

VULNERARE

a film by Sergio Mario Illuminato



FILM OVERVIEW

Title: Vulnerare

Director: Sergio Mario Illuminato

Genre: Experimental video - Video art

Duration: 13'30"

Format: 1.77:1

Year: 2024

Country: Italy

TAGLINE

Why enter an abandoned 19th-century Italian prison? What treasure is there to discover? There might be something worth saving. Something that speaks to you. To your desires.

LOGLINE

In an abandoned 19th-century papal prison, a group of contemporary artists explores the powerful connection between human vulnerability and creative force through an innovative form of "creative speleology."

SYNOPSIS

Set in a former papal prison built in 1875 during the three days of mourning for Giuseppe Garibaldi, VULNERARE follows an "Urbex Squad" of contemporary artists who inhabit this abandoned space before its demolition. Over the course of six months, painters, photographers, filmmakers, dancers, and musicians practice a form of creative archaeology, unearthing "Communicating Artistic Organisms" that reveal the intimate relationship between human vulnerability and creative force that exists within us all. This cinematic exploration transforms a place once filled with suffering into a contemporary cathedral of vulnerability, where art becomes the most powerful manifestation of human fragility and resilience.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"In response to the dramatic current situation, I felt the need to react creatively, escaping from the anesthetic daily spaces that relegate art to the margins. I attempted to 'bring the world into the world,' as artist Alighiero Boetti stated.

This is a work to rehabilitate the 'contemporary cathedrals of vulnerability'... and other places and people in states of severe marginalization. In the heart of this former Papal Prison, the stone walls worn by history and the bars bear witness to a past of confinement and isolation. Today, these same walls serve as a canvas to explore a theme as universal as it is intimate: human vulnerability."

ARTISTIC CONCEPT

The Communicating Artistic Organisms (CAO)

Central to the film are the "Communicating Artistic Organisms" - artistic devices far from conventional artworks. They present themselves as a continuously evolving "cosmic-tissue-weave" composed of metallic and organic pigments that constantly change through chemical reactions, fermentations, and chromatic alterations.

These organisms act as pure flashes of color, integrating with black and white environments, allowing the worlds of painting and reality to communicate deep interior impulses.

Visual Language

The film employs a carefully constructed visual progression:

- **Black and white:** Symbolizes the past
- **Yellow-orange tones:** Represent transition
- **Explosion of ultramarine blue:** Culminates in the prison courtyard with writings and sky

This chromatic journey reflects a thoughtful choice between cold and warm tones to accentuate the drama of high-saturation filming.

MAIN CHARACTERS

The Location

The former Papal Prison of Velletri becomes a character itself, with its deteriorated corridors, cells marked by prisoners' inscriptions, and dusty legal files abandoned for decades.

The Urbex Squad

Contemporary artists practicing creative speleology:

- Painters
- Photographers
- Filmmakers
- Dancers
- Musicians

The Communicating Artistic Organisms

Artistic devices that serve as guardians of the idea that art is an intrinsic part of life, constantly evolving through chemical and organic processes.

CAST AND CREW

Written, Directed and Edited by: Sergio Mario Illuminato

Featuring:

- Patrizia Cavola
- Camilla Perugini
- Nicholas Baffoni
- Sergio Mario Illuminato

Director of Photography: Federico Marchi, Roberto Biagiotti

Location and Art Direction: Rosa Maria Zito

Choreography: Patrizia Cavola, Ivan Truol

Music: Andrea Moscianese

Sound Design: Davide Palmiotto

Post-Production: Pyramid Factory

Conforming: Elena Becchetti

Colorist: Alessandro Ammendola

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Format: Digital

Aspect Ratio: 1.77:1 (16:9)

Duration: 13 minutes and 30 seconds

Audio: 5.1 Surround

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Papal Prison of Velletri (1875-2023)

The former Papal Prison of Velletri was built in 1875, during the three days of mourning declared for Giuseppe Garibaldi, national hero and honorary citizen. After two centuries of operation, the prison was decommissioned and the last inmates transferred to a modern penitentiary facility.

Abandoned for over 30 years, shortly before demolition, the building became home to this group of artists as a final testimony to its historical significance.

Key Historical Facts:

- **Built:** 1875 during the mourning period for Garibaldi
- **Decommissioned:** 1991 with the opening of the new maximum-security prison
- **Abandoned:** Over 30 years
- **Acquired by the Municipality of Velletri:** 2015 for €1.3 million
- **Current Status:** Scheduled for demolition/transformation

THEMES

Vulnerability and Creativity

The film explores how human vulnerability can be transformed into creative energy, suggesting that our wounds and fragilities are not weaknesses but sources of artistic power.

Memory and Transformation

The prison serves as a metaphor for how spaces of suffering can be transformed into places of creation and rebirth.

Art as Resistance

The artistic intervention becomes an act of resistance against the erasure of memory and the commodification of historical spaces.

Time and Space

The film reflects on how we inhabit time and space, both as limitations and as possibilities for human expression.

VISUAL STYLE

Cinematography

- Handheld shots that create intimacy with the space
- Natural lighting that emphasizes the atmospheric qualities of the location
- High contrast between decaying architecture and vibrant artistic interventions
- Fluid camera movements that follow the artists' exploration of space

Color Palette

- Monochromatic sequences representing the past
- Warm earth tones for transitional moments
- Explosions of vivid color when the Communicating Artistic Organisms appear
- Blue sky finale symbolizing liberation and hope

CRITICAL RECEPTION

In-Depth Critical Analysis

Prof. Giulio Casini, psychologist of art, cinema and dance: "Time and space are the realms in which life unfolds - at once possibility and constraint. We have always sought - or imagined - a way to escape being confined to this assigned space, this limited time." Casini analyzes the alchemical dimension of the work: "This is exactly what Sergio Mario Illuminato enacts in VULNERARE: within the conquered space of the work, he performs an alchemical transformation using the material world - stones, colors, plants, objects, and above all, fire. Through the Opus Rubedo, the 'Work of Red,' he achieves the ideal goal of alchemy." The professor highlights how "the final image of the film is a square courtyard - a frame - of a prison. Space and limit for those who, in the present of a distant past, inhabited it during the single hour when they were allowed to try to give their lives again the space of sky. And it is under this sky, reconquered for our gaze, that our vulnerability, our wounds, become a testimony of possible life - just as the words on the wall at the end of the film declare: 'Vulnerable, therefore alive. Art is loving reality.'"

Bruno Marino, media historian: "There are three levels of representation that interweave in Vulnerare, levels that in their unfolding generate as many more, evoking suggestions and emotions in the viewer's mind. The first level concerns the location, a specific abandoned prison, although the setting suggests almost a cross-genre audiovisual evocation of disused and crumbling spaces that evoke a more or less recent past pregnant with more or less painful memories." Marino emphasizes how "dance becomes, in some cases, a means to reclaim these sites, symbolically restoring life to them," while the Communicating Artistic Organisms "acquire new meanings thanks to the space they inhabit perfectly, almost camouflaging themselves." Marino's analysis highlights how "Vulnerare can be seen as a singular installation. In this sense, Illuminato's presence within one of the courtyards seems to complete the circle. The artist's silhouette seen from above fixes on a phrase written by someone on the wall: 'Vulnerable therefore alive. Art is loving reality.' Vulnerability means weakness since man can be a victim of others, but it is also his strength, because he is aware of being alive even in pain."

Sergio Battista, film critic and journalist: "Sergio Mario Illuminato's directorial debut, VULNERARE, lasts just over 13 minutes but is loaded with layers of meaning that arise primarily from observation of the matter itself. Shot inside the former pontifical prison of Velletri - built in 1860 and decommissioned in 1991, now awaiting reconversion - the film develops as a sequence of images, in color and in evocative black and white, that evoke the past." Battista emphasizes the tactile aspect of the work: "Accompanied by a jagged and harsh soundtrack composed by Andrea Moscianese, which gives the material imagery both depth and necessary hardness, the film provokes a sensation that goes beyond the visual. One almost perceives the tactile presence of the objects and structures that Illuminato places before our eyes." The critic concludes by observing how "this short film avoids self-referential abstractions or esoteric visual codes reserved for an elite audience. Instead, it opens a communicative channel - an artistic function too often forgotten - that speaks directly to the present, through memory (that is, time) and the places where memory is etched (that is, space). Illuminato's cinematic gesture becomes a warning: don't treat this simply as a reflection on the past. Instead, make it present. Make it personal."

FESTIVAL STRATEGY

Target Festivals

- International Documentary Festivals
- Artistic and Experimental Film Festivals
- Architecture and Space Festivals
- Italian Cinema Festivals
- Prison/Social Justice Festivals

Award Submissions

- Best Short Documentary
- Best Experimental Film
- Best Cinematography
- Best Sound Design
- Best Art Direction

DISTRIBUTION

Primary Audience

- Young adults and artists interested in contemporary art and social issues
- Documentary enthusiasts seeking unique narrative approaches
- Cultural institutions and educational markets
- International festival circuits

Platforms

- Theatrical: Art cinemas and cultural centers
- Digital: Art and documentary streaming platforms
- Educational: Universities and art schools
- Cultural: Museums and contemporary art spaces

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Sergio Mario Illuminato

Born in Catania, raised between Rome, London and New York, Sergio Mario Illuminato has always refused to be confined to a single definition. He is not only a director, nor only a visual artist, nor only a curator. He is someone who inhabits thresholds, who lives in in-between spaces, who finds in vulnerability not a weakness but the most powerful raw material for creation.

His academic training - from the Master's in Letters and Philosophy at La Sapienza to degrees in Painting and Cinema at the Academy of Fine Arts, to the Master's in Contemporary Art at MoMA in New York - tells of a hunger for different languages. But it is in life that he truly learned: directing the Communication Center of the UN Environment Programme for the Mediterranean, working as assistant director with Maurizio Scaparro at the Teatro Stabile in Rome alongside giants like Giorgio Albertazzi, creating in 1992 "Giù la Maschera" at the Palermo stadium immediately after the mafia massacres.

As a curator he has transformed impossible spaces into cathedrals of art: from the former Pontifical Prison of Velletri to the Italian Institute of Culture in Paris, from Palazzo Valentini to Villa Madama. His projects - "Iosonovulnerabile," "Intorno alla Seduzione," the "Intorno al Futurismo" cycle - are never just exhibitions, but experiences that change those who go through them.

In cinema he brings this same urgency. "Vulnerare," his most recent film, was born from six months lived inside an abandoned 19th-century prison with a group of artists, seeking that deep connection between wound and creation that is the heart of all his work. Before there had been "Mediterranea," "Corpus et Vulnus," and dozens of television programs for RAI that have always told stories on the margins, memories in danger, beauty where no one thought to look for it.

As an artist he has exhibited from galleries in Rome to museums in Paris, from London to Dubai, always carrying with him that same question: what happens when we stop hiding our fragilities and start transforming them into art?

President of the VulnerarTe Movement, director of the magazine of the same name, registered with the Order of Lazio since 1993, Illuminato does not collect titles but builds bridges. Between disciplines that don't speak to each other, between institutions and the street, between pain and beauty.

For him the body is not just an artistic theme but an ontological condition. Vulnerability is not something to overcome but to inhabit. Art is not decoration but necessity. And cinema, like all the rest of his work, is a way of saying: we are fragile, therefore we are alive. And this is all we need to start creating.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Creative Process

The film was created through a participatory direct reality methodology over six months of creative exploration within the prison walls. The artistic collective developed their interventions organically, allowing the space itself to guide their creative responses.

Unique Challenges

- **Time constraints:** Working within the deadline of the building's demolition
- **Historical preservation:** Balancing artistic intervention with respect for the site's historical significance
- **Safety concerns:** Navigating a deteriorating building structure
- **Weather conditions:** Managing humidity and temperature changes affecting both equipment and artworks

Post-Production Philosophy

The editing process emphasized the organic evolution of artistic exploration, maintaining the spontaneous quality of the artists' discoveries while building a coherent narrative arc.

QUOTES

"This place is not just an abandoned prison, but a 'contemporary cathedral of vulnerability.' It is a place of rebirth and it is art that must express this transformation." - *Sergio Mario Illuminato*

"Vulnerable therefore alive, art is loving reality." - *Final inscription appearing in the film*

"We are innocent condemned to a prison we did not choose, but within which we can find companions capable of giving meaning to our time." - *Prof. Giulio Casini*

"The cuts on the skin are not an illusion. They never heal." - *Inscription on a prison wall, quoted by Sergio Battista*

"Vulnerability means weakness since man can be a victim of others, but it is also his strength, because he is aware of being alive even in pain." - *Bruno Marino*

CONTACT INFORMATION

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AVAILABLE MATERIALS

- Screener links (password protected)
- High-resolution photos (300 DPI)
- Behind-the-scenes footage (7 minutes)
- Director interviews (video and audio)
- Location B-roll footage
- Artist statements and additional quotes
- Technical specifications sheet
- Subtitle files (multiple languages)

"VULNERARE: *Where vulnerability becomes the raw material of creation, and art emerges as the most powerful manifestation of human resilience.*"