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Irish Painter Brian Maguire Pays Tribute to 'Invisible' Victims of Juárez, Mexico Murders (EXCLUSIVE)

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"The job of the artist is to make the invisible visible... In a hierarchy, the higher you are, the more visible you are, the lower you are, the more invisible you are." -- Irish painter Brian Maguire told Latin Post.

With every stroke of his brush, Maguire has made it his artistic and human mission to tell the stories of victims in Juárez, Mexico, which is considered to be "the murder capital of the world."

It's where more than 5,000 people have been butchered by drug cartels over the past six years, including the most recent travesty, the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping of 43 male students who are believed to be dead.

For the past five years, Maguire has provided a creative medium and platform for their voices to be heard.

Maguire spoke with Latin Post in an exclusive interview and shared his recent work as well as the impact that the people of Juárez, Mexico have had on his life. His latest exhibition, which includes 14 large paintings completed between 2012 and 2014 that address the Mexican drug war, is currently on display at the Fergus McCaffrey gallery in New York and will run until April 25.

"The paintings that are here at the Fergus McCaffrey Gallery all had their start in photographs given to me by journalists in Mexico. Journalists in Juárez and all over Mexico are being killed because of their work," Maguire said.

Profits from the show will go towards Reporters Without Borders.

"I wanted to bring the story of what was happening in Juarez through these paintings to New York to show what had happened because I feel that there is a sense in which our gaze is averted from this murder."

The exhibition also includes the documentary "Blood Rising," in which he co-produced and is directed by Mark McLoughlin, 2013, Mexico/Ireland), which details his portraiture and activism in response to the murder of 1,400 young women in Juárez since 1994.

"Blood Rising" was screened at Curzon Cinema, London (2014) and premiered at the closing Gala of the Jameson Dublin International Film Festival (2013).

Through his portraits, the critically acclaimed Irish painter has addressed the phenomenon of "femicide," also known as "femincido" -- "the killing of women ostensibly due to their gender." He has worked with the families and women affected by this atrocity. In addition, he also furthered his research by working alongside crime reporters on the city's newspaper, El Norte.

"Women have been picked up, raped and killed in an organized fashion," he said.

For his research, Maguire contacted an NGO (a non-governmental organization) to talk to the mothers of the victims of in Juárez.

"They would allow me to talk to the mothers on one condition -- that I teach classes to their children -- and, to me, that was magic," he said. "It enabled me to enter the story in a very meaningful way. It was a very joyful experience."

Maguire recognizes the toll that these situations take on the families.

"Whatever feelings we have are inconsequential compared to the families," he said. "I know that from my own life. Expressing pain is part of how you deal with it. That's the process. So I knew that no matter how it was being done, it was a good thing."

Maguire's work stems from social and political situations, and he considers his approach to his paintings "as a gesture of solidarity." "He operates a truly engaged practice, compelled by the raw realities of humanity's violence against itself, and the potential for justice."

For over 30 years as an artist, Maguire has also worked in Brazil and Mexico City and has captured those in closed institutions such as mental homes and prisons.

"I have a familiarity of working with images of people being killed. ... What drew me to Juárez was in that if you take the hierarchy of people and you start thinking about young women, young, colored women who haven't received a second- or third-level education, who are factory workers..." He went on to point out that within that hierarchy there are a lot of injustices, especially for those less fortunate.

"Everything that I had that I wanted to encompass in my work was here in this story," he added.

According to Maguire, he interviewed the editor of El Norte, who then gave him access to his archives, which proved to be invaluable at the end of the project.

"I selected the images of the violence of the killing of men. I had made paintings about the killing of women and I wanted to balance it out with this," he explained. "I was working with the girls' families and I was concerned with what they were like. With the men, I was working with photojournalists and I was concerned with how they died rather than what they were like. I wanted to make work that would underline that they had been killed in this manner," he explained.

He furthered explained that "his purpose is to show respect to the victims of violence, to remove all the easy rationalizations which excuse, cover over, and protect us from this reality."

"As the man is dead, the painting keeps his death in the present. The absence of justice demands this act," he said.

Maguire has shown consistently in Europe and the USA with participation in shows in Korea, China and Japan. In 2000, a major retrospective toured from Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane to Contemporary Art Museum, Houston USA. He has presented many one-person shows with Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, the most recent being in 2009 and 2011.