

ALIGHIERO & BOETTI

Bringing the world into art 1993-1962

curated by Achille Bonito Oliva

MADRE, Naples, 21 February – 11 May 2009

The exhibition *Alighiero & Boetti. Putting the World into Art 1993-1962* illustrates the creative approach of Alighiero Boetti (1940-1994), a **“singular” artist who over time achieved “plurality”**. Born in Turin, he was one of the leading figures in the *Arte Povera* and *Conceptual Art* movements. During the course of his life he explored multiple disciplines ranging from music to mathematics, from philosophy to esotericism, from African cultures to those of the Middle and Far East to which he frequently travelled.

Every artistic project is always based around **an initial moment of conception**, conducted individually by the artist and then defined, materialised and distributed by means of **collective development** in which the executors are artificers rather than mere labourers. Boetti gives life to a concept of extended creativity: the artist provides his inputs to the social body that accepts and makes use of them, confirming a relationship of exchange and reciprocal dignity. **Artist and artificer** together explore a fertile terrain in which the image that appeared in the mind of the conceiver becomes a source of play and takes concrete form in the hands of others.

The **exhibition layout** is intended to underline the cultural and existential nomadism of an artist who succeeded in doubling himself iconographically into Alighiero & Boetti and who, by way of the moment of creation, reconnected himself with the world through his work. Hence the title *Putting the World into Art*, which is indicative of the approach of a great artist who deliberately collectivized his own creativity, developing interactivity, the deuteroprotagonism of the executors and the communication of art in the mass society as a methodology. Boetti's poetic is based on a **playful analysis of reality, mind games, attention to detail, the overcoming of all binary patterns, an openness to intelligent chance and the coexistence of differences**.

The works on show confirm Boetti's poetic strabismus, the artist always having worked on the coexistence of difference, **Alighiero and Boetti, Twins, Order and Disorder, Salt and Sugar, geopolitics and confines, classification and indetermination, writing and numbers, identity and metamorphosis, story and interval, rule and unexpected, modular and manual, organic and geometric, linear and circular, concave and convex**. This is why the entrance to and exit from the exhibition coincide in a configuration referencing the circularity as a philosophical principle that characterizes the artist's oeuvre and which shows no preference for an entrance from right or left, proposing a conjunction between east and west. The life-size photo of a performance *Today, Friday the twenty-seventh of March, nineteen seventy hours...* exhibited at the Madre portrays Boetti mirror writing with his left and right hands to the utmost extension of his corporal space, indicating the circular, non-chronological time that presides over the entire exhibition. The exhibition layout evolves from we to I, from the works executed collectively in various parts of the world (kilims, tapestries, maps, works in ballpoint pen, postal works and so on) through to those created in the early years in Turin and in Rome.

Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva in collaboration with the Alighiero Boetti Archive and the Alighiero e Boetti Foundation, the exhibition features an introduction in the Madre's great central hall with the installation of a number of kilims belonging to the series *Alternating from one to one hundred and vice versa*: an agreeable horizontal prologue for the public. The external courtyard instead features the vertical *Self-portrait* (bronze sculpture) alluding to an ironic narcissism of the artist who here dialogues with all the natural elements.



Location	Naples, Madre Museum Via Settembrini, 79 Naples
Information and bookings	Telephone: 081 19313016 (Monday – Sunday: 10.00 am – 8.00 pm)
Website	www.museomadre.it
Opening hours	from Monday to Friday: 10.00 am – 9.00 pm Saturday and Sunday: 10.00 am – 12.00 Midnight Closed Tuesdays
Tickets	Adult: euro 7.00 Concessions: euro 3.50 Free every Monday
Audioguide	euro 4.00
To reach the museum from Capodichino airport and from Central Station	Taxi: around 10/15 minutes By bus: Bus 3S departing every 15 minutes, alight at Central Station (Piazza Garibaldi). Alibus: departing every 30 minutes, alight at Central Station (Piazza Garibaldi). From Central Station take the metro Line 2, alight at Cavour and walk for around 200 metres.
This exhibition is part of	the CampaniaArtecard circuit www.campaniartecard.it
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Alighiero e Boetti, *Strumento musicale*, 1970,
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BRINGING THE WORLD INTO ART

HOW TO DREAM AND PHILOSOPHIZE ON THE WORK OF A. & B.

of Achille Bonito Oliva

“Perhaps Leibniz’ phrase *cum deus calculat fit mundus* might find a more adequate translation in the words: *As God plays, the world becomes the world.*” [M. Heidegger]. Western reason has attempted to establish dominion over both life and play, and its cunning notions of identity and dialectics excogitate a seamless control of the world, as also of its transformations. Logocentric western thought has always simulated attention and adaptation to the dynamics of factual reality, and finally created the totalizing notion of History.

The irruption of psychoanalysis and of scientific discoveries, which burgeoned at the beginning of the twentieth century, limited the presumption of total control on the part of the subject: the presumption of the subject’s ability to dominate the whole of reality. Freud’s interpretation of dreams, Plank’s quantum theory, Heisenberg’s principle of indeterminacy all derailed the Cartesian arrogance of western reason, and opened out in directions that the avantgardes as well were to explore and make part of their praxis.

Traditional art was rooted in technical procedures that aimed to elevate the artist’s obscure intuitions up to the plane of the image, and in doing so to meet no interferences. The avantgardes, on the other hand, discovered the value of interferences and discontinuities, of the ways in which chance continually irrupts into play in any and every activity, in any and every sphere of life, from the molecular level to the shaping of daily life. Western culture was to learn by way of the avantgardes to perceive and accept the value of a given that oriental culture had long since seen to be a principle of the formation of the world. In accord with the humanities and social sciences, the art of the avantgardes optimistically embraced the principle of expansion, and attempted by way of its own particular practices to activate the process of the growth of the sensibilities. The connection with the humanities stimulated a new level of awareness on the part of the artists, who, even while remaining enclosed in a narrow field of consensus, could feel themselves to be working in the direction of a progressive and progress-oriented culture, and thus on terms of a circularity that finally brought western and eastern thought together, in a locus both open to chance and subject to technical control.

A. & B. likewise practice a culture of expansion, the first by playing on the skin of things and objects and thus of daily life, the other by scratching down to beneath the skin of the subject. Both, in any case, are in search of dilatations that move beyond the phenomenology of the object and the subject, and beyond the principle of identity that had dominated the nineteenth century’s positivistic rationalism. Just as reason is no longer able to dominate the process of the world’s transformation, art is unable to complete its own trajectory by way of its traditional techniques, all of which hinge on control, or by adhering to a project exclusively guided by the artist. If art involves the proverbial activity of giving things a name – a normative identification of the real – A. & B. will be seen to produce an anti-art that reverses such attitudes of reasonability and harmony with the world; his anti-art is instead a systematic attack upon such attitudes, by way of its acceptance and incorporation of the world itself, of all the fragments and relics of daily life, hijacked and relieved of their common-sense meaning and charged with uselessness, skewed off into the precinct of things that have no function. In order for this to come about, the artist must be aware of the omnipotence of his language, of the freedom of will which permits him any and every gesture toward the world. “The human being is no longer an artist, but has become a work of art.” [Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*.] This awareness permits him to practice the appropriation of the object, and thus to lift the world to previously inconceivable heights, raising it up into places where he himself is no longer the absolute lord and master, and instead must be open to experiencing the process of growth and development which the object achieves by virtue of the workings of other forces. The Ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp are the clearest examples of an art that subverts the traditional intentionality of the work of art; decisions that control and direct the

making of the work of art are supplanted by the automatism of the language that the artist chooses to employ. The language itself becomes a mill that turns out meaning. Beyond the control of the artist's will, the language works automatically, producing a chain of new and independent meanings. The elementary nature of the gesture – the appropriation and relocation of already extant objects – is itself an indication of a frame of mind in which art intends to reduce its levels of technical complexity, in awareness of the existence of other forces that lie outside the artist's operations, beyond the scope of the rational formulation of projects. The crux of things for A. & B. becomes the mutual interpenetration of the artist's intervention and chance: a rupture of cause and effect relationships, and thus the introduction into the work of art of possible discontinuities and elements of disturbance. New intensity is thus infused into facts of daily life, and cancels their inertia. This is possible to the extent that the language of art possesses a power of condensation that ranges beyond the rules of codified communication, and a measure of a-sociality that's open to novel juxtapositions that don't depend on acts of the will.

Automatism thus implies that the language is free to behave independently, and to constellate new meanings that don't derive from the artist's will or the artist's project. The artist, indeed, asks other forms of will to intervene in the work and to bring about an expansion of its meaning, to the point of its transformation into pure signifier. The artist has no desire to proceed from one certainty to the next, intending instead to produce displacements among perpetually moving meanings that never come to rest.

Chance is no longer a loss of control; it becomes an enrichment, introducing western reason to accidents that circumvent projects and expectations. Automatism gives the imagination the chance of flying low, and of dipping down to the horizontal plane of reality, from which to lift up signs of unpredictability. The poetics of expansion thus reveals its strategy, which summons together cultural awareness and acceptance of the unexpected. Western lucidity and oriental acquiescence are reconciled within the work. Tzara called for "universal idiocy," meaning that the tools of intelligence are now too dull to deal with a reality that adheres to laws which either are hidden, or guided by chance. This procedure thus encourages the appearance of the unexpected within the work. The redemption of art depends on shifting the making of art into places beyond control. Control presupposes intentions and goals, and thereby final criteria. The constant hope is to introduce the free play of reality and the free association of facts into the sphere of art. Collage technique again involves an elementary procedure, based on juxtapositions that challenge the notion of complex execution. Collage construes associations of elements from diverse sources, and thereby allows them to release new meanings that derive from their interior, individual qualities. Dada collages resulted from chance juxtaposition of scraps of language, or from unforeseeable assemblages of randomly chosen components; or they record the arrangement into which their elements fell after being dropped to the ground.

The dishevelment of technical procedures, indifference to the nobility of materials, the appropriation of linguistic discoveries on the part of other movements: these are the touchstones of an attitude – A. & B.'s attitude to art – that hopes to induce reality to reveal internal rules that could never be expressed by way of technical expertise, which functions entirely through the rationality of its application. Displacement, collage association of various linguistic fragments, as well as indeterminate images that effectively conceal their features are all at the service of a new mentality in an art that asserts that those who refuse to search will find, and perhaps be found. Indeed, the titles of A. & B.'s works always emphasize this possibility of encountering new meanings that alter the valence of the real-world facts the works deploy. Such encounters take place in ways which are almost stoic, and are free of all traces of emotional participation.

Such an attitude stems from the perception that the subject who creates the work – its artifex – isn't simply the artist alone. It's understood that the creation of the work depends as well on the convergence of other imponderable factors that no longer allow the artist to preen in the demiurgic arrogance of exclusive creative responsibility. The artist creates the work of art to the extent that the artist construes a situation in which the language of art can produce new meanings, thanks as well to the support, participation and collaboration of other elements that present themselves from unforeseeable sources. The automatism of the language of art results from a use of language that unleashes and freely fires its own internal mechanisms. A. & B. manages to sound out data in the depths, and to bring it up to the surface of art. And in doing so, he never allows the moorings of his language – the techniques by which it is limited – to interfere with the process. Linguistic automatism places itself at the service of a liberatory notion of art, in light of the awareness that the unconscious too has the structure of a language. The language of the unconscious is a code that speaks through association and displacement, or by way of condensation. Art is an even further praxis of expansion and transgression to the degree that it also recuperates and attributes a value to the territories of absent-minded thought, as an impulse that effectively circumvents the censorship of form, or which blithely functions in spite of it. In A. & B., the creative process is charged with an almost philosophic and impersonal delight that borders on the Greek

idea of ataraxia. The image is buoyed by a white magic, as well as sustained by that absent-minded thought that functions as a conduit toward other images. The image is absent-minded insofar as it no longer has any single artifex to which to refer; the effort of the artist doesn't count as the whole of its paternity. Other factors have also come into play, and contributed to bringing it into existence. This condition of absent-mindedness implies no sense of anything lost, but quite to the contrary is understood as an acquisition of further possibilities. Or if something has been lost, it would be only the pathetic arrogance that accompanied the work of the traditional, solitary, western artist. The creative adventure of A. & B. in fact began with the elaboration of works that stood beneath the sign of an absolutely individual paternity, of a single and unique artist who at that time was known by the name of Alighiero Boetti. An analytic and conceptual attitude takes precedence over the creative process, which always tends toward formal results which are clear and intentionally simplistic.

Form confirmed the identity of industrial materials which the artist reconfigured into modular, tautological entities. In any case, art for A. & B. was always a matter of responding to the perception of an absence: a praxis that hoped to heal and repair some initially diminished thing. Art, by its very nature, is opposed to every condition of loss. But all the same, it inscribes its action in the mind's system of negation, or in the locus of linguistic catastrophe. It's here that the rupture is perpetrated, and yet one seeks a place of solace within the decorous private realm of the languages of art. It's here that one seeks repair from the irreparable: that irreparable beneath the sign of which the social system has placed its conventions of exchange and all the minor maneuvers of existence. The art of A. & B. appeals to a different type of economy, not simply dual – debit and credit, take it or leave it – but grounded in a perverse dose of opportunism. The opportunism lies in the exclusion from the very start of any possibility of reductive choice, of any clear, unambiguous gesture that protests a further loss. Art intentionally sites itself in irresponsibility, in solutions that exclude all functionality, opening out instead to a possible horizon of pleasure where gesture never links to a notion of paralysis or movement, but simultaneously alludes to both.

The art of A. & B. always spawns an ambiguous tension in which manual and mental activity coincide, and mutually develop a point of view in which the theory and the praxis of art, project and execution, don't stand in opposition to one another: instead they are integrated in the event of the making of art. Throughout the 1960s, the artist reaffirmed his own solitary identity. It was in 1969 that he decided to double or split himself in two, with the realization of an image of himself as twins, then formalized by making the decision that he himself would accompany himself throughout the whole of his life: A. e B. The elaboration of the work served to produce a duplex result: new processes of knowledge – knowledge of the world – that the artist discovers as he proceeds along his way; and their subsequent consignment to the active contemplation of the public.

In any case, the individual became a duo in the 1970s, and the conjunction "and" for once and all inserted itself between his name and surname, not to insist on a conflict, a duel of the self with the self, but rather on an amplification of subjectivity, so as better to deal with the complexity and multiplicity of the world of things. Surely the artist had no intention of laying claim to a modular ego, or indeed to any highly metaphysical double. Every shudder of awareness is accompanied here by Goethe's view of irony: as the passion that finds free play in detachment. Two separate heats thus accompany the work of A. & B. and hold it on the threshold of a light and smiling epiphany. A. & B.'s nomadism was to lead him not only to metaphoric voyages in the world of materials, mathematics, and the exact sciences, or of geography and history. As a self-consciously modern artist, he adopted the combinatory system as the absolute system of his creativity, and used it to hold the double of everything, and not only of himself, within the precincts of language: salt and sugar, order and disorder, geopolitics and limits, classification and determination, writing and number, identity and metamorphosis, plot and interval, rule and the unpredictable, the modular and the manual, the organic and the geometric, the linear and the circular, concave and convex. Here, the games of the mind direct attention toward details, towards the surpassing of every binary scheme, toward intelligent openness to chance and the coexistence of differences. Voyage as a part of his life became authentically geographic, an openness that led beyond all frontiers towards oriental horizons from India to Afghanistan to Pakistan. In any case, even his postal works confirm his list toward a peripatetic activity that can also assume aesthetic stigmata. The stamps in their combinations become the tesserae of a mosaic that wants finally and always to affirm the theme of beauty. Stendahl and Baudelaire saw beauty as the promise of happiness.

On the crest of this wave of hedonism, from the 1970s to the end of his life, A. & B. decided to effect a further amplification of his ego: no longer singular, and no longer dual, it presents itself as plural. He entrusted the execution of his works to other persons who rather than simply artisans also took on the role of artifex, and who as such were able, by way of sensitive manual craftsmanship, to contribute an additional value to the work. The artist is the creator and the social body is likewise creative. Execution, here, is more than purely mechanical: it is also inclu-

sive of elements that effect an increase of experience and knowledge. His works made with ball-point pens were realized in a cultural context – his native Italy – with which he was conversant and highly familiar; at a later date, he entrusted the realization of arrases and kilims to women of Afghanistan and Pakistan. A. & B. definitively accepted the identity of a plural ego, and this brought along with it a fertile convergence of diverse cultures: a pacific prophecy of an intertwining of east and west; and as well, by consequence, an amplified cultural anthropology of the work of art. A. & B.'s handcrafted works are essentially a mental thing – a *cosa mentale* – in precisely the sense that this term was used by Leonardo da Vinci, who saw the image as the materialized projection of imagination. Here it's a question of various kinds of imagination. The solitary ego becomes socialized, and communitarian, and the fruit of a cultural miscegenation that surely represents the future of the world. So, A. & B. was involved in bringing art into the world, and assumed this to be indispensable. There is here no narcissism that's antagonistic to reality, but perhaps an erotic need for exchange, involvement, and cultural seduction. The artist's project makes him both seductive and seducing, and offers the social body a true and proper potlatch; its acceptance of that offer then dispossesses the artist of personal creative solitude, and opens it up into a more collective condition.

For the peoples who practiced the potlatch, it was more than a question of gifts to be given to another, and instead involved inevitable loss, even destitution, for the donor. A. & B. presents himself to his appointment with the world, armed with fecund and creative projects. The singular ego relinquishes power in favor of the plural ego. The artist and the corps of which each member is an *artifex* celebrate a continuous series of morganatic marriages in which the work is the feast, the formal expression of an encounter in which every hierarchy falls away in order to affirm the central position of a form that visually and anthropologically belongs to them all. Both unsure of himself and nonchalant, the artist fertilely assumes an attitude of ataractic indifference, as the fruit of a systemic wisdom that continually leads him to play with the world and to enter into dialogue with it. The entirety of the work of A. & B. is systematically both manual and mental. It produces progressive modes of knowledge and awareness that always involve amazement and discovery. The entirety of the work of A. & B. is the result of a great capacity for abstraction, and it shifts the viewers always off toward new dimensions. The voyage ceases to be geographic and presents itself as uninterruptedly mental, and from out of this dimension it again calls up the memory of real landscapes and territories. For A. & B. there is no such thing as the lesser beauties of daily life, no hierarchy from which to look down at everyday experience. Indeed, daily experience is something the artist constantly observes and explores, seeking out and discovering attitudes and habits, mental splendors and places commonly shared. A. & B. is basically an iconoclast who has no love for images in the round. He prefers an iconography that stems from a mixture of abstraction and figuration, has an out-of-fashion preference for the decorative, is always at odds with static images, and in favor of signs imbued with volatile rhythms. This accords with his love for music, and especially for the tabla that he played with such great cunning. A.&B. is surely in favor of the vaporization of images, and of every form of fixity; for the signifier, rather than the signified; for doubt rather than certainty. His preference went first of all to the immaterial language of music, and to the lightness and volatility that allow it to find its way into every place and situation, and to voyage across all continents. The musical instrument became a true and proper sculpture in his hands. A photo made in 1970 shows A. & B. as he holds up a banjo with two improbable necks and points out the source of its sounds, and perhaps as well their visibility in three-dimensional form.

This leads me to believe, to hypothesize, that this great artist from the city of Turin may have nurtured a hidden love for drawing, as the fruit of manual abilities which in any case tend towards essential sign. And reasons of consistency might explain why he kept concealed within himself all possible temptation to make use of a language which at one and the very same time is so Franciscan, and yet so close to the body of the artist. Here, then, is a critic's dream – my personal dream – of using this photo of the artist's hands as the starting point for the description of an epiphany and a vision: the vision of a suspected and perhaps tormented relationship between A. & B. and drawing. The sign rises up to the sheet of paper, hoists its antennae at the level of the whiteness of its surface, spreads its sails and unfolds its filaments so as then to begin to traverse its solar tranquility. Here the hand awaits it, the tools that's ready to unravel it, to deflect it from any course that might be linear and secure. There's none of the safety of a predetermined route, because there's neither direction nor orientation. Art serves to augment the frequency of the difficult points of the flight, to exasperate the nodes and involvements in which the graphic sign articulates itself and sings. And indeed it's a question of song, of a fast and high-pitched string that resounds in response to the tremors of the hand. The sheet of paper is set up in front of the body of A. & B., who, never aware of it, continually traces out his own portrait as seen from a distance, and thus makes use of distance as an amplification of his way of seeing. The gaze, most surely, finds its source not only in the eye. The artist possesses a thousand gazes, hidden in the

recess of the body's many senses. From there he lovingly lends attention to the daedal of his lines, pulling it closer and pushing it further away from himself, according to tangents of love and exasperation. These movements constitute the act with which the body projects itself, the hidden drawing that tends to carry the signs of which it's made toward the place of similitude. This is why the sign must be heavy: it must bear the stigmata of a full and viscous material. Because similitude most certainly doesn't arise from any function of hyperrealism, but from the possibility of light and imperceptible reference, oblique and aerial, caught in its line of flight on a sheet of paper, and so much so as to give the sense of a sonority that resounds from any number points and sources. It seems sometimes that the drawing veers off in directions that lead to dead ends, as confirmed by decisions and orientations that leave other points as though untouched, or dry, or blank. But the point of this, precisely, is to leave it in an always precarious condition, with an always volatile destiny, an uncertain parabola, an always possible retreat, a revival of interest in other horizons, in other directions for the moment left blank. The accoutrements of the graphic sign are absolutely precarious, without the comforts of a ground or a sky, the vectors of a ceiling or a floor. It is left in the happy perplexity of an uncertain collocation, without the comfort of anything at which to grasp. This is what makes it possible to leave the space unfilled, with possibilities of full and empty spaces that do not balance symmetrically, abandoning themselves instead to the uncertainty of their own provisional and volatile state. The provisional is the vital substance of the sign, which triggers thousands of attempts and no final result. When A. & B. pushes out toward the edges of the sheet of paper, this is no indication of any desire to exit from the confines or the framing of art; it is a way of testing or tasting an inebriation, the headiness of touching the feeling of transgression, of holding it in his sights. The signs on the surface can also withdraw, reverse their course, turn around in their tracks. Because that course, par excellence, is a collision course, continually traversed and charged with tension. When the signs seems to run like a river in flood, like a magma in its channel and with no way out, this means that they have managed to drag along within themselves all possibilities of direction, to engulf all lateral movements and reabsorb them. In this case, the graphic sign is a representation of theatrical transit, in line with a style of decision that does not stem from any desire to shape or pursue a project, but from the uncontainable force of eroticism.

The eros of the sign, when it manifests itself, doesn't drape itself in the garb of any certain image, but very informally insinuates itself into an indication of direction, free of any object. And since there is no object, the sign can live and will flourish only on its own eroticism, on the pleasure of its self-representation of the interior movements of an irrepressible tension. Therefore, at times, it will break the banks into which it had channeled itself, creating multiple flows and intersections, running along lines of flight that consist of accelerations, inversions, overtakings and cancellations. Sometimes A. & B. attenuates all thicknesses, thinning things out into exiguous, inconstant branchings, with hints of geometric shapes and awkward figurations. The graphic sign, in its biological opportunism, recognizes no priorities, no rights of way, has no spatial parameters to which to refer, no way of looking up or down, since no such coordinates exist. Sign spins madly across the sheet of paper, never seeking or finding a moment of pause. It is volatile, and enjoys the pleasure of being utterly unprotected. At times it assumes the guise of a definable image, boasting the garb of some cordial and familiar figure, offering hints of a dance step that makes one hope for the best. But the best of the graphic sign is always the image that remains to appear, the discarding of the previous disguise. We thereby see that it takes on features of figuration only for the purpose of trying out all the possible emotions, all the range of disguises. Basically, it works on a system of permanent expectation, on the hope for a faceless future.

Because for A. & B. chance has no face: it knows the felicity of a condition eternally open to all possible conclusions, without exception. So the guise in which it appears is always provisional, and must never offer the comfort of any impossible protection. The sign prefers an existence in the condition of a germinant potential of which the growth can experience no arrest. So, it's continually forced to make room for itself, destroying whatever configuration it assumed but a moment before, and leaving in its wake a landscape of ruins. Ruins happily created, and accumulated as a reserve. The sign is housed among makeshift props, frees itself from any gift or loan, and tends to be forgetful of any inheritance received. It prefers a life lived day by day, and dwells in a climate of uncertainty that allows it every dissipation, delight and desperation. When it touches its moments of greatest felicity, it folds back within itself, closes up within its own nodes, so as not to allow the loss of any of its energies. The sign is thus both circular and autistic, even when it radiates, and allows itself to radiate, from the body of the artist, because it lives an interior biology with its own slow and never arrestable articulation.

In any case, as A. & B. has put it, it's the body that always speaks in silence. Art, by way of its self-articulation, is a listening post for life and its metamorphoses. The creative voyage of A. & B. finds its point of departure in the stereophony of the world, and in the course of its evolution progressively intercepts industrial and everyday materials, manual, craftsmanly, mechanical and postal

techniques that lead him ever more toward open solutions that prompt him first to affirm the world in one of his titles, *Bringing the world into the world*, and then, as I see it, to extend that goal into bringing the world into art. But the entirety of the work of A. & B. lies beneath the sign of these generous intentions, even before the above-mentioned work of 1972-73. From the very beginning, a felicitous culture of suspicion was alive within this artist who in every object discovers a pre-conception, in every reality a code to fracture, thus permitting a flow of surprises and a plethora of marvels of meaning to issue from their interiors.

The whole of the body of work he produced presents itself as a miraculous oxymoron: it everywhere adheres to the motto: the mind is manual. An acrobat of thought, a nomad and a wanderer, A. & B. always brought an aristocratic style into the geographies of his public and private life: the style of the man who chooses the privileges of thought, who lives the life of the imagination by opening it up to social participation. The special feature of his aristocratic condition lay precisely in its overturning of all hierarchy, injustice, and exploitation in the name of modes of participation that grow progressively interactive with the work, by way of which the whole social body, and not simply the artist's own, is able to speak. Finally, A. & B. has left us with a body of work that by way of its formal proposal of beauty tends to reconfirm the promise of happiness, the discovery of a universe constantly traversed by delicate zephyrs, and continuous contests of harmony and invention that further and stimulate our imaginations. His death, in 1994, may perhaps corroborate our conviction that the artist [he had homes in Rome and Turin, and traveled widely throughout the east] is a biological error with respect to the work of art, but his work remains among us and reminds us that the great creative drive of A. & B. [singular, dual, plural] was in the service of a hidden desire to leave us with traces of a powerful need for something durable. We can think of his works as so many slips of the tongue.

P.S.

The exhibition is the fruit of the notion that the works of the artist constitute three-dimensional words that physically traverse the space of the museum, and metaphorically the mind of the critic, myself, who has designed and realized it. A. & B. is an artist who, like Hamlet's madness, has a method, the combinatory method. The critic responds to the artist's method with a counter-method, not oppositional, but complementary. Chronological, but not pedestrian. The fruit of a choice that understands the present as the point of departure from which to understand the past, and not vice versa. Once again, as already in the case of the *Contemporanea* exhibition [1973], held in the garage of Rome's Villa Borghese, we proceed by moving backwards. We start with the works of the last year of the artist's life, 1993, and work our way back to his earliest works, of 1962. This route reveals the way in which A. & B. worked on the basis of the multiplicity of the ego, as singular, dual, and plural. It shows, moving back through time, how he came at the end of his life as a great artist to work on the *We*, having started out with the *I*. The spaces of the museum thus trace out the happy regression of an interactive body of work that, starting out with great collective consciousness, moves back to the singular secrets of works which found their realization entirely in personal solitude: in the metaphoric secrecy of the studio that hosted his collection of the objects intercepted by his curiosity, and especially the seals he pursued throughout his life while happily traveling in the east. The notions that guide the exhibition fully recognize the spectator's right to read and re-read history, inclusive of the history of art, by starting out from the present. The exhibition reaffirms an ancient African adage: *I am, because we are*.

The show's itinerary measures off the moments of a circular time that's open in both directions to the movements and gaze of the spectator, and it reveals the presence of the further value of communication and exchange that also seems to invert that phrase: *We are, because I am*. For all these reasons we might freely, but also respectfully, replace the "and" in Alighiero and Boetti, with an "&" that might better represent the relationship between the artist who conceives of the work and those in the role of artifex who realize it.

The creative artist commissions a creative workforce. This is what's meant by "bringing the world into art," a new world. Chronological time is orthogonal [with a beginning and an end] and leads to death. Circular time, on the other hand, in its eternal return, effects a suspension of death and opens a channel to duration, to immortality.

Long live Alighiero & Boetti!

THE ADVENTUROUS LIFE OF ALIGHIERO BOETTI

of Pino Corrias

The fabric of Alighiero Boetti's existence was a woof and weave of dual threads. Melancholy and joyful, he was a solitary man who delighted in chance encounters; a father three times over, he retained a sort of child-like spirit. He would live in Turin, Paris, Rome and Kabul, travelling – and returning from – the entire world. He was a lover of women and of high speeds, of money and of sunsets, of wide-open deserts and his own personal landscapes. The last months of his life, he spent on the terrace of his apartment in Via del Teatro Pace near Piazza Navona, sitting in the sun amidst large cactuses and slanting palms, and with certain regrets for company.

Time had not played fair with him, he thought. And yet it had revealed to him the hidden resources of a spectacular ancestor: Giovanni Battista Boetti. An eighteenth-century Dominican friar, this forebear had travelled amongst the Afghans, Kurds and the Shiites of modern-day Iraq, becoming a local hero of the Caucasus when he declared war on the might of Catherine the Great. Having led a bloody rebellion in Dagestan, he would disappear in Siberia, where at his death he became a sort of legend in the uplands of Chechnya. And then, in the distant city of Turin, he would reach out to the youthful Alighiero, who whilst gazing upon the landscapes painted by Nicholas De Stael would somehow feel his spirit touched by this ancestor – to the point that the youth believed he was his double. That double – and the concept of duality – would remain with him for the rest of his life. Alighiero Boetti was born in Turin on 16 December 1940. His father, Corrado, was a lawyer; his mother, Adelina, was a refined woman who specialized in producing wedding-gown embroidery for girls from good families, as well as being a proficient and conscientious player of the violin. The family was one of sharplyfelt regrets for a wealth that was no longer theirs. Their original landed estates in Monferrato – the former Counts Boetti had had a family crest composed of a bull and three stars – had been frittered away by a pair of distant ancestors and [above all] the boy's paternal grandfather: having been left blind by a fall from a horse at the age of thirty, that man had done everything possible to assuage his taste for life, finishing his days in Paris, where anisette and the dancers of the *cafés chantants* provided his final consolation. The grandson was christened Alighiero Fabrizio, no saint apparently being available to lend him his first name. He had a younger brother, Gualtiero. But there was a gaping absence in his childhood: at the end of the war, the father – in a gesture that seems like something from a drawing-room farce – ran off with the maid, leaving a little cash on the kitchen table [as if it were a sort of tip]. Later, the man would live his days out in solitude and rancor, detested by his ex-wife [who could never forgive herself for missing him] and ignored by his sons, who would every and again engage in the filial penance of a meal at the 'Caval'd Brôns' restaurant, with heavy servings of *agnolotti*, sarcasm and recriminations. As a boy, Alighiero had already taken his own slant on life, with adolescence then bringing its inevitable period of silence and reflection. There was a lot to music, and dreams of becoming an orchestra conductor: the youth played the drums, feeling the rhythm within himself – to the point that it found expression even in his manner of walking. A quick reader, he devoured Tolstoy and Faulkner, but in his own way – that is, jumping entire chapters, and perhaps slipping in sections from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. And he would always open books at random – as the practitioners of *I Ching* might do. It was something he did throughout his life, aware that in a single chapter he would be able to grasp the 'happy coincidences' that could then be molded into an idea – an idea that could generate an image that might itself generate a project for a work of art.

This was the dawn of the 1960s; in fog-bound Turin there were more and more factories – and increasing numbers of immigrants drawn from southern Italy to work in them. The city was expanding outwards to its suburbs; time was measured by the clocks of the FIAT factories. And whilst outlying areas saw people being crammed together, the old city centre experienced its first traffic jams; the number of traffic lights tripled, plastic and glass gleamed in perfume shops, and

in the galleries of long-established art dealers, the price of Felice Casorati's work soared. The economic miracle generated energy, stimulated impatience. Alighiero had just enrolled at the Economics faculty and was memorizing the essential fact of money: "the plus column and the minus column" – a fact that would remain impressed upon him during the years to come. Everything else about the faculty bored him. Music was no longer enough for him: he was looking for the meaning of things. Long-haired and sporting a Zapata moustache, he drove around the city in a white FIAT 500, using the car to visit surrounding junk fairs and antiques markets, where he bought things then sold on at a higher price elsewhere. [Otherwise, the plus column and the minus column would have remained totally empty.] His business ventures took him to the Côte d'Azur, then as far as Provence, where he came upon Vallauris, the village of ceramics, where – up to 1955 – Picasso himself had had his own works fired in the Madoura kilns [before moving down to Cannes and on to Vauvenargues with his new wife, Jacqueline Roque]. Alighiero saw the opportunity: he bought up ceramics – vases, teapots, etc. – and then wrapped them in newspaper and cardboard before cramming them into the Fiat 500. To keep himself going, he would live on hastily eaten sandwiches and the odd glass of Bandol.

Then he encountered love – behind the glass doors of the 'La Ferrade' ceramics works, in August 1962. The precise date was 11 August: '11', the very first number comprising a twinned pair. The heat was stifling – more than 40°C – and the kilns were blazing away. But that was where he saw her for the first time, with her dark eyes and her nouvelle vague hairstyle – the very embodiment of Parisian youth. She actually felt faint because of the heat, and Alighiero read that as a sign of the emotion she was feeling. In romantic fiction it is the lady's handkerchief that falls to the ground; here it was the lady herself. Workers came running from the kiln... and Alighiero came running. What was this fallen angel's name? Annemarie Sauzeau.

Many lifetimes have passed in the forty-six years since then, but one can still see the echo of that heat [and the fainting fit it induced] when Annemarie talks. Dressed in black, she sits amongst the white shelves of the Archivio Boetti and remembers that day, which lifted the curtain on so much: a marriage, two children [Matteo and Agata], three homes, extensive travelling, frequent visits to Afghanistan. It was a life in which money was not plentiful – and of which certain things are passed over in silence. All in all, twenty years together. She smiles and recalls "I fainted and it was all very theatrical. When I opened my eyes again, there he was. Beneath his long hair, the expression in his eyes was beautiful. And he was very gentle. He spoke a little French, and we passed that first afternoon together as if under a spell. He was someone bursting with energy. He knew the various workshops and kilns and had invented this business for himself, buying ceramics, cramming more than you would have thought possible into his car and then setting off at night for Turin – passing the border at deserted areas in the mountains, using dirt roads. In effect, doing a bit of smuggling. And then selling the whole lot to antiques dealers in Turin.

"He wasn't really happy about living in Turin, so he came to live in Paris that autumn. I had finished university and was teaching English in a high school. Once a month he went back to Vallauris and then on to Turin. Then he hurried back to Paris. All that time spent in the car, driving as fast as possible. He was good driver, but also a little bit mad, spending sleepless nights driving that FIAT 500 through the Alps and across France, so as to get to Paris by dawn. "We lived in small rooms in the fifth arrondissement, off Boulevard Saint-Michel; once it was an actual garret, another time the concierge's room. We had to watch the pennies, and used to have fried eggs at Café La Palette. But all around us there was Paris, and to us everything seemed as young and beautiful as we were at twenty years old – the same age as the sort of people we hung out with at the cafés of Saint-Germain: musicians playing Miles Davis, or artists, poets, and students who had fallen behind with their exams. Alighiero was clear about two things: that he would never go on with his Economics degree and that he would become an artist. But not a painter. Once he said to me: 'After everything that has been painted, from Piero della Francesca to Malevich, what would I be doing with a paintbrush?' He sought things out in the streets; knew how to look at the things around him; was curious about everything. He had a special eye – not so much for the beauty as for the significance of thing – and loved being surprised by forms and shapes. He wanted to learn how to use India ink and engraving. But he wasn't interested in the Louvre. Instead, he went a lot to the Musée Guimet. Chinese art fascinated him – that rarefaction of form and sign. "Paris was beautiful but tough. After a couple of years it had worn us down, and we decided to move south, to make our life easier. We would start in Turin, to which we came back at the end of 1964. He had a lot of plans. But the thing that intrigued him most was seeing what traces he could find of that ancestor of his, the Dominican friar..."

Scholar and traveler, Giovanni Battista Boetti had left Monferrato and, in 1771, reached Mosul in Mesopotamia. There he became physician to the local pasha, before travelling on as far as Constantinople. Having clashed with the Vatican, he left his Order and became involved in esoteric Islamic sects. A preacher, he then became 'Monsur' – the Victorious – leading a popular uprising in the Caucasus against Catherine the Great of Russia and one of her supreme generals,

Prince Potyomkin. Captured, he was exiled to the Siberian monastery of Solovetsk, where he disappeared forever, probably dying in 1794. Annemarie recalls. "I know the entire history of the man because I worked on piecing it together, in the early months of 1965, working in the State Archives in Turin. Alighiero sent me; he himself did not have the patience required for such research. I was happy to work for him, to find what he was looking for. I used to pass all my mornings there; then in the afternoon, teaching French at the Istituto Culturale, I learnt Italian myself. In the evening I used to tell Alighiero everything I had discovered about the friar. He listened to me enthralled, then continually reworked, elaborated upon the story. Given his particularly intuitive form of intelligence, he used to find surprising links and connections.

"The more I went ahead with the research, the more convinced he became that he was a sort of reincarnation of Mansur. I found a portrait of the man for him. In effect, there was a resemblance. He made some photocopies of it. I remember that in the early years he liked to pin one of these in some corner during his first exhibitions. Just there, without any explanation. The idea of this sort of subterranean – selective – communication amused him: those who understood, understood... And if anyone asked him any questions about it, he was always vague. Meanwhile, his ancestor hung there, looking at the exhibition and getting looked at himself." At the time it was the non-imaginary objects – the boxes, rags and water – of Arte Povera that were conquering a space for themselves within the galleries of the early 70s. In Milan there was Luciano Fabro. In Rome, Jannis Kounellis and Pino Pascali. But it was in Turin that the group first really got underway, with Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Merz, Gilberto Zorio, Giovanni Anselmo, Giulio Paolini, etc. Alighiero's path would intersect with the group right from the beginning. He felt in tune with them, and would then develop in parallel – to later move off in his own direction. He had come back to Turin in June 1964, setting up home and studio in Via Principe Amedeo. He destroyed his previous drawings but kept the filters from Muratti cigarettes, which he snapped off to form ribbons out of. It was at this point that he began to make outlines of film cameras and FIAT engine components using India ink. He also soldered together spherical sheets of metal. However, when he saw an intriguing work by Rosenquist, he would abandon sculpture. "Life is made up of details," he thought, and began to note down such details. For example: "A pile of sand of around 30 centimeters high arose in 1949, in Alasso, where I also dug a deep hole, down to the point where I discovered water." At his first one-man show – in 1967 at the Galleria Christian Stein – he exhibited his act of homage to the invisibility of time, the *Lampada Annuale*. This could be lit only once a year for the symbolic duration of only 11 seconds [again, the number 11]. For all the other millions of instants in the year, nothing. In that show, he also exhibited a sheet of camouflage fabric, a roll of cardboard, painted firewood and the 'luminous idea' of ping-pong.

Meanwhile he went on exploring the worlds packed away within the Balôn, the Turin second-hand market at Porta Palazzo, and to visit art galleries. He discovered the work of Franz Kline and Joseph Beuys. Especially important for him, was his encounter with the art of Piero Manzoni, who – not yet 30 years of age – had died in the cold Milan winter of 1963, carried off by a heart attack amidst the tin cans and white-cotton monochromes of his studio, slumped there, still wearing his overcoat. Alighiero reflected upon the coincidences of existence. The attraction of numbers led him to engage in multiplications and subtractions. Along with 11, his favorite numbers were 2 – the very means of reduplication – and 0, which he described as a "time point," the result of the most elementary of all sums: "Minus one plus one equals zero". It was zero which stood at the very centre of the clepsydra that itself stood over the world. And the sands of time slid into 1968. The area around Palazzo Campana was thick with tear gas, as university students put themselves in the front line. There were innumerable assemblies, meetings and occupied factories; millions of words were spoken. These were the first tepid signs of the 'Hot Autumn' that would rage throughout the city's factories and along the ring-roads running through its industrial estates. The walls themselves were heavy with words, but Boetti looked on in silence; he didn't like all that noise, saying to the many artists who were caught up in the fervor of the moment: "revolutions are carried out on the inside not the outside". What was required was impatience, but also a number of generations. It was time that was needed. Upon an oval stone, Alighiero would impress his *Self-Portrait in Negative*, just as he was finishing his own very personal window on the world: a sheet of transparent glass, to which he would give the title *Niente da vedere, niente da nascondere* [Nothing to see, nothing to hide].

He had rented a new studio and was [in installments] paying for an abandoned farmhouse on the, then still unspoilt, coastline of the Cinque Terre [at San Bernardino, between Vernazza and Corniglia]. Set between olive groves and beds of basil, the house overlooked the sea to the west, its dark stones and green windowshutters snuggled against the rocks that then extended to the sheer cliffs below. Meanwhile Arte Povera had triumphed, becoming a recognized group, an 'opinion leader'. It was art that celebrated materials themselves, imbuing them with an energy that was intended to oppose the inertia of everyday life. However, Alighiero chose a more solitary path; he did not want to exhibit the mass of stuff but its very lightness. What he explored were

concepts, numerical combinations. He had no time for the public space occupied by a 'movement' that itself then generated background noise; that strove to determine the directions poetic research should follow; that spoke with the voice of Pistoletto. He did not like being misrepresented as the ironic version of Giulio Paolini. And his desire for a certain distance made him restive. Thus he chose his own path. He spent some time in New York – which he liked, but not completely – and then travelled further and further afield: to Guatemala and Mexico, to Morocco and Ethiopia, to Istanbul. And inhaling hashish, he travelled on to imaginary places. What he was looking for was a combination of transformation and balance. His work as an artist became more and more focused on the mental procedures and operations involved. And one of these procedures envisaged that the material execution of a work should be delegated to others, necessarily making each piece the expression of a collective form of art. In a television interview, he would comment: "I would like to have the infinite periods of time there used to be in old-fashioned winters; to settle myself in the countryside and fill up blank sheets of paper. However, I know that after a couple of minutes I would go mad. I do not have the patience. So, I get others to do things. Because, when it comes down to it, my primary focus is on thought. For me, manual ability is a secondary matter, a detail. This is why, when I have one of my works made, I can even use the most banal of things – things like postage stamps, which everyone uses, or perfectly everyday blue biros." On the floor of the Turin gallery of Gian Enzo Sperone, who would remain his dealer throughout his career, Alighiero laid out his new self-portrait under the neon lighting overhead. Made up of cement spheres, this would be entitled: *Io che prendo il sole a Torino il 19 gennaio 1969* [Me, sunbathing in Turin on 19 January 1969].

1969 would prove to be a special year, with the birth of Boetti's first child, Matteo. It was also the period when the artist began his *Viaggi Postali* series, with combinations of Afghan stamps, and sent off the last of the 1968 *Gemelli* series. Addressed to a total of fifty different friends, these works were photomontages of himself reduplicated, the two figures shown hand-in-hand and with slight differences in expression, posture and hairstyle [in one of the two versions, the hair was all fluffed up]. The chance journey through the territory of *Arte Povera* was coming to an end. Now, the Conceptual period was starting, with the artist advancing in the company of his 'double', forming the partnership Alighiero and Boetti. In the study of his Rome home in Via Giulia, Achille Bonito Oliva appears not in duplicate but in triplicate: twice in Pistoletto's life-size portraits on mirrored surfaces and a third time in the flesh, seated cross-legged in a leather chair and wearing a green jacket, blue shirt and cream-colored trousers. Smiling ironically at his own memories, he recalls: "We met in 1967, in Turin, after the presentation of a book on Prampolini; it was in a discotheque hung with Marisa Merz's metallic lianas. He was still with the *Arte Povera* group, but already a bit restive. What struck me was his openness to life, his curiosity, his combination of intensity and ability.

He was very good-looking – slim, with almond-shaped eyes – and he had an elegance that was all his own, as if it were the expression of some sort of ancient nobility. The things that drew us together were a shared interest in art, women and life – in that order. "We all had moustaches, long hair and flared trousers. And we were all mad about the Rolling Stones. We felt close to their style, to their rhythm. Alighiero loved rhythm; he used to play the drums, and in playing would go into a sort of trance. We met the following year in Amalfi, where he was exhibiting his *Shaman-Showman* at an exhibition called "*Arte povera, azioni povere*" organized by Marcello Rumma; the piece was already a reflection upon 'the double' and duplicity, the theme which delegated to others, necessarily making each piece the expression of a collective form of art. In a television interview, he would comment: "I would like to have the infinite periods of time there used to be in old-fashioned winters; to settle myself in the countryside and fill up blank sheets of paper. However, I know that after a couple of minutes I would go mad. I do not have the patience. So, I get others to do things. Because, when it comes down to it, my primary focus is on thought. For me, manual ability is a secondary matter, a detail. This is why, when I have one of my works made, I can even use the most banal of things – things like postage stamps, which everyone uses, or perfectly everyday blue biros." On the floor of the Turin gallery of Gian Enzo Sperone, who would remain his dealer throughout his career, Alighiero laid out his new self-portrait under the neon lighting overhead. Made up of cement spheres, this would be entitled: *Io che prendo il sole a Torino il 19 gennaio 1969* [Me, sunbathing in Turin on 19 January 1969]. 1969 would prove to be a special year, with the birth of Boetti's first child, Matteo. It was also the period when the artist began his *Viaggi Postali* series, with combinations of Afghan stamps, and sent off the last of the 1968 *Gemelli* series. Addressed to a total of fifty different friends, these works were photomontages of himself reduplicated, the two figures shown hand-in-hand and with slight differences in expression, posture and hairstyle [in one of the two versions, the hair was all fluffed up]. The chance journey through the territory of *Arte Povera* was coming to an end. Now, the Conceptual period was starting, with the artist advancing in the company of his 'double', forming the partnership Alighiero and Boetti. In the study of his Rome home in Via Giulia, Achille Bonito Oliva appears not in duplicate

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He was very good-looking – slim, with almond-shaped eyes – and he had an elegance that was all his own, as if it were the expression of some sort of ancient nobility. The things that drew us together were a shared interest in art, women and life – in that order.

"We all had moustaches, long hair and flared trousers. And we were all mad about the Rolling Stones. We felt close to their style, to their rhythm. Alighiero loved rhythm; he used to play the drums, and in playing would go into a sort of trance. We met the following year in Amalfi, where he was exhibiting his Shaman-Showman at an exhibition called "Arte povera, azioni povere" organized by Marcello Rumma; the piece was already a reflection upon 'the double' and duplicity, the theme which would ultimately become the core of his work. There is some film footage of him and Annemarie in swimming costumes on the beach. Bare-chested and with a handkerchief tied around his neck, he is saying that he is not interested in the materials of art but only in the process of imagination that leads to a work. You can't see the interviewer, but it is me. He also talks about the alienation of vision, about the free perception of reality.

"It was towards the end of summer and people were in a euphoric state; we used to stay in discotheques until dawn. Those were the nights during which we became friends. One night in a discothèque I remember I did my first ever striptease. He found it amusing but was also a little disconcerted by such things, which would never have happened in his native city. Alighiero had an ambivalent attitude to Turin: he liked it, but he also found it restrictive. Here, too, one can see the double in him: half Turin Calvinist, half hedonist." Restive, the artist once more set off on his travels. In Rome he had just met Mario Schifano – the 'little puma', as Goffredo Parise called him – a man who carried the Roman lack of discipline to new heights. But before fully entering into that Roman world, Alighiero would travel for a good two years, passing via Afghanistan. Matteo Boetti, his son, is now almost 40. Sporting a beard and with blue eyes that are the same almond-shape as his father's, he wears a red ring made of aluminium and one simple stone. He inherited it from Alighiero and thus, though it cost nothing, it is very precious to him, a unique reminder of Boetti. His father left on his first trip to Kabul when he was just two years old, and the whole episode has become the stuff of family legend. "He told me that he had set off by chance, heading into chance. He had just sold a work, and went to the airport without even passing by home. Having counted his money, he asked for a ticket to the most distant destination. They told him: in two hours there is a flight for Afghanistan. Some days later he rang my mother and said: 'Hi Love, I am calling you from Kabul.'"

That is almost how things went. Annemarie says: "Alighiero did not leave by chance. He wanted to go to the places associated with Giovanni Battista Boetti, his ancestor, to follow in his footsteps, to see for himself the places he had been imagining for so long. He was in Milan and it is true that he had just sold a work: he went into a travel agent's and asked if there was a flight for Afghanistan or Iraq." By coincidence, just as Annemarie is telling me about that departure in 1971, the phone rings. It is the art dealer Emilio Mazzoli in Modena, and he adds another piece of the story: "I remember that he came by my place to collect a good sum of money – about half a million lire – and he wanted it all in cash. He told me that he was then going to Milan and that from there he would try to get to Afghanistan. He wanted to set off straightaway, alone, without telling anyone. And he did." Annemarie continues: "There! I didn't remember the details Mazzoli filled in. However, he did leave from Milan without telling anyone. And he never phoned. It was after two or three days, when I was beginning to ask around in Turin to find out if anyone had news of him, that I received a telegram from Kabul. It said: I am stopping here for a bit.

"He came back a month later, bursting with joy and emotion. Beaming, he said: 'We have to go back together, we have to go and live there.' He had discovered the desert, a day-to-day existence based on next to nothing: light, tea, hashish – and immense open spaces. In six months we had already prepared for the second trip. And the next time all three of us went to Kabul. It really was a magical place, unlike any other; there were so many stars in the sky that you couldn't sleep." Matteo recalls. "I have indelible memories of those trips. The first is the light; the second is me, at seven years old, riding around Kabul on a horse. Then there is the physical beauty of the Afghans. And how little one used to eat: a handful of chickpeas, a few apricots and raisins – but it was a pittance that gave you incredible reserves of energy. The place was more magical than any fairytale. It was a combination of fire, cold and mountains. My father adored that emptiness. He felt that it was in tune with what he was doing in his work: searching out order in disorder, striving for the lost silence of things." Before contemporary history embroiled the country in its wars and bloodshed, Afghanistan was a favorite destination for many Western travelers. Salvo, a

Turin artist, says: "You would go with just 5,000 lire in your pocket, setting off by ship from Brindisi. Then you took the train to Istanbul, sleeping on the floor or up in the luggage racks. It cost nothing to live in Kabul. In the city's single hotel you could have your own room for 300 lire a night, a dormitory bed for 200 lire, or a carpet on the floor for just 100. The Afghans were very kind and discreet. There were young people of all nationalities on those trains: I remember one beautiful girl who was travelling with a white rabbit. Of course, it was an existence on a razor's edge, and there were a lot who didn't manage to pull it off." Alighiero, however, would open his own hotel. He did it with the speed he did everything, and in part to guarantee himself a good place to sleep in Kabul. But he also approached it as a piece of performance art, thinking it through and then entrusting others with carrying it out. The place was called One Hotel and occupied a small twin-story building on Chicken Street [in the central Share Nau area] which had once housed the Indonesian consulate. The rooms were clean and light-filled; needless to say, Alighiero's room would be Number 11.

It was the autumn of 1971 and Boetti had found a very bright young Afghan who could take care of everything: food, trips, travel tickets. Called Dastaghir, he adored Alighiero and was always talking about his dream of opening his own hotel. In the end, he spoke about it so much that he passed on the bug to Alighiero, who – in the manner that was typically of him – acted without saying anything in advance. One day he came back to Kabul with a large sum in cash – some 20-30,000 dollars – and called Dastaghir to propose a bargain: you find the right building and I will pay a year's rent in exchange for getting the best room in the house every time I am in Kabul. Dastaghir found the abandoned villa and took Alighiero and Annemarie to see it; there was even an enclosed garden, though the plants were withering in the heat. Dastaghir was enthusiastic, Alighiero signed and paid, and then the necessary workforce – Dastaghir's brothers, cousins, uncles and friends – appeared out of nowhere. They cleaned, rebuilt, repainted. And at the end of each day's work, they sat around smoking and saying that this would be the number one hotel in Kabul, the number one. And thus One Hotel got its name. The furnishings, beds, carpets and crockery were all bought at the bazaar. And when everything was ready, Dastaghir's entire workforce moved over to the bus station to provide arriving travelers with the address of "the best hotel in the city", complete with discount offers. On the first day there was an official opening in the garden, where the plants had come back to life. Sugared tea, fruit and fresh yogurt were served and Alighiero was the host; photographs show him sitting in a chair in the garden. Afghanistan added a new thread to Alighiero's life and work. The hotel was not the only performance it inspired: he was fascinated by the women weavers and embroiderers he saw there. Wishing to get caught up in that woof and weave, he earned that a large Bukhara carpet involved at least four people on a good three months' work. Amongst the looms, he could feel the silence of time, of time being renewed as in a ritual. And this ritual, which involved the classic five prayers a day, was as much a part of the air of the workshop as the smell of dust and of hot green tea, of hashish and Naan bread.

Afghanistan was a revelation, and Alighiero would for years visit the place at least twice every twelve months. He saw the highlands of Panshir and the Buddhas of Bamyan; he listened to the teachings of Berang, the Sufi master who expounded his own mysticism of the world, seeing Allah in all things. Alighiero also listened to the desert winds as they moulded destinies and embodied stories, just as "susami" did. And he fell in love with Caucasian weaving and embroidery.

The ancient gestures of this secret craft would produce all the tapestries and kilims in which Alighiero recounted any number of stories. His first narrative in fabric would be maps of the world, inspired initially by a black-and-white print of the planisphere bought from a Turin market stall in 1969 and then hand-colored by the artist, each nation being depicted in the colors of its flag. Hence came about the design for the first map. The women weavers and embroiderers worked to instructions on what was in effect a collective work of art, arising from a single thought that had generated a project whose execution was entrusted to the hands of others. In 1974 Alighiero would write: "For me, work on the embroidered Map achieved the highest form of beauty. For the finished work, I myself did nothing, chose nothing, in the sense that the world is as it is [I didn't draw it] and the national flags are as they are [I didn't design them]. In short, I did absolutely nothing. What emerges from the work is the concept; the rest was not a matter of choice." And even the errors generated by such autonomous procedures could be fruitful. Once, when giving instructions, Alighiero forgot to tell a new group of women weavers the color to use for the sea; he took it for granted. However, those women had never seen the sea, so they had to invent a color for it. Annemarie recalls: "Usually, the embroideries arrived in large packages, by post. I remember that that time I was opening them up on the floor when we discovered that the sea was in pink. I was horrified. Pink! And when we unrolled another carpet, the sea was all green. So what were we to do now? I was at a loss. But Alighiero was totally silent, walking around the tapestries. Then he began to smile, beaming with enthusiasm. 'You see how wonderful it is to entrust oneself to others,' he said. 'I would never have thought of doing the sea in pink, but it's perfect.'

He was really pleased." In that warm autumn of 1972, the Rome sunsets glowed pink too, with the marine pines of the Janiculum standing out ash grey against the light. Sound was provided by the roar of Mario Schifano's cars. And the beauty of Rome, the excesses of the last of the 'spectacular' painters – a man of endless words and endless nights – would introduce Alighiero to a new life. Matteo recalls. "When we left Turin for Rome it was as if we had moved to Tripoli, into the heart of the sunny Mediterranean south. Rome was another world. And Trastevere was a sort of village, with old people sitting in the sun, kids playing in the streets, babbling fountains and trattorias crammed with customers." The family's first home had windows overlooking Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, right opposite the basilica. The studio was on the second floor: three large rooms which the little Matteo used to ride around on his bicycle. Alighiero would comment "In Turin I lived like a resident. I was part of the city and the city was part of me. In Rome I was like an outsider, someone who is staying there for a time and is therefore constantly aware of where he is." His eyes kept him alert, and would provide him with the full pleasure of color. "I discovered, after the fact, that I had never used colors when I was in Turin. Perhaps it was in response to the excessive rigor of the city. But in Rome I understood the beauty of doing a lot and doing it rapidly; of branching out and making things easier for oneself..."

Rome was a veritable explosion of color. It was where the art scene was part of a scenography – be it in such galleries as Odyssia, L'Attico and La Salita or in streets that provided the setting for acts of visual poetry. And there was the mix of cinema and the high life, the inexhaustible theatre of appearances. Plinio De Martiis, owner of the gallery 'La Tartaruga', provides dazzling pencil sketches of the artists in the Rome of those years. "The most charismatic of all was Schifano. With his rather louche air and white MG sports car, he was someone who knew how to dress, how to talk... how to adopt a pose without posing. He was always with beautiful women, including those who had been with the Rolling Stones. Everyone tried to imitate him. And when he started with heavy drugs, the others followed. He used to go around with Tano Festa and Franco Angeli. They'd all hang around in Piazza dei Popoli, where they were known as 'The Masters of Sorrow' because they were always dressed in black and looked down on other people, adopting a rather bored air." The poet Nanni Balestrini says: "Apart from Guttuso – who embodied orthodox communism, uninventive realism – Rome basically contained two generations of artists. On the one hand, Perilli, Turcato, Novelli and Scialoja, who were erudite and rather cold. On the other hand, Schifano and his crowd, all driven by instinct, talent and a love of speed. Beautiful and determined, they wanted to 'make it'; frequented princesses and society women as well as rock-stars and actresses. They threw their money around – on cars, parties, restaurants... and then, of course, drugs." Achille Bonito Oliva: "In Rome, Schifano was the very icon of transgression. A lot of life still hinged around Piazza del Popolo. There were still the last remnants of La Dolce Vita, which was less deadly than it had been. Plus there was a bit cinema, a dash of Moravia and Pasolini. Alighiero hung out mainly with Goffredo Parise. In the evening he was at Rosati's, before moving on to the bars of Piazza Navona – for example, I Tre Scalini or Bar della Pace [which was just behind the piazza]. Later they would all frequent discotheques; there was an endless stream of parties and dawn would find them at the Hemingway. Alighiero was attracted by Mario as a person; in their different ways, they were both investigators of reality. Mario was interested in the 'skin' of things, Alighiero in the way things worked. And this difference would have consequences." The Venetian collector Giovanni Michelagnoli was a friend of Boetti, Schifano and Gino De Dominicis, spending many of these Roman nights with them. He recalls: "Schifano was great at the gesture; Boetti had great intuitions. They admired and respected each other. Schifano was especially clear-eyed with regard to the temptations of life and his own demons [beginning with heroin]. He loved doing nothing, and he had money to waste. He also viewed people from a certain distance – and had a particularly disabused view of the art market. He had a lot of influence over Alighiero who, as a result, would at times break with his natural Turin-style good manners, his old-world standards of behavior." However, in spite of these Roman influences, Boetti lived one his two lives as a man who was habitually clad in jacket and tie [his preference being for dark Palermo pinstripe, with purple socks and breast-pocket handkerchief]. The bills were always paid on time, his family was far from neglected and he maintained the decorum of a household that was also bourgeois. The other life had areas that are rather more opaque. There were endless nights spent in the studio well-supplied with tea and hashish; numerous journeys off into solitude. Alighiero was an artist who was capable of journeying within himself but also of losing himself in endless imaginary worlds.

Annemarie observes: "For him, day and night were subjective notions. He worked listening to Mozart and Ornette Coleman. He saw very few people, mainly young artists. He did see Schifano, but not his 'court'. He didn't like the Roman parties. And he detested exhibition openings, especially his own." In 1972 their second child, Agata, was born. This was also the year of *Mettere al mondo il mondo*, worked in biro, and of the classification of the thousand longest rivers in the world. Work on the compilation of the list involved dozens of friends and young artists and critics

– such as Alessandra Mammi. “We passed entire afternoons consulting encyclopedias and atlases, writing things down, crossing them out, correcting them. It was a sort of collective game, and the one who got the most fun out of it was Alighiero. I was so fascinated by his artistic intuitions and knowledge, by his playful, joyous view of life, that after my encounter with him I abandoned my studies of Iconology to change to Contemporary Art.”

In the meantime, Boetti was adding to the series of tapestries with the sixteenletter titles. After *Ordine e disordine* and *Alighiero e Boetti*, would come *Pensato e quadrato*, *Fuso ma non confuso*, *Avere sete di fuoco*, *Il dolce far niente*, *Immaginando tutto* and *Pisciarsi in bocca*. He searched out quotations that he could use, drawing upon the lyrical music of Sandro Penna: “Life I would like to live asleep within the sweet sound of life”, “In your life of wandering, my brother, keep fixed your eye on the doughnut and not its hole”, “That which always speaks in silence is the body.” One day [in a single day] he bought a farmhouse near Todi. Annemarie recalls: “We saw it in an estate agent’s in Rome. One hour later we set off by car; it was beautiful, standing light and airy amidst the hills. We took it. The solicitor was amazed. ‘I have another ten to show you,’ he said. But Alighiero said: Forget it, we want this one.” Matteo: “He was a great father. He did everything in half the usual time. He would think things up, invent things, collate things. He might open a book by the philosopher Bachelard on one of the four elements – earth, air, fire or water – and just one page would give him enough to work on for six months.” There was never a great amount of money at home. But there were those wonderful trips, and friends everywhere, with strange characters who turned up from time to time – for example, Gino De Dominicis in his black cape, Luigi Ontani dressed as a wizard, Francesco Clemente full of wonderful tales about his recent trip to India, and Gianni Michelagnoli, the sage. Matteo remembers: “For certain periods of time, we survived on soups and loans. However, at Christmas there was always a tree full of lights, and to Agata and me everything seemed as it should be.” The trips to Afghanistan also led to the encounter with Salman Ali. Born in Jagori in 1948, this lively and kind young man of small stature would first come to Rome in 1975, thereafter following Alighiero through all his vicissitudes: the separation from Annemarie in 1982, the move to the apartment in Via Fratelli Bandiera in the Monteverde district of Rome, then to the home in Via del Governo Vecchio and finally to the small apartment block in Via Teatro Pace, where Ali still works. While making a cup of coffee, he talks about the strange adventure that brought him from the One Hotel in Kabul to the rains of Rome, spending all those long winters with the Alighiero he describes as “the angel of my life.”

Meanwhile, Afghanistan itself had fallen victim to the Soviet invasion. An entire world disappeared, taking with it Dastaghir and the One Hotel [the doors being sealed in 1979]. In that same year Alighiero’s mother, Adelina, died in Turin. It was a time of double, indelible loss, for which the only remedy was the passage of time. The Pakistan city of Peshawar also played its part, for this place near the Afghan border attracted some of the three million refugees who were fleeing from Soviet tanks. It was here that new teams of women weavers and embroiderers set to work, each piece being signed “By Afghan People”, affirming roots and identity even in exile. In Italy, the grim years of terrorism and protest were coming to an end. Everything glittered as the public debt shot up and there was more money for everyone. New art galleries were opened and prices increased. Alighiero was indifferent to politics – Michelagnoli comments that “he certainly wasn’t left-wing, and as far as I know he never voted” – and so he remained as free and unpredictable as the gibbons he loved so much, defying gravity as he leapt through the trees taking his own individual course. True, he did drawings for the newspaper ‘Il Manifesto’, sent money to the Afghan resistance, and much admired Massud, the ‘Lion of Panshir’. However, at the same time, he also had a liking for Gianni di Michelis, a minister in Craxi’s Socialist Party who was famous for his love of the good life; as a result, he got caught up with a ‘party crowd’, perhaps being whisked off on private jets to Paris for uninhibited all-nighters that were hardly artistic in inspiration. Still, he was also capable of open anger towards another Socialist minister, Claudio Martelli, who continually delayed payment for a tapestry: one day Alighiero simply sent Salman to take it back. Some were amazed at his daring, others laughed up their sleeves. All Martelli was left with was a small 16-letter tapestry, whose title – given future legal investigations of the man – now seems prophetic: *Il Tesoro Nascosto* [The Hidden Treasure].

Within art and within life, loves came and went. The Transavanguardia had arrived; Schifano’s palette was clearly inspired by Pop Art. And Alighiero held numerous one-man shows - in Paris, New York, Milan, Berlin, Tenerife. He flew to Tokyo, where he worked on dismantling ideograms with the famed calligrapher Enomoto San. The *Tra sé e sé* works were created; his *Aeroplani* took flight, and there were the bright colors of the *Senza Titolo*. His art of lightness seemed to catch the prevailing wind, to ride upon the sea of things. There was a moment in which everything changed, when the years 1983-84 saw a nascent boom in the art market. “The true turning-point,” Matteo recalls, “was his first retrospective, in Lyons in 1986. Then the prices of his works really did begin to rise and there was a lot of money at home; the invitations for lobster suppers onboard yachts began to arrive. Before, when we visited Naples we all stayed in a small room in Lucio

Amelio's gallery. Then, at a certain point, we were all in a luxury hotel."

Alighiero's studio began to fill up with assistants: after Clemente, came Pancrazi, Tirelli and Arienti. In Peshawar, more work was produced in the "Afghan People's" workshops, which began to work on one hundred tapestries at a time. The idea was serial production of prototypes, in order to multiply a single idea, to break into the market. Giuseppe Gallo, an artist from the Roman school of San Lorenzo, recalls that "Alighiero loved money. He had this dandy-ish aspiration to work as little as possible; to create works that completed themselves, without him having to dirty his hands. Intuition was to be seized in its purest form – the form that was capable of generating the highest material correlative. And that correlative was the market price fetched, which was both the highest tribute to his work and a bulwark that protected it [...] Once he said to me: – You think that there are good galleries and bad galleries, but there are only galleries that pay and those that don't –." For Alighiero, money was part of the game – as were good restaurants, clothes and his Alfa Romeos. Annemarie: "He adored that car. Whenever he could he would drive at 200 km an hour." Matteo recalls: "When we were kids, he'd say to us: 'Hold on!' And then he was off." Achille Bonito Oliva remembers: "In town, he used to cut everyone up; he drove like a maniac, with no regard for traffic lights. With his 'Giuletta' we used to play this game of driving at top speed into Santa Maria in Trastevere, then screeching to a halt by the fountain in the square. Whilst he revved up the engine, I got out, like some sort of police officer. The kids ran off in all directions, thinking it was a drugs raid. Then they stopped, when they saw us laughing."

Friends recall how one Milanese artist, Laura Del Ponte, felt so ill because of the speed he was driving on the motorway that she made him stop, then walked off, furious. Ironically, the one time that Alighiero had a serious accident he was travelling at 30 km per hour. It happened at Vernazza, towards the end of the summer of 1982. A doctor had prescribed Valium for his anxiety attacks, but had not told him that it might make him drowsy. When driving along the curving hillside road, Alighiero fell asleep at the wheel, the car going off the road and crashing down the gradient for more than one hundred meters. Fortunately, it ran into a massive olive tree before reaching the cliffs. Trapped in the car, Alighiero fainted and was eventually pulled from the wreckage more dead than alive: he had broken his ribs, his hip and both legs. For three months he was imprisoned in plaster casts in a Roman clinic, with Salman looking after him. The stay in hospital also brought on withdrawal symptoms, and it was this difficult time that finally decided Annemarie. She had to break away, to keep her distance and keep him at his distance. It would take years before the two could re-establish contact, each by then living their own separate lives. Alighiero's solitude was a very crowded one. Giuseppe Gallo recalls: "He liked to frequent young artists, to keep his eye 'up to speed'. He was curious about everything."

The critic Laura Cherubini, who became a friend around this time, remembers: "There was a lot of euphoria around in the mid-80s. Alighiero lived with Salman in a large house. He liked to organize dinners that went on for hours and hours; his dining-table could seat thirty-three people. Salman did the cooking. Everyone went to his house, starting with Gino De Dominicis, Clemente, Aldo Mondino. But Alighiero himself didn't go out much; he liked to chat until dawn. And he was always working; in his hands he always had something he'd taken from those incredible work tables of his, which seemed to be strewn with stuff from all over the world. "Rome was full of places. He often had dinner at Il Bolognese, in Piazza del Popolo, or at Colline Emiliane. Then there was Il Moro and L'Augustea. After dinner came the nightclubs: Hemingway, Notorious, Jackie'O, Gilda, Le Stelle.. or Piazzlandia, where at four in the morning you would find Paolo Villaggio, trashed by the previous night, eating whilst surrounded by an incredible court of people." Money came and went. And there was Schifano, an epicenter of disorder. New loves also entered Alighiero's life. First, the art dealer Alessandra Bonomo, a relationship that would last for seven years and almost – but not quite – end in marriage. This was followed by another relationship, which came to an end over an embroidered cushion which should have been the seal of marriage but ended up being the mark of separation. Finally, in 1990, things took the right course, thanks to the romance of an Alfa Romeo – only this time the car was stationary, parked on the gleaming floor of a car dealer's. The other passenger in the car was Caterina Raganelli, who would be the mother of Alighiero's third child, Giordano. In a spirit of playful tenderness, the couple would actually get married four times in four years. This is how Caterina remembers that first day: "We met in April 1990, and three weeks later he asked me to marry him. I was 25 and he was 50. At the wedding I wore a red suit. I didn't know it, but it was exactly the same shade as a certain kind of Afghan fabric that Alighiero used, and which they referred to as 'Boetti Red'. Chance underlined the rightness of things." Caterina Raganelli has numerous memories of that past and speaks of them with affection. She still lives in the home she shared with Alighiero, where his studio on the first floor has become the seat of the Fondazione Boetti. The ceiling is wood, the walls are white and floor is black. There is also the very last carpet that Alighiero designed, plus a map with the seas shown in green and a photograph of One Hotel. The black bookcases and twin glass worktables are lit with small lamps, and there is one blue armchair.

In that distant spring Alighiero had just broken up with a girl who, the last time she used it, had also managed to wreck his car. To console himself for the break-up, he was looking for a new car and Felice D'Alfonso, his lawyer, had recommended the Raganelli car dealership in Via Aurelia. Alighiero phoned to make an appointment, then sent off by taxi. Caterina had just come back from London, where she had been studying for three years. It was she who had taken the appointment and who was now waiting for this new client. "I knew absolutely nothing about him.

But I did know he was late; I was rather annoyed as I waited for him by the door. I wasn't used to being kept waiting. After all, I was young, beautiful and had any number of men after me – one even had a castle in the Black Forest. In short, I was getting into a foul mood when he arrived, stepped out of the taxi and looked at me. I recognized him straightaway. He smiled at me. We were like two people who had been looking for each other. I forgot everything else. I melted. "The two of us ended up sitting in an Alfa Romeo in the center of the car showroom, with curious sales assistants buzzing about. He and I were there for more than an hour, talking and laughing, falling under each other's spell. He told me about his travels. I told him about my life in London. We left the showroom together and went to dinner. We didn't stop talking. And from that day on were never apart." Like the encounter of two halves of one whole, like a double pair blending into one. In May of that year a room at the Venice Biennale was dedicated to Alighiero's work. Caterina recalls: "In those first weeks, he sent me faxes with ideas for the Animal Frieze he was working on. Then I joined him in Venice." Laura Cherubini: "Caterina was beautiful. I remember her in a dress of green and purple tulle. She used to go around with Vanni Leopardi, the great grand-nephew of the poet, and other flamboyant figures. She and Alighiero made a joyous couple." Caterina: "We got married in September. The first time was in Rome, in the registry office. Then we left for Pakistan, where we got married a second time, in a Sufi ceremony. The third time was while we were travelling to Hindukush; it was in a small village at the foot of the Himalayas. The last time was in 1994 in church. Alighiero was already ill; he asked me to. He wanted to have one last party. I know that that service gave him two extra months of life."

The illness hit him without warning. In July he got the results of a check-up on his lungs: six, maybe eight, months. And yet life had in the meantime granted him his third child, Giordano, born in 1992. The child had Caterina's eyes. "Alighiero was really moved. His other two children were already in their 20s... He was amazed at how small Giordano was; he didn't know how to touch him. He spent hours looking at him, trying to find out who he looked like. Once he said to be: 'Well done, you've reduplicated yourself.' He was happy." The illness was a change of light, an overturned table, a mirror that had darkened. If Alighiero Boetti had been a river, then the journey from source to estuary was about to come to an end. And time that flowed by with no return was now like sand flowing out of a broken clepsydra. Days slipped through his fingers, even if the morphine made them less painful, seemed to expand them somehow. One day he said to his friend Giovan Battista Salerno: "If just one day of my course through life has been nimble and happy, how can I remember it without feeling regret?" And those regrets became anger, Caterina recalls: "He used to say to me: 'Why now?' He was furious, and devastated. He used to say: 'Now that finally I have everything, everything is to be taken away from me. Now that life is conforming to desire, desire is to be snuffed out.' He couldn't make sense of it. He was dying. He was dying. And the whole thing would happen in front of his eyes, with the same velocity as he had lived his life." That anger nurtured a sense of urgency. At the Magasin di Eiffel in Grenoble they were preparing an exhibition of his kilims. Supporting himself with a walking-stick, he moved back and forth, making a great effort to check each room, to choose the photographs for the catalogue. Giovan Battista Salerno would later write: "The ten thousand things that he had done and created were only one half of what he was still doing and creating now."

However, the detachment from life had already begun. According to Caterina, the last Self-Portrait [La Fontana] – a life-size figure in bronze, with water pouring onto an electrically-heated head and thence rising in steam – reflects an image of how he was at the time. "The face is turned downwards, immobile; there is all the sadness of farewell." Salman recalls: "Ali had always been very brave. He asked me for a chair so he could sit on the terrace and think. If I asked him if he needed anything, he always said no, he was fine."

Caterina: "There was a young Polish priest who came to see him. They became friends. I prayed a lot for him." Annemarie: "He was an atheist, but attracted by the spiritual. He considered Sufi mysticism a means of access to the mystery of existence. But I don't think he would ever have converted to either Catholicism or Islam. The devil fascinated him too." Matteo adds: "He had understood that this was the end. He used to say to me: 'This time I'll croak', using that verb. Then he would smile in that way of his, and add: 'Shit, and I've already paid for the house in Sabaudia for next summer!' It was his way of holding the tears at bay." Sometimes the illness would let up a little. Alighiero himself noted: "For some time waking up in the morning has been less painful, if not exactly jolly." On one of those last days of respite, he used his energy to say farewell to Mario Schifano. When he called him on the phone, Schifano told him that he couldn't go to see

him because he never went out. Alighiero replied: "So I'll come to you." It was his act of homage to the painter he had loved more than any other.. and it was also his farewell. Young artists and assistants would pass by for a cup of tea and a chat. Michelagnoli also visited him: "Unfortunately, it was a time for taking stock. On one of those last visits, he said to me. 'What can you expect critics to know about me... Do you know where my embroideries come from? From my mother, who used to make wedding outfits for girls in Turin. And do you know where she kept the attorns for that embroidery? In old envelopes. Embroidery, envelopes, stamps...

It all comes from there.'" Matteo: "One morning, while we were chatting, they called me from the gallery where I was working at the time. 'I have to go,' I said. 'I'll be there and back in no time.' But one hour later he went into a coma, and that hasty farewell turned out o be our last leave-taking. For years I thought about the last farewell we never had, about that sudden interruption in which we didn't really say anything to each other. Then I understood that that was how it should have been. It had a kind of simplicity that he would have appreciated. It was a very Boetti-esque farewell." Art, love, numbers and coincidences had all played a part in his life. And in that life, he always found space for playful exploration of different thoughts and alphabets. Like a river, he travelled endlessly, except that he flowed against the current – exploring the rules of the game, searching out the game itself. From Afghanistan to his studio, he seemed capable of breaking days in half in order to double them. Work tables and carpets, linen, wool and opium, giraffes and scissors, airplanes, tapestries and toys, tall skies and biros, hurricanes and maps, cheetahs and ink – these were the stuff of an art that could set thoughts within squares of words, could bring the world into the world. Alighiero was someone who sought the fire and water in the heart of things, who could turn a labyrinth into its solution. He also discovered that writing with the 'wrong' hand was tantamount to drawing. He explored the magic of mirrors and the three degrees of knowledge as described in Sufism. He declared himself to be a 'seer', Alì Ghiero, a wandering Bedouin camped alongside the Pantheon.

Alighiero Boetti was kind, gentle and ironic. He always advised lightness of touch, warning his friends against taking on the rich, ponderous qualities of marsala [Non marsalarti]. But he was also fragile, and let himself be taken in by drugs. However, against his final illness he showed great strength. An elegant man, he always maintained those gestures of elegance, whether dressed in shirt and tie or in a tunic. He was someone who could adapt to his surroundings, and he loved the sea. The sad volcanoes of Guatemala moved him, and the wind was for him "a moment of grace". As for art, he described it as "daring to do something, to look at the world upside down." He believed in the unintentional gesture. Around mid-afternoon used to make himself an egg yolk mixed with some sugar and warm milk, and on that scant food he could work until dawn. Or he might relax, swinging in a hammock. Helping numerous young artists, he was generous with both his time and his works; even at his own wedding, he was the one who gave rather than received gifts. He played upon all five senses [referring to thought as the sixth]; and, like all real travelers, he knew how to travel light, how to get lost and then find his way back. Right up to the end, he talked about life, about all the time that would never return. He even forecast the date of his own death, optimistically choosing 11 July 2023. But he would die on 24 April 1994.

Two days after Alighiero Boetti's death, his funeral was held in Chiesa Nuova in Corso Vittoria, Rome. The church was full of friends and the companions of so many travels; there were also his children, his ex-girlfriends, his ex-wife and his wife. All of them sad, even if they knew that Alighiero had not really left them. Behind him, he had left an entire constellation of colors and numbers, of tapestries and thoughts, of ideas and different-colored skies. He had once said that he would like his ashes to be scattered over the blue waters of the seven lakes of Afghanistan. However, that second homeland of his has yet to enjoy the peace that will make it ossible to respect that wish. For the moment, his final journey has come to an end in Todi, leaving the conclusion of his outstanding adventure outstanding. Alighiero and Boetti may be said to have lived twice over: it was only one half of that double pair who died.

1940-1959

Alighiero Boetti was born in Turin on 16 December, the son of Corrado Boetti, a lawyer, and Adelina Marchisio, a promising violinist. With his elder brother, Gualtiero, he would spend his childhood and adolescence in Turin, showing little interest in his school studies. However, he was much interested in the exotic qualities that he recognised in the Moroccan watercolours of Paul Klee, and was intrigued by the deeds of his ancestor Giovan Battista Boetti (1743-94), a Dominican missionary who, in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Mosul (present-day Iraq) .

1960-1966

He walked out on University and his Economy studies and approached art as a self-taught artist, discovering - within the Turin Art Galleries, the informal *tachisme* of Wols' watercolours (1960); and the American expressionism of Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko and Cy Twombly (1961), Lucio Fontana's *spazialismo*, the Henri Michaux's 'mescaline' drawings (1962), the Futurist universe as expressed in the work of Giacomo Balla (1963). On one of his trips to Vallauris (Provence) in 1962 he met Anne-Marie Sauzeau and married her in 1964. The couple would then have two children: Matteo (1969) and Agata (1972).

He then spent a long period in Paris, where – at the Johnny Friedländer studio – he would learn engraving techniques; he would also discover the lyrical abstractionism of Nicolas de Staël, Jean Dubuffet's dramatic use of the very materials of art, and encounter the universal art to be found in André Malraux's Musée Imaginaire. At the same time Boetti was reading the works of the sinologist Marcel Granet aimed to undermine the dualistic dichotomy between empiricism and rationalism. Back to Turin, he would produce a series of India ink drawings, depicting the instruments used to record or reproduce reality, which he soon abandoned in favour of works on three-dimensional objects and non-pictorial industrial resources.

1967-1968

In his first one-man show – at Christian Stein Gallery in Turin – Boetti exhibited a series of works based on the notion of tautology or made by using everyday objects in such a way that the artist's intervention both underlined and subverted their function. At the same time, he explored the artistic potential of Polaroid photography. His interest in the close relation between an object and its image, in the value of materials as such –irrespective of the symbolic or cultural references with which objects might be imbued – led the critic Germano Celant to include Boetti within the Arte Povera movement.

1969-1970

Boetti soon felt the need to move beyond this Arte Povera phase, striving for an art that would focus on the potential of various languages of communication, in line with the new art movements of Conceptualism and the Land Art, both embodied the disappearance of the 'work of art' as an identifiable object. In Boetti's work, this led to a return to the two-dimensions of the sheet of paper and resort to the elementary technique of tracing. He also started a new line of research by producing the *Lavori postali* series. In addition, his interest in alchemy and Pythagorean mathematics would later lead him to explore the illusionary nature of all rationalistic-scientific knowledge of the world and inspired a period of study and information-gathering in 1970 that would culminate in 1974 with the compilation (together with Anne-Marie Sauzeau) of *Classifying the Thousand Longest Rivers in the World*, published in 1977.

Around the same time, he engaged himself with a series of reflections upon the physical dimension of the human body and the relation between internal and external time which culminated in a series of *performance*.

1971-1977

In 1971 he discovered Afghanistan and together with Gholam Dastaghir would later open a hotel – One Hotel – in Kabul. He would start commissioning brightly-coloured tapestries and carpets representing the world (*Maps*) from the local female weavers. This marked the beginning of an artistic process in which there was a marked temporal gap between the conception the idea and its execution .

Having moved to Rome, his artistic research was now extending but was still predicated on the delegation of actual execution of works to others. This can be seen, for example, in the large *Biro* panels, where the artist intervened solely in the text, transforming writing into a sort of cryptographic rebus. Between 1974 and 1976 he travelled to Guatemala, Ethiopia and Sudan, stopping in New York in 1975. Fascinated by the laws governing numerical progressions and combinations, by the potential for acceleration implicit in procedures of multiplication, he created the “mathematical works” between 1975 and 1977 bringing together graphic signs of contrasting colours and works such as *Ordine e disordine* (1973), in which there was a linguistic play upon similar words of very different meanings.

1978-1989

1978 was the year of the show curated by Jean Christof Ammann at the Basle Kunsthalle, which brought together historic pieces by Boetti with more recent works that had been inspired by political and cultural events covered in the newspapers. The artist’s interest in the media of mass communication would, in 1980, lead to the beginning of a collaboration with the Rome newspaper *Il Manifesto*, for which Boetti would produce one drawing a day for an entire year; this project was the culmination of the idea of a work of art for mass exploitation which Boetti had first worked on in his 1968 postcards of *Twins*. In 1980s his works would begin to contain dense groupings of letters or entire stories written with the left hand . At the same time there was a use of jets of bright colour, of cut-out paper shapes and of impressions left by stamps and seals (objects which the artist had collected during his travels around the world).

Thanks to his collaboration with the female weavers of Afghanistan, he would start a new cycle of works entitled *Tutto*, which brought together myriads of multicoloured images of the most diverse objects. Boetti would then make two trips to Japan in 1985, becoming interested in *shodo* (the art of Japanese calligraphy) and collaborating with the master calligrapher Enomoto San in Tokyo. In 1989 Boetti would design the stage sets and costumes for Vita Accardi’s *Hanjo* at the Rome Teatro in Trastevere (the piece was drawn from the *Modern Noh Plays* by Yukio Mishima, a Japanese author and important Kabuki playwright).

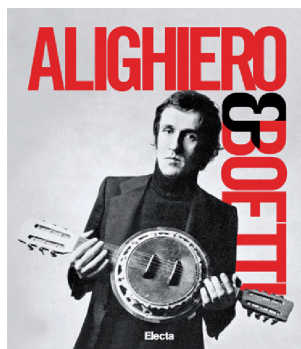
1990-1994

At the 44th Venice Biennale Boetti wins the Special Jury Prize, an entire room being dedicated to his work. He would exhibit large-sized works on paper, which represent a development upon the research that had begun in the 1980s with the *Tutto* pieces and the *Extra-strong* series of drawings. In the same year, Boetti married Caterina Raganelli, who would bear him a son – Giordano – in 1992. Alongside small scale works produced in person, the artist would also work large-scale ‘choral’ works, which were created for his solo exhibition at the Magasin de Grenoble in 1993. These included the 50 kilims on the theme of *Alternando da uno a cento e viceversa*, which were produced by twenty weavers working to cartoons produced by students at thirty different French art schools, who themselves worked to indications provided by the artist. Similarly there was the *Oeuvre postale*, which was carried out with the collaboration of the Paris Musée de la Poste. In 1993 Boetti would stay at Zéprégüé on the Ivory Coast, the guest of the local artist Frédéric Bruly Bouabré. The two men were to work together on a double show intended for 1994 at the DIA Center for the Arts in New York. At the same time Boetti also finished the cast for a sculpture based on an idea of twenty years earlier; this *Self-Portrait* would be cast in bronze at the Fonderia Artistica Battaglia in Milan in 1993. In the summer of that same year, however, Boetti would be diagnosed with cancer. He died in Rome on 24 April 2004.



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Contents

p. 11

BRINGING THE WORLD INTO ART
HOW TO DREAM AND PHILOSOPHIZE
ON THE WORK OF A. & B.

Achille Bonito Oliva

p. 31

DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST

Sergio Givone

p. 43

A FUGUE FOR ALIGHIERO BOETTI

Francesco Clemente and Louise Neri

p. 57

A CARPET FOR OLD CHILDREN

Giovan Battista Salerno

p. 61

THE NEVER-ENDING VOYAGE
OF ALI-GHIERO AND BOETTI

Caterina Boetti

p. 67

DOCUMENTING FOR "BRINGING THE
WORLD INTO ART"

Annemarie Sauzeau

p. 71

CATALOGUE

p. 163

WRITINGS, INTERVIEWS,
TESTIMONIES

by Alighiero & Boetti

p. 221

ADVENTUROUS LIFE
OF ALIGHIERO BOETTI

Pino Corrias

p. 247

CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY. A
SELECTION

p. 285

BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY

Francesca Franco

p. 301

APPENDIX