

VULNERARE at Festival of Cinema NYC - Sergio Mario Illuminato's short film transforms two cen

From an Abandoned Prison in Italy to New York: Rebirth Becomes Cinema



VULNERARE

a film by Sergio Mario Illuminato

Why enter an abandoned Italian 19th-century prison?
What treasure is there to be discovered?
There could be something to save.
Something that speaks to you. To your desires.

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Six months inside an abandoned prison. Empty cells for thirty years, crumbling walls, heavy silence. A group of Italian artists enters where no one wants to stay and finds something unexpected: beauty hidden in pain.

Now, this discovery reaches America: *VULNERARE*, the short film born within the former Pontifical Prison of Velletri, has been selected by the Festival of Cinema NYC to represent ITALY. It is the only film festival in New York City supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Globally, only five short films have been selected to represent their countries — alongside Italy, the USA, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland.

When Art Inhabits Wounds

The former Pontifical Prison of Velletri, located 40 kilometers southeast of Rome, tells a story spanning centuries. Built in the 19th century under papal authority when the Catholic Church governed much of central Italy, this imposing structure served as both courthouse and detention center for what was then the Papal States. For over a century, it housed prisoners, witnessed trials, and embodied the justice system of a bygone era.

Closed in the 1990s as Italy modernized its penal system, the building stood empty for three decades—a forgotten monument to institutional power turned relic. In 2023, facing demolition, it seemed destined for erasure from history.

But before that could happen, painters, photographers, dancers, and musicians made it their home. For six months, they inhabited decaying cells and dark corridors, transforming every corner into a creative laboratory—turning Italy's abandoned spaces into sites of artistic resurrection.

The result is "*VULNERARE*": 13 minutes and 30 seconds that escape every definition. It's not just experimental cinema, not just video art. It's a journey into the human soul through what director Sergio Mario Illuminato calls "Communicating Artistic Organisms"—living works that change, ferment, and transform before the viewer's eyes.

These elements, as cinema psychologist Giulio Casini explains, "*act like flashes of pure color, allowing the worlds of painting and reality to communicate deep inner impulses.*"

"*Walls, floors, ceilings become cuts, wounds, faults,*" adds media historian Bruno di Marino. "*Choreographic gestures and pictorial matter merge into a single visual score thanks to surgical editing and plays of light.*"

Vulnerable Therefore Alive

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

The film closes with words carved on a prison wall: "Vulnerable therefore alive, art is loving reality." And a message: IAMVULNERABLE, hidden in Morse code within the short film's audio track.

Illuminato's methodology, which he calls "THRESHOLD CINEMA" of presence and relationship, captures the authenticity of emotions through improvisation and spontaneity. No scripts, just life happening.

A Cast Dancing Among the Ruins

The choreographies by Patrizia Cavola and Ivan Truol of Compagnia Atacama, featuring Camilla Perugini and Nicholas Baffoni, transform claustrophobic spaces into stages of freedom. The photography by Federico Marchi and Roberto Biagiotti plays with the transition from black and white of the past to the explosion of colors of rebirth. The soundtrack by Andrea Moscianese and sound design by Davide Palmiotto accompany viewers from prison drama toward a horizon of creative possibilities.

From Performance to global recognition

Before becoming cinema, "VULNERARE" was a live experience. Thousands of visitors crossed the former prison, then the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris, then the Museum of Villa Altieri in Rome. Each time the same discovery: vulnerability as strength, not weakness.

"Opening those dusty files means letting viewers flow through a personal story perhaps lost forever," writes film critic Sergio Battista. *"A short that seeks to open a communication channel with contemporaries by speaking of memory and places where this memory has condensed."*

On a prison wall is written: "The cuts on the skin are not an illusion, they no longer heal." Words that seal how reality impacts life without asking permission, leaving indelible marks. But also how these marks can become art.

From Italia to the World

The Festival of Cinema NYC represents the international landing of a project: IOSONOVULNERABILE, which has already changed the way we look at abandoned spaces. In an age of walls that divide and forgotten places, "VULNERARE" offers a concrete answer: art as an instrument of transformation, vulnerability as a generator of beauty.

The short film participates in the competitive section from August 1-10, 2025, bringing to America an Italian voice that speaks to the entire world. Because "VULNERARE" doesn't just tell the story of a prison that became a cathedral of art: it tells the story of all of us, vulnerable beings who through creativity, transform wounds into beauty.

Sergio Mario Illuminato is already preparing his debut feature film, "La soglia di Basalto" (The Basalt Threshold), which will be shot in 2026 on the island of Pantelleria.

Key notes:

Date: August 1-10, 2025

Location: CINEMA REGAL United Artist Midway Stadium 9

108-22 Queens Blvd, Forest Hills, NY 11375

Times: 8 AM - 10 PM

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Available: backstage video materials, high-resolution images, interviews with the director and artistic cast. [MEDIA-KIT Link](#)

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