

Naples

Stephen Prina

Museo MADRE

Palazzo Donnaregina, via Settembrini, 79

May 15, 2017–October 16, 2017



View of "Stephen Prina: English for Foreigners," 2017.

In 1923 Stephen Prina's father, Pietro Prina, was seventeen years old and played the clarinet in a band in Canischio, his family's small hometown in Piedmont. The sound of this musical instrument draws visitors across a threshold into the large room where the younger Prina's solo show is installed. Dense and stratified, the exhibition is a visual story of a century's worth of his family's history. For instance, we learn how Pietro was confronted by a group of Mussolini's Blackshirts who forced his band to play "Giovinezza" (Youth), the Fascist National Party anthem. This event provided the impetus for his emigration to the United States. A cover of the memorable tune can be heard merging with a song the artist composed—English for Foreigners. Ode to Canischio, 2016—broadcast over speakers mounted on a wooden grid, which is completely carpeted by a light-brown fabric covered in faded red writing. This motif, both visual and linguistic, is taken from the front and back covers of a book titled *Second Book in English for Foreigners in Evening Schools* (1917), which the artist's father studied to learn English.

Recontextualized within a space where Pantone's 2017 color of the year ("Greenery") appears in lithographs, promotional materials for the exhibition, and on gallery exits, the aforementioned fabric functions as a palimpsest of memory. Texts, paintings, photographs, sculptures, and an autobiography of Prina's family all speak to a universal story of fathers and sons, countries and cities, migrations and uprootings, public spaces and private interiors, and all that it takes to finally feel like a "citizen."

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.