

Núria Güell

—

**Una película de Dios
A Godly Tale**



150 x 100 cm
1600
1600

Una película de Dios



Una película de Dios





Reproducción de la obra de Nùria Güell
"Una película de Dios—A Godly Tale"
[Reproduction of the work of Nùria Güell
"A Godly Tale—A Godly Tale"]
[2018—2018]
[Oil on canvas]
[Cortina del artista]



Nùria Güell, *Una película de Dios—A Godly Tale*, 2018, vista de la exhibición—exhibition view. Foto—Photo: Oliver Santana [Cat. 7]

Saint Ursula, Saint Barbara, Saint Catherine, Saint Agatha, Mary Magdalene, Adam and Eve, Ruth...at first, the visitor is surprised to encounter centuries-old paintings of Biblical scenes in a contemporary art museum. Then their surprise becomes unease: they hear a cacophony of voices. The clamor subsides when they stand underneath the speakers positioned in front of each painting and they listen to a description of the scene. Each recording narrates a highly specific context in present-day Mexico, the second-most lucrative business in the country after drug trafficking: human trafficking.

During her residency in Mexico City, Núria Güell developed a mechanism for listening to other kinds of knowledge that are acquired through experience rather than through institutional validation. The project is a several-month-long collaboration with Maritza, Izzy, Nayeli, Katherine, María Ángela, Halcel, Ezra, and Damaris, all legal minors who have been subsumed into networks of child sexual exploitation in Mexico. At the same time, they curated a selection of paintings, mostly dating from the colonial period, that depict Catholic Biblical scenes. Based on the young women's own experiences, both the selection and the accompanying commentary describe the unequal dynamics of power and violence at work between women and men in our patriarchal society. Güell sought to complete and complicate these expressions of knowledge by also interviewing a family of ex-pimps, who have now served their sentences and are invited to offer their own interpretations of the paintings.

In the project's working methodology, participants elaborate on personal experiences to frame the emotional realm within a sociopolitical analysis. In this dynamic, the contributors aren't defined as "victims" or objects of compassion or criminalization. Rather, they are seen as autonomous political subjects: in sharing their knowledge, they help us rethink ourselves as a society.

A Godly Tale continues the research that Güell conducted at the Museum of Antioquia in Medellín. In that earlier phrase, young women in the same situation led guided visits through the permanent Fernando Botero exhibition. The face-to-face contact between participants and the general public was essential to the artist's work in Colombia. In Mexico, the intersection between human and drug trafficking exponentially complicated the young women's security restrictions, which meant that they could only conduct the guided visit on one occasion and behind closed doors. Given these conditions, the project became, on

the one hand, a sound installation that alternates the girls' accounts with those of the former pimps; and, on the other, a video that documents the working process and contextualizes the complex circumstances around each case. The video is divided into five sections: the artist, the paintings, the young women, family, and God. Through this structure, Güell explicitly spells out her role as an agent in the process and explains the rules of the dynamic in which she has invited her interlocutors to engage; she also defines her position on the concepts of *victim* and *victimizer*. One key premise of her practice is recognizing her privilege in the world as a Spanish citizen, and in the art world as an artist: rather than fleeing from this status, she uses it to challenge the very structures that underpin it. Her editing of the material also serves to examine the elements of girls' and the ex-pimps' narratives that mirror each other, albeit from completely opposite perspectives: physical violence, psychological torture, fear, submission, and the complicity and silence of the authorities and the society around them, including their own families. The video also sheds light on the vicious cycle of violence and poverty—a cycle that defines all of the participants, and in which the line between victim and victimizer is easily blurred. Finally, the video focuses on the role that religion has played in their lives: the influence of Catholicism on the implementation of a patriarchal society, in the West in general and Mexico in particular. It explores, too, how Santa Muerte [Holy Death] and evangelical Christianity govern their present-day lives: both the minors living in a safe house, where they are instilled with Christianity, and the former pimps, who converted in prison and are now evangelical pastors.

All of the artist's decisions—like her use of images depicting Catholic scenes—are intended to examine the responsibility of all parties involved, including the state, art history, the institution, the artist, the curators, and the spectators themselves.

Alejandra Labastida