

# BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Alighiero Boetti, *Alternando da uno a Cento e Viceversa*, 1977-1978, embroidery, 126 x 126 cm. (49 5/8 x 49 5/8 in.)

## Alighiero Boetti

### Embroideries Including Mappas, Tuttos and a Rug

28 FEBRUARY – 19 APRIL 2019

Ben Brown Fine Arts is pleased to announce *Alighiero Boetti: Embroideries Including Mappas, Tuttos and a Rug*, an extensive survey of embroideries by Alighiero Boetti, one of the most important and influential Italian artists of the twentieth century.

Boetti used simple and often industrial materials, concentrating more on the creative conception of the work and leaving its execution to others. Between 1971 and 1979, Boetti travelled extensively to Afghanistan to work with Afghan artisans in Kabul on a series of projects, producing numerous embroideries that would become some of his most iconic works. The process of working with local craftspeople allowed Boetti to address several principal issues within his practice, namely collaboration, material, and time. This collaboration also enabled Boetti to integrate Eastern culture and its tradition in his works (often represented by Farsi writing) and hence, bridging West and East. Boetti's *arazzi* are some of his most widely known works and highlight his love of games and wordplay; consisting of coloured letters embroidered in grids on canvases of varying sizes, the letters can be read in a sequence

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of arrangements to reveal short phrases in Italian, such as *Fuso Ma Non Confuso* (1988) ('stoned but not confused'), *Tra l'Incudine e il Martello*, (c. 1988) ('between the anvil and the hammer'), *Piegare e Spiegare* (c. 1990) ('to fold and to explain'), as well as a myriad of other truisms and riddles.

The *Mappa* are amongst Boetti's most important works within the embroideries and were first executed in 1971. Like the *arazzi*, Boetti outsourced the embroidering to Afghan weaving families, who worked from designs provided by the artist. Subsequently, Boetti's *Mappa* are deeply rooted in a local context, whilst suggesting the world in its entirety. At the time of the design of each *Mappa*, Boetti chronicled the then current geo-political situation of the world, as revolutions in Africa, collapse in the Soviet Union and fragmentation in the former Yugoslavia came and went. However, because the lengthy process of embroidering a *Mappa* could take up to two years, each individual work would gain a character of transition because the world had changed since its original design. These shifting boundaries and perpetual changes appealed to Boetti's fascination with order and disorder, system and chaos – the two poles around which his artistic output revolved.

While in Boetti's *mappa* and *arazzi*, time is recorded by the political representation of the maps or the dates that are part of the inscription within the work, in his *Tuttos*, time is conveyed through the endless layering of symbols and motifs. *Tutto* means 'all' or 'everything', and Boetti went on to fill these embroideries with hundreds of clustered, crowded images – everything from airplanes and lounging sphynx to embroidered alpine skiers and sewing machines. These works represented Boetti's attempt to measure and quantify the scale of his world in its entirety.

Boetti's series of *tappeti*, or rugs, are the last series of works the artist completed before his death in April 1994. Though Boetti had initially planned to make 100 wool and cotton carpets like *Senza Titolo* (1994), ultimately only eleven were realised, all unique colour variations and with different images and text throughout. Traditional iconographies from throughout Boetti's artistic production can be found throughout these rugs, as well as many objects belonging to his daily life: the violin case of his mother, a toy of his son Giordano and other items of his house and his studio and are iconographic representations of his life and work.

## ABOUT ALIGHIERO BOETTI

Alighiero Boetti was born in Turin in 1940 and lived and worked in Rome, where he died in 1994. From 1968, he added an 'e' (Italian for 'and') between his first name and surname creating a double character which he used throughout his career. Boetti's affiliation with the *Arte Povera* movement was brief, and by the 1970s, he stood apart from the collective movements of those times. He travelled to Afghanistan for the first time in 1971 and visited the country regularly until 1979 when the Russian Army invaded. Boetti is represented in numerous important public collections worldwide. Notable solo exhibitions have taken place at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, Grenoble; Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles; and the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York. A major retrospective recently took place at the Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Tate Modern, London; and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

## FOR FURTHER PRESS INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Sidonie Jebesen

T. +44 (0)20 7734 8888

E. [sidonie@benbrownfinearts.com](mailto:sidonie@benbrownfinearts.com)

Ben Brown Fine Arts

12 Brook's Mews, London W1K 4DG

[www.benbrownfinearts.com](http://www.benbrownfinearts.com)