

Nuria Guell

Visual artist

Una película de Dios

Visual Ethnography

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Biography

Born in 1981 in Vidreres (Girona, España), lives and works in her native village.

Photographic, video, administrative and textual documents attest to its projects, most often performative. Her practice is not the expression of contemplation or a virtuous display of technique, but a practice of confrontation, of questioning evidence and conventions. She does not understand artistic practice as a cultural practice, but quite the opposite: she understands it as a socially and politically necessary practice in which the cultural and the established are brought into play.

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I made all recordings myself with a camera and my own mobile phone, without any previous script. The script for the video essay was conceived and developed on the basis of the documentation obtained during the process. What the editing script does, beyond bringing together the documentation, is to add another temporality, a narrative of its own in which the real bursts in to prevent us from settling too comfortably into preconceived ideas.

Link & password

<https://vimeo.com/514597838?share=copy>
UPDDENG22

Synopsis of the video

I collaborated for several months with eight underage girls who had been immersed in the context of sexual abuse and exploitation in Mexico to jointly produce a curatorial piece accompanied by an audio guide of religious paintings, mostly from the colonial period.

I showed the children around fifty paintings from Mexican collections, and from these they chose the nine that would end up making up the curatorial project. The content of the audio guide was extracted from their subjective interpretations of the Catholic scenes depicted.

I then contacted a family of former pimps – a mother and two of her children – who, while in prison for their crimes, “found God” and became Christian pastors. I invited them to interpret, based on their experience as traffickers, the paintings selected by the minors, thus complementing the audio guide.

I asked the MUAC, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (University Museum of Contemporary Art), to negotiate the loans of works of art with the institutions that owned the paintings in order to display the original works in the exhibition.

STRUCTURE

The video essay is divided in 5 parts or thematic chapters:

PART 1 / The artist

To work or to make works in collaboration with subjects who expose part of their intimacy to the cameras’ eyes and ears is a sensitive practice, and it becomes reckless when the exposed subjects are minors who are victims of sexual abuse. As a woman from Vidreres (Girona) who barely makes a living from artistic practice but who at the same time must feel privileged for it, in this type of project I am just another subject that adds to the plot or narrative. I am there with my ignorance, with my prejudices, with my subjective experience, with my contradictions; and I consider this an ethical requirement.

While the narrative does not follow a chronological order – each chapter includes moments from my three stays in Mexico for the production of the work – this first part also serves as an opening chapter, as I introduce myself to the girls and explain my proposal to them.

PART 2 / The paintings

This part covers the process of selecting the paintings. Through the paintings, we begin to get to know the girls and their singularities, and we become immersed in the religious and cultural context of the piece. In the representations shown in the paintings, we can clearly see some of the traits attributed to the feminine by the dominant Christian culture: purity, spirit of sacrifice, victimhood, object of male desire, subordination to men, etc... The children begin to come to terms with the fact that the violence they suffered was not their inescapable fate, but rather part of a way of understanding existence that is the consequence of a vast cultural framework.

PART 3 / The girls

The girls live together in a Christian shelter, where they stay temporarily. Each one carries her own story. These girls between 13 and 17 years old have suffered in their flesh and in their minds a violence that most citizens cannot even imagine, but they are still there, and they do not want to be victims, they want to live, they want to understand.

PART 4 / The mother, the father and the stepfathers

Organising a society based on a particular concept of power has consequences; the scale of power is applied in all institutions, so that whoever is at the bottom of the scale receives all the blows, all the stray bullets. The family is a key institution in the patriarchal order, most abuses of power tend to take place within it, far from the public eye. Psychologists' and psychoanalysts' offices are full of family traumas, the echo of their confessions resounding in every corner of the public space.

PART 5 / God

Every power orders and identifies according to a scale of values based on faith. Power implies subordination and abuse, and this pattern serves as a model in the production of subjectivities. This film is a film about God and its consequences, about the consequences of organising a society on the basis of a power core, and no culture or community is free from that. Power is flexible, it adapts to all kinds of signifiers, it can take the form of Homeland, Love, Family, Identity, Justice, Destiny, etc., and it is always accompanied by the best intentions.