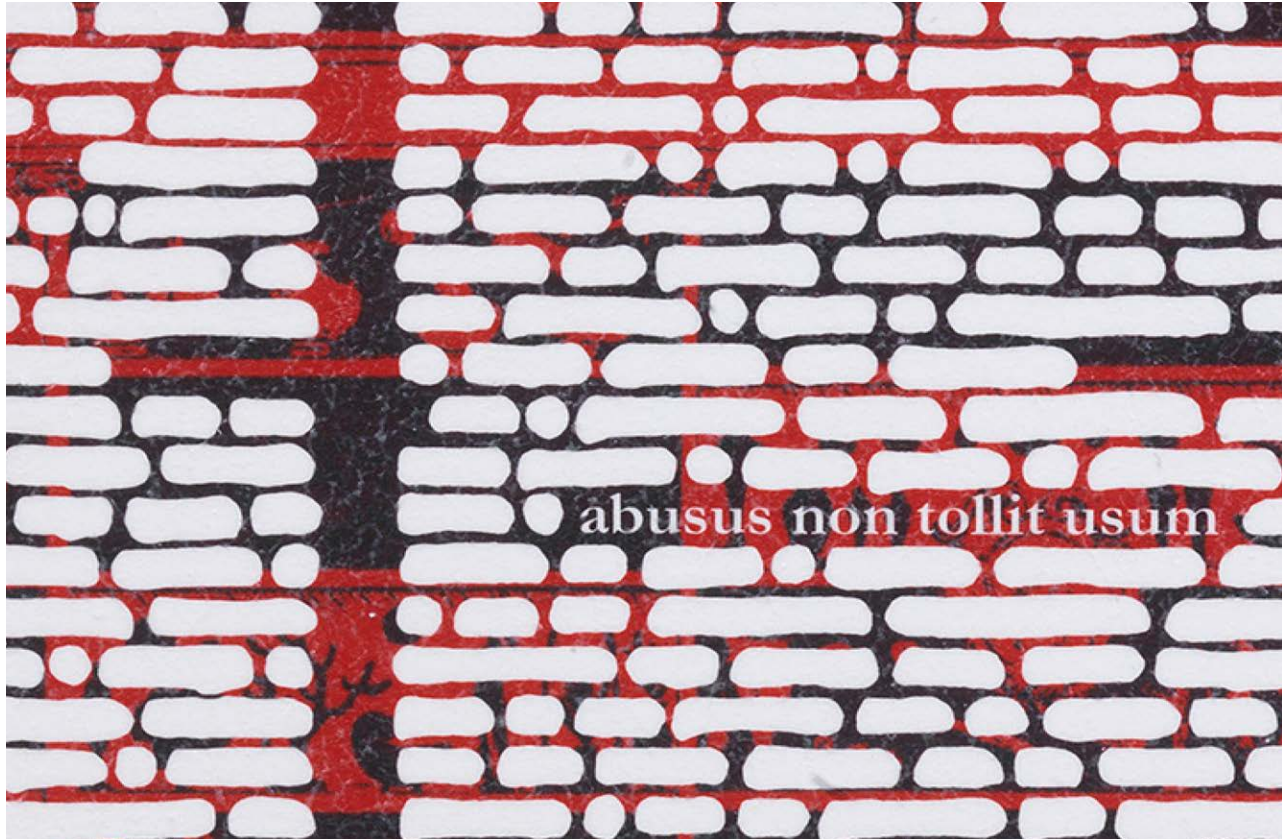


CARDI GALLERY



Emilio Isgrò, *Non tollit*, 2013, Mixed media on paper, 50 x 63 x 3 cm (19 3/4 x 24 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)

EMILIO ISGRÒ

February 1-March 19, 2022
22 Grafton Street, London W1S 4EX

Cardi Gallery is proud to present its first solo show dedicated to Italian artist Emilio Isgrò, in an intimate display occupying the first floor of its Mayfair townhouse.

Born in 1937 in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, Isgrò lives and works in Milan, where he moved in 1956 after a stint as an actor in Sicily. With a background in classical studies and no formal artistic training, the Sicilian artist approached the visual arts after years spent writing poetry and news reports. Through a practice focused on the encounter between word and image, this pioneering artist shook and profoundly reshaped visual language in post-war Italy.

In the early 1960s, his experience as a journalist at *Il Gazzettino* spilt over into his first artworks, “*Titoli di Giornale*” (Newspaper Headlines), 1962–64, visual commentaries on the media treatment of information that highlighted the deceptive relationship between truth and falsehood. He incorporated advertising in 1964 and began intervening through a radical gesture, that of erasure or deletion (*‘cancellatura’* in Italian). Born out of observing a heavily corrected draft a colleague was editing for publication, this simple action soon became his signature. By 1966, Isgrò had theorised a personal form of visual poetry where word and image coexist to generate an organic aesthetic manifestation.

Erasing printed notation with thick marks, leaving only one word or fragments legible, Isgrò intervenes on language, be it words on books, newspapers or historical documents, musical scores, or maps. In doing so, he dramatically alters the horizon of the visible, highlighting and bringing to the fore what is not erased. What may be deemed destructive is instead revelatory, offering new readings through a gesture capable of reframing and affirming reality. It is a gesture that in subverting codes of communication challenges the very structures of power that have infiltrated and shaped them. The artist’s quest for the essential exposes how the overabundance of words - as much as of images - makes people blind, desensitised to meaning. To Isgrò, this is a philosophical and anthropological issue affecting us all: his act of destruction of the word sets the stage for the reconstruction of being human.

While the results of these erasures are pictorial, these works are not paintings. Instead, they are constructions of metaphors, jousting historical and contemporary icons, solidifying them into a decontextualised mythology that speaks of cultural universalism. The works included in this exhibition, produced between 2010 and 2018, present erasures on either physical books or pages in different languages and cultural ages. Italian classics such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, with a *cantica* from *Heaven* focussing on light, truth, and the pursuit of knowledge, and Manzoni’s historical essay *Storia della Colonna Infame*, are displayed alongside pages from legal codexes in Latin and Turkish.

BIO

Artist, poet, dramaturge and director, Emilio Isgrò is one of the pioneers of the post-war artistic language.

Born in 1937 in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, he lives and works in Milan, where he moved in 1956 after a stint as an actor in Sicily. With a background in classical studies and no formal artistic training, Isgrò approached the visual arts after years of practice as a writer working with poetry and news reporting.

Famous for his radical gesture of erasure – *cancellatura* in Italian – he recalls how this signature of his was born out of observing a heavily corrected draft by *Il Gazzettino*’s colleague Giovanni Comisso that he was editing for publication.

“I am Emilio Isgrò, and I can do only one thing: erase what is superfluous.” His gestures are not destructive; instead, they are revelatory as they open up a text to new readings. His quest for the essential alongside removing the superfluous exposes how the overabundance of words – as much as images – makes people blind, desensitised to the meaning of words.

Another crucial motif in Isgrò's practice is the duality between humanity and nature, investigated incorporating in many of his works delicate insects: swarms of bees to symbolise culture, ants reminding us of our fragility. Furthermore, the artist works extensively with maps; toponomastics – the names people assign to places – is erased to balance nature's anthropisation and allow the land to exist beyond the confines of geography.

His artworks were featured in some of the most important exhibition worldwide, such as "The Artist and the Book in Twentieth-Century Italy" presented in 1992- 1993 at the MoMA, New York and in 1994 at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. In June 2013 he held a solo show at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Rome and from June to September 2016 a major retrospective was held in multiple locations in Milan as a tribute to him.

Ben's works are included in the world's largest private and public collections, including MoMA in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna, the MUHKA in Antwerp, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Solothurn Museum in Switzerland, Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain in Nice, M. A.C. Marseille, M.A.C. Lyon.

#Emilio Isgrò

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