 5/8 " / 70 x 50 cm, 25 PIECES/STÜCKE.



ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, *PING PONG*, 1966, WOOD, GLASS AND ELECTRICITY/HOLZ, GLAS UND ELEKTRIZITÄT, 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 x 7 7/8 " / 50 x 50 x 20 cm.

(PHOTO: P. BRESSANO)

of depth in a reversible image. Elsewhere, embroidered signs mesh together (*PACK*, 1975) in intense and brightly colored fragmentations, creating a dispersed topography.

### DISRUPTIONS

While the artist's global project can be set in a rational framework, his message becomes expressive through the various disruptions to which he subjects his work. The fruit of craft and chance, the space of the painting is transformed. In *LA NATURA, UNA FACCENDA OTTUSA* (Nature, a Shady Business,

1984), the writing and the inscriptions are aleatory, as if the development of the space was determined by elements outside it, the whole corresponding to a vast operation of formal decomposition. In *IL CIMENTO DELL'ARMONIA E DELL'INVENZIONE* (The Risk of Harmony and Invention, 1969), Boetti traced all the squares on twenty-five sheets of graph paper and formally presented them. The artist or viewer can leaf through them in search for an impossible harmony.

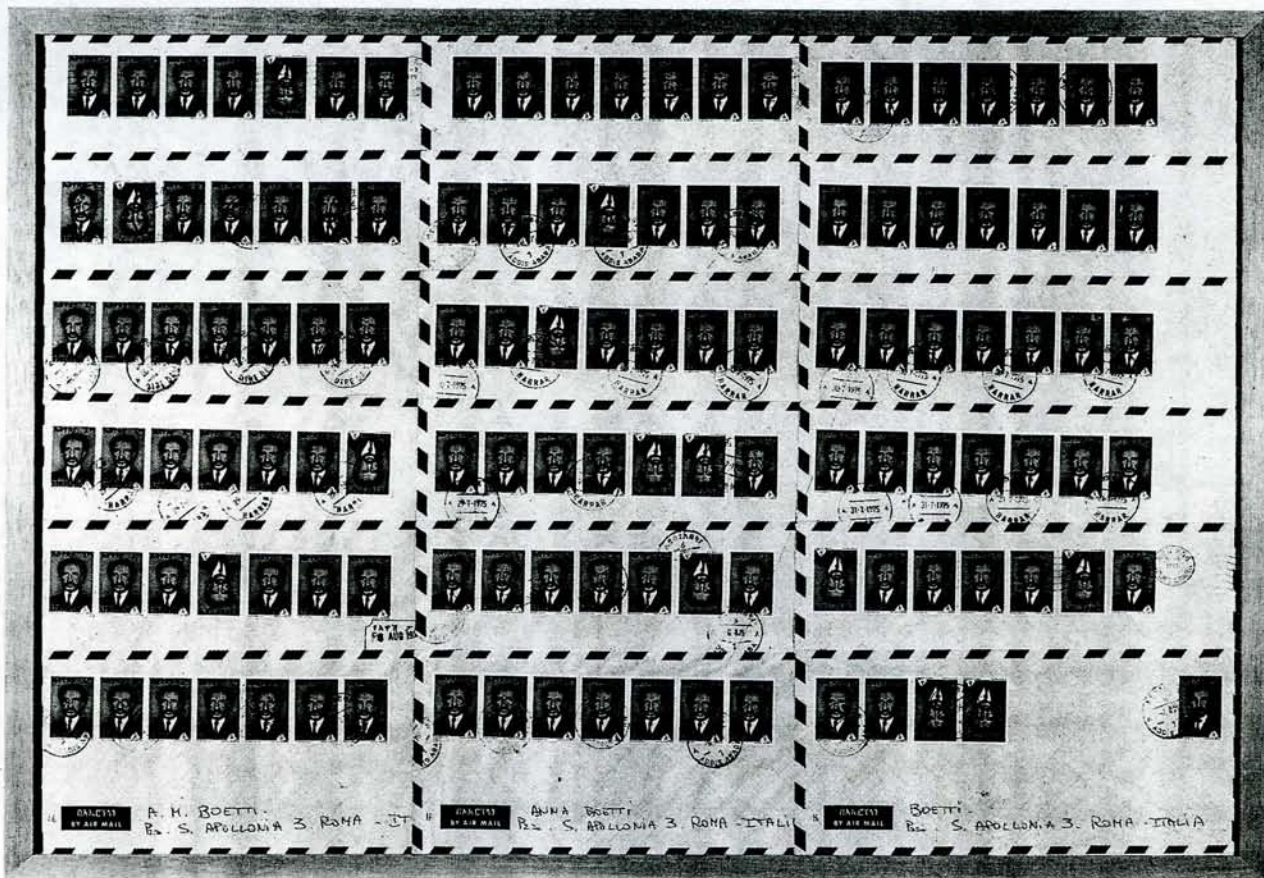
*I MILLE FIUMI PIÙ LUNGHI DEL MONDO* (The Thousand Longest Rivers in the World, 1975/1982), a



*ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, SHAMAN / SHOWMAN, 1968.*



ALIGHIERO E BOETTI, *TUTTO (EVERYTHING/ALLES)*, 1988,  
EMBROIDERY ON CANVAS/STICKEREI AUF LEINWAND,  
40" x 37 1/2" / 102 x 96 cm.



ALIGHIERO E BOETTI. ERITREA LIBERA (FREE ERITREA / FREIES ERITREA), 1975, 27 1/2 x 39 1/8" / 70 x 100 cm.

key work, comprises a book together with tapestries made in Afghanistan over a period of several years. The various aspects of this work proclaim an immense ambition: the thousand words written in a space that has become too small for them, however real it may be, seem to be the pure product of the artist's imagination, as it reveals the poetry of the world. Other modifications appear in the generic and "minimal" geometric figures. In the square (PAVIMENTO/Floor, 1967) and in the circle (FERRO E LEGNO/Iron and Wood, 1967), the human involvement in these assemblages of extraneous elements is manifest in the imperfections that have found their way into the given geometrical structures.

LAMPADA ANNUALE (Annual Lamp, 1966) opposes the laws of the physical world. The lamp only "works" within the periods defined by the artist and only "lights up, unexpectedly, once a year, for eleven seconds."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Boetti's personal calendar

(1985) and the watch he invented bear only the figures of the year of their creation, paradoxically stepping outside time. By copying the covers of magazines (1984), he eliminates the temporality from events. In a gesture that is both iconoclastic and creative, he places them outside the movement of time. Reworked in this way, these images acquire artwork status. Even writing is transgressed, becoming the result of a long and patient bodily activity ("What always speaks in silence is the body."). It is given full reign in the unlimited spaces of the new work. With Lucio Amelio, in Naples, on a 14-meter long animal frieze, Boetti offers us the vision of a primitive world that is constantly changing, in keeping with his own.

(Translation from the French: Charles Penwarden)

1) In MANUEL DE LA CONNAISSANCE (Manual of Knowledge) published for the A. Boetti exhibition at the Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne, 1986.

2) Op. cit.