

MAYA GODED

PHOTOGRAPHER OF FREEDOM

Teresa Jiménez*

The photographer's gaze brings dignity to what is photographed.

SUSAN SONTAG¹



The Witches of San Luis Series.



Disappeared Women Series.

Women, always women. Women full length, women with hidden faces, dead women, living women, women in love, disappointed women, women under the ground, women on a bed, women in the street, women on a slab in the morgue, first-, second-, and third-generation women, wise women, ignorant women, joyful women, nostalgic women, abandoned women, desired women, excluded women, disguised women, naked women, women who love, women who suffer, dignified women . . . women on the edge.

The Witches of San Luis. Ancient women who live on the margins in two senses: on the outskirts of the city, and marginalized, judged, feared, and sought out, just like prostitutes. People go to them to access “dark” knowledge, but nobody talks about them or recognizes their existence.



The Witches of San Luis Series.

Maya Goded’s work is a visual response to existential questions of the photographer herself, who through her lens does not aim for simple answers to sate her curiosity or mitigate her anxiety, but who seeks arguments to denounce the ethical injustice with which society continues to classify the feminine condition: the “bad” woman or the “good” mother, a condition which, by the way, she shares as do many other women in

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Mexico. That's why sexuality, violence, and marginality is the triad on which she has built her photographic oeuvre for many years now and which she insists upon time and again whenever there is a reason to document that condemnation. That's why her photographs are not instantaneous or from a single sitting, but are rather the result of recurring encounters with the figures, with whom she weaves a common history, sometimes years long; she does not attempt to rescue them, but only to document their reality.

When asked about the images of a documentary series about prostitutes from Mexico City's Soledad de la Merced neighborhood, she explains, "These photos arise from the need to find answers to certain questions that unconsciously led me to wander through the streets and plazas observing the people who inhabit them. I grew up in Mexico City, where Catholic morals decree



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what a 'good woman' must be, mythologizing maternity and virginity as though the body decided our value as people and, finally, our fate. I wanted to do something that would let me look deeply at the roots of inequality, transgression, the body, sex, virginity, maternity, childhood, old age, desire, and our beliefs. I wanted to talk about love and the lack of it. I wanted to know about women. I photographed prostitutes, their people, their neighborhood."

Before that experience, Goded had confronted an atrocity that was also absurd: the Ciudad Juárez feminicides. The series *Disappeared Women* is a paradoxical visual testimony: images of non-existence, of young women who are no longer here, who have been murdered, but whose presence we can intuit under the earth in those desolate wastes that filter through the camera, in the painful memory marked on the face of a mother who has lost her daughter or in the indifference of an unperturbed official. *Disappeared Women* is a painful metaphor



Disappeared Women Series.

Disappeared Women. Representation of pain, desolation, violence, hatred, and the senselessness of a society that crosses its arms in the face of Ciudad Juárez's femicide.



Disappeared Women Series.

of hatred, violence, and impunity that for a long time fogged her lens, imposing a brief pause or “photographic silence” for a time—but not for long, because her camera is her word, and she soon began to focus on other women with whom she once again engaged in dialogue and that she humanizes through her images. Women who meet on the real edge, like the women who every day try to cross or live temporarily on the border, or the metaphoric limit of the prohibited and the permitted, like the “witches” of San Luis, who possess knowledge that defies reason, condemned by a society fearful to break through the permitted limits. Maya Goded finds in every woman the possibility of free-



Plaza de la Soledad Series.

Plaza de la Soledad. Prostitutes from the Merced neighborhood, photographed with their children, their partners, their clients, with each other, with their bodies, with their sexuality, their dreams, in their day-to-day life, and their yearnings for freedom.



Plaza de la Soledad Series.



Plaza de la Soledad Series.

dom, since she thinks that through a break, we can reconstruct ourselves in many ways more freely than the ones to which society had condemned us.

Without affectations, without pre-established scenes, through photography, Maya Goded simply confirms what she sees and feels, leaving before our eyes testimonies of great expressive force and a beauty as unusual as it is startling. And, after looking at these photos, there comes a point at which we viewers don't know if we're seeing them, we're experiencing them, or if we're feeling them. Image, reflection, experience; before her photographs, we are simultaneously witnesses, reflection in a mirror, and protagonists of this visual document, images that are worth looking at because, more than inert images, Maya Goded captures with her camera experiences of great emotional impact. The photographs of Maya Goded enjoy a dual category: art and truth. **VM**

NOTES

¹ Susan Sontag, *Sobre la fotografía* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 2006).