

Petzel

STEPHEN PRINA

English for Foreigners (abridged)

September 11 – October 26, 2019

Opening Reception: Wednesday, September 11th, 6–8pm

35 East 67th Street

Petzel Gallery is pleased to present *English for Foreigners (abridged)*, a solo show of works by Stephen Prina. The exhibition will be on view from September 11 to October 26 and marks the artist's seventeenth exhibition at Petzel and his first at the gallery's Upper East Side location.

*Pete [Peter] [Pietro] Prina, *October 22, 1905, †May 9, 1975, my father, played clarinet for the local band in the Comune di Canischio, in the Piedmont region of Northwestern Italy. One day the Blackshirts arrived and demanded that the band perform "Giovinezza," the anthem of the Italian National Fascist Party. It was this event that convinced him it was time to emigrate from Italy—immigrate to America. He set sail on the RMS Mauretania from The Port of Cherbourg, France, and arrived at The Port of New York on October 5, 1923, at the age of seventeen.*

English for Foreigners, a project commissioned by Madre (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina), Naples, 2017, was launched by the aforementioned anecdote. *English for Foreigners (abridged)* isolates two sections of this project—a portfolio of lithographs and the listening station with soundtrack—for its New York première. The lithographs feature all of the illustrations from *Second Book in English for Foreigners in Evening Schools* by Frederick Houghton (American Book Company, 1917), a book passed down to the artist from his father. The soundtrack is comprised of covers of preexisting compositions, arranged and performed by the artist for vocal and guitar, with the assistance from a clarinetist, including an instrumental version of "Giovinezza," or "Youth," the anthem of the Italian Fascist Party, with the clarinet—the father's instrument in the village band—as solo instrument; "Bella Ciao," the Italian Resistance anthem, and "Sabato Sera," a then-current, hit single by Bruno Filippini that was gifted to the artist by his parents in 1964 upon their return from their first trip to Italy together and the first his father made since his emigration in 1923. In addition, the artist has composed a song, the lyrics of which are guided by notes and annotations his father inscribed in his copy of *Second Book in English for Foreigners in Evening Schools*.

The most recent example of *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet*, an ongoing project which began on January 1, 1988, will be included in the exhibition.

"Pete's Meat Can't Be Beat," the slogan of the grocery store that Prina's father owned and operated in Galesburg, Illinois, can be found woven into the fabric of the various systems of display.

A story of immigration in this country as told through the lens of one father's quest for citizenship provides an avenue for assessing immigration practices today.

Stephen Prina is an American artist, musician, and composer, born in 1954 in Galesburg, Illinois. He currently splits his time between Los Angeles, California and Cambridge, Massachusetts where he is a professor at the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies (AFVS) at Harvard University. Prina received his B.F.A. from the Northern Illinois University and an M.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts.

Petzel Gallery is located on the third floor of 35 East 67th Street between Madison and Park Avenues, New York. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquires, please contact Ricky Lee at ricky@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.