

CONSECRATED:

The life of Catholic cloistered nuns of Mexico in the 21st Century

My purpose is to document the life of the centuries-old tradition of women who enter cloistered life devoted entirely to spiritual pursuits and that are almost separated from the outside world. This old Catholic monastic life persists, although barely, in the 21st century. This body of work shows ancient but still surviving religious orders that may be gradually disappearing from the mainstream of Catholic life.

I grew up in the city of Puebla, the second most important city of Mexico in terms of the number of Catholic monasteries built during colonial times. At present, we can still find 11 Catholic monasteries where cloistered women reside. Most of these orders were founded 400 years ago. I was surprised to find that they are still active.

What are the reasons that motivate women to join the monastery in the 21st century? Are they spiritual, theoretical or social reasons, or is it because of personal issues? What makes them deny their femininity, vanity and sexuality?

This is a relatively unexplored subject. The nuns are surrounded by many prejudices and our society almost ignores them. My interest is to get closer, investigate and explore their life with my camera. I grasp visually what made them renounce this world and lead a life inspired by the idea of being the Servants of the Lord.

I explored these questions while doing my work. I have lived with them for some periods of time and I have investigated the reasons that continue to draw them to a convent. The first step was to gain the trust of the nuns, so that they could allow me in. Even though I had a letter from the Archbishop of Puebla, I was denied access to some monasteries. I was told that they have their own constitutions and no photo was to be taken inside. I feel that they are afraid. Because of persistence and perseverance, I have been allowed to take pictures in the convents of Concepcionists, Augustinians, De la Cruz, Brigidas, Discalced Carmelites, Dominicans, Capuchinas and Clarisas.

My work is based on the timing of Catholic celebrations. By having lived periodically with them, I have been able to reach some closeness, photograph and interview them. Little by little, they have trusted me in a woman-to-woman dialogue and thus I have been able to comprehend the spiritualism to which they are devoted.