

= Santa Santita =

Santa Santita , or Magdalena , The Unholy Saint , is a 2004 Filipino film starring Angelica Panganiban and Jericho Rosales , directed by Laurice Guillen . The film follows Malen , the daughter of an intercessor , her love affair with a hustler and gigolo , and her confrontation of the evil within her life . Based on a script by Jerry Gracio , the film was picked up by Guillen in 2000 but did not start production because an appropriate actress for Malen could not be found . After picking Panganiban , Guillen began work , and the eventual film was released on November 17 , 2004 , in the Philippines and March 11 , 2005 , internationally . Receiving good reviews from Variety and the Philippine Daily Inquirer , Santa Santita was one of only two films to be rated as Grade A by the Cinema Evaluation Board of the Philippines , and represented the Philippines at the Asiaticafilmediale festival in Italy and the Bangkok International Film Festival .

= = Plot = =

Malen ( Angelica Panganiban ) is the daughter of Chayong ( Hilda Koronel ) , a widowed intercessor at Quiapo Church in Manila . Selling religious charms as a way of meeting men , Malen falls for Mike ( Jericho Rosales ) , a gigolo and hustler . Mike hustles both for his own survival and that of his son , but also because " he knows essentially he 's just strong enough and unscrupulous enough " to do so . After her mother takes umbrage at Malen 's assumed promiscuity , she moves out of Chayong 's house and stays with Mike . When her mother then dies of a heart attack , Malen feels guilt and becomes an intercessor despite having previously sworn the profession off .

Initially met with mistrust by her colleagues , one of whom exclaims that " She is defiling prayer " , Malen heals a child with a hole in its heart through her prayers , despite not even praying seriously . This meets with additional hostility , both from the other intercessors and the clergy , and when Malen dreams of having stigmata , she is forced to confront the problems with her own life , something which comes to a climax when she is asked to bring Mike 's dead son back to life . A side plot involves Father Tony ( Johnny Delgado ) , an alcoholic priest who lives with Mike . Initially his drinking partner , Mike begins to taunt the priest about his failures as the film goes on . At the end of the film , Mike is sent to prison for killing a man after a traffic accident , while Tony 's interactions with Malen convince him that he is addicted to alcohol , prompting him to return to his parish and continue serving as a priest .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

The script was written by Jerry Gracio , influenced by the poem The Hound of Heaven , and won first prize at the scriptwriting competition hosted by the Film Development Council of the Philippines in 2000 . This attracted the attention of Laurice Guillen , who bought the script ( the first time in her career that she had done so ) and signed on to direct the eventual film . The script was brought to Star Cinema , who became interested in producing it , but production stalled due to difficulties finding an appropriate actress to play Malen . Guillen stated that " Since she was a Magdalene , she had to be sexy but she also had to be much more than that .... I was shown many sexy actresses , some of them name stars , but I couldn 't find my Santa @-@ Santita . I felt that the role should go to someone relatively new , who had no fixed image , so that there would be no expectations " . An additional problem was over the religious content of the film , which met with controversy . Guillen eventually found Angelica Panganiban to play Malen , and after five years without production , work on the film began for Unitel Pictures International , whose CEO stated that " the majority of Filipinos , the so @-@ called masses , are not the targets of this movie . Those who frequent the cineplexes and look for fresh material in the movies are " . The title , Santa Santita , translates as " saint who is not really a saint " .

The scenes were primarily shot in Quiapo , Manila , church scenes were recorded in Iguig and dream sequences in Currimao , Ilocos Norte . Guillen noted the stress of recording in Quiapo , due to the large number of extras , the already crowded nature of the area and the small size of the time periods during which they were allowed to film in the church itself .

= = Release = =

The film was previewed to good reviews , and after an initial release in the Philippines on November 17 , 2004 , opened in cinemas in Manhattan , San Diego and Honolulu on March 11 , 2005 , as Magdalena , The Unholy Saint . It was given good reviews by both Filipino and American magazines and newspapers ; Variety magazine 's reviewer noted that " Performances are solid , and former child actress Panganiban is impressive as a young woman who finds herself with a vocation she never asked for .... Guillen 's helming is slick and confident , and the HD @-@ sourced photography and other technical credits are of good quality " , and the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported that " Gorgeously crafted , ' Santa Santita 's ' strength lies in its illuminating take on man 's neverending search for meaning , and in the thoughtful , truthful characterization of its leads " .

Other reviewers were more cautionary ; the New York Times wrote that " the aim of the filmmaker seems unclear , with Magdalena at first celebrated for her humanness and then exalted for her sudden saintliness " and describing the story as " wearilyngly eventful " . The Manila Bulletin noted that while the film is about belief ( or lack thereof ) in miracles , " the effort to explore this issue is not brought into fulfilling fruition . We keep on hoping something else more significant would happen later in the film to invoke the viewers own feelings about faith and an all @-@ seeing , all @-@ merciful God , but this never comes " . Although Rosales and Panganiban were praised for their acting , the reviewer felt that there was " just no combustible chemistry between the two of them " .

The Cinema Evaluation Board of the Philippines gave the film a Grade A rating , making it one of only two films to qualify into that category at that point , and the only film to qualify in 2004 . This rating gave Santa Santita a 100 percent rebate on amusement taxes , and is only awarded to films that the Board feels can " revitalize the moribund industry " . The movie represented the Philippines at the Asiaticafilmediale festival in Italy , and was also shown at the Sine ! Sine ! Film Fest in San Francisco . It was a finalist in the Catholic Mass Media Awards , and represented the Philippines at the Bangkok International Film Festival .