

STANDARD (OSLO) is proud to present a new exhibition of German artist Michaela Meise, comprised of seven ceramic sculptures. Directly inspired by the most influential and widespread account of the lives of Saints by Jacobus de Voragine entitled *The Golden Legend* (ca. 1260), the ceramic figures lay at the threshold between a distant legend and a modern reenactment.

*Outside the lights were shining*

*On the river of tears*

*I watched them from the distance*

*With music in my ears*

- Bob Dylan, *Went To See The Gypsy*, 1970

“Gens du voyage” (“Nomad people”) is the name coined for the thousands of Romani that every year walk in pilgrimage to a small town in the South of France. A town that, throughout centuries, has borne the infamous legend of eight drifters that miraculously marooned on a sandy beach beneath a cloister after crossing the Mediterranean sea. Sent in a small wooden barque from Jerusalem by persecutors of the Roman Empire around 40AD, these condemned souls were not meant to survive and yet, they would be the first eight Christians arriving on the European soil. From there they allegedly preached Christ's words in the French Camargue county, up the Rhône valley and further across Europe. Three of these travelers - St. Maria Jacobé, St. Maria Salomé and St. Maria Magdalena - later gave their first name to this town today known as Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (“The-Saints-Marys-of-the-Sea”).

As the world's largest sea surrounded by land, the Mediterranean has been the stage for numerous cultural exchanges and trade routes between ethnicities over centuries. It is in the context of the escalating refugee crisis in the past four years that Meise chooses to address the sea's virtue by reactualizing *The Golden Legend*. Meise's rendition of the legend through her ceramics would be the tale of individuals that transcend cultural disparities. In a time consuming and painstaking process of moulding clay mostly with her hands, Meise works by materializing her ideas into the material in an immediate process: from an intensely researched subject matter to a spontaneous execution. The dark wooden plinth upon which the figures are placed is, in some instances, complemented with fabric to form its cover, a fabric carefully chosen in relation to contemporary references the Saints may invoke.

With each ceramic sculpture standing on these custom-made plinths, Meise is interested in questioning the function the Saints have today. A potential answer can perhaps be found by

following the “nomad people” in their pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the end of May, where their Saint Sara-la-Kali is venerated in a Carnavalesque and popular fashion, reminding every believer that before becoming a patron she was an ordinary servant from Egypt. Staging these objects of worship using references such as yoga poses, life vests or football players, Meise blurs the lines between the religiously charged and the prosaic. The vulnerable becoming sacred and the sacred vulnerable.

Michaela Meise (b. 1976) lives and works in Berlin. This is her third solo exhibition with the gallery. Other recent solo exhibitions include Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; Dépendance, Brussels; Johann König, Berlin; Meyer Kainer, Vienna; Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles. Selected group exhibitions include Kunstsäle, Berlin; Kunstverein Leipzig, Leipzig; nGbK, Berlin; Bregenzer Kunstverein, Bregenz; Dommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel. Meise is currently working on a musical record with record label Martin Hossbach, which will be released in spring 2017.

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