

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Alighiero Boetti, *ABEEGHIILOORTT*, 1973, ballpoint pen on paper laid down on canvas, 69.1 x 99 cm. (27 1/4 x 39 in.)

ALIGHIERO E BOETTI *ONONIMO*

Ben Brown Fine Arts

201 The Factory, 1 Yip Fat Street, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong

6 November 2025 - 14 February 2026

Private View: 11:00 - 7:00 Saturday 22 November

Ben Brown Fine Arts Hong Kong is delighted to present **Alighiero e Boetti: *Ononimo***, an exhibition exploring the artist's enduring fascination with systems, collaboration, and variation. Bringing together works from Boetti's celebrated *Biro* and *Aerei* series, the exhibition traces his investigation into how order and repetition give rise to difference, and how meaning emerges through collective labour, time, and chance.

The exhibition's title, *Ononimo* – borrowed from Boetti's 1973 work – derives from a neologism he coined by merging the Italian *anonimo* (anonymous) and *omonimo* (homonymous). First written in blue biro in 1971 as a self-reflexive expression, it reflects Boetti's preoccupation with duality and the splitting of identity, a principle he formalised that same year by inserting an "and" between his names to become "Alighiero e Boetti."

In 1972, as he would later do with the embroidered *Arazzi*, Boetti devised a system of delegation, instructing assistants in Rome to fill sheets of paper with dense fields of biro ink leaving only cryptic letters and symbols exposed. The origins of these works lie in his earlier experiments in repetitive mark-making, such as the now-lost *La Luna* (1968). From these gestures of rote drawing emerged the *Biro* series: vast compositions governed by codes, alphabets, and linguistic puzzles.

Each *Biro* drawing requires the viewer to uncover a hidden word or phrase governed by its own internal logic. Some spell out sentences through alphabets and commas read across or down the surface; others form anagrams to be mentally reconstructed, recalling a child learning to sound out words. At their core, the *Biro* works are meditations on repetition and variation. Each follows a rule – filling every square with ink, stroke by stroke – yet because no two hands move alike, no two marks are identical. The surface builds through repetition, but it is difference that accumulates: in density, rhythm, and time. Boetti designed the systems but entrusted their execution to others, whose unique gestures introduced individuality. Meaning, for Boetti, arose not from fixed identities but from relationships – between letters, colours, and the people who enacted them.

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While the *Biro* drawings articulate this logic through language and code, the *Aerei* series translates it into image and motion. In both, Boetti devised frameworks that others would realise, allowing individuality to emerge within constraint. Whether depicting a swarm of aircraft or exploring the hidden geometries of language, he sought to visualise systems of connection – between people, between signs, between the seen and the unseen.

In 1977, Boetti collaborated with architect Guido Fuga to produce a triptych of aeroplanes suspended in flight against an infinite sky – passenger jets, fighter planes, cargo aircraft, Concordes, and propeller-driven models. Executed through a process combining photographic templates, watercolour, and biro, the *Aerei* works are characterised by a permutational and disorienting structure, where chaos and order collide within a system that is paradoxically rational and classified.

Among the works in the exhibition, *Ononimo* (1973) stands as the largest and most ambitious *Biro*. Composed of eleven panels, only five works of this scale exist, one of which resides in the Municipal Museum of Art in Toyota, Japan. The title offers a self-portrait of distributed authorship – what Mirella Sauzeau called a “plural feast of the divided self.” The number eleven, Boetti’s favourite, doubles the unit “1”, mirroring his twinned identity as Alighiero e Boetti.

Aerei (1978–79), executed in black biro, extends this logic of multiplicity as Boetti shifted from linguistic to pictorial structures. Against a dazzling field of ink applied by assistants, white planes soar in sharp relief, the irregularities of the medium lending the surface a living pulse.

Il dolce farniente (1975) unfolds across four panels, a constellation of commas scattered across a black field, each corresponding to a letter in an alphabetic key running down the side. When read in sequence, they spell out the work’s title. Once part of sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro’s collection, the piece embodies Boetti’s belief that the *Biro* drawings were about “giving time to time” – the time taken to make them, and the time required for their slow deciphering by the viewer. In *Insicuro noncurante* (1983), a radiant red surface conceals a phrase pairing structurally similar but conceptually opposed words. Here, Boetti explores the distance between what is seen and what is meant, what is written and what is felt.

Playful, lucid, and conceptually resonant, the works in *Ononimo* move between intellect and emotion, order and freedom. They remind us that even the most exact systems cannot contain the vitality of human gesture. Structured yet tremulous with life, they affirm Boetti’s conviction that within repetition lies infinite variation – and that in every difference, the world remakes itself anew.

ABOUT ALIGHIERO BOETTI

Born in Turin in 1940, Alighiero Boetti spent much of his life in Rome until his death in 1994, leaving behind a legacy of artistic innovation unparalleled in Western post-war contemporary art. Boetti participated in the Venice Biennale several times and was the subject of a posthumous tribute at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001. Notable solo exhibitions have taken place at the Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble, Grenoble; Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Los Angeles; the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. Major recent retrospective *Game Plan* has taken place at the Museo Nacional de Arte Centro Reina Sofía, Madrid; Tate Modern, London; and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, in 2012. Boetti is represented in numerous important public collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Museo d’Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMBo), Bologna; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

ABOUT BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

Ben Brown Fine Arts is a leading international gallery specialising in post-war and contemporary art, with locations in London, Hong Kong, and New York. Founded in 2004 in Mayfair, London, it has become a distinguished presence in both primary and secondary art markets, representing an outstanding roster of contemporary artists like Tony Bevan, Candida Höfer, Vik Muniz, Yoan Capote, Gavin Turk, José Parlá, and Ena Swansea. Alongside contemporary art, the gallery is renowned for exhibitions of post-war masters, including Alighiero Boetti, Frank Auerbach, and Alexander Calder. Expanding its global presence, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened a gallery in Hong Kong in 2009, followed by a seasonal space in Palm Beach in 2021, and most recently, a gallery in New York in 2024. Notable recent exhibitions include *Planète Lalande*, which coincided with the 60th Venice Biennale and *Calder: Extreme Cantilever* (London, 2024). Ben Brown Fine Arts is a regular participant in major international art fairs, including Art Basel (Basel, Miami Beach, and Hong Kong), the Armory Show (New York), Frieze Masters, TEFAF (Maastricht and New York), miart (Milan) and Art Mumbai.

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