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## ALKEmica: tHE ARt Of TRANSfORMATION



**“When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.”**

**Paulo Coelho knew this well when, in *The Alchemist*, he transformed the ancient wisdom of transformation into a universal fable.**

**But long before Santiago the shepherd, long before the quest for treasure became a metaphor for the inner journey, there was a single word: al-kīmiyā.**

Words *Sabrina Bolzoni*

Alkemica, Martirio e Rinascita Michelangelo Galliani, courtesy-of-Cris Contini Contemporary

*Al-kīmiyā*. From ancient Arabic, this enigmatic word still resonates today. Through the Greek *khēmía* and the Egyptian *kmt*, “black earth”, it whispers timeless secrets of profound transformation. From this powerful etymological root, steeped in centuries of spiritual inquiry, emerges “**ALKEMICA – Martyrdom and Rebirth**”, the solo exhibition by **Michelangelo Galliani**, on view from **June 4 to October 26, 2025**, in the Monumental Hall of the **Casanatense Library in Rome**.

Before it became science, **alchemy was soul work**: a path of inner purification known to the ancients as the *Opus Magnus*, the Great Work. A spiritual journey marked by distinct phases, in which matter, like the human being, must endure dissolution and rebirth to reach enlightenment.

The *nigredo*, the black stage, represents decomposition. Everything must be broken down



to its primal essence in order to be reborn. It is the necessary darkness, the chaos before every new creation. Then comes the *albedo*, the white stage, where from decay emerges clarity, and from shadow, light.

Alkemica, Martirio e Rinascita Michelangelo Galliani, courtesy of Cris Contini Contemporary

Galliani sees in this ancient wisdom a universal truth:

"Matter, like the body and the soul, is in constant evolution, a struggle between death and rebirth."

At the center of the installation, **Saint Sebastian** lies on a lead shroud, golden javelins piercing his body. It is not a depiction of suffering, but of transformation: every wound becomes a portal through which the soul may shine. Martyrdom, here, is an act of purification and creative emergence, where death and rebirth are indivisible.

**Eighteen wooden and glass cases** orchestrate this symbolic alchemical dance. On one side, patinated bronze sculptures, still lifes, skulls, fragmented faces, rest on lead scrolls, embodying the *nigredo*. On the other, white marble forms adorned with gold leaf celebrate the hard-earned radiance of *albedo*.

Alkemica, Martirio e Rinascita, Michelangelo Galliani, courtesy of Cris Contini Contemporary

There is something deeply moving in how Galliani engages with the antique books and prints of the Casanatense Library. This is not a simple juxtaposition, but a silent conversation between bodies of knowledge: contemporary art **bowing to ancient wisdom**, acknowledging itself as both heir and guardian.

"Each work is a meditation on how sacrifice, pain, and transformation are essential to reach the light," says the artist.

His words echo the legacy of all those alchemists who, in secret laboratories, sought not vulgar gold but the **philosopher's stone**—that mythical catalyst of transmutation.

**Cristian Contini and Fulvio Granocchia**, founders of **Cris Contini Contemporary**, grasp the essence of Galliani's work: "This exhibition is a perfect synthesis of art and philosophy, inviting reflection on what is seen and unseen, on the duality within every process of change."

Alkemica Martirio e Rinascita Michelangelo Galliani, courtesy of Cris Contini Contemporary

This is the true gift of **ALKEMICA**: a reminder that **art, like alchemy, is above all a form of healing**, of the soul seeking transformation, of the material longing to be elevated, of time itself, yearning to be redeemed through beauty.



In an age of haste and distraction, Galliani invites us to pause in the mystery of the Great Work, to recognize that every true transformation passes through the *nigredo* of doubt to reach the *albedo* of awareness.

And within the sacred silence of the Casanatense Library, between ancient volumes and contemporary sculpture, the miracle is renewed: art transforms those who behold it;  
**alchemy still works in the souls willing to receive it.**

Michelangelo Galliani photo credit Michele Stanzione courtesy Cris Contini Contemporary