

Gergő Bánkúti  
and  
Michelle Schmollgruber

SAINTS

2021 - 2023





## Saints

The Saints project explores the portrayal of saints through a combination of photography by Michelle Schmollgruber and potato-sculptures by Gergő Bánkúti.

Potatoes are closely linked to agricultural work. Their cultivation – like all types of domestic work – is extremely monotonous. This repetitive work process can also be seen as a kind of meditation or prayer. In the life of the Hungarian peasantry, work and religion have always formed an inseparable and organic unity. By preserving the potatoes with salt, the moisture - the 'water of life' - seeps away, while the potato itself shrinks. This process is linked to the distortion of our memories. The water's disappearance from the plant is in parallel with the fading of our memories when we try to recall them. Leaving a vague vision, overflowing with emotions, still affecting the present.

In the photographs taken by Michelle Schmollgruber, Gergő Bánkúti took on the role of the saint, using objects from his current life, the living beings around him, and his childhood memories associated with the particular saint's attributes. Like many grandmothers in rural villages in Eastern and Central Europe, Bánkúti's grandmother collected various religious relics and kept them in a display case. Although he does not identify with any particular religion, these depictions and figures had a profound influence on him. And not only in the Hungarian villages, but also in the Austrian Tyrol, where the two artists currently live, one encounters saints every day; it is impossible not to spot them on the facades of houses and along forest paths.

In this series, Schmollgruber impersonated the icon painter, while Bánkúti became the saint himself, reliving childhood memories that continue to shape his life as an adult: understanding and connecting with the saints here and now.



**Saint Eulalia**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 14 x 4 x 5 cm



**Saint Eulalia**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„Our family never had a significant connection to religion. However, once I attended a mass at the local church during the christmas holidays with my mom. My feet were shivering. I have no memories of the architecture and the people, or what the priestess had talked about, but the freezing, beastly cold, and a dove that flown forth from my mouth.“







**Saint Stephen**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 11 x 5 x 5 cm



**Saint Stephen**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„I had the idea of lifting a heavy stone with my friends in a rock garden at the end of our street. There were three of us, so it should have been easy to deal with that big stone together. But the others let it go halfway and I could see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man and God, and my ring finger broke.“









**Saint Francis**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 13 x 5 x 5 cm



**Saint Francis**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„My grandfather got rid of the unwanted kittens - there were always too many of them. He took them from the litter, which was a common practice in the villages. The next day, I heard a desperate meowing from under the woodpile in the garden. Who's calling me? We didn't want to keep any cats except this survivor, the kitten I rescued. Since then I have saved birds, ants and butterflies, and my dog who keeps telling me to save more.“







**Saint Barbara**

2023, potato, watercolour, salt 10 x 7 x 4 cm



**Saint Barbara**

2023, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„There is a hill behind our garden. A radio tower was built there, about 80 metres high. Somehow beautiful but terrifying. Yet in one August night I sneaked out and climbed on it. It was cold and stormy and I was struck by lightning on the long way. I ignored it - it was not meant for me - and climbed to the top.“









**Saint Florian**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 11 x 8 x 6 cm



**Saint Florian**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„I was left home alone for some hours. I liked to keep myself busy, so I poured some of my father's gasoline on the ground of the hen's yard. A chicken said to me then: 'I'm not afraid, light the fire and I will climb into it.' I did as she said, but then I got so scared that I ran for water and quickly put the fire out.”







**Saint Dorothea**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 12 x 6 x 5 cm



**Saint Dorothea**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„When I arrived home with a bouquet from the field, my grandmother always told to me: ‘Anyone who loves flowers can not be a bad person.’ I asked myself whether I was a good person at all and flew back to heaven.”









**Saint Roch**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 8 x 7 x 5 cm



**Saint Roch**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„When I first had corona and had to stay at home, Pakli, my dog went out to buy me some food. I have a very special relationship with him. We are almost never separated, apart from a few hours a week. He knows the trick: bang-bang and he heals all my wounds.“







**Saint Lucia**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 11 x 4 x 4 cm

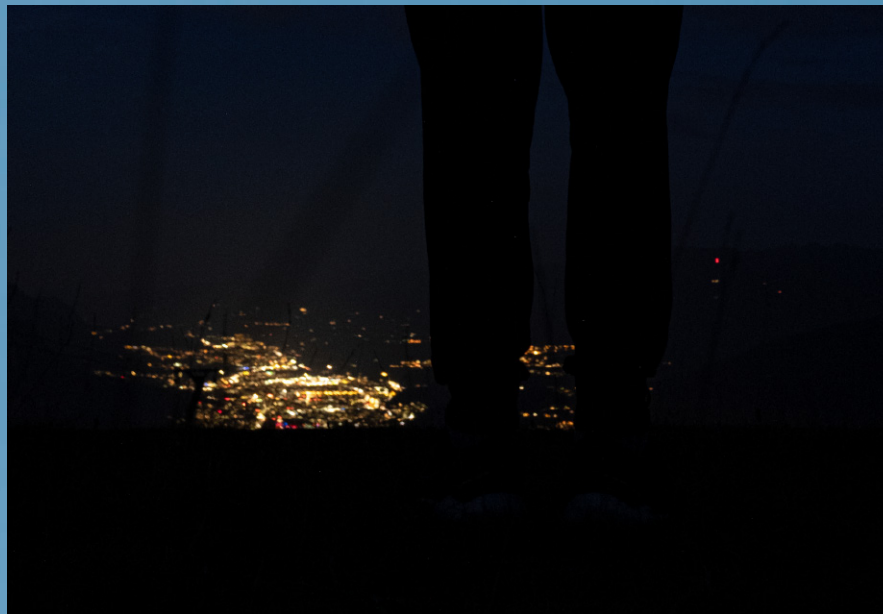


**Saint Lucia**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„The old kitchen was in a separate building, and at night when I had to go out, I always felt scared of the darkness. I was afraid that something or someone was lurking behind me. Once, when I was brave enough, I took out my eyes and, without turning around, looked behind my back. Since then I am no longer afraid to turn back in the dark.“







**Saint Sebastian**

2021, potato, watercolour, salt 11 x 7 x 8 cm



**Saint Sebastian**

2023, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„At a dance camp near Lake Balaton, me and two of my friends were mocked, some other boys called us faggots. Tied to a pillar, I was shot with four arrows by these bullies, but a teacher, Irene helped me recover. For quite a while I had to hide a big part of my personality, only the trees could understand me.“







**Saint Lucas**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 9 x 6 x 8 cm



**Saint Lucas**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„The award ceremony for the linocut competition was held at another school, in the city. I really enjoyed creating the piece I won with. Although she was more than suspicious of the winged bull that gave me the glowing golden chalice, my mother - who escorted me - was very proud of me.“









**Santa Muerte**

2023, potato, watercolour, salt 12 x 5 x 5 cm



**Santa Muerte**

2023, photoprint 75 x 50 cm



„Touching her cheeks softly I knew that my grandmother is not there anymore. There was a body in the coffin, but the person left two days ago. And then life was turned upside down, just like after my father's death. A woman in white appeared above his grave, turned into a stork and flew away.“







**Saint Medard**

2022, potato, watercolour, salt 14 x 6 x 5 cm



**Saint Medard**

2022, photoprint 75 x 50 cm

„Riding downhill on my bike against the rain on a stormy summer afternoon, I could barely catch my breath. The brakes were wet too, so I couldn't stop. I was suffocating. And suddenly I had to smile: an eagle grabbed me with the bike and carried me home safely.“

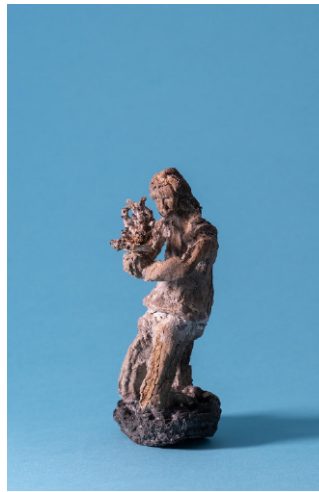




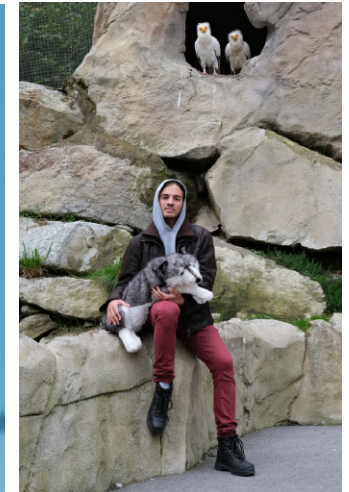
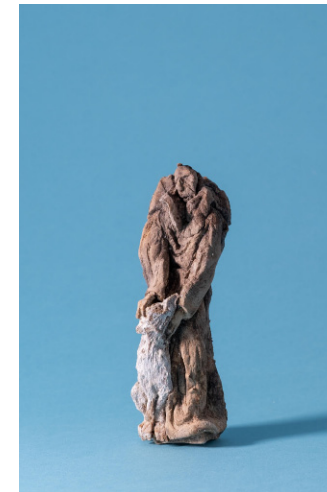




Saint Eulalia



Saint Stephen



Saint Francis



Saint Barbara

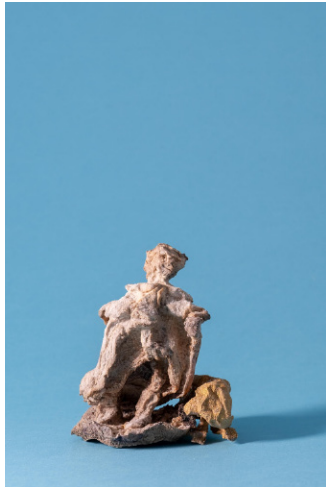


Saint Florian

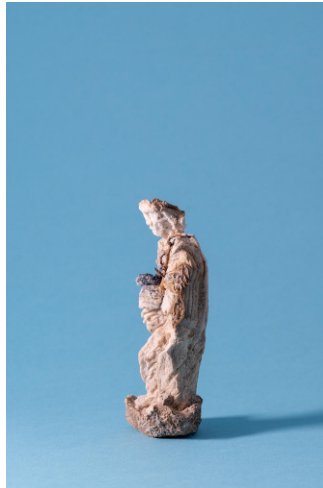


Saint Dorothea

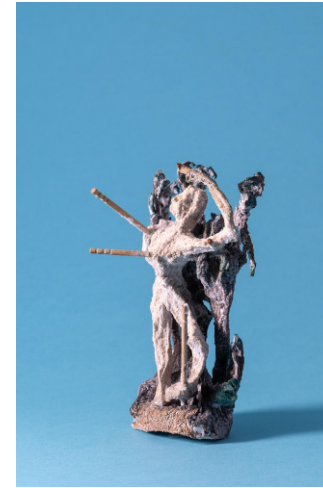




Saint Roch



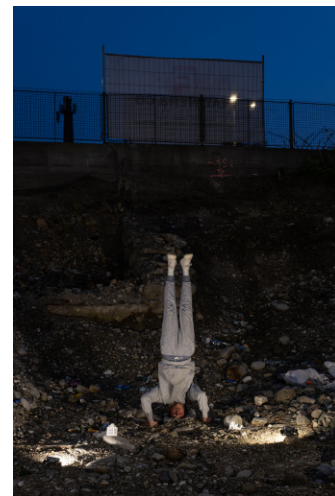
Saint Lucia



Saint Sebastian



Saint Lucas



Santa Muerte



Saint Medard

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