

SERGIO BATTISTA, Film Critic

The screening of the short film *VULNERARE* marks a symbolic milestone in the life of a broader artistic endeavor unfolding across several locations. *IOSONOVULNERABILE* began earlier this year with an artist residency inside the abandoned walls of the former Pontifical prison in Velletri. Since then, the project has traveled to Paris and will continue this December in the 17th-century halls of the Historical Museum of Villa Altieri in Rome. *IOSONOVULNERABILE* is a complex artistic project that explores human vulnerability—our fears, failures, and frailties—as an inescapable condition of earthly experience. These elements are transformed, even exorcised, through multiple art forms: photography, cinema, choreography, theater, music, scenography, and publishing.

The significance of the project is underscored by the words of Antonio Calbi, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris: *"Culture is an opportunity for education and growth—and sometimes, also for resistance against injustice. The first step is accepting our own fragilities. In a world that demands perfection, we choose to exalt vulnerability, the beauty of simple, pure gestures."*

VULNERARE: A Tactile Short Film

The directorial debut of Sergio Mario Illuminato, *VULNERARE*, runs just over 13 minutes but is charged with layers of meaning that arise primarily from the observation of matter itself. Shot within the former Pontifical prison of Velletri—built in 1860 and decommissioned in 1991, now awaiting repurposing—the film unfolds as a sequence of images, in both color and a striking black-and-white, that conjure the past. Or rather, they evoke the echoes of countless lives—often suffering ones, as befits a prison—that were once expressed and repressed within those walls.

Barred gates, metal grates, doors, wire frames, folders piled on the floor, writings on the walls, and endless corridors become the protagonists of the film. Yet, they are accompanied by evocative performative gestures—choreographic actions that reawaken the corporeality of the human beings who once inhabited the space. Shadows flicker like sediments of life, tethering us to a blurred memory that seeps through the crumbling walls, where decaying surfaces carry their own eloquence.

Matter as Expression of Reality

Accompanied by a jagged, raw score composed by Andrea Moscianese, which imbues the material imagery with both depth and a necessary harshness, the film provokes a sensation that goes beyond the visual. One almost feels the tactile presence of the objects and structures Illuminato places before our eyes. There's a compelling urge to open those dusty files and trace the names of those who once lived in the space—lived through the vulnerability of the condemned. Each name evokes an individual, a defeated one, a personal story possibly lost forever in the black hole of a history that favors victors.

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).

One particular wall inscription stands out—and perhaps "pulls" is more accurate than "strikes": *"The cuts on the skin are not an illusion. They never heal."* It seals the central idea: reality impacts us without asking permission, often warping our course and dictating our fates, leaving behind indelible marks.

Art is Loving Reality, Whatever It Is

The title *VULNERARE* originates from the Latin *vulnus*, meaning wound, but also offense or harm. And indeed, the film suggests that such wounds may never be fully healed. The scribbled words on the walls, the names of prisoners on the surviving ledgers, seem to speak not only from the past, but to it—and from a place where memory and emotion remain alive.

Illuminato's cinematic gesture becomes a warning: don't treat this merely as a reflection on the past. Instead, make it present. Make it personal. He invites us, as spectators, to claim the courage to show our own wounds, to accept our own vulnerability—as an essential part of confronting reality.

Drawing from the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini, he challenges today's obsession with success, urging us to embrace a world *"where one can fail and begin again without losing value or dignity."* This reclaims the human experience as something far greater than the flawless masks we wear.

In the final sequences, a stark message appears, painted on the prison's outer wall—on the very surface where prisoners once caught their hour of open air. Perhaps it addresses us all: **"Vulnerable, therefore alive. Art is loving reality."**