

## ***PRESENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION "FAITH OF LIFE" ("FE DE VIDA")***

Being a woman in a patriarchal and sexist society, having experienced violence up close, being a therapist for women who have suffered and are suffering violence, being an artist convinced of the transformative value of art, being a believer that a better world is possible.

These are some of the reasons that led me to organize this group exhibition whose theme is violence against women. Other reasons are located within the therapeutic field, since it was in a music therapy session directed by the psychotherapist Péter Szil where this idea was gestated. In that session we could even imagine as background music the song "Fragile" by Sting, in which the author reminds us of our fragility, the fragility of everyone.

Music, art in a safe context allows weaknesses and strengths to emerge, to make contact with our most genuine feelings, needs and desires. From there it is possible to draw new paths.

My gratitude goes to the Department of Equality of the Calpe City Council for their constant support, to my fellows in the exhibition, for being above all fellows, as well as being excellent artists, and to Péter Szil for writing the prologue to this catalogue, for his involvement and for giving so much faith and light to life. Finally, I want to dedicate this work to the memory of all the people who have known how to love with respect, care, affection, trust and honesty.

Susana Garcia Ungo  
Artist and Therapist

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## ***PREFACE FOR THE CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION "FAITH OF LIFE" ("FE DE VIDA")***

Years ago I read the following thought by Alberto Manguel: "There is no remedy. Reading is not consoling. Instead, it can mysteriously serve as a mirror." I think that the idea, applied not only to literature, but to any form of art, serves as a slogan for a visual arts exhibition about violence against women.

Artistic representation faces several challenges. One of them is to ensure that a work reflects what is particular in the experience of whoever created the work, but with a degree of abstraction capable of encompassing the particular experiences of the people who receive the work, so that they also feel reflected by it.

I have come to the honor of prefacing the catalogue of this exhibition from a field (not that of the arts, but of psychotherapy and activism committed to the eradication of violence against women and children) characterized by a similar task. To help the victims and to prevent the surge of more victims, we have to master the art of seeing and making see the systematic in the individual. See and make see in the suffering of each victim, whom we accompany as the

individual that she or he is, a system beyond the occasional acts of violence of different kinds. See and make see in the individual acts of each abuser the control systems that correspond to the structural violence exercised by patriarchy, inequality and a sexist and violent culture. Only with a solid anchoring in the knowledge of that structure, its economy, statistics, laws and cultural patterns can I offer the therapeutic framework in which individual change can emerge, and that often occurs more in the symbolic than in the cognitive realm.

Art always moves in the realm of the symbolic. However, when its subject is something as concrete and with as many political connotations as violence, it becomes even more evident that there are various ways of understanding art. One of them was defined ironically by Elmer Diktonius, a Finnish Swedish-speaking writer and musician, as this: "If the meaning of art were to anesthetize, to make us forget life, a hammer blow to the head would be the best and simplest of arts". Another trend, quite widespread in our days, is the one that does assign art a function of awakening and raising awareness, but for this it turns art into a hammer, ignoring that when a public is directly exposed to the violence the artwork is supposed to represent, but the violence is not put into its context, that public easily becomes more violated than aware.

The works in this exhibition capture in symbols which are apprehensible with the senses and intelligence three aspects of the violence against women: its causes, its effects and the resources to counteract it. The fourth aspect is missing: how to eradicate it. But this is not a fault of the curators or the artists. Their angle of vision is that of women, all women: those who are direct victims of violence and those who are thus warned of what can happen to them for the mere fact of being women, and even more if they do not accept the place assigned to them by the patriarchal order. Male violence is caused by men, practically all men: those who exercise it and those who actively or passively tolerate it. That is why the eradication of gender violence has to be the work of men, of all the men. Therefore, this aspect will have to be represented by works of art created by men who assume their collective responsibility and become dissidents of patriarchy.

Meanwhile, we can delight us here with the artistic representations of the breeding ground of violence against women (sexist stereotypes, the myth of romantic love and the family as a private sphere), of the consequences of this violence (invisible wounds, the sealed mouths and the silences full of cries of pain, rage and impotence) and of what mitigates the suffering (the small acts of help that arises from sisterhood, the solidarity among women).

Yes, I did say "delight". Because this exhibition provides beauty and therefore pleasure, even if its theme is ugly and painful; it attests to life in the face of the constant attack on life violence constitutes. Thus it is demonstrated that art may not be consoling, but it can provide us with hope.

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