

Núria Güell

Núria Güell understands her artistic work "as a socially and politically necessary practice in which the cultural and the established are put into play." In her projects, she analyzes the institutions that govern us and exposes the abuses of power allowed within the margins of legality by these same institutions. Her work process starts with the analysis of data and situations, raising questions, followed by exposure, to finally carry out an action with real impact, often targeting the system's blind spots.

Her artistic trajectory becomes a journey through various issues that highlight the abuse of power by institutions such as banks, the legislative system, or immigration policies.

This latter sphere is referenced in works like *Out of Play* (2009) in which she involved an unemployed African immigrant who needed to renew his residence permit in Spain. Güell hired him to play hide and seek in the exhibition space. This contract allowed him to regularize his situation. Carried out in Cuba, *Humanitarian Aid* (2008-2013) started with a public call where the artist offered herself as a wife to any Cuban interested in emigrating to Spain. The call specified that applicants had to "write the most beautiful love letter in the world." The winner was selected by a jury composed of three sex workers. The wedding was then held, and after a reasonable period and once nationality was obtained, a divorce was processed.

With her projects, Núria Güell seeks direct impact on reality. In 2014, she carried out the work *Black on White* for the collective exhibition *The Invocable Reality* (MACBA). With the complicity of immigrants evicted from the Poblenou warehouses, she contributed to the creation of a legal framework that allowed them to work and self-employ. The cooperative's first client was MACBA, which hired them to carry out some activities related to the group exhibition. As the artist herself explained: "beyond using the cooperative's legal framework as an instrument for generating democratic and horizontal employment, where the members themselves are the owners, I am interested in its potential as a legal tool that allows the legalization of those who the law illegalizes."

Other projects delve into the ambiguities of financial systems: in *Degenerate Political Art, Ethical Protocol* (2014), created together with Levi Orta and using the production money from a public art center, she established a corporation in a tax haven. Later, she transferred the management of the company with all its advantages to a group of activists developing a project for an autonomous society, outside capitalist dynamics.

The working conditions of artists have also been a focus: in *Aphrodite* (2017), she allocated the production budget of an exhibition to pay her social security contributions for six months so she could receive social benefits during her maternity leave. In *The Banality of Good* (2021), she decided to register under the Special Regime for Self-Employed Workers as a Catholic religious worker (after several interviews in which ecclesiastical authorities endorsed that her work as an artist aimed to "do good"), thus adding tax benefits to her exercise of professional coherence.

One of her most recent works explored the definition of heritage value from non-legitimized narratives (*National Heritage. New Temporary Exhibition at MNAC, 2024*). In her research at the National Art Museum of Catalonia, she focused on a little-known but common function of museums: custodianship of works that are under judicial deposit, that is, those assets (artworks) that judges proceed to secure as litigated assets when in a legal case, an embargo or seizure is decreed. The project's final formalization took the form of a conference in which she compiled her entire research process, evoking an exhibition curated not by art specialists but by courts of justice.

Montse Badia