

**GALLERIA POGGIALI
MILAN**

**FABIO VIALE
*LUCKY EHI***

curated by Sergio Risaliti

19 January to 30 March 2018
Opening, Thursday 18 January at 7 p.m.



The **Galleria Poggiali** is delighted to announce the opening of a new space in **Milan**, to be inaugurated on **18 January** next with ***LUCKY EHI***, a solo show by **Fabio Viale** curated by **Sergio Risaliti**.

Fabio Viale's project has been produced in liaison with the CAS reception shelter of Turin run by the cooperative "**L'ISOLA DI ARIEL**".

The new Milan premises of the gallery, **which join the historic Florence gallery and the more recent spaces in Pietrasanta**, are conceived as a large cubic container in the "piece unique" tradition: a site of research somewhere between a project room and a large-scale showcase. Here

the gallery intends to host only site-specific exhibitions; the artists involved in each show will be invited to display a single, specially-designed project.

In adherence to the identity of the new **location in Foro Buonaparte 52, Fabio Viale** – famous for his marble works and his performances – has chosen to present a layout consisting of **just three works**: a **marble replica of the Vatican *Pietà*** (1499) by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), a **large-scale poster** portraying Lucky Ehi, a young Nigerian stretched out on the replica in the place of Christ, and a **sound recording** consisting of Lucky, a young Christian forced by religious persecution to escape from Nigeria, telling the tormented story of his life in his own words. These three works build together into a single text in which artistic practice and art history, theology and poetry and different media come up against the hard facts of local and global political reality, fusing with human destiny and the suffering and injustice of the world.

In the LUCKY EHI project Fabio Viale has set himself a challenge. His extraordinary technical skill, bordering on virtuosity, has led him to measure himself against the Vatican *Pietà*, one of the highest and most extensively studied sculptural models of all time (religious and not). And also to take a step beyond it, bringing the divine back to the human dimension through the simple and touching gesture of “tearing” Christ from Mary’s lap. In Viale’s version Mary’s arms are open and empty, symbolically ready to welcome another body while waiting to be reunited with the fruit of her womb. And here we have the artist’s most courageous gesture, unafraid of adding new elements to the already notably complex contents of the *Pietà*. As a new, contemporary “Christ” he introduces a young man of colour: Lucky Ehi, a Nigerian migrant with a large Christian cross tattooed on one shoulder who fled from a hell of violence at the age of seventeen and after many long hardships finally arrived in Italy. Lucky is one of the many last in our society; the artist has chosen to portray him in a dimension of maternal love that now more than ever knows no bounds – geographical, political, social or religious.

“It is the individual story of Lucky Ehi that becomes central” stresses **Sergio Risaliti, curator of the exhibition and scholar of Michelangelo** (co-author with Francesco Vossilla of the study *Michelangelo. La Pietà vaticana*, published by Bompiani). “It is an exemplary and paradigmatic story, yet at the same time similar to those of thousands of other men and women who flee their homelands in search of peace and wellbeing, freedom and brotherhood. And Lucky Ehi’s story also overlaps with that of Jesus: it is the weary Lucky Ehi who finds peace in the *Pietà* in the Messiah’s place. The Christian message in which the young Nigerian has placed his hope (as shown by his tattoo) is symbolically accomplished. And in this story Mary – who in religious iconography also represents Church and community – is the mother who embraces and consoles.”

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