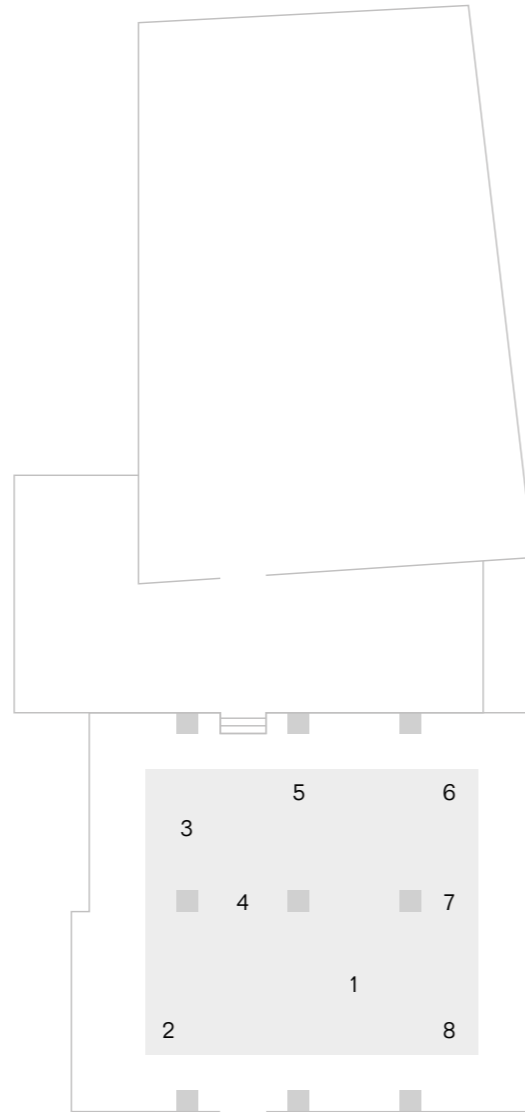


EXHIBITED WORKS

- 1
Reine mère, 2022
polychrome ceramic,
80 × 58 × 49 cm
- 2
Voyager ensemble, 2021
ceramic and gold,
54 × 35 × 40 cm
- 3
Observer les Étoiles, 2021
ceramic and gold,
23 × 99 × 34 cm
- 4
Vue céleste, 2022
ceramic and gold,
35 × 23 × 30 cm
- 5
Venus, 2022
ceramic and gold,
40 × 28,5 × 33 cm
- 6
Notable, 2022
ceramic,
40 × 22 × 29 cm
- 7
Rêve lucide, 2021
ceramic and gold,
32 × 42 × 35 cm
- 8
Purificazione, 2022
glazed ceramic,
73 × 23,5 × 33 cm



Victor Fotso Nyie

Rêve Lucide

P420 is pleased to announce the opening in the gallery of *Rêve Lucide*, the first solo exhibition by the Cameroonian sculptor Victor Fotso Nyie (Douala, 1990; lives and works between Faenza and Rieti, IT).

The exhibition features a series of terracotta sculptures created between 2021 and 2023, arranged in a nonlinear and nonhierarchical manner, peacefully resting on brick-built plinths and a cumulative bed of soil: a constellation that evokes a soundless environment halfway between a lunar landscape and a sacred burial ground. Through his sculptural language impregnated with magic realism, Fotso Nyie employs clay as a vessel for storytelling, where the encounter with the spirits of the ancestors happens through the dimension of dreams — an oneiric realm where personal and collective memories intertwine with uncanny visions, hinting at a future time.

His anthropomorphic figures are rendered in double-baked clay of a dark tone with a smooth waxed finish, embodying a powerful iconography aligned with the new contemporary figuration and imbued, at the same time, with references and sensibilities sourced from Pan-African vernacular culture, particularly the spiritual knowledge of West Africa.

Interweaving a biographical narrative with the collective unease surrounding the displaced heritage of African art and artifacts, Fotso Nyie's sculptures are primarily self-portraits that imaginatively blend with figures shaped as traditional African sculptures, unfaithful reproductions of the wood statuettes that he collects from flea markets or that he observes in the archives of ethnographic museums.

At a time in which museums are rising up across Africa to repatriate artifacts trapped in European ethnographic museums, the powerful body of works presented in *Rêve Lucide* etches tales of fragility and resilience that envision a process of collective healing and an imminent reconciliation with ancestral values.

A critical essay by Mariella Franzoni accompanies the exhibition.

Recent exhibitions:
Ipercorpo 2023. InPresenza, XIX Festival Internazionale delle Arti dal Vivo, EXATR, Arena Forlivese, Forlì, IT (2023); *Lo davamo per scontato*, Palazzo Ducale, Genova, IT (2023); *The way back home*, Centro Internazionale d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome, IT (solo, 2023); *Una Boccata d'Arte - Tesori e meraviglie*, Rocca San Giovanni, Chieti, IT (solo, 2022);

ALTROVE - viandanti, pellegrini, sognatori, Museo Diocesano, Faenza, IT (2022); *Golden Hour*, Bloom Galerie, Saint-Tropez, FR (2022); *Sediments. After Memory*, Mattatoio, Rome, IT (2022); *Memoriae*, Off Gallery, Bologna, IT (solo, 2022); *Radici aeree*, Pinacoteca di Pieve di Cento, Pieve di Cento, Bologna, IT (solo, 2022); *12 Artists of Tomorrow*, Muciaccia Contemporary, Rome, IT (2022);

Gettare il Sasso e Nascondere la Mano, Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Parigi, Paris, FR (2022); *Quella terra tra le mani*, Galleria Comunale d'Arte della Molinella, Faenza (RA), IT (solo, 2022); *Les Filons Géologiques: Transafrique*, BHMF & BHMB, Palazzo d'Accursio, Bologna, IT (2021); *Rimembranza*, Palazzo Turchi di Bagno, Ferrara, IT (solo, 2021); *Mediterranea 19 Young Artists Biennale*, School of

Waters, Repubblica di San Marino, SM (2021); *Resilienza*, Museo MAGA, Gallarate, IT (solo, 2021); *MCZ Territorio*, Victor Fotso Nyie, Museo Carlo Zauli, Faenza, IT (solo, 2021); *MAD per Black History Month Florence 2021*, Le Murate, Firenze, IT (2021); *MediTERRAneo - XXVII concorso di ceramica contemporanea*, Chiostro del complesso conventuale del Paolotti, Grottaglie (TA), IT (2020).

Titled *Rêve Lucide*, Victor Fotso Nyie's first solo show at P420 gallery serves as a gateway to an enchanting yet mordant world, where figures dwell in a realm suspended between dreams and restlessness, rendered through the fragile beauty of clay — a material seen as bearer of an archaic resilience and ancestral forces. Grappling with a profound sense of lost belonging, a sentiment described by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha as “unhomeliness”, Fotso Nyie draws inspiration from his Sub-Saharan African heritage and the transience of cultural identities, to gently delve deep into themes such as the quest for cultural restitution and the journey toward a renewed sense of self.

The exhibition features a series of terracotta sculptures created between 2021 and 2023, arranged in a nonlinear and nonhierarchical manner, peacefully resting on a cumulative bed of soil: a constellation that evokes a soundless environment halfway between a lunar landscape and a sacred burial ground. Through his sculptural language impregnated with magic realism, Fotso Nyie employs clay as a vessel for storytelling, where the encounter with the spirits of the ancestors happens through the dimension of dreams — an oneiric realm where personal and collective memories intertwine with uncanny visions, hinting at a future time.

Interweaving a biographical narrative with the collective unease surrounding the displaced heritage of African art and artifacts, Fotso Nyie's sculptures are primarily self-portraits that imaginatively blend with figures shaped as traditional African sculptures, unfaithful reproductions of wood statuettes he collects from flea markets or that he observes in the archives of ethnographic museums. His anthropomorphic figures are rendered in double-baked clay of a dark tone and a smooth waxed finish, embodying a powerful iconography aligned with the new contemporary figuration and imbued, at the same time, with references and sensibilities sourced from Pan-African vernacular culture, particularly the spiritual knowledge of West Africa. In this body of work, Fotso Nyie applies a shining layer of gold to selected

elements of the sculptures, transcending the earthly feel of terracotta. This ethereal touch enriches the spiritual significance of the artwork and creates moments of enchantment and revelation, like in the delicate droplet of golden milk falling from a maternity figure's breast in *Rêve Lucide* (2021). The work, which lends its title to the show, portrays a Fang statuette of Eyema-O-Byeri reshaped as a royal maternity figure, reminiscent of the continuation of life through the maternal line in matriarchal civilizations. Bricks-built plinths elevate some of these sculptures, evoking a sense of ongoing reconstruction, an everlasting process encompassing the self, the community, and the ancestral forces.

A similar use of gold can be seen in other featured works, including *Observer les Étoiles* (2022), where the statuette is cradled like a precious doll by a serenely sleepy child, and in *Reine Mère* (2022), a sculptural work exploring themes of maternity and the transmission of ancestral values to the newborn. Amongst the works is also *Voyager Ensemble* (2021), in which Fotso Nyie presents a cluster of statuettes, some of them fragmented, reminiscent of the typical ancestral figures found in the tradition of Ivory Coast's Baule material culture. In a captivating juxtaposition, these ancient figures delicately rest upon the artist's meditative self-portrait head, partially covering his eyes and taking on the appearance of materialized thoughts and memories. In *Vue céleste* (2022), Fotso Nyie appropriates Dan's typical wooden ceremonial ladles from Ivory Coast and Liberia, to stage a symmetrical composition in which the golden spoons with anthropomorphic bodies overlay the subject's eyes. Considered objects of propitious connotation, the ladles seem to establish a connection with the potent primordial forces of divination. According to the artist: “they are like binoculars through which one projects oneself into the future”.

While Fotso Nyie's thought-provoking sculptures contribute to the discourse on restitution, his work also revamps the criticism of European modernist “primitivism” and its

affirmative reappropriation from the Global South. Fotso Nyie intentionally draws inspiration from the rich tradition of portraiture that emerged during Italian humanism in the fifteenth century. On the other hand, the persistence of self-portraits in his work resonates with the broader quest for self-representation among African and African diasporic artists, as exemplified in the recent exhibition *When We See Us* (Zeitz Mocaa, Cape Town, 2023). In line with this restored agency of art historical storytelling, the sculptural work of Victor Fotso Nyie echoes the practice of “Self-Writing” as described by the Cameroonian author and political philosopher Achille Mbembe — the act of taking control of one's narrative.

Fotso Nyie's visual vocabulary also draws inspiration from a wide spectrum of contemporary authors, from the British-Nigerian Yinka Shonibare to the Algerian-French Kadder Attia. Amongst Victor Fotso Nyie's reference, is also the ritualistic and performative dimension of Nick Cave's work, especially his *Soundsuits* that merge references from Dogon and Rococo costumes. He surely shares with the American artist a genuine interest in the symbolic and transformative potential of art. Moreover, his work tacitly finds resonance with the practices of artists that have carved a path in the realm of a post-colonial critique of the institution of the Museum and its hierarchical classifications. For instance, his research recalls the groundbreaking itinerant project “Museum of Contemporary African Art” by Beninese artist Meschac Gaba, as well as the intricate installations of found objects arranged in the style of a West African market by Beninese artist George Adeagbo. Fotso Nyie's strong emphasis on materiality and craftsmanship reminds us of the visual poetics of American artist Simone Leigh, whose work often incorporates ceramic and other tactile materials to evoke a pan-African visual culture populated with ancestral knowledge. By deliberately appropriating traditional African artifacts and juxtaposing them with representations of his own body, Fotso Nyie reminds us of the lyrical-yet-political black & white photographic work of Nigerian-born photographer Rotimi Fani-

Kayode. Despite weaving very different personal mythologies, the two artists share an intimate hermeneutical response to the controversies surrounding the ownership

and display of ethnographic collections. Notably, Fotso Nyie also shares similarities with South African artist Kendell Geers, as both artists collect traditional African statuettes from flea markets and incorporate them into their visual research, to address the fetishization of African material culture and raise awareness about the illicit and hidden trade of ritual and cultural objects. What distinguishes Fotso Nyie's complex work, however, is his ability to evoke a personal mythology populated by potent spiritual powers and situated in a ritualistic, eternal time. Through his art, Victor Fotso Nyie seeks to immerse us in an oneiric realm where the awakening of ancestral spirits simultaneously evokes the artist's primordial memory and envisions a new era.

At a time in which museums rise across Africa to repatriate artifacts trapped in European ethnographic museums, the powerful body of works presented in *Rêve Lucide* etches tales of fragility and resilience that envision a process of collective healing and an imminent reconciliation with ancestral values.