Material Witness: Doris Salcedo's Practice as an Address on Political Violence through Materiality

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Doris Salcedo's Practice as an Address on Political Violence through Materiality

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates Doris Salcedo's practice and the means by which she addresses political violence relying on materials rather than figural images. She evokes the imminence of violence, the presence of the absent victims, and the hidden wounds of the survivors. An examination of her sculptures and installations begins by focusing on the socio-political context and history of prolonged civil violence Salcedo has experienced during her life in Colombia. Following this I analyze: the artist's deliberate choice of sculpture as her medium; her preference for everyday objects, such as domestic furniture and materials charged with meaning but without reference to specific victims; her rigorous, highly involved process; and finally, her emphasis on surface as an evocative element integral to the work. The ideas of Beatriz Gonzalez, Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp are considered to the extent to which they were engaged in or contested by Salcedo in developing her practice. Finally, by analyzing a particular body of Salcedo's work, I propose a series of six visual strategies the artist employs to convey through materials without pictorializing the enduring effects of political violence: 1) the suggestion of space to place, 2) the sense of the uncanny and anthropomorphism, 3) the materiality of the heavily worked surfaces of her sculptures, 4) the weight of time as a material presence, 5) the correspondence of body to scale, and 6) the sense of disjunction and

disorientation. Over the course of her career, I propose that Salcedo has focused on two principal concerns: political violence, first in Colombia and now throughout the world; and materiality, making materials speak on behalf of the victims through a complex, painstaking process using increasingly ephemeral materials. I conclude that Salcedo's project pushes materiality beyond its expected parameters and that her recent work challenges the definition of sculpture and the object, as well as the idea of the temporal, in an audacious expression born of her longstanding vision and commitment to the victims of political violence.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation was driven by my passion for Doris Salcedo's sculpture but reached completion through the support of numerous people to whom I owe enormous thanks. I took a long road to reach this point, but absorbed the experience of living in Latin America, of teaching and curating that strengthened my resolve to write my thesis about Doris and her specific project. Harvard allowed me the opportunity to first meet and talk with Doris when she was a visiting artist more than ten years ago, just after I returned from Mexico. That dialogue coupled with my deep respect for her work convinced me to focus on her sculpture.

It was my advisor, Tom Cummins who sparked my decision to complete my doctorate and write this dissertation and I am extremely grateful to him. Without his encouragement, unwavering belief in my ability to write this thesis and understanding of the demands of my personal and professional responsibilities, I would not have finished. Tom understood my keen focus on Salcedo's project and he championed my efforts with unfailing certainty. His support was invaluable and his knowledge of Latin American culture, history, politics and art was fundamental to my work.

Within the History of Art and Architecture Department I would also like to thank Henri Zerner whose teachings began for me in college and I am grateful did not end there, but continued with his insightful comments and warm encouragement on my thesis. Deanna Dalyrmple has long supported and helped me over the many years I have pursued my doctorate for which I am thankful.

I have had the pleasure of learning from Doris Sommer since the 1990's on DRCLAS projects and exhibitions relating to the arts and culture of Latin America. Her intelligence and commitment inspire me and her support of my work on Doris Salcedo has proven invaluable.

While writing my dissertation I have enjoyed serving as the Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Harvard Art Museums and to Director, Tom Lentz, and Chief Curator, Debi Kao, I owe enormous thanks. Tom and Debi hired me with the expectation that my dissertation would soon reach completion. Their persistent support, encouragement and patience during a period of intense activity within the museums, allowed me to finish. Moreover, their unwavering belief in me and my dissertation fueled my efforts. Debi's direction, support and flexibility these last two years pushed and inspired me more than I can say.

A number of colleagues at the museums have encouraged me along the way including Sarah Kianovsky, Lynette Roth, Laura Muir, Michael Dumas and Michelle Lamuniere and I have greatly appreciated it. Jessica Ficken set an example, spurring me onward as she doggedly finished her Master's thesis while I toiled to complete my dissertation. Francesca Bewer and Karen Gausch also provided frequent words and images of inspiration.

I am fortunate to have received support over many years from two esteemed colleagues at the art museums, whose words of wisdom and belief in me have given me strength. Jerry Cohn has taught me, prodded me and inspired me countless times over the last three decades. She proved equally important to me during my dissertation process. Porter Mansfield has been a source of encouragement and help over more years than I can count. Her unflagging optimism and wise counsel I am grateful to have received, particularly over the final years of my doctorate.

In my surrounding world, my friends Sally Kemp Atkinson, Dottie Williams and Helen Quigley have been behind me every step of the way encouraging me to keep going, regardless of my doubts. Their support has made an enormous difference, as has their understanding of my passion for Salcedo's sculpture. Dottie's help under heavy time constraints was especially important to me and I cannot begin to thank her. Similarly, Eve Griffin's long hours of

assistance and her positive attitude, regardless of my frequent questions regarding technology, made an enormous difference to me and I am extremely grateful.

This dissertation was written because Doris Salcedo's sculpture and installations provoke, move and disturb me on so many levels that I wanted to delve deeply into analyzing and elucidating the nature and importance of her work. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to Doris for sharing her thoughts, ideas, concerns and challenges with me, and for answering my endless questions. The hours spent discussing the details of her process, the choice and qualities of materials, the logistics, the successes and the failures behind each piece and above all, hearing about the victims and survivors whose experiences she absorbed as her own, deeply informed my thoughts. Learning from Doris about the times she shared with mothers searching for their lost sons, witnessing their private pain and enduring loss, allowed me a perspective on her sculptures that the written word, alone, could not provide. Doris is a private, deeply thoughtful individual and I am eternally thankful that she allowed me "in" and shared perspectives that I have absorbed into my life as a whole.

My correspondence with Doris and knowledge of her work was helped invaluably by Carolyn Alexander whose commitment to the artist and her challenging projects began in the early 1990's, before Salcedo became an international figure. Carolyn's support and assistance with photographs, collections and numerous questions related to my research allowed me to surmount the various challenges entailed in writing on a living artist and I am extremely grateful.

I cannot begin to express the depth of appreciation I owe my longtime mentor, Dean Margot Gill. This thesis evolved, grew and came to conclusion due to the unflagging certainty and commitment Margot demonstrated to me over the last seventeen months. Despite her overwhelmingly full calendar, we met weekly to discuss and review my writing. Her intellectual

curiosity, her delight in learning, her commitment to students and the substance of graduate work, combined with her absolute certainty that I would write this thesis on Salcedo, inspired and propelled me forward. Margot is a singular academic figure at Harvard, one whose leadership, intelligence and humanity I was extremely fortunate to benefit from these last months, in particular. She made this challenging process one in which the excitement of the ideas I sought to express in my dissertation and the sheer joy of learning continued through to the end.

To my family I owe my utmost appreciation for their endless patience and boundless encouragement over the exceedingly long journey they have shared with me. Long ago my mother and father gave me the gift of encouraging me to pursue my passion for art history, believing I could accomplish this doctorate. Never did they question the long path I took or the choices I made. Although my mother and I often discussed art and did not always agree about who and what deserved acclaim, she and my Father believed in my ideas and my devotion to the work. It saddens me that my Mother is no longer alive to see me complete this dissertation; her tough questions and commitment to her ideals have greatly influenced my perspective throughout this process. To my Father, whose unwavering love and support has given me strength since childhood, I owe boundless appreciation. Without his certainty that I could and would write this dissertation I could not have reached this point. Always asking without pressuring, he nurtured my commitment and allowed me to do so without question. In the same way, my brothers Tom and John have been certain about my work and have pushed me to complete my dissertation, never skeptical and always curious about my ideas and Salcedo's sculpture. Their enthusiasm for my topic and my work has sustained me over these many years. Within my husband's family, Muffie Cabot has similarly championed my research and writing, encouraging me to do what she knew I had in me, for which I am extremely grateful.

It is to Juan, Diana and Nico I wish to express my greatest thanks. Diana and Nico have grown up living with my deep commitment to Doris Salcedo's work, discussing and questioning her ideas and the nature of her sculpture. They have prodded me, waited for me, carved out space for me to think, to write and to pursue my dream. I am enormously grateful for their continuous encouragement and understanding on this long road. Their support and pride in my work fueled my efforts beyond words. I hope that they will find in my journey an example, despite the years it took to reach this end. Finally, to Juan I owe a depth of gratitude impossible to measure. His enduring patience, his belief in me, my ideas and my ability to write and reflect during this drawn out process made this dissertation possible. Never did he question me or my commitment, rather, he made every effort to support and foster my work so that I would achieve what he knew I could. His attitude, his concern and his willingness to listen, read, encourage and stand by me, while balancing his own countless projects and responsibilities, helped me finish this thesis and I am extremely grateful.

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Introduction

> I remember I met a very beautiful woman two years ago. A mother who had been waiting for ten years for her son to appear. In ten years she has never come out of the house in fear tha ther son might call or come to knock at the door when she is not around. She is a person caught in her own jail. His dish is always on the table. There are hundreds of cases like hers. It is then that one realizes how these persons have been marked by violence….
>
> ---Doris Salcedo[1]

Doris Salcedo addresses political violence through sculpture and installation, creating a material presence evoking, without pictorializing, the presence of the absent, unnamed victims of civil war. She lives in Colombia, where she was born and has chosen to remain, experiencing this violence stemming from historical conditions plagued by an unstable rule of law, witnessing the devastation and listening to the victims of the country's brutal conflict between leftist guerrillas, the military, narcotics traffickers and the paramilitary forces. Thousands of people have disappeared (kidnapped and/or never found), been killed or forced to abandon their homes and resettle due to the strife, and the victims' testimonies have fueled Salcedo's project from the beginning, driving her commitment to acknowledge and mourn through sculpture, the unburied dead ignored by the State. Her trajectory initially focused on the politics and the silent victims of its violence in Colombia, but as her work gained international attention in the 1990's, she created pieces confronting the political violence plaguing societies throughout the world.

Salcedo is an artist of global significance whose pieces figure in major international museums and private collections. She has been commissioned to create site-specific public

[1] Doris Salcedo in Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo, "Art and Media-tion: Reflections on Violence and Representation," in *Cultural Producers in Perilous States*, ed. George E. Marcus (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 241.

installations on political violence at venues ranging from the Tate Modern Turbine Hall, to the Istanbul Biennial, to the T1Triennial of Contemporary Art in the Castello di Rivoli, Turin, and the city of Chicago in 2014. In addition, she has mounted travelling international exhibitions, such as her *Plegaria Muda* in 2010-12 and earned major art awards including the Spanish Ministry of Culture's 2010 Velasquez prize and, in 2013, the Hiroshima Art Prize. The political subject of her work resonates throughout the world, and the attention she has received in the last fifteen years has expanded as her presence and aesthetic project have circulated through exhibitions, essays and lectures.

My interest in Salcedo's work evolved from my experience living in Mexico City for more than a decade from the mid 1980's to 1990's, during a period of uprising by harshly oppressed indigenous peoples in Chiapas, Mexico and of dramatic political rupture in the country. My exposure to the fractious circumstances surrounding the Zapatista Revolution in southern Mexico and to the threatening discord within the nation's Government and military regarding the means of addressing the group's demands, (articulated by their charismatic leader Subcommandante Marcos), was direct, personal and permanently changed my life and that of my family. Chiapas and the indigenous communities figured significantly in my family's commitment to Mexico and its history; the socio-political situation in the region was a concern of such importance that my husband was sent as a negotiator to the jungle to reach a peaceful solution with the Zapatistas. Their marginalization and the ways in which political violence threatens and makes disappear members of these communities I understand firsthand and the reason my family left Mexico directly responds to this reality.

The certainty of Salcedo's statement, without prior knowledge of the specifics of her history and sources, resonated with me following my experience in Mexico. It absorbed my

attention when I studied her sculpture within the white cube of the museum. Her cement-filled furniture pieces, the single chairs, the bureau with chairs fused on top, were the first works I saw by Salcedo, the latter at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the 1990's. (Figure I.1) The ways in which materials she obsessively layered, melded, rubbed and forced materials into a surprisingly delicate, evocative surface that conveyed a solid, silent presence muffling so much within, absorbed my eye and deeply disturbed my thoughts. During these years in the 1990's, she exhibited widely, at for example, the ICA Boston in *Currents 92: The Absent Body;* Carnegie International 1995; the Art Institute of Chicago, "About Place: Recent Art of the Americas"; the New Museum of Contemporary Art and SITE/Santa Fe in her 1998-99 *Unland/Doris Salcedo;* , and at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, "Displacements: Miroslaw Balka, Doris Salcedo, Rachel Whiteread." During the same period Charles Merewether wrote his essays on her sculptures, such as "Naming Violence in the Work of Doris Salcedo," among others. Merewether is an art historian who wrote frequently about art in Latin America at the time, hence I was familiar with his body of work. Moreover, Carlos Basualdo and Nancy Princenthal contributed essays along with Merewether to the Phaidon book *Doris Salcedo* in 2000, that included the artist within a group of leading international painters, sculptors, photographers and performance artists who were major figures in the global art world at the time. Together, my exposure to her work, my personal experience in the context of her focus on political violence, and the essays I read regarding her ideas and process, drew me to her sculpture.

The importance of Salcedo's project, her address on political violence, will be the focus of this thesis. Namely, I will examine how, without vivid imagery, figurative elements or a narrative, but centering solely on materials, she imparts the sense of the absent victims and the unmeasured consequences of war. Attention will be given to a body of Salcedo's work, as a

means of analyzing how she conveys through sculpture a witness to the violence and the physical and emotional effects wrought by conflict through materiality, engaging the public through a series of visual strategies integral to the image she conceives. Her project is not about pictorializing the human loss from violence, but focuses on charging materials with the weight of expressing the tragedy. From the beginning, two aesthetic choices have figured in her work; first, she selected as her means the worn objects of everyday existence, domestic furniture and possessions, materials familiar and charged with meaning, but without referencing specific victims. Second, surface is critical to her project; each piece reveals an evocative, almost painterly layering like a skin bearing scars, which conveys the complexity of her exacting process of melding, abrading and interweaving diverse materials. Beyond these two constants in her sculptures, the artist pursues a series of visual strategies that serve to convey without figuration or narrative, her address on political violence, acknowledging the unburied dead and surviving victims.

This thesis will examine Salcedo's practice in three chapters, focusing on a body of her work and her language of materials, to speak to the violence and the politics behind it. The first chapter will present the socio-political history and context of violence in Colombia, explaining the roots and ongoing nature of the civil strife informing the artist's project and her visual choices. A comparison of Salcedo's approach with that of other prominent Colombian artists, Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría, whose work addresses the war by dissimilar means, will be explored to establish a framework for the kinds of aesthetic responses circulating within Colombia at the time. Chapter Two will analyze the art historical influences important in Salcedo's formation as an artist, and the issues she chose to engage and deliberately alter or reject in her practice. Included in this chapter will be the study of her teacher, Colombian artist

Beatriz González, as well as, the writings, works and practice of German artist Joseph Beuys and last, the theories and pieces of the French artist, Marcel Duchamp. Finally and most importantly, Chapter Three will propose and analyze six visual strategies employed by Salcedo to convey her address on political violence through materiality without pictorializing. These strategies, related to the two aesthetic priorities mentioned above--the use of everyday objects and materials and her emphasis on the expressive qualities of surface--are integral to her project. They are the means by which Salcedo realizes her statement on civil violence and her implicit criticism of the politics behind it. Given the absence of narrative and figurative imagery in the artist's address, and the manner in which materials are charged with the weight of imparting the presence of the silent victims, the relative effectiveness of her intention will be touched upon as well.

The importance of Doris Salcedo's work within Colombia, as well as internationally, stems in part from the deeply researched and fastidiously conceived and constructed pieces she creates with domestic objects and materials familiar across cultures and generations—pieces that address a pervasive condition of political violence that leaves countless, unnamed victims worldwide. Her project seeks to acknowledge and to mourn through works that communicate with the viewer the human loss, allowing one to witness the repercussions of civil war and to remember the dead through a material expression universal in language and scope. Although she began as a political artist focusing on the politics and war in Colombia, from the start she has taken a stance in her work highlighting the political conditions and violent means inflicted on many peoples of various societies and eras. However, the original and continued source for her address stems from living in Colombia. In order to unpack and analyze her project, this thesis will examine the social and political history and conditions that preceded and have unfolded during Saledo's years as an artist and the primary artistic influences in theory, means and

concept she found particularly informative to her practice. At the same time, her work engages dialectically with postwar sculptural traditions by artists such as Christian Boltanski, Eugenio Dittborn, Mona Hatoum and Rachel Whiteread that take up memory, absence, violence, and oppression.

Perspectives on Past Literature

Writings on Salcedo's work center on her practice as a means of creating a visual discourse on violence and its victims in Colombia. They discuss her work in relation to the political, as an index of violence, and the role in her practice of metaphor, of process, ritual and healing, memory and the body. Each of these approaches lends an important perspective on Salcedo's work, but none focuses upon the notion of materiality with or without legible signifiers as fundamental to her address. Tied to her profound commitment to materials I also propose that her emphasis on surface is critical in all of her works, regardless of scale and ephemerality. Moreover, the extent to which her project speaks to an international experience, as well as the Colombian context of political violence, is a point the other writers do not fully engage. Salcedo's process, and the extended period in which she conceives her sculpture or installation, entailing research into the context of the site, and the victims' experiences, link to her focus on the materials and the procedures she chooses. This commitment to materiality is inextricably connected to her emphasis on political violence; it is a priority that defines her practice and the nature of her address on civil war.

Charles Merewether presents Salcedo's project as creating a kind of counter-monument, which addresses the violence that tears apart her country's history but remains unacknowledged. He sees her work as created through the details of individual memories. He discusses her use of worn furniture, of torn clothing and shoes, as testimony to the absent body and giving form to the

memory of the violence. Merewether situates Salcedo's practice within the context of Colombia, explaining the significance of her decision to place her sculptures of worn, cement-filled furniture within the galleries of art museums as an act of acknowledging the violence publically, giving voice to what victims have feared expressing due to the possibility of recrimination.[2] Moreover, her installation stands as a public space of mourning. He speaks, as well, of her use of furniture and personal belongings as exposing the nonsite, the home abandoned as victims flee, displaced by guerrillas or paramilitary forces, as well as the hidden world and life where victims and survivors exist, outside the public eye. Referring to her *Unland* series he points to the weaving of threads and hairs as a means of overcoming traumatic experience by sewing over the wounds, commemorating the orphaned girl whose dress the artist recalls in this piece.[3] (Figure I.2) Merewether states that Salcedo places in public the relics, the remembered stories from Colombia's violent past, making sure they will not be forgotten, and forcing the nation to measure this past, the unburied dead.[4]

Similarly, Madeleine Grynsztejn defines Salcedo's project as one that gives a voice and a place to the community of victims and survivors of violence in Colombia. She describes the artist's use of domestic objects as extensions of a body, and that through her process of embedding with cement, her sculptures "…allude by metaphorical indirection to a savage destruction of the domestic sphere that is nearly impossible to express and almost never

[2] Charles Merewether, "Zones of Marked Instability: Woman and the Space of Emergence," in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 114-15, 119-120, and Charles Merewether, "To Bear Witness," in *Doris Salcedo* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 19-22.

[3] Merewether, *Doris Salcedo*, 23.

[4] Charles Merewether, "Return of the Dead," in *The Interrupted Life*, ed. Frances Morin (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 76-84 and Merewether, *Doris Salcedo*, 23.

witnessed."[5] She discusses the process by which the artist melds and joins dismembered parts in her sculptures as a kind resistance to violence, suggesting that the details of lace and of the making entailed in her *La Casa Viuda* series, are primarily feminine, and that the evidence of repetition is "ritualistic."[6] (Figure I.3) I would argue that her repetitive process is less about ritual and more about the obsessive pattern of actions she undertakes throughout her oeuvre, as highly detailed, exhaustive steps that at once suggest a kind of violent act and one of release.

Finally, Grynsztejn points to *Atrabilarios* as a piece that creates a site for remembrance, and mourning in a public space. (Figure I.4) She links the idea of the trace, suggested by the shoe as the remains of the loved one and the wall niches in which the shoes are placed, sewn behind animal skin, as suggestive of a cemetery site. This installation she perceives as a place for maintaining and acknowledging the memories that, as Merewether stated, Salcedo fears will be lost and never addressed publicly.[7]

Carlos Basualdo discusses Salcedo's sculptures as composed of a montage of elements, diverse materials, layered, disparate, disjointed, which he compares to the disintegration of language which Paul Celan used in his poetry to express the experience of absence after the Holocaust. Basualdo sees, as well, a kind of hybridism in her work that includes the element of craft along with industrial aesthetics, the Duchampian readymade and what he calls "craft fabrication."[8] Space as a political and aesthetic meeting point for viewers to confront, study and be forced to see her work as a whole and in detail, is another aspect of her project that he

[5] Madeleine Grynsztejn, *About Place: Recent Art of the Americas* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 12.

[6] Grynsztejn, *About Place*, 12.

[7] Grynsztejn, *About Place*, 14.

[8] Carlos Basualdo, "Interview: Carlos Basualdo in Conversation with Doris Salcedo," in *Doris Salcedo*, ed. Nancy Princenthal, Carlos Basualdo, and Andreas Huyssen (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 21-22.

pinpoints as important. In particular, he sees what he terms "condensation and displacement" as the dominant processes in Salcedo's work: that parts of her sculptures of furniture, the stainless steel pieces in *Nov. 6,* for example, the legs and seats fuse or "condense" together then "displace" themselves so that the original chair used to begin the piece gets lost within the strange amalgamation of elements of chair that results. (Figure I.5) He cites the tables in the *Unland* series, the efforts to join and mend furniture, as an act of making that embodies her will to keep alive the parts of memory. Through sewing together the everyday, interweaving but maintaining the fragments, she creates a whole that never coalesces. He compares the tables and chairs in these two series to the fragmented words in Paul Celan's poetry, but says that Salcedo's pieces become what they once were but are "…witnesses and proof" of the procedures they endured.[9] Finally, he talks about her sculptures as part of a continuous present. They are fragments of something that happened, that is happening and that could happen. He describes this sense of time as underlying many of her works, infusing the materials and the effort to access memories that may not be retrievable.[10] Much of Basualdo's writing on Salcedo outlines ideas with which I am in agreement. However, his emphasis on the continual transformation he finds occurring in the disjointed furniture pieces, and the priority he gives to naming each piece as part of a genre of object in an effort to illuminate the hybrid visuality of her tables, chairs etc. are ideas which interfere with the aesthetic and political issues I view as most important in understanding the work and her project.

Jill Bennett writes about Salcedo's practice from the perspective of trauma and memory studies, viewing her sculptures as means of prompting an affective response in the viewer. Her

[9] Carlos Basualdo, "A Model of Pain," in *Doris Salcedo: NEITHER,* ed. Rod Mengham and Carlos Basualdo (London: White Cube Gallery, 2004), 31-32.

[10] Basualdo, "A Model of Pain," 32-33.

approach perceives art as operating in a kind of transactive manner, in which sensation is embedded in the work, triggering affect through the viewer's direct engagement.[11] She positions Salcedo's pieces as inanimate objects that bear an elusive trace of the pain of the other, and states that as an artist who gets to know those who have endured trauma, Salcedo creates work that "enacts" the state of grief, the memories of violence they share with her. Bennett cites the personal objects, shoes, chairs etc. in the artist's pieces as "…not fixed signifiers but index a change in the way such common objects are perceived…."[12] She sees these objects as not representative of those who mourn, rather as projecting "the sense memory of loss" and the state of sorrow the survivor continues to live.[13] Moreover, she suggests that these personal belongings go through a process of transformation, of remaking and "becoming strange" as the viewer studies the chair or table, recognizing its familiar contours then realizing it is altered; the human traces function as "affective triggers" and the table or chair occupies the space of those who endured the trauma and are mourning. [14] After the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center tragedy Bennett wrote that Salcedo's work was a kind of political art that speaks to international incidents of trauma, generating affect in a manner that engages viewers worldwide.[15]

Although I agree that the traces embedded in Salcedo's work function neither as relics, nor as fixed signifiers and that her work generates an affective response, I do not view her pieces

[11] Jill Bennett, *Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 2-7.

[12] Jill Bennett, "Art, Affect, and the 'Bad Death:' Strategies for Communicating the Sense Memory of Loss," in *Signs* 28:1 Gender and Cultural Memory (Autumn, 2002), 333, 335-6.

[13] Bennett, "Art, Affect…," 345.

[14] Jill Bennett, "*Tenebrae* after September 11," in *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, ed. Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 188-190 and Bennett, "Art, Affect…," 346-347.

[15] Bennett, "*Tenebrae* after September 11," 193.

solely from the ways in which they operate transactively. Bennett analyzes the visual qualities of Salcedo's sculptures from the perspective of their communicative properties, as conveying the experience of conflict and trauma. My reading emphasizes the artist's focus on materials, both as a means of addressing the human cost and pervasive conditions of political violence, and as an aesthetic statement embedded in her commitment to the making of her pieces and to the visual qualities of texture, hue, scale and presence that define her statement. Salcedo chose sculpture as her medium, and her process and the ways in which she employs materiality to convey the reality of civil war, in my view, is fundamental to her practice. Bennett's perspective on Salcedo's project stems from the approach of trauma and memory studies and does not consider the artist's work from the perspective of her commitment to creating sculpture and the tradition and issues of art and its history that figure significantly in her material expression.

Finally, Mieke Bal has written about Salcedo's practice from her perspective in the field of visual studies, considering each piece as a "theoretical object" and examining it as a means of demonstrating the writer's ideas on the political function of art. From this approach, Bal views art as functioning by "enforcing a gaze" and defines the means by which Salcedo's pieces operate as reliant on a series of aesthetic strategies. She includes anthropomorphisms, the inclusion of a fragment of a child's dress, or bones and a zipper, and the idea of translation, which she explains as Salcedo's means of avoiding the overdetermined reading of the shoes in her *Atrabiliarios* (worn shoes typically are read from the perspective of the "holocaust effect"[16]) by separating them, placing them in niches and covering them with animal skin, hence

[16] Ernest van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). "Holocaust effect" is a term that comes from a study of aesthetic strategies in facing mass violence, that van Alphen discusses relating in particular to the worn shoes in piles taken from Jews in Concentration camps during World War II.

"translating" the shoes into singular objects rather than the pile.[17] (Figure I.4) Another strategy she cites is duration, which she describes as the significant time commitment Salcedo's pieces require of the viewer to "surrender" time and closely study to see the traces, the threads, the ways in which she created each work.[18] She lists installation as a strategy, meaning the placement of objects in a manner that is strange or out-of-place, and describes site-specificity as a fifth strategy: the artist creates her work in relation to the context in which it is installed. Bal describes monumentality as Salcedo's next aesthetic strategy: connecting the idea of monuments, typically regarded as tokens of memory, to Salcedo's way of bringing the hidden memories of context into her work, creating social spaces where politics and the affective experience combine. Related to monumentality, Bal cites scale as another strategy: referring to the intersection of the disproportionately large to intimately small details and objects in space, adding the human proportion into this back and forth, as a means of framing the political function of Salcedo's sculpture. The final two aesthetic strategies she sets up include first, labor: the exhaustive working process of many hands, that is necessary in the building of most of her pieces, and that she says Salcedo undertakes so that the artist can experience the suffering of others.[19] Finally, language is the final strategy she proposes, referring to the artist's choice of words as deliberate and linked directly with the political function of her art.[20]

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[17] Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2-5 and Mieke Bal, "Earth Aches: the Aesthetics of the Cut," *Doris Salcedo: Shibboleth* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 44, 46, 49, 72, 73.

[18] Bal, "Earth Aches," 49.

[19] Bal, "Earth Aches," 60. Bal draws a comparison to the anonymous workers whose tireless efforts build and built so much in a myriad of societies over time.

[20] Bal, "Earth Aches," 60-62.

Although I agree with several of the aesthetic strategies Bal proposes, I fundamentally disagree with her approach to Salcedo's work as perceived, overall, as "theoretical objects" that function as political objects. She says they enforce a gaze as pieces of cultural evidence rather than as works of art. She does not regard them as sculptures and installations that figure in a tradition and history of art, of visual languages and process, bearing the issues of political violence and the challenges of materiality in each expression. Bal's lens is focused on theories that shed light on Salcedo's project but fail to frame her work within the context of a history of artmaking which is integral to the artist's practice. She chose to create sculpture and installations, as opposed to visual statements through another medium because art, and the possibilities of materials, defines her address. Poetry resonates deeply with Salcedo, as her frequent references to Celan, for example, attests; that genre at once evocative and spare, is also the language of expression she prefers and realizes through sculpture.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One will examine the nature of violence in Colombia, it's historic roots, the context of civil war and violent crime endured by the country for the last sixty years and the disturbing result, that violence is considered an element of national identity. The frequency of deliberate, horrific violence that figures in daily life directly through "disappearances" meaning the kidnapping and/or murder of individuals, or indirectly through forced evacuations and displacements from homes and entire villages, for example, requires people to adapt to the continuous violation and trauma by deeming it an ordinary occurrence.[21] Periods of violence

[21] Daniel Pécaut, "From the Banality of Violence to Real Terror: the Case of Colombia," in *Societies of Fear: The Legacy of Civil War, Violence and Terror in Latin America*, ed. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), 141-142 and 147. He presents the idea that because intense violence was so prevalent

driven by differing protagonists seeking varied ends mark Colombian history: the 1930's; the time known as *La Violencia* beginning in the late 1940's through the 1950's into the 1960's; and again in the 1980's to 1990's, resulting in the perception that violence is a seemingly continuous presence in society. It is considered a fundamental aspect of power relations in the country, a point that deeply informs Salcedo's perspective on political violence.[22] The persistent and dominant role violence plays in Colombian social history and politics lead to the creation in the late 1980's of an academic field, *violentologia/violentology*, in which scholars in political science, history and sociology focused on the study of violence and the nation's civil war, proposing objective causes for Colombia's violent culture. Through this field, violence became objectified as a specific Colombian subject within social science, leading to its study by various disciplines in a discursive way.[23] Moreover, in 1987, the Colombian government organized a Special Commission for the Study of Violence, with members including, among others, a retired major general from the military and the preeminent scholar on the history of Colombian violence. Their mandate was to investigate the nature, context and causes of the violence, and publish their findings in a government report.[24] It was during the years of the Commission and

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from 1980 on, that it became a given, and was seen as an everyday fact of life. "…the marked continuities in the forms of violence led that violence to be perceived as given, rather than something new," 142.

[22] Pécaut, "From the Banality of Violence,"163-164. Pécaut talks about "overt violence" as integral in establishing power and as an example says "Such relations of violence cut across existing institutions. By 1978, the Frente Nacional government having been in power for twenty years, the killings organized by a local leader were not even seen as violating the rule of law."

[23] The field of violentology was created in 1987 by scholars in various fields, political science, sociology, history, etc. as a means of investigating, analyzing and discussing the roots, continued presence, causes and proposed means of counteracting it. Unlike Holocaust studies, it is a field particular to Colombia, its context and set of conditions that were ongoing and exacerbated by the structure and negotiation of power in the country and growth of the narcotics industry within this situation. See Mary Roldan, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia: 1946-1953* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 282-283.

[24] *Colombia: Violencia y Democracia, Informe presentado al Ministerio de Gobierno*, ed. Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia-Financiacion Colciencias, 1987) 17-30.

the establishment of the field of *Violentologia*, that Salcedo began interviewing victims of the violence and creating her sculptures from worn furniture and materials.

The complex nature and changing players in Colombia's violence and the economic, legal and social structures related to municipal politics and trade in both sanctioned and illicit products, from flowers to emeralds and narcotics, begin to explain the entrenched conditions fueling civil war. This thesis will outline the history, developments and the principal powers who fostered the violence that led to tragedies such as the November 6-7, 1985 takeover of the Palace of Justice and the massacres of villagers in various rural municipalities in order to establish the context in which Salcedo's address on the sheer number of instances and unacknowledged victims of horrific violence must be recognized. The specificity of her project will be contrasted with the work created by other Colombian artists living under these circumstances and that also speaks to the violence, such as that of Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría.

Chapter Two will delve into the works and practices of three artists of particular importance to Salcedo's address on political violence. She chose to absorb and question the issues, practices, and ideas of Beatriz González, Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp. Although the concerns of each artist vary in terms of their influence on Salcedo's project, she interweaves elements from each that will be examined in this chapter. Acclaimed Colombian artist, Beatriz González was Salcedo's principal teacher, her work and her thorough instruction in art history and theory, deeply grounded the young artist before she left Bogotá to travel abroad, then attend graduate school in sculpture at NYU. González' interweaving of different kinds of information, from photographs documenting events to art historical images or popular and religious iconography and non-pictorial elements in works composed of diverse materials, Salcedo cites as

influential to her artistic development.[25] Her teacher received national and international attention in the late 1960's to 1970's for her figurative paintings of masterpieces of art history or local religious or political icons, rendered in bright hues on enamel, framed within a piece of domestic furniture such as a bed, side table or vanity. (Figure I.6) The furniture was metal with a painted, faux-wood surface, recognized as the kind of furniture generally found in the homes of the lower classes, or second hand, wooden pieces typical in middle class homes. Both types of furniture were deliberately chosen and together with her paintings, conveyed her layered address and critique of Colombian social and cultural norms. From the beginning, González' practice explored the gender specific, popular hobbies and activities considered inappropriate subjects of high art in Colombia. Salcedo was familiar with her teacher's quotidian, historical and devotional images rendered in the flat, bright-hued, visual language typical of pop art, framed by domestic furniture and although the younger artist's aesthetic choices diverge, the issues of socio-political critique and mix of materials figure prominently in the practice of both sculptors.

González' work and rigorous theoretical teachings fostered Salcedo's receptiveness and keen interest in the work and practice of Joseph Beuys. His approach to sculpture, namely his idea of social sculpture and use of common materials and everyday objects influenced her approach, providing an example of merging political concerns with materiality. She first saw Beuys' multiples in an exhibition in Bogotá, and when she began the graduate program in sculpture in New York, she extensively studied his work.[26] In particular, two aspects of Beuys' practice resonate with the ideas central to Salcedo's project. First, the idea of Social Sculpture, his type of activist aesthetic proposal, in which the material form takes on a socio-political space,

[25] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

[26] Doris Salcedo, email correspondence with author, May 7, 2013.

engaging viewers in the installations, performance and related pieces he created as part of his "expanded notion of art," was an approach that informed her thinking about creating pieces that draw viewers into acknowledging the victims of political violence.

Second, Beuys' deliberate choice of materials charged with socio-political significance, is an approach related to Salcedo's emphasis on the specificity of materials and surface. As Gene Ray proposes, Beuys' frequent use of fat and felt, among other materials, referred to World War II and although unmentioned by the artist, could be seen to indirectly express a kind of mourning project by the German sculptor. (Figure I.7) The fat not only represented the substance Beuys claimed warmed and saved him from freezing to death during the war, but Ray associates it with the ovens at Auschwitz. Similarly, the felt Beuys described as insulating his body in the icy conditions surrounding his crashed plane, was a material made in wartime Germany from the shorn hair of concentration camp victims.[27] Employing the weight of materials as a means of approaching a socio-political context in which trauma prevails, is a strategy that Salcedo pursues, and as Ray suggests, figured in Beuys' project. Similarly, the specific materials, the everyday objects typical in Beuys' practice, such as the chair, sled, broom, cans, flashlight, clothing, compare to the domestic belongings Salcedo employs in her sculptures to convey the effects of violence inexpressible in words or figurative images rendered in paint or marble. The redemptive aspect of Beuys' project in reference to the German role in World War II atrocities, however, distinctly departs from the issues at play in Salcedo's body of work.

Salcedo's incorporation of the everyday object as fundamental in her address, draws comparisons to Beuys' practice, and also calls to mind Marcel Duchamp's theory of the readymade. However, Salcedo decidedly alters the Duchampian idea of making art from the

[27] Gene Ray, "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (Sarasota and New York: The John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art and DAP, 2001), 57, 59, 62-65.

anonymous, everyday, manufactured object by placing it outside its context, on a pedestal, installed and labeled in a gallery. Rather, the common domestic objects she selects are particular, worn, personal possessions which she fills, scrapes, meld; they bear the traces of those violated by political violence. They are objects she builds upon, inserting fragments of found buttons, zippers, bones, fabric, hair, determinedly creating a specific, hand-wrought work. Salcedo's found objects and materials are the antithesis of the banal, mass-produced readymade Duchamp emphasized. Her engagement with Duchamp draws from ideas he put forth decades ago. The readymades are a starting point from which she, like numerous artists since World War II, re-considers his work, introducing a different set of concerns. Salcedo combines her reading of Duchampian strategies with the context of the political and civil violence and the materiality of the hand-wrought with the found object.

Chapter Three will examine the means by which Salcedo conveys her address on political violence through materials without pictorializing or relying on a narrative articulated through realist images of destruction and death. As a lifelong resident of Colombia, Salcedo has experienced the continuous violence fueled by the political structures of power long dominant, has listened to victims and the loved ones of those disappeared under these conditions of civil war, and has witnessed the failure of the State to acknowledge the thousands of unburied dead over decades. Although she began her work focusing on the victims ignored in her country, Salcedo's sculptures and installations grew to address the conditions of political violence in cultures throughout the world as her fame spread in the 1990's. Without incorporating the specificity of figurative elements: the vivid image of a wounded body, a house damaged by gunfire with blood splattering the walls, the face of a victim, Salcedo imparts through materiality the presence of those harmed by violence, the enduring effects of the violation, and the

uncertainty and strangeness of life following trauma. The testimonies of victims and witnesses to the violence form the foundation of her approach; she conceives her work drawing from their experiences; their pain and mourning is seminal to the piece she creates.

This chapter explains how Salcedo conveys her address on political violence without pictorializing by analyzing the six visual strategies the artist employs to make her statement. The first is her use of space to place. Two approaches to this aesthetic strategy operate in the artist's project. One relates to the idea of the protected, private space in the home such as the kitchen or bedroom, where most of the artist's worn domestic furniture derives. Hence, it signifies the safe haven within the domestic setting, and to see those pieces altered dramatically, filled with cement, gouged, spliced with bones or steel bars, signifies the violation of one's private space. And the placement of the bed or kitchen table in the public gallery or museum setting is an intrusion, a stark displacement. The second concept relates to the idea of space as particular; it cannot be neutral; it is the frequent cause of war. Within violent conflict, victims lose their place, they are literally forced to flee their homes and their space becomes uninhabitable. The absence of place creates a strange, inhuman means of existence as refugees are forced to live in tent cities or the shanty towns spreading outside cities, from Bogotá and beyond. Not only does Salcedo position her furniture pieces in public spaces where they appear out-of-place, she installs various sculptures awkwardly together, or near an entrance so that the viewer can scarcely enter or move around them. She also places them at an angle, against a wall allowing no space to view or approach the piece; each installation is a means of proposing the impossible conditions for inhabiting space. (Figure I.8)

The second aesthetic strategy critical to Salcedo's project is her use of the uncanny and anthropomorphism. Her works manifest the qualities of what Freud termed, *unheimlich,* the

familiar made strange, the pervading sense of the uncanny, in two ways. First, many of her sculptures from the late 1980's and the 1990's include pieces of worn clothing, a child's dress, a man's torn shirt, the bodice of a woman's blouse and later fragments evoking the belongings left by victims, buttons, a zipper, a spoon, delicate bone segments, threads and human hair. (Figure I.3) These insertions impart the traces of those lost to violence, and their presence inside the cement filling a china cabinet, inserted within the windowpane, or within the surface of a table lend a sense of the uncanny to the familiar pieces of domestic furniture. Moreover, the buttons, the hair, the bones, the form of the chair embedded within the door, the bureau conjoined with the bedframe, project a human presence within her sculpture. Both the elements she sews, implants or melds into the furniture from which she builds her sculpture, and the awkward splicing and fusing of furniture frames and appendages, table legs, bed frames, wardrobes, drawers, doors and chairs, result in sculptures suggestive of beings unsettlingly familiar but strange.

A third visual strategy integral to Salcedo's project is the materiality of surface. Trained as a painter, surface is a priority in her address. Her exhaustive, deliberate working process serves to build centimeter by centimeter, a complex layering of materials resulting in an evocative skin bearing the wounds and the history of the political violence she confronts. The surface of her pieces provides a means by which to read Salcedo's work. In careful study of her sculpture at close proximity, one sees the bone fragments, buttons, torn sleeve and hairs fused or threaded into the wooden door or table. (Figure I.2) Her stainless steel pieces bearing the wood grain, the chipped and gouged seat and legs hand-carved by the artist, require close scrutiny to see, their surfaces imparting the fragile condition left following violence. Monumental installations, such as her *Installation, 8th International Istanbul Biennial*, 2003, of 1550 wooden

chairs filling a towering vacant lot between buildings, projected a finely articulated surface despite the obvious challenges of placing that number of found chairs in a pile within the space. (Figure I.9) Facing the street, this insertion between buildings created a smooth curtain of wood, no chair leg, seat or back protruded into the space frequented by passersby. But the surface appeared a varied interweaving of brown hues, curves, lines and shadows, a kind of skin marked by freckles and scars.

The fourth aesthetic strategy fundamental to Salcedo's project is the concept of time, which operates as a material presence in her work. As the artist explains, living in war one's perception of time changes dramatically. It seems to slow excessively for those held captive who wait uncertain of their fate for weeks or years, and it seems to accelerate for victims of repeated violence, who measure time's passage compressed between each assault. Time operates in several ways in Salcedo's practice. Time is necessary for the viewer to draw close and study her pieces, to see the bone, the torn lace of a woman's blouse, the woven hair embedded in the surface, as well as to read the lengthy, meticulous process undertaken by the artist. Time as a material presence is manifested in the fixed garments frozen in the cement filling her domestic furniture pieces, time's passage is measured by the wear evident in the torn shirt or stained blouse, and by the concrete once poured, now densely suffocating the clothes. The measure of time as materiality appears, as well, in the silk threads and hairs sewn into the wooden tables in her *Unland* series. The fragile textile created from the weaving of these individual strands into wood, marks the hours taken to create it, or the blades of grass growing through the tabletops of her *Plegaria Muda* sculptures, in their density and height project the material evidence of time. (Figure I.10)

Finally, Salcedo's performance/installation, *Nov. 6-7,* 2002, employs time as the structure and the material presence in a piece that begins and ends at the precise hour of the tragic siege of the Colombian Palace of Justice in 1985. (Figure I.11) Following the exact timeframe over twenty-seven hours, during which the building was taken over by guerrillas, the military attacked and a fire and brutal battle culminated in the deaths of over 100 people, she lowered a chair or chairs over the side of the outside walls of the rebuilt Palace of Justice. Each chair embodied the absent victim and the exact hour of death. The time and its passage on those two days became material with the presence of each cascading chair.

The fifth aesthetic strategy Salcedo pursues in her practice concerns the idea of body to scale. The notion of body as related to scale operates in three ways in her work: one, the perspective and proportions of the viewer's body to the dimensions of the sculpture, two, body as the trace of the victim implied by the proportional size of the piece, and three, body as a distinct being suggested by the form and nature of the sculpture. Although Salcedo's cement-filled furniture pieces unsettle the viewer with the menacing qualities of the dense concrete burdening the wood, suffocating the clothing fragments within, and the doors or seats and sides of other pieces bear sutures, metal rebars, zippers and bones, these pieces are of familiar, approachable dimensions. (Figure I.12) They recall domestic furnishings and the daily rituals that occur, their proportions inviting rather than confronting the viewer. Similarly, the human scale encourages a level of intimate study of the sculptures, leading to the realization that these worn chairs and tables bear the traces of those who once touched and lived with these pieces. The correspondence of body's trace to the scale of sculpture Salcedo projects, not only in the chairs she suspended over the walls of the Palace of Justice in her performance *Nov. 6-7,* 2002 or her *Installation, 8th Istanbul Biennial 2003*, but in the precisely measured, coffin-size tables in her installation

Plegaria Muda 2008-10. This work fills a room with 166 sculptures, each composed of a wooden table with another, identical table upended on top, a wedge of dark, solid soil between the two, from which green blades of grass sprout, breaking through the wood to sparsely mark the underside of the table above. The tables are the dimensions of a human body and their gray boards resemble plain wooden coffins, a deliberate choice by Salcedo as the work addresses not only the anonymous deaths of those who live in precarious socio-economic conditions, but specifically, the murder of some 1500 young people from marginal areas in Colombia who were covertly murdered by the military in 2003-2009.[28]

Finally, the third manner is the idea of body to scale manifested through a sculpture that presents the form and notion of a body at once familiar and strange, as a kind of creature. Salcedo's installation *Tenebrae: Nov. 7, 1985,* 1999-2000 (Figure I.13), and her stainless steel pieces, such as *November 6,* 2001 and *Thouless* 2001-2, alter a basic chair such that the everyday furnishing acquires monstrous characteristics, dramatically changed legs, seats and backs. The installation *Tenebrae* includes lead and steel chairs laying upon the floor in two rooms on either side of a doorway, their elongated appendages extending across the room, piercing the adjacent wall, creating a barrier across the door. Her stainless steel chairs in *November 6* bear contorted legs bent backward and sideways, the seat and back barely balancing, the form recognizable but transformed into other, a body unknown. (Figure I.5) Other chairs in this piece are conjoined, creating a form of legible parts but appendages repurposed and/or bent and broken to jut out from beneath the imposing figure created by the fused seats and backs.

The final visual strategy Salcedo employs in her practice is disjunction and disorientation. She realizes these concerns by juxtaposing harshly different materials to

[28] Salcedo, interview by author, April 11, 2011, Mexico City and Salcedo, "ArtisTalk," lecture at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 23, 2013.

construct her pieces of familiar objects subtly but disturbingly changed. This strategy recalls the realities of living in civil war: the known becomes unknown, the random, brutal violence and destruction is disorienting such that maintaining the daily routine of laundry, meals and homework, after repeated exposure to horrific acts in the street, creates a gaping split in one's sense of normal. Salcedo's work projects the effects and psychological conditions of existence under political violence, by conceiving sculptures and installations from pieces of domestic furniture and materials meant to function in a dramatically different manner and context. Her early piece, *Untitled*, 1988 a small, worn metal crib, gingerly standing on four, wobbly legs, presents a disturbing aesthetic statement. (Figure I.14) The bed is enclosed on all sides by rusted metal mesh, sewn in place with countless rusty wires, threading in and out of the screen, hand knotted one after another, a swatch of worn plastic caught in the rough wire. The contrast between the innocence of a baby's crib and the rusty metal imprisoning it is startlingly palpable.

The artist's *Thouless*, 2001-2, provides another example of these concerns, each chair in the piece, although created from intractable, stainless steel, bears the grain, nail heads, chipped seat and cracks of wood, hand carved such that it offers the impression that it is painted wood. (Figure I.15) On an expanded scale, her installation *Neither* 2004 (Figure I.16), presents a similarly unlikely image of razor sharp, chain-link fencing embedded and emerging from the walls of the White Cube gallery, cutting through the plaster, restricting the viewer's entrance and exit. This fencing that belongs outdoors, surrounding playgrounds or sites of confinement, drew harsh limits meant to disorient the mind and body through its intrusion into the gallery space.

Conclusion

Doris Salcedo's practice, although founded and fed by the experience of political violence in Colombia, addresses these conditions and the consequent numbers of unnamed

victims throughout the world, relying on the weight of materials to convey and mourn this reality. She lives in Bogotá and has chosen to remain there despite the pull of international acclaim, because her work is conceived from absorbing the memories and experiences of those directly affected by the civil war and the politics fostering it. She is not the only artist to address political violence through sculpture and installation. However, her project stands apart because she employs materiality rather than pictorializing to convey a sense of the loss. Salcedo takes the universal familiar, worn, everyday objects and materials such as domestic furniture, fragments of personal possessions recognizable but anonymous, and constructs pieces that reveal traces of those mourned through an evocative surface born of her painstaking process of layering, melding, burnishing, scraping and sewing.

Since she began her practice during some of the bloodiest years of Colombia's civil war in the 1980's, Salcedo has focused on producing an art that addresses the civil violence, choosing sculpture as the medium and a language based solely on the material, not the narrative nor figurative to express her statement. The socio-political context she has lived and the artistic tendencies she chose to consider, provide a base from which to investigate her project. However, it is through the examination of a body of her work and analysis of the specific visual strategies the artist employs that this thesis demonstrates the importance of Salcedo's sculptures and installations. She expresses through materials the violation, the absence and the loss, presenting a witness to the violence and the enduring sorrow experienced by thousands across the world. By focusing on her process, her sculptural language and the politics of civil war informing her work, this thesis explains the significance of Salcedo's practice in the international sphere.

Chapter 1:

Nature and Context of Violence in Colombia

Civil violence in Colombia stands apart from the violence of most nations of the world because it is viewed within Colombia as an element of national identity, is examined by intellectuals as a field of study, has pervaded and informed much of the nation's history in the latter half of the 20th century, and has given rise to cultural symbols that suggest its normalcy in daily life. Its causes are varied, complex and intractable and despite efforts to minimize its hold Civil Violence maintains a forceful presence; Colombians have lived with war and intense crime for more than half a century. The extent to which strategic, continuous, horrific violence colors daily life for most in the country, directly through "disappearances" and murder or indirectly through forced evacuations and ongoing displacements, among other actions, is of such frequency that survival depends on adapting, on deeming war and violence as "normal."

The concept of "disappearances," or "disappearing someone," in Colombia and in various countries of the region, refers to kidnapping, literally taking the person, hiding and imprisoning them against their will. It frequently results in the victim's death. This tactic is employed not only by the guerrillas but by the paramilitary forces and is a tactic used throughout the groups vying for power. Victims "disappeared" can be among others, executives held for ransom by insurgents or suspected guerrilla sympathizers taken by the private militias. Those who are "disappeared" may not be found, although that is not always the case. Their disappearance, in effect, erases their existence. The threat of being "disappeared" generates extreme fear and silence by the susceptible individuals, and by the families concerned that their kidnapped loved ones will end up in mass graves. As Charles Mereweather stated in his 1995 essay: "…over the

past twenty years the experience of 'disappearance' has become a new tactic of State terror. It creates a death-space which diffuses fear through much of society. Far from erasing memory, this creates a new terror and new impossibilities, such as marking death with the ritual of burial."[29]

These conditions create a culture in which violence is almost a constituent part; that is, cultural production, performance, etc., takes acts of violence into account at every phase. This chapter will examine the historic roots of Colombia's violence as well as how Colombia differs and stands apart from other violent societies in the world. The intent is to provide a context central to the focus and visual strategies Doris Salcedo explores in her practice. The ways in which war figures in contemporary Colombian art--as demonstrated through the work of leading artists Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría, who address the conflict but through means distinct from Salcedo's approach--will be examined to establish a framework for the aesthetic responses circulating within this environment.

The History of Violence in Colombia

Violence takes various forms in the Colombian landscape: social, political, economic, rural and urban, it is both legitimate and illegitimate, State sanctioned and illicitly imposed, and its prevalence as a tool in the functioning of multiple aspects of the nation demonstrates, in part, the ways in which the country has been defined by its culture of violence. In order to understand the nature of the violence this thesis will distinguish these varied forms: the historical background behind violence today including the evolution of the perpetrators of political

[29] See Charles Mereweather, "Zones of Marked Instability: Woman and the Space of Emergence," in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 118. The paramilitaries, for example, would dismember and hide the body parts of those they forcibly disappeared, thereby making it difficult for a later investigation of the crime. Their deaths could not be confirmed and they remain the unburied dead. In 2006 the Colombian State began the first sustained, national search for the missing. See Stephen Ferry, *Violentology: A Manual of the Colombian Conflict* (New York: Umbrage, 2012), 86.

violence on the left and right from the guerrillas to the paramilitaries; the organized violence of groups linked to the smuggling tradition first of emeralds then cocaine; the formation of groups of *sicarios* or professional assassins; and the criminal activity of street gangs. Within these forms of violence the State and military exert particular influence, often without legal clarity, which further complicates efforts to diminish violence and its culture in Colombia. It is a complex affair, violence and its role in Colombia, and it frequently appears that the nation at once rejects and embraces its ongoing function.

Evidence of the persistent, predominance of violence in all levels of Colombian life can be summarized by the appointment in 1987 by the National Minister of Government of a Special Commission for the Study of Violence charged with investigating the nature, context and causes of the violence. It is important to note that during this time, the mid-1980's, Doris Salcedo began constructing her first pieces, works that engage the issues central to the Commission's mandate. Members of the Special Commission included a retired major general from the Colombian army and nine leading academics, with Gonzalo Sanchez, recognized as the preeminent scholar on the history of violence in Colombia serving as coordinator in charge of publishing their report, *Colombia: Violencia y Democracia*, in 1987.[30] Not only was the commission and its study evidence of the prevailing role violence played in Colombian society by the late 1980's, but an academic field called, *violentologia/violentology,* was created that year by University scholars, *violentologos*, to focus on the study of the civil war and violence. These historians, political

[30] *Colombia: Violencia y Democracia, Informe presentado al Ministerio de Gobierno*, ed. Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia—Financiacion Colciencias, 1987), 9-14, 17-30.

scientists, and sociologists and other intellectuals proposed objective causes for the nation's violent culture, recommending to Government leaders the means of addressing the problems.[31]

Similarly, the Commission rigorously analyzed the scope, depth and history of violence in the country, concluding that its causes were not only political, but resulted from a number of factors. Moreover, it portrayed Colombia as a nation plagued by social and economic structures that, in effect, prompt and do little to dispel persistent violence. Although the country had an international reputation for violence related to political insurgency and narcotics trafficking, the Commission pinpointed a range of causes and protagonists fueling war in Colombia, from the political violence of guerrillas against the State and paramilitary or privately funded armies fighting for conservative causes; organized crime against reporters, politicians and union leaders; organized crime against private individuals in the form of extortion and threats for financial gain; State imposed violence as a means of maintaining "public order" outside the law, including protecting territory and intimidating suspected insurgents through disappearances, torture and "other excesses;" State violence through military force rather than civil dialogue against social protest movements; State violence against ethnic minorities based on racial preferencing, including land seizures and physical brutality; violence by individual criminals including homicide, larceny, robbery; family violence and spousal abuse; organized gangs who, on moral grounds attack homosexuals, prostitutes, drug dealers, ex-convicts and others they deem

[31] "Los Violentologos," *Semana*, September 15, 2007, 10-12. One of the first such groups of *violentologos* was founded in 1987 at La Universidad Nacional in Bogotá in the center el Instituto de Estudios Politicos y Relaciones Internacionales (Lepri). Reportedly their recommendations were considered but not always heeded by rulers of State, but the work of these scholars both in Bogotá and in centers throughout the country have played a continued role in advising local and federal leaders. Mary Roldan discusses her weekly meetings with scholars (*violentologos*) at Universidad de Antioquia in Medellin between 1989-1992, during which they sought to sort out the situation of local terror fueled by Drug Lord Pablo Escobar and the paramilitaries resulting in the flood of assassinations of policemen, political leaders, judges, professors and young men and the position papers they drafted and presented the Mayor of the city proposing means to address the brutality. They (the violentologos) in turn became targets of the narcos. Mary Roldan, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia: 1946-1953* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 282-83.

detrimental to society; and finally, in conjunction with several of the groups above, the Commission cited a new group, professional contract killers or assassins for hire, called, among other things, sicarios, who serve individuals and organizations both illicit and legal.[32] Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, the Commission not only addressed the deeper problems of social and economic injustice and outlined the array of sources fomenting violence in Colombia, but analyzed the ways in which the social structure incorporating violence develops around economic dominance and wealth generation, both in terms of the emerald or coca industries and the agrarian and political authority in the countryside.[33] In short, the study found that Colombia's development has relied on violence as a means of ensuring control and economic growth, with violence the seeping into the daily life of its citizens.

The history of smuggling from emeralds to coca provides a context for the structural role violence plays in Colombia and informs a broader perspective on the particular nature of the country's violent culture. Eighty percent of the country's emeralds are mined northeast of Bogotá in the western part of Boyaca department near the Minero river basin. Throughout the 20th century this region suffered heavy partisan conflict, wrought by area political chiefs in the 1940's, then armed bands in the 1960's, led by the liberal Carlos Bernal and the conservative Efrain Gonzalez, the latter controlling the black market through an empire he formed with his brothers. By the 1970's the structure surrounding and reinforcing the emerald business also established and fortified the coca industry. Funds made from the gems were invested in the growth, processing and selling of coca. Violence through various means allowed the maintenance of the emerald and later coca empire. Private armies were organized to protect

[32] *Colombia: Violencia y democracia*, 19-21.

[33] Ibid., 82-3.

those who led the exploitation and selling of illicit gems and later narcotics, and to maintain political control in the area. Violence was employed to settle accounts between competitors for resources; weapons were stockpiled, body guards or others were hired to commit "dirty work" requiring anonymity; targeted explosions set in urban or rural settings sought to kill or terrorize political or union activists, cattle thieves or those connected to guerrilla groups; threats, bombings and sniper fire were directed at business rivals' homes or offices; informants and spies were eliminated.[34] These are but a few of the means by which the structure of violence strengthens the illicit empires and ripples into the surrounding environment affecting the innocent as well.

The preponderance of violence as an integral part of the social dynamic in Colombia, dates from the end of the 19th century and the 1000 day war, and continued in the period of "La Violencia" that exploded in 1948 with the assassination of the populist leader Gaitán. But the violence has evolved over time to include a diverse set of protagonists, cutting across various regions, fomented by conditions economic, social and ultimately, political.[35] For the purpose of my argument, the period of "La Violencia" was an historical moment that erupted, evolved and was fueled by a complex series of factors and players which established the historical foundation and structure of violence outlined in the 1987 Government Commission, which continues today. The nation's violent past, prior to recent history, centers upon the era that erupted April 9, 1948, with the assassination of the populist, liberal party Presidential Candidate,

[34] Ibid., 84-86.

[35] Daniel Pécaut, "From the Banality of Violence to Real Terror: the Case of Colombia," in *Societies of Fear: The Legacy of Civil War, Violence and Terror in Latin America*, ed. Kees Koonings and Dirk Druijt (London: Zed Books, 1999), 161. The Thousand Day War in Colombia occurred in 1899-1902. It was a civil war brought on by a sharp decline in world coffee prices. Coffee was a major Colombian export, central to the nation's economy. A revolt by the Liberals lead to partisan fighting that degenerated to guerrilla warfare, and ultimately, one of Colombia's most intense periods of violence. An estimated 100,000 deaths resulted, in a population of 4 million.

Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. His murder on a Bogotá street, sparked a popular revolt, in which thousands of his supporters(*Gaitanistas)* marched through Bogotá and other cities, burning public buildings and churches, ransacking warehouses and stores and opening prisons. The unrest resulted in the brutal deaths of 4000 people, most of whom were civilians, by the Government. Gaitán was a gifted orator who shared his popular, liberal platform with energized crowds of disaffected individuals. He encouraged them to follow him and participate in congressional elections, and repeatedly exhorted his supporters to react publicly if ill befell him stating "If they kill me, avenge me!"[36] Their widespread response to his murder, called "Bogotazo" spread nationwide leading to a conservative backlash, and ultimately, to the extended period of violence known as "La Violencia." During this period graphic images portraying the mob wielding machetes as well as wounded, bleeding bodies circulated in the press, deliberately placed to arouse fear and horror.[37]

The conflict behind "La Violencia" was politically based, beginning in 1946 when the Conservative Party assumed power following years of Liberal Party rule during which the latter's social, economic and political modernization efforts fomented political polarization. The victory of the Conservatives led to regional violence between the parties and evolved into what was deemed a civil war between the two political groups. This conflict lead to the

[36] Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 140-141. Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, "Colombia de ayer a hoy," in *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos: Arte Colombiano Contemporaneo/Contemporary Colombian Art,* ed. Hans-Michael Herzog (Zurich: Daros-Latinamerica, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 308 and 318. Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez, "The Violence: An Interpretive Synthesis" in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Delaware: SR Books, 1992), 76-83. Sánchez Gómez gives a nuanced and detailed analysis of the players and factors behind the eruption and continuation of "La Violencia."

[37] *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective,* ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez (Delaware: Scholarly Books, 1992), 88-91.

assassination of Gaitán in 1948, followed by the repressive rule of Conservative President Laureano Gómez in 1950 and the emergence of liberal and communist, peasant guerrilla groups, private, conservative counter-insurgency groups called "pajaros", a politicized police force "chulavitas." The period was marked by countless acts of brutality, including the massacre and/or torching of entire indigenous communities as well as Protestant villages, and the 1952 incineration of the country's two main newspapers, *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* among countless other examples. La Violencia wrought an estimated 300,000 fatalities between 1948 and 1965. The deaths frequently resulted from depraved acts of terror, including torture, mutilation and public sacrifice, all practiced by the State as well as the guerrillas, pajaros and chulavitas.[38] The excessively gruesome rituals of violence practiced and widely known during these years: castration, severing of tongues, disembowelment, etc., were used both to eliminate victims and to create indelible images in the minds of the remaining Colombians.[39]

By 1953 amidst this brutal turmoil, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla assumed power leading Colombia's only military Government of the 20th Century, until he was ousted by a National Strike in 1957 and an agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties created the Frente National Government, officially ending the conflict. This pact established an alliance allowing

[38] Fernan E. González, "Hacia el trasfondo historico de la violencia colombiana reciente/The Historical Background of Colombia's Recent Violence," in *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*,, 285 and 298. Mendoza, "Colombia de ayer a hoy," 308 and 318. Sánchez Gómez, "Roots of the Conflict," 19. Sánchez Gómez cites the State's 1950 burning and brutal expelling of Indians in the Ortega and Natagaima reserve, the 1952 operation of "pacification" in which the army left an estimated 1500 corpses in the rural área of Las Rocas in Tolima, as well as other examples. As he explains "La Violencia was characterized by rituals of terror, a liturgy and solemnization of death, which required an apprenticeship in the art of causing pain. Not only the killing, but the manner of killing obeyed a sinister logic, a calculus of suffering and terror. The mutilation and profanation of bodies was a way to extend the work of conquering, looting and devastating enemy territory; the impression caused by hacked, skinned and burned corpses seemed to form part of the mental landscape of a scorched earth policy."

[39] Sánchez Gómez, "Roots of the Conflict," 19. Sanchez points out that this brutality occurred at a time in which Colombia claimed to be one of the "most Catholic in the world."

the alternation of Presidential power and the division of political posts between the two parties, but left no space for political alternatives outside the established liberal and conservative organizations.[40] This inflexibility, among other factors, resulted in the growth of guerrilla groups, (many of whom evolved from the armed peasant bands created in the early 1950's in resistance to the terror imposed by President Gómez), who, as players outside the established parties, required aggressive actions to establish a voice and space in society.[41] Hence, the deliberate step taken by the Government to contain and preclude the kind of conflict that lead to violence in the 1940's and 1950's, fomented the creation of groups opposed to the ruling parties, some of whom became in the 1960's, the guerrillas FARC (Fuerza Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombianas), EPC, (Ejercito Popular Nacional), the ELN (Ejercito Liberal Nacional), and in 1970, the M-19 who were formed in response to the fraudulent elections. These groups figured prominently in the violence affecting Colombia in the 1980's, 1990's and the beginning of this century. As Gonzalo Sánchez explains, guerrilla groups created in the early 1950's to defend their rural communities, did not propose political overthrow, they were the social framework in which youth developed. For example, this experience informed insurgents such as Manuel Marulanda, leader of FARC until his death in 2008. In these circumstances, to become a guerrilla was a life choice, an alternative to becoming a teacher, doctor or priest. This "routinization of guerrilla activity" as Sánchez describes it, weighs heavily on Colombia today.[42]

The formation of guerrilla groups and private defense groups, paramilitaries,

[40] Mendoza, "Colombia de ayer a hoy," 320 and Gonzalez "Hacia el trasfondo…" 298.

[41] Mendoza, "Colombia de ayer a hoy," 320.

[42] Sánchez Gómez, "Roots of Conflict," 19.

that endured well past the 1960's, speaks to the socio-political and economic conditions that underlie the recurring presence of violence in Colombia. In addition to the violent acts of organized groups, the environment was such that criminal behavior by individuals or street gangs, including homicides, robbery and larceny was rampant. These same conditions existed during the tenure of the Frente Nacional, which continued until 1973. Although the narcotics trade, among other developments, significantly influenced power relations, the political, judicial and social systems allowed the emergence of the fearsome but marginal forces--guerrilla or paramilitary--which continue to wield leverage.

During the 1960's Colombia experienced major social changes: accelerated urbanization, the rise of an urban middle class, the changing role of women and its effect on the family structure, and expanded access to secondary and university education with a consequent increase in the number of individuals with advanced degrees.[43] At the same time, rural areas of the country suffered persistent problems of entrenched poverty related, in part, to historical issues of land tenure. Unlike many Latin American countries, Colombia did not undertake agrarian reform and the redistribution of land in the countryside. Historically, peasants were pushed to outlying regions where they subsisted until their land no longer produced crops and they moved on to homestead new property; when they moved their farms were taken by creditors or local large landowners. The agrarian peasants, called colonos, (colonizers), who make their living by homesteading in peripheral areas, play little role in Colombia's economy. They live in regions of such remove from the social and political structure of the State, that their voices are of little consequence, although each town is defined as either liberal or conservative and members of the opposing party are not welcome.

[43] Gonzalez, "Hacia el trasfondo…," 299.

In these distant, not readily accessible regions of Colombia which were traditionally settled by marginal populations, (poor whites, blacks and mestizos), the State had limited influence and the guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and later, the narcotics trade flourished. These areas included Arauca in the east, Oriente Antioqueno east of Medellín and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta north east of Cartagena.[44] These regions, along with the areas that are rural but reachable, were governed historically in two ways. In the case of the remote periphery, rule was through a kind of patron-client structure, in which the large landowner directed both the economic and social networks for the area, issuing credit, accumulating moribund farms and ever greater control, and acting as intermediary with the State, which has little other structure. In the case of the provinces, citizens were connected with and ruled by Government institutions. Over time the liberal and conservative political parties functioned as the link between local Governments, or the power structure of the area. They represented the Government as an elected official or as the leader of the regional power base, addressing issues of land tenure, economic modernization and regional and racial rivalries and conflicts.

However, in the 1960's, the political parties ruling the United Front Government, were increasingly removed from the realities plaguing the rural peasants, colonos, and their traditional political means of confronting these problems were ineffectual at this time of national change. Consequently, this led to, as Fernan González states "…the erosion of the liberal and conservative parties' abilities to express and canalize social tensions."[45] Due to the heterogeneity of the Frente Nacional, any efforts made to repair the ills were deemed "timid" by the middle and lower classes and too radical by the elites.

[44] Ibid., 296-7.

[45] Ibid., 299.

Within the vacuum of power left by the ineffectual leadership, radical, armed guerrilla groups emerged, responding to problems of the rural peasants, the militant activism of the University students and the growing urban middle class. The success of the 1959 Cuban Revolution served, as well, to encourage the organization of the armed insurgent groups, two of which, the FARC and the ELN, exist today. Following Castro's revolutionary ideals, the ELN was formed in 1964 by middle class students, intellectuals, union sympathizers and previous liberal guerrillas. Three years later emerged the EPL (Ejercito Popular de Liberacion), who supported Maoist theories and acted as the military wing of the Communist Leninist Party. In 1966 peasant defense groups in the peripheral areas encouraged by the communist party, and after attacks by the army, formed the FARC guerrillas, one of the principal players in the violence afflicting Colombia over twenty years later.[46] The M-19 group (the Movement of 19 of April) which was responsible for a national tragedy in Colombia's Supreme Court November 1985, was formed in 1973 by dissidents from the FARC. Primarily an urban group, they formed in protest of the electoral fraud that is believed to have cost former General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla the 1970 presidential election.[47]

This is an overview of the guerrilla groups filling Colombia's socio-political landscape from the 1960's on, but it is important to note that not all of these groups were united within. As Daniel Pécaut explains, there are various guerrilla groups, each following their own specific priorities and alliances. He cites the FARC, in particular, which at one time has included more

[46] Ibid., and Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence,* 190. Palacios explains the emergence of the guerrilla groups of the 1960's as follows: "The revolutionary guerrillas of the 1960s were several things at once: the continuation of the most radicalized Liberal fighting spirit of the high Violencia, the response of part of the Colombian left to the Liberal-Conservative oligarchy's monopoly of legal politics under the National Front, and an opportunity to bring the Colombian peasantry into a socialist project from which they had been excluded."

[47] Gonzalez, "Hacia el trasfondo…," 299.

than sixty groups, each with its own loyalties.[48] Consequently, the motives, goals and actions taken may differ from one group to another, making the characterization and containment of them by those and the Government confronting these groups, complicated at best. In fact, guerrilla groups such as the aforementioned, and their splinter organizations, among other groups, played a principal role in the nation's violent, 20th century history.

Another major player within the balance of socio-political power, the paramilitary forces officially emerged in the 1960's and continue to exercise significant influence in the structure of violence pervading Colombia. These private, unofficial counterinsurgency forces were created to work alongside the military in the early 60's to threaten and eliminate leftist threats to the nation. The U.S. Government, in the wake of the Cuban revolution in an effort to preclude further Marxist revolts in the region, proposed the creation of a civilian armed force linked to the Colombian army, which would "perform counteragent and counterpropaganda functions and, as necessary, execute paramilitary, sabotage, and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents."[49]

The paramilitary forces formed in the early 60's were legalized by the Colombian Congress in 1968, and the Defense Ministry issued arms to these civilian defense groups. Hence from the outset they were given authority and permitted to use force, but within parameters that allowed them to operate without sullying the military.[50] Since that time their role has evolved and with the growth of the narcotics industry in the early 1980's, their prominence and power expanded dramatically at the hands of the drug traffickers, as well as private landowners,

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[48] Pécaut, *Guerra Contra la Socieda,* 43.

[49] Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence,* 190 and Human Rights Watch, *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States*, New York, 1996, cited by Ferry, *Violentology,* 66, footnote 1.

[50] Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence,* 190, and Ferry, *Violentology,* 66.

businessmen and the State. As narcotics leaders began to invest profits in vast cattle ranches and rural properties, they were subject to extortion and attacks by guerrilla forces. Consequently they formed self-defense militias or *autodefensas* labeled "narco-paramilitaries" by the press. These civilian armies initially attacked the guerrillas, but they grew to protect coca growing regions and their export routes. They accumulated such wealth and power that by 2004, a Colombian government report stated that they controlled much of the country.[51] These forces began, for example, when drug leader Pablo Escobar and nearly 200 other narco-traffickers created MAS (Death to Kidnappers), a private militia created to kill guerrillas in 1981 following the kidnapping of the daughter of the family running the Medellín cartel. At the same time another paramilitary group, also called MAS, was created by army leaders, ranchers and businessmen in Boyaca department. MAS was composed of trained civilians and formed with the purpose of killing suspected FARC sympathizers.

By 1987 the government reported that an estimated 140 different, right-wing militias existed across the country seeking to destroy the guerrillas. Their efforts focused not on direct combat with the guerrillas themselves, but rather on murdering their presumed supporters, whether leftists or reformers in general and doing so by invading homes, villages and forcefully displacing whole communities.[52] As the Government Commission to study Violence stated in its 1987 report, these death squads fostered by "an imprudent law" in 1968, are now organized by private groups or individual military or police officers and they administer justice by "acts of extermination against political movements and parties, opposition leaders, union members and

[51] Fiscalia General de la Nación, *Gestion Unidad Nacional de Fiscalias para la Justicia y la Paz,* March 31, 2011.

[52] Carlos Medina Gallego, "Autodefensas, paramilitares y narcotrafico en Colombia. Origen, desarrollo y consolidación. El caso de Puerto Boyaca," in *A las Puertas de El Uberrimo,* ed. Evan Cepeda and Jorge Rojas (Bogotá: Random House Mondadori, 2008), 45; "Hay 140 grupos paramilitares: Mingobierno," *El Tiempo*, October 1, 1987 and Pécaut, *Guerra Contra la Socieda,* 153.

sectors presumed sympathetic to the guerrillas…after the killing of more than three hundred activists from the political party…it is clear that the death squads have shifted considerably from their initial objectives and have become instruments of revenge, reprisal, and intimidation…Although these groups supposedly are organized to defend the economic, political and cultural order, their actions translate into the destruction of that very order."[53] Stories are endless of the legendary brutality of the AUC (autodefensas Colombianos) from their beginnings through today, including cell phone images recording a paramilitary instructor demonstrating how to dismember a man, as well as the militia's preference for disappearing victims by quartering bodies and disposing of the parts by dispersing them, in rivers, in shallow graves, or by burning, leaving no trace to implicate the perpetrators.[54] The ambiguous relationship between the AUC and officials in the Colombian government over the last thirty years lends an additional perspective on this paramilitary's characteristic extermination practice.

An important action taken by both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas that bears heavily on the conditions in which people live in Colombia is that of forced displacement. The guerrillas who are known to finance their operations through kidnappings, have directly and indirectly forced evacuations of families and whole villages: directly through threats and bombings, and indirectly as villagers flee in fear of retaliation by the paramilitaries who presume the local people harbor sympathy for the guerrillas.[55] Similarly, the private militias displace whole towns

[53] Sánchez Gómez, *Colombia: Violencia y Democracia*, 92-3. The Commission recommends the creation of a judicial panel to investigate the large number of assassinations hurting Colombian society, a tribunal seeking to stop the criminality of these groups.

[54] Ferry, *Violentology*, 86-88.

[55] Herbert Braun, *Our Guerrillas, Our Sidewalks: A Journey into the Violence of Colombia* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003),176-181.

in the course of in their search for and elimination of guerrilla supporters.[56] Armed conflict in Colombia has displaced an estimated 3.7 million Colombians from their homes, which after Sudan is the second largest population of internally displaced people in the world. Countless families, men, women and children have been forced to flee empty-handed from their homes, neighbors, relatives and all that they know and hold dear to start over, living hand-to-mouth, often in the growing circle of shacks around the cities. And in their exodus, someone they know will have disappeared at the hands of the combating forces.

Contemporary Art and the Culture of Violence in Colombia

The historical conditions and the protagonists informing the structure of violence in Colombia beginning with the period of La Violencia are important to identify as they shaped the period in which Salcedo began her practice.[57] The complexity of the Colombian situation, the kinds of violence, the powers behind it, the sources, players and institutions that facilitate and encourage it, explains the challenges faced in diminishing it, and they form a part of the urgency and imperative behind Salcedo's project. The very impossibility of her process, the materials she chooses, and the issues to which she gives palpable, physical weight speak to the relentlessly formidable circumstances with which her work is in dialogue. At the same time, as an artist in Colombia she is also in dialogue with her colleagues and their work. Here one realizes the

[56] Ferry, *Violentology,* 8, and Mary Roldan, *Blood and Fire,* 291. As Roldan goes on to explain "As was also true during *la Violencia* (at least in Antioquia), violence in contemporary Colombia is the responsibility of both the left and the right, but the majority of those currently displaced have been forced to move by the presence of right-wing paramilitary groups, while leftist groups (the equivalent of *la Violencia's* guerrilla groups) are responsible for approximately a third of all displacements, and the Colombian Army for less than 5 percent. She refers to *The New York Times,* October 21, 1999.

[57] Roldan, *Blood and Fire,* 282-3, 286, 291-4. Ferry, *Violentology,* 18 and 26. Both scholars, among others, cite various factors and inherent conditions, as well as structures and players that link current violence to the mid-20th century history of violence in Colombia.

dialectic between the public discourse on violence, the reality of violence as a daily occurrence, and the tension to work as an artist.

Consequently, it is important to situate Salcedo's practice in relation to that of other Colombian artists for whom the violence factors heavily in their production. The two most important are Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría. Their work dwells on the pervading presence and/or effects of violence. An examination of their approaches affords a perspective on the ways in which Colombia's socio-political conditions inform and actively figure in their respective projects. Moreover, it provides points of comparison which highlight the particular contrasts between their work and the visual strategies of fundamental significance to Salcedo's project.

Before analyzing the work of Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manual Echavarría it is important to note that by the 1990's art criticism in Colombia discusses the growing reflection on violence in Colombian art, the expanded, continuous presence of violent images in the media and the resulting heightened public tolerance for these graphic images. People were slowly becoming numb to the brutality. As critic José Roca points out in his January 2003 column *Sand Columns*, "In this regime violent visual images play a dual and contradictory role 'simultaneously presenting violence and making it disappear' as the critic Sylvere Lotringer noted….In other words since the death photograph presents incontrovertible proof, evidence of a fait accompli, the images do not motivate us to act….The repetition of these images turns the violence into something mythical, and therefore inevitable, resulting in our passive resignation."[58] He goes on to say that although

[58] José Roca, "Ausencia/Evidencia: José Alejandro Restrepo, Oscar Muñoz, Teresa Margolles," in *Columna de Arena,* No. 48, last modified September 24, 2012, http://www. Universes-in-universe.de/columna/col48/col48.htm. Roca quotes, Sylvere Lotringer, "Representación de Violencia/Violencia de Representación." Interview with Ruben Gallo in *TRANS* No. 3/4 Telesymposium. 1997, accessed September 24, 2012. http://www.echonyc.com/~trans/Telesymposia3/Lotringer//SLotringer.html

violence has figured in the art of Colombia since the mid-20th century, the impact of the relentless stream of graphically violent images on television and in print, identified in cultural spheres as "pornomiseria," raises the issue among artists of how one presents an image of death such that its personal and public significance engages the viewer.[59] Another critic, Santiago Olmo explains: "Over the last few decades, in the social and political context of Colombia, the struggle between appearance, representation and perception of reality (…a reality beset by conflict) has determined the social body's adaptation and coexistence to generalized violence."[60] He says that Colombian society protects itself within these conditions by "…keeping the ghosts at a distance," and that it is within the art and literature that a means of address to the personal tragedies has found an emotional voice.[61] Some artists responded to this issue by refusing to use such images, an approach I will further analyze in my chapter on Salcedo's visual strategies.

A measure of the response by artists and writers in the face of the violence was explored in a seminal exhibition, "Arte y Violencia en Colombia desde 1948/Art and Violence in Colombia since 1948" mounted in 1999 at the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá. Organized by the museum director, Gloria Zea, as a means of addressing what she calls the most horrific conflict in recent Colombian history, she explains in the catalogue that "…artists cannot evade their moral and civic responsibilities. On the contrary they have the ethical obligation to incessantly search for a better

[59] Roca, "Ausencia/Evidencia," 3-5.

[60] Santiago Olmo, "When Drawing on Water is more than Just Metaphor," in *Oscar Muñoz: Documentos de la Amnesia* (Badiaoz: MEIAC, 2009), 155.

[61] Ibid., 155. He adds that important and effective programs such as programs produced by radio stations have been created which focus on lived experiences that serve as the sole communication between captives and their families. Nonetheless, he says, the population chooses to keep these realities removed from daily life when possible, as means of coping and existing day by day with violence.

world."[62] The hope she voices is that through the research and presentation of this art it might "…help change behaviors and habits that impede civil discourse."[63]The exhibition was the first systematic presentation of the ways artists address the violence, through painting, sculpture, installations, video, prints and photography to film, fiction and poetry. Organized in a dozen sections, it stretched over four floors of the museum, each focusing on a particular manifestation of the violence Colombians have endured: torture, kidnappings and disappearances and displacements. The work ranged from the semi-abstract 1960's paintings of the national prize-winning painter Alejandro Obregon, to more graphic and deeply disturbing videos and installations by Clemencia Echeverri and Ricardo Amaya, the figurative canvases of Beatriz González, Debora Arango and Fernando Botero, the conceptual work of Antonio Caro and María Fernanda Cardoso, sculpture of Enrique Grau, prints of Diego Arango and Bernardo Salcedo, installations of Rosemberg Sandoval, Rodrigo Facundo and numerous others. These works were interspersed with popular films and theatre stills, poetry and works of fiction, such as Vallejo's *La Virgen de los Sicarios*. The work of fifty Colombian artists of various ages was shown, including pieces by Doris Salcedo, and the two artists whose work I will explore below, Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría. Mounted in one of the nation's leading museums, in the final year of a decade of extreme violence, the exhibition was seen by more than 60,000 people in its opening three months, arousing strong reactions including death threats for the chief curator, Alvaro Medina.[64] The exhibition clearly spoke to the pervasive presence of Colombia's culture of violence and the need by artists and writers to address and diffuse this brutal constant distorting

[62] Gloria Zea, "Presentación/Presentation," in *Arte Violencia en Colombia desde 1948* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Grupo Editorial Norma, 1999), 8-9.

[63] Ibid., 8.

[64] Larry Rohter, "In the Trauma of Barbarity, Art Speaks Out," *New York Times*, October 17, 1999, 41.

everyday life. As Zea states "The violence has indelibly marked Colombian culture…" and consequently various artists speak to this daily reality. But I would suggest that few besides Doris Salcedo, address the war employing visual strategies at once in dialogue with the Colombian context and with a set of visual concerns operating within an international language of conceptualism. The specificity of Salcedo's project can be illuminated through the study and contrast of two major artists from Colombia, Oscar Muñoz and Juan Manuel Echavarría, whose works address the violence through dissimilar means.

Oscar Muñoz incorporates the figure, creating a kind of portrait that speaks to the violence in Colombia, but, does not he declares, put forth a political statement. He is an artist who grew up, lives and works in Cali which is somewhat isolated geographically from the rest of Colombia, is a main center of the narcotics trade. Consequently, he has endured the trade's influence in economic and social terms and in the ensuing constant presence of political violence.[65] The idea of portraiture that he explores in various series of works from the mid 1980's to the present, imparts likenesses that represent and stand for the victims, but are rendered through impermanent means such as water on a stone ground. Hence the portrait appears then disappears in a sequence of images projected on film, suggesting the ongoing Colombian reality the presence then disappearance of victims. As he states, "…the idea of the portrait also interests me because it extracts individuals from a formless universe. It is said that those killed by violence in Colombia are faceless and without identity. Paradoxically, I think that never before has the portrait had more evocative and cult power."[66] Through means stemming from photography but testing the parameters of the medium and incorporating drawing and painting as well, Muñoz explores

[65] Oscar Muñoz, *Guerra y Pa: Symposium on the Social, Political, and Artistic Situation of Colombia* (Zurich: Daros-Latinoamerica Kunsthaus Zurich, 2005), 113.

[66] Oscar Muñoz, quoted in conversation with Hans-Michael Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 243.

photography's conceptual possibilities. He focuses on the play between illusion and reality by literally evoking and erasing the image in a process the viewer observes and in a sense, measures. The temporality, illusiveness and materiality palpable in the work are qualities characteristic of his practice and fixing the portrait as a lasting image is an endless challenge for the audience. Water, air, ashes, light and stone figure in his pieces, as do photographs of the deceased that he collects from the newspaper obituary pages, and his own image, as well. Conjuring portraits that are at once impermanent and evocative from these materials relates to the complicated history and circumstances of Colombia, and as Muñoz explains, the complex nature of memory under these conditions: "…in Colombia there is the war, a peculiar phenomenon in relation to memory. The war began at the end of the 1940's…I don't know if it can be called a process, but it's a situation that has existed for fifty years, that has not been resolved…Even the faces of the dead can never be determined. There is something very contaminated and confusing in all of that which is memory….what we have here, where people have no identity or particularities, where nobody remembers anyone else, where the deceased are not remembered because they do not have a face or a name…."[67]

Muñoz' response to this context of continued violence is to produce works that repeatedly impart an image and then change, essentially capturing the destabilization, the impermanence inherent to a country in war. In an early, seminal piece, *Aliento (Breathing)* 1995, (Figure 1.1) twelve metal discs hang at face level, each revealing an unknown person (taken from the artist's collection of obituary photos) when the viewer breathes upon it. The deceased's face appears with the viewer's exhaled breath and disappears when one inhales, at which time the mirrored surface

[67] Muñoz, in *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 240. The artist goes on to compare the Colombian situation to that in the work of Christian Boltanski saying that the latter's use of the photographs of Jewish children could not occur in Colombia because the victims are without faces or names, and establishing memories is difficult to do.

reflects the viewer's visage. Breathing brings forth and extinguishes the fleeting image of a stranger, and you, the viewer, exist in reflection then disappear in between, a process that continues over and over again at each of the twelve discs. One cannot help but consider this work within the context that the artist, among others, clearly describe in Colombia, the disappearances of vast numbers of people, family, friends, neighbors never found, faces unknown, in a ceaseless situation. As Colombian scholar Lupe Alvarez writes, "In this work one cannot overlook the allusion to political context, since the disappearance of people in the incommensurable and habitual armed conflict afflicting the country, is probably one of the ghosts that haunts the collective conscience. In effect, *Aliento,* uses portraits of people who were assassinated or met with violent deaths, thus allowing it to be interpreted as a protest against apathy…."[68]

In *Biografías* 2002/2003, (Figure 1.2) Muñoz creates from the photographs of the deceased collected from newspaper obituaries, individual portraits rendered through charcoal dust suspended on water, in a film that records a process by which the image evolves, a process he began with the series *Narcisos,* in 1994-5. In *Biografías* the portrait appears from the dust loosely, but obviously, projecting the likeness of the particular individual on the water contained in a sink. As the video proceeds the water begins to disappear down the drain and as it does the portrayed face distorts to grotesque, then indecipherable blots, that ultimately flow down the drain, forever lost, accompanied by the sucking sound of water escaping. In a continuous, seven minute loop, the drain soon spouts water, the sink fills and the portrait of the recently disappeared, reemerges to the sound of water filling the basin, only to contort, disfigure and disappear again, when the drain opens the next time. Each of the five portraits in the *Biografía* series is installed upon the floor in a large, 138 x 138cm square of light for viewers to fall into; as if they, too, might disappear down

[68] Lupe Alvarez, "Dissolution and Phantasmagoria," in *Oscar Muñoz: Documentos de la Amnesia,* 177.

the drain, helpless to the circumstances that took the deceased subject, and the countless other victims in Colombia.

Muñoz's portraits employing photographs from the newspaper obituaries, demonstrate an integral aspect of the artist's practice. Although he states that the images of the deceased he collects interest him, not for their relation to political violence, rather because they illustrate the dead and are published in a daily list: new day, new deaths, new faces replace and hide those reported yesterday and so on. As he mentions, in the Colombian context of war, everyday events require one to filter out occurrences as a means of survival "We need to forget, for legitimate reasons of self-defense and health, but it is also necessary to remember…And I am referring now to things that happen every day in this country."[69] Hence his portrait subjects provide discernible faces that read as individuals who are unknown, but somehow familiar, within this nation in conflict, as examples of victims, disappeared and/or dead.

This interpretation relates to Muñoz' reliance and particular way of using photography as the medium central to his expression. He cites Roland Barthes when discussing his approach: "….Barthes' idea is very relevant: that the true function of photography is fulfilled when the referent disappears; it is at that point that photography acquires all of its force and value. Of these individuals who have disappeared and died, the only document that can attest to their existence—in addition to those mementos sometimes preserved by their families, like articles of clothing or certain objects—is photography."[70] The obituary photo serving as the subject in Muñoz work acts

[69] Muñoz, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 246. Critic Santiago Olmo, historian Daniel Pécaut and various other writers, historians, sociologists and others who have lived and/or studied the Colombian civil war of these last thirty-five years, in particular, discuss the extent to which living requires forgetting for survival under these conditions of extended, brutal conflict and uncertainty. See Olmo, *Oscar Muñoz,* 155-57, Pécaut, *Guerra Contra la Sociedad,* 137-9, 211.

[70] Muñoz, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 246. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 78-79.

as the index for the deceased individual; the face of a specific person, a particular nose, chin, pair of eyes is legible, and therefore, remembered through Muñoz' art. Although the artist declares his work not overtly political, the distinct faces of nameless, deceased individuals in his pieces lend themselves to interpretation through the lens of the violent context surrounding their creation. Because they are faces of the dead, Muñoz' portraits, however they are conveyed and evolve in the course of the work's projection, serve as index and remembrance of these individuals and the countless others whose unacknowledged deaths mark the violence in Colombia. Regardless of Muñoz' statement of disinterest in the political aspect of his work, by including images of the deceased, conveyed as figuratively rendered portrayals, his pieces evoke individual victims within the Colombian context.

In *Re/trato* (Portrait/re-treat) 2003, (Figure 1.3), Muñoz touches upon the impossibility of fixing the portrait in a lasting image in a twenty-eight minute video incorporating his own face as the subject that is repeatedly rendered that then dissolves. In the large-scale projection of the video looming over the viewer, Muñoz draws his likeness with a water-soaked brush on a ground of gray stone, creating a simple caricature of lines, his portrait recognizable but fluid, without the exacting portrayal of a photograph. It is a rendering that changes as the lines dry and disappear, the likeness a fleeting image that recurs repeatedly in the video, suggesting the deliberate efforts of trying to fix and save the portrait but, like a memory it dissolves gradually, leaving only the strongest lines of the composition until they too, vanish. Within the constancy of violence in Colombia, the futile attempts to hold and protect those taken, killed or displaced, resonates in this piece. *Re/trato* envisions change, continuous and disquieting, and the incessant effort to regain what is lost.

Hence, unlike Salcedo whose work includes no vivid, figurative portrayal of a person, no face, no name, no appendage or facial feature, Muñoz centers his practice on portraits and the rendering of people recognizable but anonymous, making the toll from violence human and personal in readily legible ways. Again, he does this working in a genre different than the medium Salcedo chose, one that carries a separate set of expectations by the viewer. Alternatively, her approach elicits the viewer's deliberate confrontation and study of the work to absorb the deep seeded sense of pain and loss endured by victims without relying on visual cues—albeit faces or scenes depicting violent acts. As the complexity of the history of the conflict in Colombia defies straightforward summarization, the visual address Salcedo constructs within the context of daily violence challenges and complicates the means by which art conveys the measure of war's effects.

By way of contrast, Colombian artist, Juan Manuel Echavarría explores the effects wrought by violence through constructed photographs and videos that speak to the brutality through images at once indirectly and vividly referential. Echavarría was an author of fiction who after decades of writing began in the mid 1990's to address the conflict in photo-based, metaphorical images. His first, deeply unsettling photographs are a series called *Retratos/Portraits* 1996, (Figure 1.4), numbered black and white images of chipped, cracked and scarred mannequins found on the streets of Bogotá, not unlike Beatriz González' use of found objects from urban sites in her sculptures. Each piece presents a head revealing the blank stare of these improbably idealized, blond, blue-eyed figures, jarringly battered with gaping holes, gouges, chipped areas and enormous fissures surrounding their imperturbable gaze. A sense of the uncanny pervades these human likenesses. Despite their immobile features, they symbolize in graphic detail, the violence suffered by the Colombian people, and as functioning street models for the merchandise sold in the nearby stores, they resolutely continue to "function" despite what they have endured.

Although the idea of portraying mannequins as a stand-in for victims sounds predictable, Echavarría's portraits are anything but expected. Each image is shot from a perspective that sharply fixes our gaze on the irreversible damage suffered, the tape and string awkwardly mending the wounds, and the continued role they play decided by shopkeepers who ignore their injuries because their bodies remain serviceable, thereby eliciting our empathy for their shattered faces. The artist describes these portraits, his initial visual rather than written expressions, as indicative of his approach "Somehow in taking these pictures, which became my first series, I understood the direction my art should take. I would explore violence through metaphor…."[71]

Echavarría approaches his focus on the conflict from the perspective of someone whose life spans the history of "The Violence," and he seeks to confront the normalization of this terror. "I was born in 1947. We have not had a single year of peace since then. There has been an ongoing civil war in Colombia. In 1950 it was the political struggle between Liberals and Conservatives throughout rural Colombia….Many in the paramilitary and guerrilla forces come from families that were victims of this violence. The point is that this recurring cycle, this vicious circle of violence, has become normal."[72] From his experience Echavarría conceives works first in photographs, later in videos, that draw one's eye, then deeply unsettle as the viewer interprets the nature and implications of his images. As he succinctly states: "But without seeing blood, because when you work with such painful and chilling themes you have to be very careful. Deciding how to represent violence is an important ethical judgment."[73] Although his medium differs from Salcedo's sculpture-based practice, both artists address the conflict in their country by creating

[71] Laurel Reuter, "Requiem for a Country," in *Juan Manuel Echavarría: Mouths of Ash/Bocas de Ceniza* (North Dakota: Edizioni Charta Milan, North Dakota Museum of Art, 2005), 10.

[72] Ana Tiscornia, "Juan Manuel Echavarría," trans. Santiago Giraldo in *Mouths of Ash/Bocas de Ceniza*, 72.

[73] Juan Manuel Echavarría, in Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 190-91.

works that require the viewer's sustained visual engagement to discern the full measure of violence's effects.

Echavarría's *Corte de Florero/Flower Vase Cut* 1997 (Figure 1.5 and 1.6), series of thirty-six, large, black and white gelatin silver prints exemplify his deliberately constructed, metaphorical approach. The artist draws from two unrelated traditions in creating these works, building from a history that weighs and enlivens these images. Based on the beautiful, late 18th century botanical prints created by the Spanish to document the flora discovered during expeditions, Echavarría constructs exquisite images of flowers, each on white ground, the blossom labeled below in elegant script.[74] The name given each specimen derives from their Latin scientific name followed by an adjective the artist chose related to his impressions of violence and drawn from old memories. Those memories inform the artist's choice of subject in this series as one realizes upon studying each flower, the stem, petals, pistil and stamen are created from human bones precisely arranged such that they unnervingly portray the flora. The sense of violence each image evokes, derives not only from the human bones but from the reference Echavarría makes to a tradition during the 1950's violence, in which corpses were mutilated in a specific manner labeled "cuts," a horrific practice his arranged bones imply. As he explains, "The work has to do with a childhood memory from the 1950's when I lived in Medellín. Violence at that time was not in the city but between conservatives and liberals in the Colombian countryside. They used to mutilate the victims' corpses to which they gave the name *cortes* (cuts). As a child, I remember hearing about the *corte de corbata* (tie) and the *corte de franela* (vest)….They really were

[74] Tiscornia, "Juan Manuel Echavarría," 66-67. In particular, Tiscornia discusses the botanical expeditions from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and one book from this time that was an inspiration to Echavarría work, The *Real Expedicion Botanica* (Royal Botanical Expedition) a trip led by Jose Celestino Mutis in the Kingdom of New Granada. See also, Ana María Reyes, "Rupturas y mirades sensacionalistas: Reflexiones fotográficas de Juan Manuel Echavarría sobre la violencia en Colombia (Disrupting the Sensationalistic Gaze. Juan Manuel Echavarría Photographic Reflections on Violence in Colombia)," *Bocas de ceniza. Juan Manuel Echavarría* (Bogotá: Valenzuela y Klenner arte contemporáneo, 1999).

atrocious mutilations…I had to exorcise those cuts and transform that memory into something else."[75]

The name of the series and of each specimen, furthers the artist's dialogue with the violence. For example the *Corte de Florero/Flower Vase Cut* of the group refers to an infamous "cut" from the 1950's and his individual titles impart further meanings, such as *Maxillaria Vorax,* the former is the word for orchid and *Vorax,* is voracious in Latin, or *Radix Insatiabilis: Radix* is root and *Insatiabilis* insatiable in Latin. In specific titles such as these, among others, the adjective suggests the endless, continuous presence of violence. Moreover, the artist's choice to depict flowers should be considered not only as it links to 18th century botanical prints, but to the dominant role the flower industry plays in the Colombian economy. It should also be noted that although the artist creates these images in a studiously evocative reference to the lovely historic prints of flora, his works are engaging but not aesthetically appealing upon close viewing they are disturbingly vivid references to the tradition of violence. These works impart national identity, legacy and pride, in the bones of those deceased arranged as the flora and the *corte de florero* that figures prominently in Colombian history.

A final, powerful example of Echavarría's address of the reality and effects of the conflict is his four minute video *Bandeja de Bolivar/Bolivar's Platter* 1999 (Figure 1.7). This brief film based on his series of ten photographs, begins with the image of a beautiful, ornate platter bearing flowers and the words "Republic of Colombia para Siempre" (Republic of Colombia Forever), a reproduction of the porcelain platter commemorating Colombian independence given to Simon Bolivar, legendary Father of the Nation. In the successive images the priceless dish is broken, the

[75] Echavarría in Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos,* 180-184. See also, Reuter in *Bocas de Cenizas,* 4 and 28. The bones used by the artist were human and acquired in Bogotá. In reference to the *cortes,* the artist goes on to describe the contemporary practices of the paramilitaries as similar in terms of the frequent disembowelment they would undertake so that the corpses would then sink when thrown in the river.

sound reverberating in the viewer's ears, then smashed into pieces, then shards, then pulverized into a pile of dust that, in the final image appears as a snowy mound of cocaine. It dramatically portrays the violence, the current enduring causes of narco-trafficking and the devastating consequences to the nation, its heritage and citizenry. As he states, "*Bolivar's Platter* represents the fragmentation of a nation…In the beginning of the 1980s, the drug war began and the fragmentation continues with more than two million people forcefully displaced from their lands. Not to mention the death and mutilations that accompany the drug war."[76] No face, no flesh, no body nor blood appears, but with precisely constructed images, Echavarría depicts what violence destroys.

From the late 1990's on, the artist repeatedly employed video to convey his work. As he describes it, "…At this time I am much more interested in projects involving people who have suffered personally from the horrors of violence than projects about my own ideas of violence…Art, photography and videos can, I believe, be this country's memory. To become an instrument for those without voice or vote, because they have so much to tell us, so much to teach."[77]

In a nation plagued by more than half a century of violence the role of art bears a distinctive place within the complicated legacy of war fueled by protagonists fighting causes that have evolved, players who have changed, controls imposed legally or illicitly, processes of attempted negotiation and the continuing displacements, disappearances and murders. As the 1987 Government Commission and its report published on the violence stated, the causes of the conflict are various and constant, and without straightforward solutions. There are reasons that the study of

[76] Reuter, *Bocas de Cenizas,* 25.

[77] Echavarría, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 193.

violence is an academic field and its frequency known in Colombia. These varied conditions have allowed authorities to blame others and to avoid State initiated memorials for the countless, tragic victims and survivors.

Under the conditions of ongoing war that invade daily life in Colombia, the visual projects of artists such as Salcedo, as well as Muñoz and Echavarría, contend with the horror and unreality of what this means. As Salcedo states: "Life in Colombia has many brutal aspects, and re-working them allows us to survive because otherwise we would be in total chaos. Art is a necessity throughout the planet but it takes on a greater sense of urgency in a country at war."[78] This chapter accounts for the depth of certainty in her statement regarding the Colombian situation and the ensuing chapters will unpack her antecedents and the strategies she proposes. Since the middle of the 20th century and the period known as *La Violencia,* political violence has figured prominently in the nation, such that during the past several decades, cultural production has taken acts of violence into account at every phase. Within this culture of violence Salcedo and fellow artists, such as Juan Manuel Echavarría and Oscar Muñoz, speak to the realities of the horror, the memory of those mourned through distinct means and genres, drawing from images and accounts circulated in the press or interviews with victims. Each creates work in dialogue with the civil violence by means deliberately chosen to confront the loss, the memory and the realities of life under these conditions, through metaphor, through images that appear and disappear and in the case of Salcedo, through materials that evoke the trace of unnamed victims. Within a nation that recognizes and studies the dominant role violence has played in history through the present in is socio-political dynamics, the projects of artists such as Muñoz, Echavarría and Salcedo propose strategies for acknowledging the human and cultural cost of this reality.

[78] Doris Salcedo in *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos,* 168.

Chapter 2:

Works and Practices of Influence on Salcedo

Critical to the evolution of Doris Salcedo's project are the works and practices of Beatriz González, Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp. Although the issues and ideas from each artist vary in terms of their influence on Salcedo's work, she interweaves them in subtle ways that offer an important perspective on her visual choices. From play with the Duchampian idea of the readymade, to the use and significance of everyday materials, to the idea of the uncanny and to the idea of "social sculpture" giving form to society, among other ideas factored in her formation, I argue that the influences of González, Duchamp and Beuys thread together providing a point of departure for Salcedo's approach.

Salcedo's most recognized practice focuses on sculpture and installation, however she began her studies in painting at the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano. She found the sculpture program and performance related-curriculum less rigorous. Salcedo describes her painting studies as thorough, and critical to her formation as an artist. Its impact will be discussed in the next chapter. For a short time her courses included the design of theatre sets where she says her interest in the interweaving of art and politics began. After completing her degree in Bogotá, she travelled the world for a year viewing sculpture of various cultures and eras, from Modernist and contemporary pieces in the Western world to the monumental works of various non-western cultures which she preferred. In particular, the sculpture she saw in Egypt, specifically the monuments related to death, enormously influenced her.[79] Following this

[79] Doris Salcedo, email to author, May 5, 2013. Salcedo explained that the sculptures she saw that related to death during her visit to Egypt before beginning graduate school clarified in her mind why she wanted to be a sculptor.

decisive exposure to the active presence and place of sculpture throughout the world, Salcedo began her graduate studies in sculpture at New York University in the early 1980's.[80]

Prior to these travels, Salcedo cites the importance of her studies in Bogotá with the artist Beatriz González, whom Salcedo describes as, not only a painter, but an art historian deeply trained in theory, who experimented in ways unlike other artists in Colombia at the time and who provided her with a thorough and rigorous intellectual grounding.[81] In particular, González' incorporation of photographs documenting actual events and the layering of different kinds of information as decisive elements in her pieces Salcedo cites as influential, "You could see how she went about developing a piece of work superimposing layers of information that she would bring in from different fields of knowledge, not only from the pictorial. I feel that this model of working was essential for my development."[82] This fusion of different kinds of information conveyed through a complex overlay of diverse materials and means figures in Salcedo's project from her earliest pieces, but in a visual language departing from that of her teacher.

Beatriz González creates figurative paintings rendered in brightly toned pigments depicting art historical masterpieces or local religious or political icons which by the late 1960's through the 1970's she rendered on enamel, inserted within and framed by a piece of domestic furniture. It is the furniture work for which González has received national and international attention. A bed, vanity, nightstand or table, are some of the articles of furniture in which

[80] Carlos Basualdo, "Carlos Basualdo in Conversation with Doris Salcedo," in *Doris Salcedo,* ed. Nancy Princenthal, Carlos Basualdo, Andreas Huyssen (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 8-10.

[81] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, Cambridge, MA, April 22, 2013. Salcedo explained Gonzalez created a training program for art guides in which she enrolled. In this course she said, Gonzalez created a curriculum requiring her to read all of the major theorists and art historians and to produce weekly essays and talks analyzing what they read. Salcedo described it as an education so rigorous that when she arrived at NYU for her graduate program in Sculpture she found the readings and requirements far less demanding, and decidedly less thorough and substantive.

[82] Basualdo, "In Conversation," 9.

González incorporated her radiantly hued paintings. The furnishings varied, many were metal with faux-wood grain painted over it; others were constructed of wood, their warm tone and surface sharply contrasting with the bright, flat enamel image attached to their frames. The leading Colombian critic during the time, Marta Traba, related the two types of furniture to distinct social classes in Colombia, the metal furniture she said engaged the lower class masses and the wooden pieces the middle classes. González later expressed that she chose the wooden pieces from second hand stores, as a deliberate critique and statement of poor taste, a comment that substantiates the Colombian perception of her work as an attack on the elitist aesthetic dominating national cultural institutions and leadership. Within this context, the furniture pieces conveyed a layered address of social and cultural norms generated not only by the paintings and subjects, but also the composition of the furniture.[83]

Before delving into the nature of González's furniture pieces it is important to understand that from the beginning her practice explored the personal, often gender-specific and popular activities deemed inappropriate subjects for art exhibited in public museums and galleries. As art historian Ana Maria Reyes states "González called attention to private, diverse, and hybrid visual cultural practices and proposed them as legitimate sources for a modern art exhibition….González thus distanced her sources from their "proper" context: the privacy of the home, and an intimate relation with their owners." [84]An example of González's approach includes the fourteen paintings she rendered in her characteristic, brilliant tones for her second

[83] Ana María Reyes, "Art at the Limits of Modernization: The Artistic Production of Beatriz González during the National Front in Colombia," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011) 399, 402-3. González commented on her deliberate choice of the unattractive wooden furniture as an insult to cultivated audiences in an interview with Reyes in August 2005, and said, as well, that she had not considered the furniture attractive until years later when a collector admired and purchased it. Reyes explains that González was criticized during the 1960's and beyond for incorporating popular culture imagery and subjects, "kitsch" in her paintings, unacceptable and "ugly" to the cultural leaders in Colombia.

[84] Ibid., 223.

solo exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá in 1967. (Figure 2.1) Each of the canvases conveyed popular culture, three included commercial photography of children, one portrayed a family in an image taken from a newspaper photograph, nine were based on the popular prints or devotional scenes illustrated in the commercial images produced by the Cali based printers, Gráficas Molinari and the last, *Lassie*, was based on the U.S. television series then shown in Colombia about a collie dog who was a community hero. The canvases stemmed from the newspaper clippings she collected from the culture, crime and tabloid pages, commercial photographs, popular prints and stamps she gathered in her studio and clearly referenced the idea of scrap-book and album making, by including the photo corners and matting, the elements evident in the homemade family albums. Not only that, but the subjects she highlights, the family, children, devotional images and the dog starring in a family television drama, are what Reyes describes as "…maternal, familial, and pious subject matter—the realm of the feminine within Catholic Marian ideology."[85] Private life was not considered an appropriate subject in the public sphere until the late 1940's, with the emergence of the popular leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. Hence to include personal subjects in a painting, making clear that these images were rendered as if they recreated someone's private scrapbook, confronted social as well as aesthetic rules.[86] Not only were González' themes commonplace; as Reyes points out, they were subjects associated with the feminine, as understood in the Catholic culture that prevailed in Colombia. Her paintings conveying the cut, matted and pasted collection of photographs and prints references the kind of "scrapbook" hobby associated with female pursuits. Although critics objected to her paintings for the popular subjects, not gender

[85] Ibid., 217-18.

[86] Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 87-88.

affiliations, above all, her work brought the practices and uncultivated subjects of private life into the public space, appropriating and re-presenting what was deemed unacceptable for cultural institutions.

The critical response to these works provides an example of the issues frequently addressed by those writing on González's work in the 1960's and early 1970's. One reviewer, art critic Luis Fernando Lucerna described her work as deliberately including objects and colors representative of "our milieu" and of the "sincere observation of our people and of their "bad taste," while others, such as art critic, Alvaro Burgos describes González in his review of her 1967 exhibition as "…one of the most representative artists of our art…" which he explains through her ability to "…take newspaper photographs, where, one finds outlandish, tragicomic things reverberating with black humor, which make one vacillate between screaming or jumping from joy, that occur in our lovely country."[87] Although generally favorable, most reviews similarly position González's work as concerned with incorporating the kitsch, the commonplace, "low-brow" core of general Colombian culture, claiming it is of "bad taste;" consequently, her pieces were not readily embraced by the traditional cultural leadership.

This dichotomy of critical perspectives about González's practice culminated in the reception of her next works from 1967, two paintings on tin, the precursors to her furniture works. The two paintings, *Apuntes para la Historia Extensa de Colombia Tomo I (Bolivar)* and *Tomo II* (Santander) portray the two central heroes in Colombia's history, rendered in her characteristic flat, simple forms of rich tones, as pared down and colorful as cartoon figures set on an oval ground. (Figure 2.2 and 2.3) The artist's visual language critics associated with the Pop Art movement in the United States and the bright pigments, clear lines and shapes of Roy

[87] Luis Fernando Lucena, "Dos Exposiciones," *El Tiempo,* June 12, 1967 and Alvaro Burgos, "Beatriz González: la satira de lo ingenuo," *El Siglo,* June 11, 1967.

Lichenstein's figures or Andy Warhol's portraits. Because her two portraits were painted on tin, the surface shine and visual absence of brushstrokes lend an appearance of commercial art, unlike her works on canvas in which her brushstrokes fill the surface and the unique nature of the piece is apparent. Given the significance of the subjects, the critical response was dramatic, with some applauding her critique of the nation's official history through such portrayals of these iconic figures and others labeling them ugly, the colors putrid. She was also accused of plagiarism for creating these works based on portraits from the previous century.[88] Typical of her practice, González re-presented previous images in these two works. She based these portrayals on poor photographs of a portrait of Bolivar by a 19th century painter, Pedro José Figueroa and a miniature of Santander that appeared reproduced in the Sunday magazine of *El Tiempo,* adding color, re-presenting them entirely in her own language on enamel. As she no doubt expected given her choice and treatment of national heros, they raised a heated response. These enamel paintings were followed by the furniture pieces for which González has received the greatest attention in Latin America and abroad, as well as critical praise for her continued embrace of local culture in her practice.

During the 1970's, before and during the time Salcedo was her student, González created various painted furniture sculptures, framing images that depicted subjects of art historical, didactic or devotional significance. Beginning with her submission in 1970 of *Naturaleza Casí Muerta,* (Figure I.6) to the International Art Biennial of Cotejer, a faux-wood-decorated, metal bed with an enamel painting depicting a suffering Christ filling the base, González created a

[88] Reyes, "Art at the Limits of Modernization," 301-8. Reyes explains that, Arturo Abella, a political commentator and the editor of the conservative paper *El Siglo,* accused González of copying her portrait of Bolivar from a portrait of Pedro José Figureoa from 1819, clearly missing the idea that González deliberately appropriated an image she found, and was re-using, what had been interpreted as the national icon, raising questions about this set view of Colombian history.

series of what were deemed "Pop art" portrayals inserted into pieces of furniture. Critics associated her In this case her iconic figure relates to one of the most venerated images in Bogotá, the Fallen Christ of Montserrat, the famous sculpture in the Basilica of Montserrat, which represents the Biblical image of the Fallen Christ of the *Via Crucis.* In particular, this image was known to Colombian viewers through the popular local print by Gráficas Molinari representing the Christ sculpture depicted crowned in thorns laying against a Cross strewn with roses.[89] This work succinctly demonstrates what González suggests when she describes her furniture pieces as "a representation of a representation."[90] In this and her other works that juxtapose paintings of religious, social, national or art historical icons sassily rendered on enamel in a seemingly "paint by number" simplicity, she represents an image "framed" in an elaborately dramatic manner, one that continues to strike the viewer as unexpected and unfathomable. The metal furniture painted with trompe l'oeil wooden sections, the brashly toned, flat and strangely unsettling depictions of recognizable subjects, operate in a critical space that confronts expectations of what is art, where it belongs and the place of furniture as frame or subject. Although the international jurors at the biennial did not champion this work, Latin American critics celebrated the local furniture, her now recognizable "pop art," colorful depictions on enamel and writers such as Marta Traba deemed it a new Latin American avant garde, regionally specific, but integrating fresh language, materials, ideas.[91]

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[89] Ibid., 347-50.

[90] González quoted in Marta Traba, *Los Muebles de Beatriz González* (Bogotá: Museo de Arte Modern, 1977), 65.

[91] Traba, *Los Muebles de Beatriz González,* 8 and Reyes, "Art at the Limits of Modernization," 400-401 citing Dario Ruiz Gomez, "La II Bienial de Arte, La Figuración Derrotada" in *El Espectador,* May 1970, who discusses González's art as based on authentic urban popular culture not folklore. Not only critics, but art historians interpret González's furniture pieces of 1970 as part of a Latin American avant garde, her use of furniture as a base, a frame, the language of images set within domestic furniture, was recognized as introducing new forms, sources and materials into what was practiced in the Colombian and regional art world at the time. See for example, Mari

González' furniture pieces, in particular, address various issues that deserve notice for the perspective they shed on Salcedo's practice. Namely, González chose furniture that was not only secondhand, but also, most importantly, belongs in domestic interiors, specifically in the most private rooms in the home, the bedroom and dressing room. She focuses on the furnishings where one's intimate life exists hidden from the public eye, placing her vibrant enamel paintings within its form, then installs it before the eyes of everyone, making the private public. Moreover, Reyes points that, given the national context, "Emphasizing the private world in the public sphere had important connotations about the political culture in Colombia and its mechanism of gender and class exclusion. González's iconographic choices paired with the bedroom furniture, call attention to the pervasiveness of Catholic ideology in the private world of intimacy, sexuality, and gender constructs…The bed as reference to the domestic and private interior is central to González's *framing* of problems and issues."[92]

Not only is González's choice of furniture and its connotations of the private, protected space of home compare to Salcedo's selection of kitchen tables, beds and bureaus but, the former's concern with encouraging the viewer's close engagement and examination of the work is a strategy important to Salcedo. González embraced the faux wood grain, the trompe l'oeil painted on the metal frames of the furniture, praising the artisans for their great skill, and commissioning them to create a kitchen table in which she inserted her *La Ultima Mesa* 1970 (Figure 2.4), her rendering of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. González found the "visual trickery" of the faux wood a means of inciting the viewer to look closely at her pieces, creating a lively tension between the trompe l'oeil wooden surface and the colorful enamel image it framed, be it

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Carmen Ramirez' *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), which lists her furniture pieces as examples of vanguard art in the region.

[92] Reyes, "Art at the Limits of Modernization," 364.

The Last Supper or *Naturaleza Casi Muerte*, her representation of a 19th century painting by Colombian artist Pedro Quijano. Each is "a representation of a representation," the painted metal conveys a likeness of wood, and her painting on enamel, her version of a famous image. Hence her furniture pieces take on the issue of vision as one influenced by the cultural context in which the work is seen, the kind of furnishings--bed, vanity, painted table--for example, are associated for a Colombian viewer, with sellers from a particular Bogotá area and with working-class consumers. [93] And to Salcedo, these references resonated.

The visual construct González fostered implicates the viewer through not only physical proximity to the piece, but through the mode of perceiving the work. Rather than the traditional approach of viewing the painting, hung on a wall at eye-level, one must bend or crouch beside the furniture to look down at the bed or table top, or into the place where the mirror would sit upon the vanity. The viewer's body physically relates to the furnishings. As one hovers over the piece of furniture and peers down at these devotional images, the viewer assumes a posture that as Reyes states, conveys a kind of disrespect for these sacred figures.[94] Hence, González's furniture pieces pointedly criticize the established means of presentation and placement of images of reverence by inserting these representations within a piece of furniture, specifically furniture from the space of private, intimate daily life and situating them where the viewer's body reclines. Moreover, the image is depicted with the simplicity of form and color typical of popular media notices. Furthermore, the artist displays this bedroom furnishing in a public space. By various means González confronts the Colombian cultural and social elite and the audience

[93] Ibid., 370-372.

[94] Ibid., 389-90. She states that, for example, the Fallen Christ is painted "irreverently" on a surface where the viewer's body would lie, clearly not the hallowed ground befitting him. Hence, the respect due Christ is absent with the implication that she critiques Colombian devotional images and beliefs through the framing of the re-presented popular image on a bed, and in the flat, colorful manner in which she depicts the famous representation.

overall, by contesting accepted artistic practices with subjects, materials and a visual language that juxtaposes disparate worlds of thought.

Exposed to González's approach of questioning Colombia's cultural structure, Salcedo absorbed the importance of creating work in dialogue with the country's socio-political context; the fusion of disparate material elements i.e. painting on enamel, furniture, printmaking, the importance of engaging the viewer at close proximity where one can discern issues and technique visible upon careful scrutiny; the use of everyday objects as part of a carefully conceived and constructed visual expression; and the insertion of found, domestic furniture into public viewing space, with all its material implications. It would be an oversimplification to reduce Salcedo's incorporation of household furniture, chairs, bureaus, beds and tables to the influence of her teacher, González. Salcedo creates sculptures and installations with one or multiple chairs or tables, but no painted, figurative element is contained by the furniture. In addition, the surface of Salcedo's piece bears material insertions, evocative and palpable such that vision is activated through the presence of cement, cloth, hair, surfaces scarred and chipped rather than filled with brightly rendered likenesses of famous figures. Salcedo absorbed visual lessons from González such as a thorough foundation in painting and the techniques of incorporating unexpected forms and elements, but she also drew from her teacher's deep grounding in art historical ideas, artistic theories and deliberate efforts to generate art's role in social dialogue. This grounding and approach to artmaking affected Salcedo's particular interest, for example, in Joseph Beuys' ideas. González creates work that engages directly in Colombian culture, and that engagement figures prominently in Salcedo's practice.

Building from González's ideas of social engagement, attention to mundane objects and the visual weight and significance of materials, Salcedo chose to begin a graduate program at

NYU in sculpture where she intensively studied Joseph Beuys' theories and oeuvre. Her decision to pursue graduate work at NYU stemmed from her desire to live and study in downtown New York, amidst the art world and galleries. As Salcedo states, she deems Beuys' practice extremely important, and that when she was in New York during the early 1980's she studied his work obsessively; she recalls that his pieces were installed in various institutions and his ideas were widely discussed and circulating in the city.[95] Salcedo came to New York deeply interested in Beuys' project after seeing an exhibition of his multiples in Bogotá that intrigued her, she read extensively on the artist and his ideas, including the first book she read in English. Studying his work became the focus of her graduate program in sculpture, as she states, "…I chose it as a point of departure."[96] In particular, she found in Beuys the means of re-thinking the tradition of Modernist sculpture and addressing the socio-political capacity of the medium. As she explains

> ….Encountering his work revealed to me the concept of 'social sculpture', the possibility of giving form to society through art. I became passionately drawn to creating that form, which led me to find sculpture meaningful, because merely handling material was meaningless to me. Placing a small object on a base seemed completely vacuous. That is why Beuys was so important to me….[97]

Moreover, she points to the thematic weight with which he charges materials, "I found the possibility of integrating my political awareness with sculpture. I discovered how materials have the capacity to convey specific meanings."[98] Reading Salcedo's words, Beuys' influence on her

[95] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, New York, NY, October 21, 2012 and email correspondence, May 5, 2013.

[96] Ibid., May 5, 2013 and Salcedo quoted in Basualdo, "In Conversation," 9.

[97] Ibid., 10.

[98] Ibid.

practice is unmistakable. The particular aspects of his project, his ideas and means that she chose to consider, and the ways in which they thread into her address, all deserve examination as they provide sharp insights into her priorities.

Salcedo arrived in New York for graduate school with the theoretical foundation for her approach to sculpture in her mind before she began and Beuys' theories were already part of it. The art historical and theoretical education she received under Beatriz González' direction, in which Hegel, Benjamin, Levinas and Adorno, among others, figured prominently in her rigorous studies and weekly presentations, prepared her well for the issues and philosophy underpinning Beuys' practice.[99] Salcedo's project grew from the approach that the material expression she created addressed political violence in the context of the victim and viewers experience. Her art was to be situated in the world, that world which people lived but endured in silence, created from the theoretical foundation and perspective she absorbed through González, hence Beuys' approach resonated profoundly. As she states, "…I hadn't had the chance to make sculpture until I reached New York. I already had a theoretical framework for what I wanted, or didn't want, prior to sculpting in practice. That in itself made things difficult at the beginning. I wasn't at all interested in the Modernist sculptural tradition…."[100] Beuys' project exemplified a sculptural tradition in sharp contrast to the modernist legacy. His emphasis on sculpture's socio-political space and role, as well as the significance of unexpected, everyday materials, as part of sculpture's work as an agent in society, are elements important in Salcedo's practice as well.

In particular, the idea of "social sculpture" was a Beuysian concept widely known, discussed and a central idea Salcedo considered in her practice. Social sculpture was a kind of

[99] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Newton, MA.

[100] Carlos Basualdo, "Interview," 9-10.

activist aesthetic project; Beuys believed in an "expanded notion of art" in which all individuals are artists. But the ways in which his theories functioned were as much on a conceptual as a material basis and were explained by the expansive nature of his practice. Beuys created work that ranged from drawings, prints, sculptures, objects, installations, multiples, and performances. Later in his career in the 1970's, he became politically active in Germany, initially creating "counter-institutional frameworks" for timely social and political debate, then political parties,(he was a Green party candidate), and activist organizations. By the early 1970's he described the open public discussion and debate of issues as the realization of his idea of "social sculpture."[101] It should be noted that he believed that creativity was central to his idea and that in directing these political discussions his address was artistic, as he explained when asked in a 1972 interview if his work with this focus was political action: "…For me it's an artistic action. More and more we proceed from the assumption of self-determination, from human freedom as a creative, that is, also an artistic point of departure. So it is a cultural question in the first place…. all human knowledge comes from art. Every capacity comes from the artistic capacity of man, which means to be active, creatively."[102] Add to this approach the cult of personality that he encouraged throughout his career, from his early 1960's "actions-performances" telling the story of his survival as a wounded German soldier in World War II, to his use of materials such as felt and fat in his sculptures and "actions," to his embrace and focus on symbolic creatures, the stag, the hare and the coyote in his installations and performances, and one sees that the extent of Beuys' presence and practice circulating in the world was formidable. (Figure 2.5)

[101] Claudia Mesch, "Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys' *Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum* Installation (1972)," in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, ed. Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 198-9.

[102] Ibid., 211, taken from 'Postulat auf Wandtafeln im Buro Beuys, Documenta 1972' (postulate on boards of ODD office at Documenta 1972), reprinted in *Jeder Mensch ein Kunstler. Gesprache auf der Documenta* 5/1972, ed. Clara Bodenmann-ritter (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1975) 51-2, 68.

In terms of Beuys' proposals, his idea of "social sculpture" resonated most closely with directions Salcedo pursues in her practice. He proposed, as he wrote in the catalogue of his first major U.S. museum retrospective curated by Caroline Tisdall in 1979 at the Guggenheim in New York, that sculpture and the idea of sculpting can be expanded to include different results as well as means accessible to everyone and immaterial. As he states: "My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture, or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture **can** (his emphasis) be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone: **Thinking Forms—**how we mould our thoughts or **Spoken Forms—**how we shape our thoughts into words or, **SOCIAL SCULPTURE—**how we mould and shape the world in which we live: **Sculpture as an evolutionary process; everyone an artist.**"[103] Tisdall interprets these ideas, describing Beuys' intention as one in which "…It means a widened concept of art in which the **whole process of living** itself is the creative act…it implies an intensified feeling for life, for the processes of living, and for the structures of society."[104] Most importantly for the purposes of the Beuys-Salcedo link, she points to the German artist's approach as, "For Beuys this process of personally understanding and discovering the world began with sculpture, or more precisely, with material. Material is substance, both carrier and conveyor of meaning."[105]

The meaning of materials in Beuys' project played a significant role within his concept of "social sculpture," but in particular, it bore symbolic weight within the context of post-World War II Germany. As Gene Ray proposes in his essay "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz

[103] Joseph Beuys, "Introduction," in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 1979), 7.

[104] Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 7.

[105] Ibid.

Sublime," the artist's work was a "project of mourning" and within this construct Beuys' chosen materials and objects, felt, fat, flashlights, for example, carry connotations linked to German history during and after the war.[106] As Bejamin Buchloh states in his 1998 essay reconsidering Beuys' work, "All of Beuys' materials are no doubt derived from the shambles of postwar Germany, in the literal sense of a culture in shambles, a culture of debris…."[107] Beuys repeatedly used felt and fat in his actions and sculptures, materials he explained as integral to his personal history and survival during the war, when he was shot down over Crimea and found by Tartars whom he credited with saving him, "…They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in."[108] Regardless of the extensive scholarly discussion as to the veracity of Beuys' tale of this war experience and the colorful, seemingly mythical life story he repeatedly presented, the artist's choice and frequent use of fat and felt in his practice bears a socio-political significance integral to his social sculpture project that registered with Salcedo and other artists.[109] Hence, the materials and the

[106] Gene Ray, "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (Sarasota and New York: The John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art and DAP, 2001), 60-65, 68-69.

[107] Benjamin Buchloh, "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys: Once Again," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, 86.

[108] Joseph Beuys, Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 17.

[109] Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum*, (January 1980): 35-40. Buchloh's critical assessment of Beuys' declared personal history and the role this plays in his practice was articulated, now famously, in this article. He stated "As for Beuys, the cult and the myth seem to have become inseparable from the work, and as his confusion of art and life is a deliberate programmatic position, an 'integration' to be achieved by everybody, it seems appropriate to take a critical look at some aspects of Beuys' private 'myth of origin' before looking at the actual work. Beuys' most spectacular biographic fable convenue, the plane crash in the Crimea, which supposedly brought him into contact with Tartars, has never been questioned, even though it seems contrived as it is dramatic." Buchloh's criticism was followed by numerous scholarly questionings of the Beuys' story of his past and its relation to his project, as Gene Ray states in his essay, "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," "In focusing on Beuys' asserted project and in accepting the purported unity of his life and work, critics have restricted themselves to a general dependence on Beuys' own discourse and self-interpretations. Such sources are of course primary for art historians seeking to reconstruct Beuys' intention or the genesis of particular works. But critics, too, whether discussing an action, interpreting an installation, or analyzing Beuys' theory of social sculpture, have followed the leads and borrowed the terms provided by the artist himself." Hence, the artist's statements weighed heavily in the reception and embrace of his work during his lifetime in particular. He died in 1986. It should be noted that Caroline Tisdall, in her exhibition catalogue for Beuys' first U.S. museum retrospective, *Joseph Beuys*, presented

larger than life biography Beuys presented were so tightly interwoven that one's perception of his work was fueled by this joint address.

The idea of the "project of mourning" and the significance of materials Ray proposes, provides a means by which to perceive the ways in which Salcedo finds resonance in Beuys' practice. As Buchloh stated in his 1980 essay on Beuys, "In the work and public myth of Beuys, the new German spirit of the post-war period finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known."[110] Ray makes clear that Beuys did not publically state his intention to address the war and its atrocities, as he did announce his focus on creating an expanded notion of art encompassing a broad public in actions of creating social sculpture, however, in Ray's words "…Evoking and avowing the Holocaust through various strategies, Beuys' pieces and actions can also be read as objects and gestures of mourning…Beuys' strategy for evoking and avowing the Holocaust became one of indirection. The strongest works function through formal resemblance, material affinity, and allegory, rather than through direct representation or confrontation."[111] Ray establishes that Beuys did not directly discuss his beliefs and feelings regarding the Holocaust, nor did he state a deliberate

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the artist's account of his WWII plane crash and tale of the Tartar's help with fat and felt, and included three photographs of the damaged plane in Crimea as well as a separate photograph of Beuys in soldier's uniform in Manfredonia. She refers to the crash as "…absolutely determining…It is certainly true that without this encounter with the Tartars, and with their ritualistic respect for the healing potential of materials, Beuys would never have turned to fat and felt as the material for sculpture," 16-17.

[110] Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum*, (January 1980), reprinted in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, ed. Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 114-115. As he further states: "What the myth does tell us, however, is how an artist, showed work developed in the middle and late 1950s, and whose intellectual and aesthetic formation must have occurred somehow in the proceeding decade, tries to come to terms with the period of history marked by German fascism and the war resulting from it, destroying and annihilating cultural memory and discontinuity for almost two decades and causing a rupture in history that left mental blocks and blanks and severe psychic scars on everybody living in this period and the generations following it. Beuys' personal myth is an attempt to come to terms with those blocks and scars."

[111] Ray, "After-Auschwitz Sublime," 57 and 59.

strategy to encode his materials, objects and actions with references to that horrific tragedy. However, visual links can be drawn from his work that, as Ray suggests, support a reading of indirect statements that act as part of a kind of mourning project.

I cite two from the several examples that Ray discusses, as they should be considered in the context of materials and objects figuring in Salcedo's project. The first is fat, and in particular, Beuys' 1963 work, *Chair with Fat,* (Figure I.7), in which an enormous wedge of fat sits upon the seat of a basic wooden chair, The form of the chair suggests the absent human figure, the fat placed, as it is, upon the seat where the body would rest, evokes a disembodied, but physical presence. As Ray describes, "…the seated human figure which the chair's form so strongly evokes is absent, but reappears stubbornly, in a kind of ghastly afterimage, in and through the wedge of fat Beuys has substituted for it."[112] Fat, although equated by Beuys with the lifesaving, warming properties he learned from the Tartans, Ray associates with the oven fires at Auschwitz, and specifically, its "form to formlessness" quality as it relates to the body. "But it must be said unequivocally that fat first of all refers to the body and to the vulnerability of the body to fire. Beuys could have demonstrated the sculptural principle by simply using wax. There was no need at all to use or name fat and involve the inevitable links to the body. That fat marks not just the body but the body of the holocaustal sacrifice is clear enough…"[113]

Felt is a second material Ray suggests as an example of Beuys' World War II reference. Beuys claimed the Tartans insulated his chilled body by wrapping it in felt, but the material was known in wartime Germany for other disturbing reasons one cannot help but consider. (Figure 2.6) Ray explains that after 1942, the hair of concentration camp victims was cut, gathered on

[112] Ibid., 69.

[113] Ibid., 62-63.

site and sent to German-owned factories to be made into felt that was then used to make products during the war, such as slippers for U-boat crews and railroad workers' stockings. In short, as Ray states, "…Seven tons of human hair, packed and ready for shipment, were discovered at Auschwitz when the camp was liberated in 1945. Whatever Beuys' personal experience of this pressed material may have been and whatever its sculptural properties may be, felt has a place in the history of the Holocaust that cannot be erased or avoided.[114] Beuys incorporated felt into many of his works, from his *Felt Suits,* 1970 multiples to *Infiltration-Homogen for grand piano, the greatest contemporary composer is the Thalidomide child,* 1966 in which a grand piano is completely enclosed in a felt cover sewn to fit eerily and perfectly, to his *I Like America and America Likes Me,* action from May 23-25,1974 (Figure 2.5), at Rene Block gallery in New York, in which he shrouded himself in an enormous felt blanket and lived the three days with a coyote. His felt works are too numerous to mention, like fat, felt is a material one associates with Beuys' practice and when considered from the perspective Ray proposes, the significance of the material evokes Holocaust references, as well as the suggestion of a muted silence, absence, empty space or place, ideas prevalent in Salcedo's practice.

The "project of mourning" through indirection, that Ray proposes as a Beuysian strategy, provides a basis in which to examine the elements of the artist's ideas of "social sculpture" and the expanded concept of art from which Salcedo drew in her own work. Germany after World War II was a country in which unspeakable trauma had occurred, such that in 1949 Theodor Adorno wrote his famous statement: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[115] As Ray

[114] Ibid., 64-65. Ray cites Andrzej Strzelecki, "The Plunder of victims and Their Corpses," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp,* ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana UP; Washington D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), 259-261.

[115] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 34.

succinctly states, "…the art of a German of Beuys' generation must refuse both the beautiful and the direct or "positive" modes of traditional representation. It must, like Beuys' art at its strongest, produce its effect according to different rules—those of the sublime. Only an art in that register, an art which evokes and avows, which strikes, hits and hollows, can hope to honor the major trauma of the historical referent."[116]

The widespread violence and brutality that ruptured Colombian society over the last half of the 20th century and especially during the last thirty years, raises issues related to those Adorno's statement addresses and Salcedo, like Beuys, finds the weight of materials as the means of approaching a context in which trauma prevails. The idea of "social sculpture," in its dialogue with the social and political circumstances, with the context in which people live, provides a proposal fundamental to ideas Salcedo pursues in her practice. But, in specific terms, the focus on materials, the objects chosen to construct the address, Beuys' use of the domestic and ordinary, felt, flashlights, sleds, brooms, clothing, chairs and furniture, stuff familiar and aesthetically defined not by words of beauty but by purpose, and the significance invoked by their presence in the artist's form of expression (be it action, sculpture or installation) resonates in Salcedo's approach. She chooses the everyday, the domestic furnishings, the worn clothing, the frayed cloth, the hairs, the threads, the chipped crib, the narrow doors to invoke, to convey what cannot be expressed with words or figurative renderings in oils or marble. As she says, "Sculpture is its materiality. I work with materials that are already charged with significance, with a meaning they have acquired in the practice of everyday life. Used materials are profoundly human; they all bespeak the presence of a human being."[117] In some of her early

[116] Ray, "After-Auschwitz Sublime," 68.

[117] Basualdo, "In Conversation," 21.

works she incorporated the belongings of the disappeared victims in the Colombian war given to her by their families, but in most of her sculptures the objects, the furniture signifies without a known history or status as relic.[118] The indirect statement through materials weighted with references, social and political, is central to her project.

Not only the importance of materiality, the specificity of what is chosen and how it figures in each artist's production bears comparison, but, Beuys' engagement with his audience, his interest in seeking their physical involvement in his work, is an approach evident by different means in Salcedo sculptures or installations. She does not actively encourage viewers to create and participate in her pieces in the manner Beuys articulated in his concept of social sculpture with words and actions. However, many of her pieces require the viewer to draw physically close: to examine carefully the cement-filled chests to see the worn clothing or the grain of the table to recognize the human hairs woven into the wood; or to walk between a sea of coffin-like tables one turned upside down upon the other, to measure the vast space they fill, the silence of these hulking forms and to feel the humid soil in the air and note the tender green grass shooting up from within the wood; or to walk along the expanding then diminishing width of the crevice that split the monumental expanse of the Tate's Turbine Hall; or to approach and step back in an attempt to read, quantify and fully perceive the 1550 chairs, the depth and height of the vacant space between buildings and the wall of diverse, impossibly balanced, strewn and stacked wooden chairs perched beside rather than spilling over the Istanbul sidewalk. The viewer's engagement with her works is more than visual and contemplative, her pieces reference the body. The furniture is from domestic spaces, it is common, worn, accustomed to holding a person's weight, filling one's home. Hence, as one sees and walks beside, between, around her pieces,

[118] Doris Salcedo, *Guerra y Pa`, Simposio Sobre La Situación Social, Política y Artística en Colombia*, (Zurich: Daros-Latinamerica AG, 2006), 129.

they physically engage by drawing on the viewer's recognition of the kitchen table or chair from daily existence, prompting one's active, immediate reception of the work. Salcedo's sculptures and installations are composed of objects and materials that are by no means neutral, they claim the viewer's engagement by the sheer familiarity of the domestic furniture, fabric, cement and soil she chooses then painstakingly alters such that it is at once familiar and strange, forcing one to think and to do so in the public space.

More recently, since the turn of the century her focus on political violence broadened to include not only the experience of victims and survivors in Colombia, but to address individuals throughout the world who have endured violent oppression at the hands of forces public and private. Her *Installation for the 8th International Biennial* 2003, (Figure I.9), is a topography of war, a memorial that speaks, for example, to the violent oppression of Armenians and Greeks in Turkey's history, while also evoking a broad sense of historical atrocities and the notion of a mass grave in the seemingly chaotic assemblage of worn chairs.[119] In *Plegaria Muda* 2008-10, (Figure I.10), Salcedo addresses the violent cycle that permeates the lives of those living in precarious socio-economic conditions from the gangs in Los Angeles to the youth in Colombia. As she explained, "In *Plegaria Muda* I try to articulate a series of violent events that determine the unstoppable spiral of mimetic and fratricidal violence that equally marks out gang violence, internal conflicts or civil wars, all over the world."[120] These are two examples of works among others, in which the materials selected and the means by which Salcedo juxtaposed, melded and installed them address and remember victims of political violence through a lens, at once, Colombian and international in scope.

[119] Rod Mengham, "'Failing Better': Salcedo's Trajectory," in *Doris Salcedo: Neither* (White Cube: London, 2004) 9.

[120] Doris Salcedo, "ArtisTalk," lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 23, 2013.

Not unlike Beuys' proposal, but with a differing context and address, Salcedo sees the viewer as an integral element in the realization of her work. Her pieces create a space and place for acknowledging the absence and devastating losses wrought by violence in Colombia, as people experience what she constructs from materials weighted with the familiarity of possessions from people's homes, whether or not drawn literally from the victims. As she says, "This work is an attempt to form a certain community, an ephemeral community, the community of the desaparecidos, with whose families I work. They gave me objects that had belonged to the desaparecidos of the violence in Colombia, and then I tried to recreate these objects, which came from the individual space, the private grief of the families, into a work with many niches in order to convert an individual phenomenon into a social phenomenon. The grief that is limited to the family circle becomes a social phenomenon."[121] By contrast, Oscar Muñoz addresses these tragic losses by incorporating the photographs of the faces of victims who were assassinated or violently killed. In his *Aliento* 1995, (Figure 1.1), the viewer's breath upon a round, metallic mirror reveals momentarily the image of a victim, their portrait adhered through photo-transfer to the metal disc.[122] Hence, unlike Salcedo, he incorporates the victim's visage, which appears as an ephemeral, fleeting image, one that hauntingly relies on the viewer's interaction to be realized, and then lasts only moments, a memory soon lost. By contrast, Salcedo renders a palpable material presence in which the victims' specificity and absence depends on their worn shoes and the traces these harbor, encased in wall niches, shrouded behind animal skin. (Figure I.4)

By conceiving her work and placing it outside her studio, in a museum, gallery or public setting she draws the audience into an interaction in mind and body. In the space her sculpture or

[121] Salcedo, *Guerra y Pa*, 129.

[122] Lupe Alvarez, "Dissolution and Phantasmagoria," in *Oscar Muñoz: documentos de la amnesia* (Badajos, Spain: Museo Extremeno e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2008), 176-177.

installation assumes vis-a-vis the viewer, she creates a physical place for viewers' connection with the deaths, the pain, the harrowing circumstances that so many have endured during war. As Salcedo states, "…my interest in the space of sculpture was in the way it can represent a crossroad, a meeting point."[123] It is in this space that the audience confronts and engages the ideas weighted in the materiality of Salcedo's sculptures.

Central to Salcedo's practice is the incorporation of everyday objects, a strategy that engages but transforms the Duchampian idea of the readymade. Duchamp's influence played a central role in the issues and ideas circulating among artists from the mid 20th century on. As Robert Smithson stated in a 1972 interview, "…The prewar period was dominated by Matisse and Picasso and the post-World War II period was dominated by Duchamp…There has been a kind of Duchampitis recently…."[124] In particular, one or more of three paradigms attributed to Duchamp on artmaking figured in the approach of various artists in Europe and the American continent beginning in the fifties: the idea of the readymade and decontextualization, the idea of the index or visual mark as a trace in a picture and the central role of language in the expression.[125] Varied elements of Duchamp's approach were embraced by artists such as John Cage, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Morris, Fluxus artists Allan Kaprow and George Maciunas, and European conceptual artists Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni, among others. However, it was the readymade, the manufactured object (utilitarian, not original nor charged with particular aesthetic qualities) placed and titled such that it is presented as art, that played a fundamental role in tandem with his emphasis on the artist's idea over the aesthetic

[123] Basualdo, "In Conversation," 11.

[124] Robert Smithson, "Robert Smithson on Duchamp: An Interview," *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1973): 47.

[125] *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism,* ed. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 496-97.

expression, that sparked fundamental changes in the strategies, means and language of art mid-century through today. (Figure 2.7) As a former Dadaist, Hans Richter declared upon Duchamp's death in 1968, "It is a fantastic phenomenon, and it is part of the myth surrounding Duchamp, that his intellectual tour de force, his Readymades, these philosophical, esoteric, critical, social statements, weigh infinitely more for the present generation than his remarkable unique works of art…."[126] As Lynne Cooke discusses in her essay 'Reviewing Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Rrose Selavy, Marchand Du Sel…', for *The Readymade Boomerang. Certain Relations in the Art of the 20th Century*, the 1990 Sydney Biennale, "…it was the three-dimensional found objects, the readymades, which became major stimulants in the sixties, as may be seen in the flourishing of the assemblage mode, in the early work of Robert Morris, as well as, less directly in the activities of many Pop and Nouveaux Realistes artists."[127] Recalling Smithson's comment about the "Duchampitis" Cooke states that the French artist's influence grew in the seventies and eighties, with artists such as Bruce Nauman citing his influence in the way in which objects represent ideas. She also mentions Daniel Buren and Lawrence Weiner, and other 70's artists, who "…reiterated Duchamp's seminal realization that an ordinary artifact is designated as art by inserting it in the apparatus of the art system."[128] It bears mention that the claims of Duchamp and the depth and scope of his influence are issues without consensus among scholars in the art historical community. There are those who consider most of his recognized ideas as unintended and regard him as a vacuous thinker whose works and the proposals gleaned

[126] Hans Richter, "In Memory of a Friend," in *Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968*, ed. Cleve Gray, in *Art in America*, (July-August 1969): 40.

[127] Lynne Cooke, "Reviewing Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Rrose Selavy, Marchand Du Sel…" in *The Readymade Boomerang. Certain Relations in the Art of the 20th Century, the 8th Biennale of Sydney*, ed. Rene Block (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1990), 104.

[128] Ibid.,104.

from his words have assumed an authority in the last century that they find suspect.[129] Regardless of the profundity or vacuity of Duchamp's pronouncements and the power or weakness of his intellect, he set the conditions for artistic possibilities hitherto unknown. And it is within these expanded parameters that artist's such as Salcedo and countless others before her, began to use found objects in their work.

Of particular importance to an examination of the presence of Duchamp's ideas in Salcedo's choices, is the marked position Beuys allows the French artist in regard to his own project. Beuys criticized Duchamp, but also acknowledged the artist's theories and objects in his practice, leaving little doubt that Duchamp figured in his approach from diverging perspectives. In 1964 Beuys performed an action he called *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated* in the studios of the ZDF North Rhine-Westphalia television stations which was broadcast as part of a series. Characteristic of Beuys, materials assumed particular significances. Felt, fat, ringing chimes, brown cross, brown bandages, walking stick and chocolate, and their use in his action, were said to suggest principles of nature and were interpreted as a reference to the French artist's indifference towards his career.[130] Following on Duchamp, Beuys created a later work referencing the French artist's first readymade, the bicycle wheel on the stool, 1913. (Figure 2.8) The German's work, *Is it about a Bicycle?* was produced in stages, and includes a bicycle and fifteen blackboards some covered with white or colored chalk drawings and later paint and the tread impressions from bike tires. Beuys' spoken comments on Duchamp pointedly criticize the

[129] See *The Duchamp Effect*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). This book, which is an expanded edition for the Fall 1994 issue of *October*, relates the discussion surrounding divergent viewpoints regarding the historical reception of Duchamp's work from the 1950's to the present. In particular, the exchange between T. J. Clark and Benjamin Buchloh illuminates the contrasting perspectives on Duchamp's ideas and significance.

[130] Ibid., 103, and Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 92, and Antje von Graevenitz, "Breaking the Silence Joseph Beuys on his 'Challenger', Marcel Duchamp," in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, 32-3

artist for his lack of social engagement, which he suggests was the direction his project should have taken. "Duchamp was a slacker who completed beautiful and interesting experiments as shocks to the bourgeoisie, and those were done brilliantly in the aesthetic typology of the time, but for all that, he did not develop a category of thought for it."[131] In a later statement he continues "So he [Duchamp] did not enhance all the work and all the labour to a new understanding of art as necessity….This would have been of great importance, because since then it could have already become a kind of discussion about existing ideology in society…. But then he distanced himself from further reflection. So he did not understand his own work completely."[132] He concluded "….So in being very modest, I could say: my interest was to make another interpretation of Marcel Duchamp. I tried to fill this most important gap in his work and make a statement, 'the silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated'. YOU know, after he stopped working…he did not speak any more of art…So I principally tried to push this beyond the threshold of modern art into an era of anthropological art, as a beginning in all fields of discussion…."[133] Years later Beuys admitted that his statements about Duchamp were misguided, and there is some question as to his understanding of the French artist's ideas, nonetheless his preoccupation with the older artist suggests the importance Duchamp's approach plays in the German artist's project.[134] Although both artists proposed an art in which the idea was of singular importance, the object was not a unique, rarified expression for which the

[131] Joseph Beuys quoted in von Graevenitz, footnote 3, p. 30, citing Joseph Beuys, *Eintritt ins Lebewesen* ('Honeypump at the Workplace'), August 6, 1977, *Documenta VI*, Kassel (Wangen: FIU-Verlag, 1991) audio recording.

[132] Joseph Beuys in discussion with William Furlong, related to Anthonly D'Offay Gallery, London, exhibition, 1985, von Graevenitz, "Breaking the Silence," 31.

[133] Joseph Beuys, Les Levine, Krzystof Wodiczko, Stephen Willats, William Furlong and Michael Archer, ed. *Audio Arts Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 1 (London: 1986), audio recording, trans. von Graevenitz, 45.

[134] Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," 39 and von Graevenitz, "Breaking the Silence," 31.

aesthetic qualities superseded all, the everyday object and common materials predominated. The artist's role in "activating" the work and engaging the audience figured prominently in Beuys' practice as opposed to the silence, the passive role he claimed Duchamp chose. Among other differences, this dramatically demonstrates the contrast between the two artists.

The underpinnings of Duchamp in Salcedo's work surfaces in her choice of everyday objects and materials as fundamental to her practice, although her strategies are not directly beholden to the French artist's tactics. Rather like many artists of the last decades, she focuses on another set of concerns. The readymade, the object from daily life Salcedo privileges is one, unlike Duchamp's urinal or bicycle wheel which have no specific origin, that is deliberately chosen as a link to the particular victims and violent event her piece addresses. The everyday object she employs in her sculptures and installations is determinedly **not** a banal, anonymous, mass-produced object just out of the factory. It is or is meant to represent a worn, personal possession from the victimized home, which Salcedo chose and altered in vividly legible ways that evidence her hand and the exacting process she pursues in getting back at violence's effects within the context of war. Robert Smithson's characterization of Duchamp's perspective on the readymade illuminates the difference between the French artist's approach and Salcedo's practice: "…Duchamp offers a sanctification for alienated objects, so you get a generation of manufactured goods. It is a complete denial of the work process and it is very mechanical too….Duchamp is trying to transcend production itself in the readymades when he takes an object out of the manufacturing process and then isolates it. He has a certain contempt for the work process...."[135]

[135] Smithson, "Robert Smithson on Duchamp," 47.

Although Salcedo's treatment of objects produces a disjunction and strangeness that could be compared to that of the Duchampian readymade, the purpose and significance of this estrangement stems from different concerns. Namely, Salcedo's practice incorporates the everyday table or chair as the material presence addressing the absence of those claimed by political violence. Her work expresses an act of mourning; the worn furnishings evoke the traces of those killed and the deliberate alterations to their surface suggest the repeated ways in which life is forever changed and contorted for those who survive. Unlike Duchamp's objects, Salcedo's sculptures bear a complex history, intimated but unknown, in the furniture given to her by the families of victims, and abraded, gouged, sewn and patched by the artist in acts of remembrance (Figure I.2). The conception and the process of deliberate construction Salcedo undertakes in layering cement supported by steel rods within a mahogany china cabinet, in allowing the collar of a woman's blouse or cuffs of a man's shirt to surface within the impenetrable gray mass, speaks to her concern with the act and efforts of making, to her hand in this work. In contrast to Duchamp's readymade, the sheer technical and aesthetic skill evident in her pieces, in the splintered wood texture of the stainless steel chairs, the shimmering surface of the table bearing hairs and threads woven into the grain, evidence the machinations of the artist.

In short, Salcedo's engagement with Duchamp is one that draws from ideas he put forth that have been re-considered through various interpretations by artists in the last sixty years. As Lynne Cooke succinctly proposes, " It could nonetheless be argued that much of the most challenging three-dimensional work of the last couple years [1988-90] is more complex or more layered in its range of reference than much of the art of the early eighties which also drew on the readymades as its starting point; that is, this recent work seeks to address not only or not even directly the apparatus that the artist is threaded through…but instead attempts to introduce other

sets of concerns…it might be argued that Duchamp's contribution is so thoroughly embedded in, so central and so pervasive to, the art of the post-war era as a whole, that it constitutes part of the very foundations out of which vanguard art practice of any kind inevitably now arises."[136]

Sculpture and the object are seminal to the project Salcedo puts forth, to the language of materials she employs to address the social and political conditions of violence experienced by so many. Mark-making in two dimensions, painting on a flat surface, photography, film, these means do not produce the address she seeks regarding war's brutal effects, the act of mourning and memorial to the victims, those absent and those whose lives are forever damaged. The object projects the statement she seeks, and the worn, found object, domestic furniture, in particular, generates that level of emphasis and expression. The materials carry thematic weight as Beuys too, proposed, and the everyday object, threading back to Duchamp's readymade, and Gonzalez' furniture pieces, suggests a space, a place Salcedo's work addresses.

But her project is particular to the circumstances of political violence experienced in Colombia and various societies in the world, and the notion of the found object in Salcedo's practice diverges significantly from Duchamp's anonymous, mass-produced readymade, and the brightly painted pieces Gonzalez created; it is a personal possession bearing the history and often, the traces of those mourned, original or fastidiously created by the artist, in its handmade form, from local materials. Her choice of domestic furniture, of everyday objects, stemmed from the fact that these were the materials that remained following the violation, then the void, the absence and sorrow wrought by ongoing political violence in Colombia. These objects are at once the ordinary, worn, unpainted household furnishings and the witness to the violence,

[136] Cooke, "Reviewing Francis Picabia," 106-7.

bearing the traces, the lingering touch of the victims. This dual charge weighs decisively in Salcedo's choice of these chairs, tables and bureaus as central to her practice.

Chapter Three:

Doris Salcedo's Visual Strategies

Introduction

Doris Salcedo's practice focuses on political violence. Her trajectory as an artist since she began creating sculpture in the early 1980's, has centered on the violence born of a condition of civil war that has long plagued her country, among others, rupturing lives and leaving victims who remain unacknowledged by the State. Her 1985 return to Bogotá, following a two year Master's program in sculpture at NYU, when she witnessed the tragic deaths resulting from the guerrilla takeover and military response at the nation's Palace of Justice, strengthened her resolve to create pieces that make measure of the unburied dead and silent victims of political violence. She chose sculpture as her medium employing everyday objects and materials, purposely selecting domestic furniture as the base, and creating a layered, fastidiously composed surface as evocatively complex as that of a painting. Beginning with individual or groups of sculptures incorporating bedframes, chairs, tables or wardrobes, her work has expanded in scale over time and with her success internationally has evolved to include site specific installations of monumental proportions.

Salcedo's project as a political artist, fueled by her experience living in Colombia since birth and listening to the victims of thirty years of war, addresses the enduring societal consequences of this continuous violence and implicitly critiques the politics that fosters it. She creates sculpture through the visual weight of materials without pictorializing or relying on a narrative rendered with realist images of death. This chapter will examine a body of Salcedo's work following her career trajectory focusing on political violence to determine how she creates a material expression that evokes the presence of the absent victim of political violence. It will also explore how she conveys the burden of the horror and sorrow wrought by civil war and

condemns the political conditions behind it, in a project that grew from addressing Colombia's situation to include global examples. This study will occur through the analysis of six visual strategies essential to the artist's project. Salcedo painstakingly conceives and constructs each piece, deliberate in her efforts to address this violence without legible figurative elements and the following six strategies are the means by which she conveys her statement: 1) the suggestion of space to place, 2) the sense of the uncanny and anthropomorphism, 3) the materiality of the heavily worked surfaces of her sculptures, 4) the weight of time as a material presence, 5) the correspondence of body to scale and, 6) the sense of disjunction and disorientation. The analysis of these strategies follows a roughly chronological path through her oeuvre beginning with her early single pieces leading to her large scale, site specific installations.

Salcedo's Early Career

Salcedo's practice has always focused on the surface and materiality she creates from everyday objects. She composed her first sculptures in 1983-85, from palpable materials such as wax, wood, leather, steel and/or latex. They measured around 100cm and she was able to construct them alone. By the end of the 1980's, the scale of her works expanded to 200cm or more on occasion, (Figure I.12) and the process used to create sculptures in materials such as steel, wood, found furniture, clothing, cement and animal fibers in the 1990's lead the artist to engage assistants to help construct her pieces.

Salcedo pursues an elaborate, meticulously planned and executed process of construction, from conception to completion. Beginning with an idea related to acts of political violence, she conceives the material image in her head, fastidiously devises the steps and painstakingly builds the sculpture, layering, scraping, melding, burnishing, leaving no detail to chance. As her pieces

grew in scale during the 1990's, her working process expanded to include a group of assistants, most of whom are trained architects, who help engineer the construction of sculptures that challenge the physical limits of materials, such as wooden furniture with narrow legs that bear cement interiors, bones and zippers seamlessly inserted in a wooden door, or crumpled and carved stainless steel chairs. Others assist in the sewing, sanding, joining, fusing, burnishing and related actions essential to making her work.[137] Salcedo's sculpture is of such technical and physical complexity that a team of individuals is essential to the realization of her idea and image, literally working with her to determine how to construct structures that impose near-impossible demands on materials, not only cement in wooden furniture but countless hairs sewn into wood, chain-link fencing emerging from plaster walls, 1500 chairs piled seemingly by chance in a vacant lot creating a flat surface street-side, grass growing through the tops of wooden tables, rose petals sewn together creating a lasting, room sized shroud. Creating her work is a demanding, highly exacting process, and the sheer challenge is elemental to the nature of Salcedo's practice. It is work that is realized through focused interchange with assistants who help find the means and help enact the steps by which she creates her pieces.

From the 1980's into the following decade her sculptures centered on the civil war and political conditions she lived in Colombia. However, since the late 1990's her practice has focused not only on the nature of such violence and the contributing social circumstances afflicting countless victims in her nation, but throughout the world. Her exhibition history follows a similar trajectory. Her emphasis centering on Colombia's political violence evolved after several years of showing as well as creating site specific installations abroad, expanding to

[137] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA and with Arq. Carlos Granada, June 25, 2013, New York, NY. As Salcedo has said, her team of assistants helps her realize, to make concrete or material, the idea she wants to express through sculpture. Most if not all of her pieces require a level of engineering

address the existence and enduring effects of this problem within the international context. Salcedo exhibited only in Colombia from 1985-1991, with solo shows in Bogotá, at the Casa de la Moneda in 1985 and at Galeria Garcés-Velásquez in 1990. She was included in group exhibitions of emerging and/or recognized Colombian artists in the XXXI Annual Salon organized by the Government Cultural organization, Cocultura in Medellín in 1987, the Primer Salon in Cali the following year and further collective shows through 1991. In her first shows, such as the XXXI National Artists Salon (Figure 3.1),where she was awarded the national prize, she showed sculpture composed of worn fragments and frames of metal furniture, bound together with animal fiber, familiar but disturbing works, to which critics responded by claiming she represented an important new direction in Colombian sculpture.[138] In 1992 she exhibited primarily outside Colombia, in a solo show at Shedhalle in Zurich, Switzerland and for example, four group exhibitions including the Sydney Biennial, "Currents 92: The Absent Body" at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, to "Américas" in Huelva, Spain..

It was 1992, in particular, when Salcedo's international presence grew. Through the visibility she received from exhibitions, some of which travelled, she drew the attention of curators, dealers and critics and soon after began to be represented by one of the prominent New York galleries, Alexander and Bonin, who continue to represent her today.[139] In 1993 she was included in a group show at the gallery, in which she installed *Los Atrabiliarios* in a separate

[138] Miguel Gonzalez, "Premio del Salón Nacional, Doris Salcedo: una escultura simbólica," *Premio Nacional del Salón Nacional* (January, 1987). Discussion of her work centered on how her work was part of a generation of Colombian artists to break from the minimalist language of known national artists such as Negret, to create work with used materials, with symbolism and significance in the work, so that the viewer connects to the work physically and spiritually.

[139] Carolyn Alexander, telephone interview by author, June 27, 2013. Alexander explained that her former partner saw Salcedo's work in the exhibition *Currents 92: The Absent Body* in its venue at Junta de Andalucía, in Huelva, Spain in 1992 recommended it and the gallery, then called Brooke Alexander invited Salcedo to exhibit with the gallery in a group show, *Matthew Benedict, Jim Hodges, Doris Salcedo*, in 1993, in which she installed her work *Los Atrabiliarios* in a separate room of the gallery.

room. She mounted another exhibition the following year presenting her new work *La Casa Viuda* 1992-94 that drew praise from among others, Roberta Smith, a prominent *New York Times* critic, as well as with Dan Cameron, a leading curator who reviewed her work in *Artforum*.[140] Her visibility and the critical success of her work spread in the United States and then worldwide beginning at that time. From 1992 on, she has had numerous solo exhibitions in museums ranging from the Tate Modern, London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, the Moderna Museet, in Malmo and she has been included in group exhibitions at major international museums including the Museum of Modern Art, NYC, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Museum Boijamans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, and the Centro Reina Sofia, Madrid. She was also selected to show at the Biennials of Venice, Istanbul, Liverpool and Sao Paulo, as well as the Carnegie International in 1995 and Documenta 11 in 2002, not to mention numerous others throughout the world. Moreover, in 2010 the Spanish Ministry of Culture awarded her the Velázquez visual arts prize, for the rigor of her artistic proposal in terms of formal qualities and the socio-political content of her work. She is the first woman to receive this prestigious award.[141]

Since the mid 1990's Salcedo has been represented not only by Alexander and Bonin but also by White Cube gallery in London. Both galleries regularly exhibit her work, and frequently, help support the long, deeply researched and deliberated process of conceiving and constructing her pieces. As is true with many contemporary artists whose work entails specialized materials, a

[140] Dan Cameron, "Absence Makes the Art: Doris Salcedo," *Artforum* (October, 1994): 88-91, Alexander, interview by author, who reported that *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith came into Alexander's office after viewing Salcedo's pieces and told Alexander that Salcedo's work was important, that she was an artist to watch. According to Alexander, that exhibition and the positive critical response it drew lead to Salcedo's fame in the United States.

[141] "La escultura colombiana Doris Salcedo, Premio Velázquez de Artes Plásticas 2010" *El Pais,* Madrid, Cultura, May 5, 2010. Accessed August 20, 2013. http://www.cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2010/05/05/actualidad/1273010404_850215.html.

particularly complicated, labor intensive creative process and enormous scale, outside support through the gallery or a private/public commission is necessary to realize the art.

Although Salcedo's work has generated international acclaim for the material means by which she addresses the pain and absence wrought by civil war, she has not had a solo exhibition in Colombia since 1990. At the time of that show, Colombian critics commented on her work as speaking to what it is to live in their country today, of what happens to those who live around violence how it "destructures life." Critics also commented on how she uses objects on a human scale to create the tension between life and death in work both simple and complex, and noted that in an installation with few works the combination of the work's elements and the artist's intentions created an emotional charge so great that viewers were pulled into the work which captured the state of the nation of the time,, the "the mental image of our nothing".[142] Although she has not had a solo exhibition in Colombia since 1990, she created a major performance piece, *November 6 and 7,* (Figure I.11) in the center of Bogotá on those two days in 2002. While the artist's reputation outside the country developed substantially from the early 90's on, her presence in Colombia, where she has lived almost continuously, remains comparatively, less prominent. In the last 20 years she has shown in only one exhibition in her country, "Arte y violencia en colombia desde 1948" at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bogotá in 1999.[143] As her onetime teacher, distinguished Colombian artist, Beatriz González stated, she is Colombia's most important artist of the time, however, her work is less visible in her homeland, where she lives,

[142] Carolina Ponce de León, "Acciones de Duelo," *El Tiempo*, May 12, 1990. "Doris Salcedo, Misión: acorralar la conciencia," *El Tiempo*, May 13, 1990, and María Claudia Parias Duran, "La Vida en Yeso," *El Espectador*, June 5, 1990. Parias Duran says, "…Por eso, las mezcla de tela blanca, yeso, varillas de metal, resortes, cintas—muy racionalmente compaginada-puede arrojar un resultado tan conmovedor: la imagen mental de la nada nuestra."

[143] Two exhibitions of Salcedo's work scheduled to open in Colombia since 2010, one in Medellín and another in Bogotá, were not realized for administrative complications at the institutions which were to present her work.

than it is in the world.[144] She has, however, created three public installations in Colombia over her career, one was the performance marking the anniversary of the Nov. 6-7, 1985, Palace of Justice tragedy(Figure I.11), the second was a public installation incorporating a 150 meter long wall of 5000 roses created with other artists as a site of memory for the slain, beloved humorist Jaime Garzon in August 1999 and finally, she led a group of artists in July 2007 to create an installation of twenty-five thousand candles in the Plaza Bolivar of central Bogotá, in memory of the 11 officials of the Valle del Cauca Assembly who were murdered in conflict between the military and the FARC guerrillas who had imprisoned them for five years.[145] Salcedo also petitioned the Bogotá municipal government in 2000 to preserve the central cemetery, the mass crypts and burial grounds for the poor they sought to demolish, and to rezone it as a park and and a space for site specific art. She interceded in an effort to stop what she deemed another political act of violence through the erasure of the burial site, an act which revealed blatant disrespect for the remains of innumerable, nameless people.[146]

Salcedo's choice to remain living in Colombia despite the civil war and the pressures felt by prominent international artists to move to an arts hub such as Berlin or New York, was a deliberate decision. Colombia, the nation, the culture, the peoples, the history that binds the country to particular conditions of political violence, fuels Salcedo's project. It is her source, *the* source of the trajectory she has followed from her early works focusing directly on tragic events at home, to the broader issues of political violence in world history addressed in her site specific

[144] "Doris Salcedo y el contenido de la forma, "*Elespectador.com* Editorial, May 7, 2010. Accessed July 30, 2013. http://www.elespectador.com/articulo2202090-doris-salcedo-y-el-contenido -de-forma.html.

[145] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

[146] "La artista Beatriz González interviene los columbarios del Cementerio Central," August 2009. Accessed July 30, 2013. http://www.Cambio.comco/culturacambio/827/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_CAMBIO-5147907.html.

pieces in Istanbul and London. Despite her greater prominence and frequent exhibitions outside Colombia, her sculptures often speak to incidents and victims of political violence from her home; they are dialogues with survivors, with mourning family incorporated in her conceptual process without names, without pictorializing their experiences. Although Salcedo builds sculptures focusing on a particular context of political violence, her material expression seeks to frame the issues from Colombia to conditions known in various cultures, countries and eras.

Salcedo produces sculptures from elements of the everyday, taking Duchamp's readymade as a starting point, as we have seen, but instead of decontextualized, found objects, she chooses specific, domestic furniture and the materials of daily life, weighted with the context, thus evoking war's consequences without representational specificity. She creates a kind of Beuysian social sculpture, but one that generates and assumes that viewers understand the significance of what it means to see familiar furniture, garments, soil, hairs and fabric intricately melded together and conjoined. Essential to this reading, is the surface Salcedo fastidiously creates, which like a skin, imparts a palpable, immediate visual impression of the wound, the scar and the damage beneath, the literal and implied traces of the violence, without vivid figurative elements (Figure 3.2). She constructs her pieces from the testimonies of witnesses, but without names, narrative, nor a proposed means of reading the work, situating her sculpture built of everyday furniture and materials in the world as reminder, "witness of the witness" of political violence, by means which thread from references to ideas of Duchamp, Beuys and González, but conceived within the socio-political circumstances informing her production.[147] . This chapter will examine a body of Salcedo's work, focusing on her deliberate

[147] Doris Salcedo quoted in Charles Merewether, "An Interview with Doris Salcedo," in *Unland/Doris Salcedo: New Work* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 5. Salcedo says "My works are for the victims of violence. I try to be a witness of the witness. I look for an intimate proximity with the victims of violence that allows me to stand in for them…."

choice of sculpture and installation as the means to address civil war and the politics behind it, by analyzing the visual strategies she pursues and how they operate in generating a profoundly charged but silent material expression.

Salcedo's Approach to Political Violence

Political violence has plagued societies for centuries, irreparably rupturing lives and communities, creating circumstances in which places of refuge and daily routines are destroyed, and the traumatic loss of family and friends leaves enduring pain and uncertainty and a sense that the world is awry and life monstrously distorted. Relating to Adorno's famous statement, "…To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric…" the brutality wrought in decades of Colombian war afflicting thousands, devastating towns, families, whole regions of the country presented a history of such horror that it challenged the sheer idea of creating an aesthetic expression.[148] No marker for those countless victims or for particular sieges, i.e. a village massacred, has the State created to register the losses and sorrow, no official visual acknowledgements exist on sites from this war.[149] The unburied dead remain a lingering reminder without closure for the survivors of the continuous violence. How does one pose a visual statement to the barbarity, the pain, the absence, the fear and uncertainty endured from this aggression without incorporating narrative, without images of the body, with no figurative element? That is the challenge Salcedo embraced, making present the absence of those unburied bodies and this chapter will examine critically how she confronted the complicated realities and layered effects of political violence through a

[148] Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 34.

[149] Ana María Reyes, interview by author, September 2011, Cambridge, MA.

nuanced, painstakingly conceived and constructed language of materials, creating sculptures that evoke what silence masks.

From the beginning, Salcedo focused on familiar domestic furniture and belongings but the manner in which they figure in her sculpture or installation changed with time following the visual strategies she successively prioritized. Her embrace of used household furniture and clothes grew when the victims of political violence, whom she interviewed and accompanied as they searched for their disappeared loved ones, gave her objects the missing left behind. Although her earliest works were created from worn iron bedframes from a Bogotá hospital, (Figure 3.3), she then incorporated domestic objects: nightstands, a crib, shirts, chairs, shoes. Her focus has long centered on the material presence of the familiar object and as this chapter will investigate, the objects she incorporated changed over the course of her career from these relic-like pieces, found shoes, blouses, torn fabric, cuffs and collars, (Figure 3.4) to the domestic furniture, worn chairs, doorframes, bureaus, tables, (Figure 3.5), objects known but offering a trace without the charged intimacy of the garments that once held the scent and warmth of the bodies they touched. In parallel to these developments, Salcedo's work has grown in size over time. By the early 1990's she began to construct pieces of imposing scale (Figure I. 1), employing a process and materials that required the involvement of her assistants. She expanded her address beyond the limitations of the individual.

Violence in Salcedo's Process

Before examining the visual strategies Salcedo employs, given the integral role of violence in her project, I will analyze the manner in which violence operates in her work as a process of creation. Salcedo depicts the effects of, the reminder of, the witness to violence, she

does not render explicitly the suffering of mutiliated victims, survivors with bloody wounds, or loved ones broken, crying in pain. The dead, the tortured bodies, the blood are not rendered in her work, rather, the war's unseen horror and enduring effects pervades. Violence in Salcedo's practice is manifested through process, what she does in the making of her pieces: forcing cement inside wooden furniture (Figure 3.4); scraping, gouging, splitting polished wood surfaces of tables or chairs to insert a zipper, bone, buttons (Figure 3.6); bisecting bureaus with bedframes (Figure 3.7); fusing fabric into a chair, its seat into a door(Figure 3.8); puncturing the surface of a table with innumerable holes and threading individual hairs, and threads one after another, after another, after another into the wood (Figure I.2). The steps taken and the continuous repetition of these gestures demonstrate a kind of aggressive process done *to* the sculpture. The artist's acts of making entail a level of intensity in focused, forced manipulations of materials beyond their characteristic properties, beyond what should be physically, structurally possible. She undertakes a kind of relentless effort to achieve the improbable visual results she seeks, such as sewing thousands of human hairs into the surface of a table, creating a skin of strands, crumpling stainless steel and carving the surface with dental tools to impart the texture of woodgrain (Figure I.15). As she states, "…I work matter to the point where it becomes something else, where metamorphosis is reached…."[150] Filling a wooden china cabinet standing on tall, narrow legs, with solid concrete (Figure 3.4); sewing an iron infant's crib into the surface of a table with threads and single hairs (Figure 3.9), creating simple wooden chairs of stainless steel, with the grain, nails, gouges painstakingly carved into the metal, their seats split, splayed and crumpled like heavy paper (Figure 3.10); filling a vacant lot surrounded on three sides by old buildings with more than 1500 ordinary wooden chairs strewn, seemingly

[150] Salcedo in Basualdo, *Doris Salcedo,* 21.

haphazardly, in a pile that does not spill into the street but balances impossibly, creating a flat surface like a curtain strung between buildings (Figure I.9); growing tender shoots of grass through the thick wooden tabletop sprouting from soil sandwiched between two tables one inverted upon the other, (Figure I.10); these examples illustrate the improbable effects she forcefully achieves. The manner in which pieces are joined, contorted, filled, layered, juxtaposed, spliced and fused, and the ways in which she manipulates the materials she employs, figure in how violence operates in her work. As Salcedo explains: "I work with gestures *ad absurdum*, until they acquire an inhuman character. The processes go beyond me, beyond my very limited capacity, whether because one single person couldn't possibly have made the work (*Unland,* 1995-98) (Figure I.2) or because of the brutality and massiveness of the act (untitled furniture sculptures, 1995-98) (Figure 3.4 and 3.7), or because it is inhuman to handle certain materials (*La Casa Viuda)*(Figure I. 3 and 3.6)."[151] Finally, she said recently that her fastidiousness, which I would describe as the almost compulsively focused efforts she undertakes to create a piece, is part of her process of "getting back at violence's effects." [152] Apart from the artist's statements, upon close scrutiny of her sculptures, one perceives the repeated, painstakingly complicated actions undertaken in the making of many of her pieces. So focused and intensively enacted are the gestures entailed in her process, the hundreds of hand woven and bent wires on the crib, as an example, (Figure I.14), that the impression created is that of a compulsively repeated act, done again and again, to confront, respond and work through the incomprehensible facts of violence. There is an element of physical and emotional catharis born by these acts of making, and a kind of push to create a statement of control over the materials,

[151] Ibid., 21.

[152] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

through the precisely orchestrated acts and repetition, leaving no space for the wire, the hair, the button, the wood to be other than as she decided it would appear in her piece.

Salcedo's process, the abrading, filling, fusing, carving and suturing of materials creates the impression that her sculpture witnessed, and bears the wounds of violence. . The crumpled steel chair, the side tables broken, contorted and cemented one to another, (Figure 3.11), the chair bisecting the door with a woman's lace-covered slip melded into the wood (Figure 3.8), suggest that violence happened *to* these pieces and they demonstrate the destructive, ongoing effects. The strange fusion and attachment of disparate furniture pieces results in a work distorted and monstrous, a deliberate effect Salcedo likens to the psychological repercussions of violence, it destroys all that one knows, disorienting the individual such that one's belongings, one's home is lost, changed irreversibly. Her oddly sinister pieces created from chest and chairs joined with cement, for example, evoke the monstrous effects violence reaps.[153]

Finally, ripping the kitchen table, chairs, bed and bureau from the protected, inner sanctuary of home, placing them in a public space for all to examine and judge, suggests a violation of domestic privacy and shelter. A shudder of recognition registers unspoken when one realizes that Salcedo's sculptures include the worn bedside table, the bedroom chest holding favorite shirts and dresses, the kitchen chairs and rough wooden table where family meals unfolded, familiar furnishings now startlingly situated in a spare, impersonal gallery removed from their customary seclusion (Figure I.8). Extracting these domestic furnishings from one's rooms of shelter then installing them in the public light for viewing, declares the rupture of the once safe privacy of home. This intrusion is to be seen as an invasive, violent act.

[153] Salcedo interview with Hans-Michael Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos: Arte Colombiano Contemporaneo:* ed. Hans-Michael Herzog (Zurich: Daros-Latinamerica, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 160.

Salcedo's Visual Strategies

As a means of understanding how Salcedo addresses the personal loss, absence and act of mourning wrought by the political violence that defines her practice, the following examines six visual strategies the artist employs in her sculpture to convey the condition and consequences. It is through these aesthetic means that Salcedo seeks to express the weight of memory, of violation, of sorrow, of the state of uncertainty during civil war. Over the course of her career, without pictorializing, she put forth her statement on political violence relying on these strategies: the idea of space and place, of the uncanny and anthropomorphism, of the materiality of surface, of time as material presence, of body to scale and of disjunction and disorientation.

1. Space to Place

Central to Salcedo's practice is the sense of displacement conveyed by used, everyday domestic furniture installed in a gallery, her visual strategy of space to place. As she states, "I think of space in terms of place, a place to eat or a place to write, a place to develop life. So there is no way of isolating living experience from spatial experience: it's exactly the same thing. Certain types of contemporary work underscore this aspect of sculpture as a topography of life."[154] The charged significance of space/place in Salcedo's work should be viewed not only through Gaston Bachelard's concept of "felicitous space," the kinds of "…space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love," a "protective space" such as the site of one's intimate lives, but also through Jean Franco's seminal analysis of the devastating violation of these spaces in Latin America in the 1960's and ensuing decades.[155] For

[154] Salcedo in, Basualdo, *Doris Salcedo*, 17.

[155] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. John Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994),. xxxv-xxxvi, 7,8. Bachelard introduces topoanalysis, "…the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives." Jean Franco, "Killing Priests, Nuns, Women, Children," in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 1985), 414-420.

the purposes of examining Salcedo's practice and her strategy of space/place, Franco's essay discusses the traditional role of the home as a place of protected refuge, one that frequently in Latin America presented a barrier to the outside world. Often surrounded by a wall, houses were built to face an inner courtyard and had shutters or iron bars on the windows; the interior space was hidden and difficult to enter. Franco equates the shelter afforded in physical and psychological terms, by the home, the convent and church, as a "territory of immunity" that allowed wives, mothers, children, nuns and priests protection, as they functioned following established traditions over decades, throughout periods when the State's power fluctuated (The church and convent were protected sanctuaries, as an embassy is today and could not be entered, so once that barrier was transgressed a real sense of political and social order was violated. But, in the mid-20th century, she explains, "It is this counter-insurgency movement which has destroyed both the notion of sacred space and the immunity which, in theory if not in practice, belonged to nuns, priests, women and children."[156] The effects of this breakdown were acutely experienced in Colombia during the 1980's through 2000's when the war and continuous political violence ravaged families and daily lives. The violation of homes, of as Bachelard termed, "…the environment where protective beings live" and the ongoing assault on people's existence, Salcedo addresses by taking the everyday object from that intimate world and placing it in the public space, at once ripping it from it's context and providing a site for a collective response to the material statement she creates.[157]

Two approaches towards the visual strategy of space and place operate in Salcedo's project, first, the place, the protected, "felicitous" space that domestic kitchen and bedroom

[156] Franco, "Killing Priests," 415-16.

[157] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 7.

furniture evoke, and second, the space her sculptures assume as she installs a single piece in a gallery or as an installation of various pieces encompassing an entire room. Salcedo describes the deeply entrenched significance of space, in the global sense, but with ramifications on a particular level for all and for her work. "I don't believe that space can be neutral. The history of wars, and perhaps even history in general, is but an endless struggle to conquer space. Space is not simply a setting, it is what makes life possible."[158] Related to the specificity of space and place, a point central to Salcedo's project concerns war and the uninhabitable space that results for the victims and countless refugees in Colombia and worldwide. "Once you travel to a war zone, you realize that life is impossible in these places. You cannot find any place there to call your own. To cite Levinas again, he changes the Cartesian dictum, "I think therefore I exist," to "I inhabit therefore I exist." To live somewhere is what makes life possible, although in many places in Colombia and throughout the world it is unattainable. You are in a negative space."[159] The charged, non-neutral nature of space, the uninhabitable circumstances and resulting absence of place, the artist deliberately addresses in her production, from pieces such as the early, *Untitled* 1989-2 tables (Figure 3.11), her *Untitled* 1992 furniture series (Figure I.1), and her *La Casa Viuda I*, 1992-94 (Figure 3.8).

In works of larger scale, incorporating several pieces, Salcedo sees the space of sculpture as a place where ideas can come together, a point of intersection, where the audience can physically move through and think about issues. "…I think the space of an installation can become a very beautiful form of political resistance. In the installation the audience is allowed to walk and live in a very concrete space. It is a space where you are allowed to think and reflect on

[158] Salcedo in Basualdo, *Doris Salcedo*, 12.

[159] Salcedo in Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos*, 154.

reality."[160] Moving before, beside and behind her furniture pieces, as in the *Untitled* 1989-95 furniture works at the "Carnegie International 1995" (Figure I.8) and the *La Casa Viuda* 1992-95 series (Figure 3.8), the viewer confronts the pieces with no preferred perspective provided. The spacing between objects is either strangely vast or so deliberately crowded that one's viewing is distorted or at the least compromised. An awkward distance and relationship between audience and object leaves the viewer trying to acclimate to the physical surroundings and the ways in which space is consumed by Salcedo's imposing pieces.

One of Salcedo's early sculptures, *Untitled* 1989-92 (Figure 3.11), seemingly two bedside tables spliced and fused together as one, manifests the strange sense of displacement her works project. This sculpture is at once a simple wooden side table and a jarringly awkward, hybrid of wooden form melded with a steel frame and three legs sustained with cement. The domestic furnishing that holds books, papers, a teacup and spectacles in countless homes, has been transformed by Salcedo into an object bearing the consequences of brutal efforts in the process of joining wood, metal and concrete into a table-like structure. The table's appearance suggests the aggressive processes the piece experienced under Salcedo's hand, resulting in aesthetic characteristics that could be read as violence witnessed firsthand in a home during wartime. The table's familar symmetry and stability is broken, a metal table with three legs supports the top and adheres to two of the three wooden legs, the broken stump of what would have been the fourth leg, made of steel, hangs severed beneath the table. A wooden leg smeared with cement, juts oddly and without purpose along one side, seemingly a remnant of a damaged table, reconfigured into this piece. Salcedo talks of the difficulties of habitation during war, of the

[160] Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo, "Art and Media-tion: Reflections on Violence and Representation," in *Cultural Producers in Perilous States* ed. George E. Marcus (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 241-2.

uncertainty, the precariousness of that life, when neither a place nor space exists for people. In those conditions the familiar, domestic interior and belongings disappear and are pieced together, an aggregate of what was and what replaces it must suffice. She refers to Paul Celan's words, "In one of his poems Celan talks of those who do not even have the protection of 'the traditional roof of sky"—those people are totally vulnerable. The point I am interested in is the impossibility of inhabiting a space."[161] *Untitled* 1989-92 conveys the separation from place, set in a space where it appears to tentatively reside. The table, like the victims of political violence, is displaced and forever changed.

Salcedo evokes the uninhabitable nature of space under the circumstances of war in her *Untitled* 1992 (Figure I.12), a cement-filled furniture piece. During much of the decade of the 1990's the artist produced these monumental works made of wooden furniture literally packed, burdened, seemingly suffocated with concrete. She constructed these sculptures during some of the most brutal years of political violence in Colombia and they are the pieces for which she drew international attention and acclaim. Unlike the tables, *Untitled 1992* is of an imposing scale, a quality accentuated by the fact that the large wardrobe that dominates the piece lies toppled on its side as if it fell from the weight of cement or from the brutal force born of violence. Lying on its side the wooden cabinet imparts an unsettling presence, one furthered by the cement filling the space where personal belongings should be stored, instead the back of a wooden chair appears, barely visible, suspended within the cold, lifeless concrete. Literally joined to one end, beneath the upended legs of the wardrobe, Salcedo fused another chair paralyzed in a cement block, with steel rods splicing through the seat, and concrete fixing the

[161] Carlos Basualdo, "A Model of Pain," in *Doris Salcedo: Neither* (London: White Cube, 2004), 32. Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos*, 154. Salcedo tells Herzog that "…it could be said that all my work stems from that extreme difficulty or impossibility of living" during war.

chair to the cabinet. Metal rods bisect the dense material and smaller metal pieces pierce the wood, connecting sections of the furniture like stitches of steel literally holding the wooden frame together against the immense weight and strain from the cement. The surface of Salcedo's sculpture suggests her process of construction and forceful manipulation of materials, wire and steel embedded in wood and cement suggest sutures on skin, physically intrusive and deliberate.

This sculpture, similar to many of her *Untitled* furniture pieces from the 1990's, conveys a dramatically altered, disturbingly distorted portrayal of domestic furniture, soldered together as a kind of monster built of familiar chairs and a wardrobe, removed from home, encased in concrete, frozen and useless, sprawled on its side in a public space. This collection of furniture belongs in a house, but the sense of intimate space it assumes physically and psychologically is displaced when one sees it in the gallery. It now resonates deeply precisely because it *is* extracted from its expected environment and has suffered the immense weight and pressure of concrete forced within and upon it. It bears the marks suggestive of an uninhabitable place where domestic furniture cannot function and has endured processes that shroud and paralyze the pieces such that they intimate a past in which the setting where their support was relied upon was violated. What is buried within the cement inside the wardrobe? Salcedo inserts this work into a public space at once conjuring up the place these domestic pieces belong and confirming the impossibility of returning to that site. Theirs is a forced displacement from their domestic context and purpose, like victims fleeing violence. Moreover, the materiality of the piece changes its dynamic as it becomes much heavier, just as history is burdened by the weight of the almost unthinkable, yet true.

As the strategy of space and place are examined in this chapter, I make a distinction between the installation of a group of Salcedo's sculptures in a gallery or public viewing space

and the public commissions/projects she has created on a monumental scale, such as for the Istanbul Biennial (Figure I.9) and the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, (Figure 3.12) for example. These were created in the context of the space, and on a vast scale. As the artist has said, creating a work for an exterior, or public space such as the Istanbul biennial implies different problems from creating it privately. The work develops as it is installed, and the artist alters and evolves her conception based on the physical circumstances. Locating the materials she wants for the piece can be complicated, particularly in another country and culture, and as the work is being constructed, the unfamilar conditions, from physical, material constraints to labor customs, present issues that challenge Salcedo's preferred level of control. "I think my brain functions differently when thinking of a piece for a public space than when I am thinking about one for an interior space. When I am working for an indoor space, I think about it as I am doing it…It is different in a public space: a project must already be in existence and should conclude with a piece of work…. In a public space the city itself is present. Buildings have a charge and a memory, and all these factors enrich the piece…. Instead, when I face a white cube, getting through it or transforming it in any way is very difficult…"[162]

In an installation of numerous *Untitled* cement-filled furniture works, such as the Carnegie International 1995, (Figure I.8), Salcedo constructed a space crowded with more than twenty of these disturbing pieces composed of domestic bureaus, beds and chairs, deliberately constraining the viewer's room to view or engage the works as separate sculptures. Within the large gallery, most of the pieces were clustered near the walls at one end, including a large wardrobe with a bed frame bisecting the cement-filled inside, a bureau filled with concrete and two chairs encased in cement on top of it, beside various, cement-filled china cabinets, chairs,

[162] Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos,* 144 and Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

chests, etc. Nearby, another collection of similarly disturbing, cement-filled clusters of furniture varying in scale lined part of the wall, the back of one chest abutting a wardrobe on its side filled with cement and chairs, while a towering antique, wooden wardrobe with two doors stood apart, a lone figure amidst the groupings of strangely fused, dysfunctional, seemingly wounded furniture works. At first glance, the installation resembled an attic, with unused chests and bureaus collected together, stored away, positioned to use minimal space. Upon walking toward the crowded cluster of works, the viewer saw the cement affixing pieces together, chairs atop or inside of chests, cabinets frozen solid with cement behind their glass front windows with fabric and objects caught in the concrete. One could not address or see each piece individually because they were so closely placed, and when placed apart from the cluster, they faced the wall, as did two chairs set alone at the opposite end of the gallery, silenced, paralyzed in place within blocks of cement. To walk behind or between the pieces, meant that, if one could fit through the narrow cavity between the chests or chairs, one's body nearly touched the wood, the cold concrete. One's face, arms, torso could not avoid acknowledging the familiar, but profoundly strange furnishings of a home.

Viewing the works in close range, body to bureau, with an almost confrontational address and in a setting in which the arrangement of pieces unexpectedly challenges the viewer's ability to see the sculptures and read the space, are key aspects of Salcedo's strategy. As she explains, "When we see a piece of furniture we know we can use it, sit on it. By converting them into dysfunctional objects I wanted to find a way of placing all of a work's meaning on its surface, a direct opaque surface. I have tried to avoid perspective, the comfortable distancing of the world. I wanted to bring everything to the surface, a surface that confronts the spectator directly…up against your being, your body. There is no way you can observe: rather it forms part of your

immediate environment." [163] The installation of these sculptures, their space and place, the challenges they present viewers, figures in Salcedo's strategy of giving material expression to war's effects on victims, in a collective space. As she explains, "…I think that the space of an installation is configured by a struggle, a resistance toward this society where there is no space for this suffering to be manifested and recognized. In the space of the installation one encounters another rhythm. I think that these pieces are actually constructing and returning that space."[164]

Salcedo's *La Casa Viuda (*The Widowed House) series from 1992-95 pointedly evokes the dysfunctional, impossible space and the nature of existence for those living in war (Figure I.3, 3.2, 3.6, 3.8, 3.13). Wooden doors figure prominently in this series, some placed against walls others standing in space, in both cases they lead nowhere. Upon the floor with some of the pieces, floor boards mark space, as if delineating the home as it once was, contained within walls that once protected.[165] The non-functional nature of the works in this series, their expression of the domestic space attacked and abandoned, is accentuated by pieces of either chair, chest, bedframe or another segment of furniture that bisect the futile, wooden door. The *La Casa Viuda* series of sculptures contort space and place in ways subtly but profoundly disturbing. Referring to the pieces in this series the artist stated, "…the specific location of the works is an essential element because it speaks to the condition of life in zones of extreme violence, where to inhabit, to be or to exist in your own private space, is impossible. We know that victims must leave their homes to face execution and in other cases are forced to move away…."[166]

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[163] Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos*, 152.

[164] Villaveces-Izquierdo, "Art and Media-tion," 241-243.

[165] Charles Mereweather, "To Bear Witness," in *Unland/Doris Salcedo*, (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 20.

[166] Natalia Gutierrez, "Conversation with Doris Salcedo," *Art Nexus* 19 (January-March, 1996): 49.

Hence, the home, the private place these sculptures suggest and the artist's title, deliberately chosen "The Widowed House" refers to place and space where violence occurred within the safe haven home should provide, destroying the husband, ravaging the dwelling. *La Casa Viuda I* 1992-94 (Figure 3.8), vividly conveys the tracks of violence. An oddly tall, narrow wooden door rests against the wall, its frame rough-hewn with the butts of severed limbs marking the right side, crude stumps jarring the doorframe. From the bottom third of the door juts the seat and two legs of a chair, conveying the impression that the chair's remainder continues behind the door colliding with the wall behind. Salcedo registers the effects of violence in this sculpture through the surface and condition of the chair, the legs reversed pointing towards the viewer on curving, narrow "toes" clearly meant to face under the seat and the swath of white, lacy fabric seared into the surface of the chair crudely stitched to thin cotton lawn in front and pinned between the chair and door hanging in loose, but secured folds. Violation occurred and that violence forced the chair through a door and horrific actions occurred against a victim whose lace garment is fused permanently into wood. The door leads nowhere; Salcedo conjures up a material statement of such vividness that one dares not imagine what did lie behind the door.

She conveys the precariousness of space and place under these circumstances, comparing it to Robert Smithson's idea of the "non-site." "*La Casa Viuda* utilizes an idea of the uncertainty, what Smithson has called no space (non-site) (Figure 3.14), that is a place of passage, where it is impossible to live."[167] Smithson installed the literal materials of which the landscape consists within proscribed containers in the gallery: rocks, sand etc. framed, out-of-context, filling space but without conveying *a* place; they embody a non-site. Salcedo extracts

[167] Ibid., 49.

the domestic furniture associated with the shelter of home, disturbingly fused with fragments of various personal belongings implying the violation of that once protected space. In *La Casa Viuda IV* 1994 (Figure I.3 and 3.13), a narrow, pale wooden door with four windows missing glass appears pinned against the bare wall by pieces of dark wooden bedframes menacingly piercing the door on either side, seeming to bisect it and continue into the wall behind. In the space between the jutting frame the door's window is covered by layers of a thin cotton blouse, the pleated bodice with lace and button holes spilling from the window onto the wood below where segments of bone are stitched to the surface by countless threads. Two long, narrow slivers of bone, inserted into the wood, mimic the horizontal line of the window frame, their blonde hue matching the color of the wood. The fragments she joins in this sculpture do not fit: bones, cloth, and wood collide, pieced together by sheer force; their assemblage presents a statement of the precarious nature of that place, the impossibility of living in the space that was once home. Walking between these sculptures the viewer circulates through testaments of places condensed into tightly forged pieces wrought by forced assemblages of domestic belongings. Each sculpture leads nowhere, each conveys the precarious, impossible nature of familiar and private space after violence.

2. The Uncanny and Anthropomorphism

Present in *La Casa Viuda* series is a second visual strategy critical to Salcedo's project, the uncanny, which I will connect with anthropomorphism. Salcedo's sculptures are conceived and constructed over an extended period of time developed from long interviews with victims' loved ones, or as she says, based on a testimony from a victim.[168] The objects she incorporates

[168] Salcedo, interview by author, Mexico City, April 9, 2011. Salcedo talked about the days she spent sitting around kitchen tables talking with and listening to the Mothers, siblings, relatives of the disappeared, the victims of violence. She said their experiences, how their lives were forever changed, how deeply they mourned and what they endured was pivotal to the sculptures she created. Also Jill Bennett, "Art, Affect, and the 'Bad Death:' Strategies

from furniture to personal belongings relate in each case to a particular victim. Whether once that person's possession, or suggestive of that individual, the objects bear the traces of the victim and Salcedo's work becomes an act of mourning for the absent body and the surviving loved one. As she explained in a 1996 interview, "The choice of objects is different in each piece. The only similarity is that these objects are used and transformed by each victim during the course of daily life. The surface of each object bears the trace of specific aspects of that person's life. In some cases I received the possessions of the victims…In other cases I intuitively chose the object…."[169] She sees this effort as a means of connecting to the victims and the violence they endured, as witness of the witness. As she described her approach to Charles Merewether "I try to be a witness of the witness. I look for an intimate proximity with the victims of violence that allows me to stand in for them. One must feel close to another in order to stand in for him or her and create an artwork out of another's experience. As a result, the work is made using his or her testimony as its foundation. It is not my rational intent but rather the experience of the victim that tells us about trauma, pain, loss. As a sculptor, I am aware of every detail that informs the life of the victim: the corporeality, the feelings, the vulnerability, the failings, the space, his or her life's trajectory and language. I don't formulate the experience of the victim, rather, I assemble it so that it remains forever a presence in the present moment…Sculpture for me is the giving of a material gift to that being who makes his presence felt in my work."[170] During the

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for Communicating the Sense of Memory of Loss," *Signs,* 28, *Gender and Cultural Memory* (Autumn, 2002): 342 Bennett states that Salcedo made long research trips into the interior of Colombia where she spoke with the families who had been victimized by political violence.

[169] Ibid., p.49.

[170] Merewether, "To Bear Witness," 7. Also, Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA. The artist discussed the fact that in working closely with the surviving parent, sibling or spouse, who learns so much about the absent victim that she creates a material presence that speaks to that person and to the act of mourning the survivor lives day after day.

late 1980's-1990's many of her sculptures acknowledged the victim's presence through the inclusion of material traces from these individuals. Literal belongings or fragments of objects they once touched surface in her pieces (Figures 3.2 and 3.4). But the victim's body is, as Jill Bennett states in discussing Salcedo's work, a "fugitive not figural" presence in her sculptures; the trace is an indeterminate one that does not impart the narrative of a specific victim.[171] However, it generates affect, leading the viewer to study closely and try to understand the ramifications of the scrap of worn shirt embedded in the cement. It puts one in the position of witness to the consequences of violence, eliciting questions and emotions, elements critical to Salcedo's practice

That the artist's sculptures act as the witness to the witness of those who have lived the horror of political violence, is Salcedo's intention. However, this realization is not always perceived by the viewer. When fragments of worn clothing, buttons, a piece of bone or the weavings of human hair figure in the sculpture, these traces create affect, the viewer recognizes these insertions as related to persons, and the melded, awkwardly conjoined domestic furniture suggests something disturbing happened and the cement-filled bureau bears and signifies something grave. Because neither narrative, nor figurative element plays a role in Salcedo's sculpture, much is conveyed by subtle means requiring close viewing and contemplation, and sometimes there is nothing to see. There is no beginning and no end to what she lays out in a sculpture, with the risk that her intention of addressing political violence is not always legible. Some of her cement furniture pieces created from 1998 on, (Figure 3.13) appear so seamlessly

[171] Jill Bennett, *Empathetic Vision* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 54 and 61.

constructed that the melding of one piece of furniture within another creates a cleanly abstract image, in which evidence of the artist's hand is missing and with it, an aspect of the experience lived is submerged to the point of imperceptibility.

The domestic furniture, worn clothing and fragments of bone, as well as buttons, plates, zippers, stitching and hairs that figure in Salcedo's pieces at once resonate for their familiarity and foster an unsettling sense of strangeness that pervades each sculpture. Although rendered through different materials, her pieces connect to Beatriz González' painted household furniture from earlier years. These traces instill an anthropomorphic quality in her work and contribute to the manner in which she actively generates the uncanny. Although the uncanny plays a pivotal role throughout her project, the vivid rendering of what Freud described as the *unheimlich,* the familiar made strange, can first be demonstrated as one of Salcedo's visual strategies in her early, *Los Atrabilarios* (Figure I.4 and 3.16) *La Casa Viuda*,(Figure I.3), the 1990's *Untitled* furniture (Figure 3.4) and the *Unland* series (Figure I.2). Salcedo perceives the *unheimlich,* that sense that the known is now unknown, as related to the living conditions created by civil violence and she manifests that disturbing sense by altering and distorting familiar furniture in her sculptures. She characterizes it as: "It is the idea developed by Freud when he analyzed what is *heimlich* and *unheimlich*…something that at a given moment was part of a familiar environment becomes distorted and terrifies us when we are unable to recognize it. The incapacity to relate directly to that familiar object disconcerts us. This rupture and distortion interest me since they are similar to the effects produced by violence, which perverts and destroys the idea of what you know."[172]

[172] Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos,* 160.

Salcedo induces the sense that the familiar kitchen chair, bedroom chest or closet door are strangely altered, scarred, no longer functional as domestic objects, by introducing anthropomorphic elements in her *La Casa Viuda* series. In *Casa Viuda II* 1993-94 (Figure 3.2 and 3.6), like *La Casa Viuda IV* 1994 (Figure I.3), pieces of bone are imbedded within the wood, visible upon close scrutiny, following the line of the window frame in the latter and inserted within a crack finely splitting the small chest abutting the door in the former piece. In *La Casa Viuda II,* the pale bone fragment appears to glow within the deep brown hue of the wood, beside scraps of a shirt, the buttons visible along the seam, as if the rest of the garment is stuffed, hidden beneath. Finally, within the back side of the chest, an opened zipper mirrors the adjacent seam of wood, its tines securing a swatch of red and black cloth submerged into the wood beneath layers of dark stain. These material traces evoke a human presence, a palpable sense, but without the narrative and specificity of individual victims of the violence suffered in this "widowed house." As Jill Bennett observes, Salcedo's inclusion of these objects and fragments is a means of signifying not particular people, but the altered function of these bits and pieces within the context of war's churning consequences on life and home. "…The fragments of clothing encased in furnishings…no longer enliven those objects but haunt them in a way that does not recall their former use, confirming instead that these items no longer function as they once did….I would argue, then, that the 'widowed house' does not constitute a visual analogy in the sense that objects stand in for mourners but is rather an effect of the way things change when loss is experienced….Salcedo's methods demonstrate an overriding concern with inhabitation—that is, with the ways in which those left behind learn to inhabit the world made strange and

uninhabitable by death."[173] That strangeness permeates these once familiar furnishings and belongings.

Los Atrabilarios (Atrabilous), or as she translates it from the Latin roots, Black Bile or Rage)[174] 1991-96 (Figure I.4 and 3.16), exemplifies the fine balance Salcedo strikes imparting the anthropomorphic, the human presence without signifying whose. She presents worn shoes, personal possessions, imbued with the victims' touch, but installed such that they are removed from direct viewing, entombed and shrouded. Inset into the wall, small niches of varied size and spacing enclose a shoe or a pair, most are women's, each barely visible beneath the murky surface of cow's bladder covering the opening which is roughly sewn on the wall with thick black sutures. Placed at eye level, the line of niches somewhat reminiscent of cemetery sites for bodily remains following cremation, does not immediately make clear what lies within them.[175] It is upon closer scrutiny that one recognizes that one or two shoes are encased behind the skin from animal bladders, some with soles to the viewer, others presented as a perfect pair, and others askew and facing opposite directions. These shoes stem from the beginning of Salcedo's concentrated research throughout Colombia with the families of the disappeared and deceased and their presence in this work unnervingly realizes, in terms more directly rendered than in most

[173] Bennett, "Art, Affect…," 344-45.

[174] Doris Salcedo, email to Emily Pulitzer, January 22, 2003. Salcedo explains that the word Atrabilarios is Spanish but is not a common word and the strangeness of the word in Spanish she deliberately sought. She explains that the Latin root comes from atra-bilis, atra for black and bilis for bile. The closest English translation she says is Atrabilous,which the Oxford English dictionary defines as irritable, but she prefers that it not be translated. Some catalogues have translated it as *Defiant.*

[175] Nancy Princenthal, *Doris Salcedo* (New York: Phaidon Press), 49. Princenthal refers to the similarity of these niches to the glass-fronted boxes revealing mementos of the deceased in the cemeteries in Spanish-speaking cultures, but makes clear that Salcedo did not intend these to recall burial boxes, as they are not typical in Colombia, where, in fact, cremation is common. Charles Merewether, "Naming Violence in the Work of Doris Salcedo" in *Third Text* 24 (Autumn 1993): 42 and 44. Merewether states that the niches recall the "cemetery as site" and suggests that by placing the niches of the piece, in the museum context, the museum assumes the role of "mausoleum of forgetting."

of her work, the searing loss and absence that endures for the survivors. Because she presents the shoes not as fragments, like the shirt cuff or swatch of bodice, but as the entire leather possession that enclosed someone's foot, the shoe more clearly signifies than the bits of dress or trousers, ***a*** person, ***the*** human being who once lived and wore these shoes. It is through these possessions that Salcedo suggests the memory of these victims and the loss endured by their loved ones, vivid traces but without the faces that appear in the work of her compatriots, such as Oscar Muñoz, whose *Aliento (Breath)* 1996-97, (Figure 1.1), includes the news images of the disappeared visible when the viewer's breath touches the twelve steel discs where the images are printed. During her research Salcedo learned that most of the female victims who were taken from their homes or "disappeared" were held captive for extended periods before execution. In her talks with the victims' family and friends, she shared not only their stories and sorrow but ultimately, she experienced their painful process of identifying the corpses found in mass graves, by their shoes. The shoes Salcedo placed in her first works in the *Atrabilarios* series, belonged to victims, which was not true in her later pieces, but the impression remains unchanged and deeply disconcerting.[176]

Although the shoes of victims are presented in this work, Salcedo frames them not as personal narratives, but as objects eerily uncanny, operating on various levels but above all, marking the absence and mourning that continues. The accumulation of worn shoes figures memorably in exhibitions at Holocaust museums. Christian Boltanski too has accumulated piles

[176] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA. Salcedo explained that because she was given these shoes she created the installation preserving and presenting the shoes untouched, and carefully framed within the boxed niches. She deliberately chose the kind of animal skin she used to cover the niche, based on the circumstances these women endured. Held in captivity, abused and not allowed privacy or the place to attend to their physical needs they endured the inability to relieve themselves, clean and care for their bodies. Salcedo, who has used animal skins in other sculptures, such as her hospital bed frames, *Untitled*, 1989-90, chose the skin of the cow's bladder as a direct reference to the indignities these women suffered. Olga Viso, "Doris Salcedo: The Dynamic of Violence," in *Distemper: Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s*, ed. Neal Benezra and Olga Viso (Washington D.C.: Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, 1996), 87 and Princenthal, *Doris Salcedo*, 49.

of discarded clothing with found photographs to imply the enormity of the loss wrought by the genocide (Figure 3.17), but Salcedo's use of worn shoes imparts a different charge. Her work pertains to the violence fueled by the politics of Colombia's civil, narcotics-related war and its domestic and global complications, and, although it's an horrific situation that cost hundreds of thousands of lives and widespread destruction, it is not acknowledged internationally through art and exhibitions as a history representative of trauma as is the Holocaust.[177] The reasons for this are various and outside the focus of this thesis. But the powerful circumstances of a violence that claims countless victims as the means to a political end, victims unnamed and remembered outside their families only if someone acknowledges their absence, figures in Salcedo's use of these shoes. Each shoe or pair, signifies a person lost, separately presented, defined and framed as individuals, an address distinct from the piles of shoes and the unfathomable numbers of victims they represent from the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Salcedo's use of shoes speaks to the conditions and constraints wrought by the politics and the violence it engendered in her country. As Jill Bennett explains "Such personal effects are not incorporated into Salcedo's work as they are into the displays in Holocaust museums, where they rest intact as shocking reminders of lives taken. Enclosed, occluded, embedded, or

[177] The political situation within Colombia was extremely complicated during the time Salcedo began to create sculpture, in particular when *Los Atrabilarios* was conceived. After Colombia signed an extradition treaty with the U.S. in 1979 and into the 1980's, extreme violence by guerrillas and narco leaders, for example, lead to the assassination of political and judicial leaders, newspaper editors, layers and left hundreds dead in protest to the treaty and the U.S. involvement in Colombian politics it represented. In 1987 the Colombian Supreme Court voted to annul the treaty, in a vote of 13-12. Simultaneously, in the late 1980's right-wing paramilitary organizations were formed, reportedly often formed by the Colombian military, their battle was against the leftist rebels, and they were said to assassinate left-leaning political figures as well. Both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas in the late 1980's into the 1990's were said to violently target politicians, the police and their families as a means of influencing the Government. In short, they used violence for political ends, and by 1993, newly elected President Clinton, citing Colombia's dreadful human rights record, cut twelve years of huge financial support for the Colombian Government and military and in 1996, the U.S. decertified the country, stopping all foreign aid and imposing trade sanctions on the then economically unstable nation. See Fernan González, "The Historical Background of Colombia's Recent Violence" in *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 299-302 and "Columbia's Civil War," accessed July 9, 2013. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia/usrole.html.

encased, they no longer function as mementos of the dead—or as the kind of personal effects that animate family shrines—but are absorbed into a perceptual scene in which they refuse to come to life, fail to signify. The shoes barely discernible behind the thick hewn skins, are less concrete signifiers of their owners than objects that now cannot be grasped, touched, or brought into focus."[178] Not only are the shoes chosen by Salcedo difficult to discern with clarity, or approach in any manner, their presentation beneath the thick, yellowed and fibrous cow bladder blurs their appearance to the point that it is the animal skin held by coarse, black stitches that commands the viewer's attention. Salcedo vividly evokes the violence that claimed the owners of these shoes, through the brutal suturing of pieces of skin to conceal the cavities holding evidence of these victims' fates.

The shoes are neither relics nor fetishes presented in the space of a museum or gallery and partly obscured behind the animal covering, although Charles Merewether places them between the two. "'*Atrabilarios'* occupy a point somewhere between a relic and a fetish…As a relic they stand in for the remains of the deceased; as a fetish they become a substitute object of both identification and disavowal."[179] Since these shoes are the personal effects of victims who disappeared, in one sense they signify specific, although nameless, females; their presence in this work grounds the viewer with evidence that these particular women suffered violence. These shoes, however blurred their presentation, witness the erasure of these women from the world

[178] Bennett, "Art, Affect…,'" 344. Mieke Bal also discusses what she refers to what is known as the "holocaust effect" referring to the piles of shoes that are all that remain after mass violence or genocide. The shoes testify to the enormous numbers of lives lost. Bal does not suggest that Salcedo collects heaps of shoes, rather, that the placement of worn shoes in her piece, recalls the kinds of aesthetic approach to the tragedy of mass killings. See Mieke Bal, "Earth Aches: the Aesthetics of the Cut," in *Doris Salcedo: Shibboleth* (London: Tate Modern Museum, 2007), 45.

[179] Merewether, "Naming Violence…," 42. Merewether goes on to say "Thus, although Salcedo's shoes appear to be without a clear identity, they were for their owners, nevertheless, personal reliquaries and objects of remembrance, and something of this difference draws us back into the folds of an individuated history: a place of origin, a wearer, family ties. These are shoes from families of women who have disappeared."

they left behind. In another sense, each shoe is a distinct, material object separate from the person whose foot it covered, and without information linking this shoe to a particular body nor a clear view of the pumps and oxfords enclosed behind the cloudy skin, the worn shoes operate ambiguously as traces of ***these particular*** victims. However, the title Salcedo deliberately chose for this work, *Atrabilarios*, a word of antiquated Spanish, translates to *Black Rage*, furthering the notion that the artist sought to materialize the enduring fact and memory of these women's absence in this piece.

Salcedo imparts the space between the absent body and the life lived pervaded by this absence. Masked behind the veil of animal skin, itself an unnervingly vivid trace of life, enhanced by the surgical thread like sutures closing a wound, the shoes impart the strangeness born of the familiar oddly removed from life, personal belongings without the body, literally entombed, in the void in which survivors live following such loss. The world is made strange by violence. The ways it transforms the lives of those remaining, all that was known is now altered hauntingly: the body disappeared but the absence palpably permeates home, surroundings, existence. In her address on political violence, Salcedo deliberately fosters a sense of the uncanny and the disconcerting silence that pervade her works. She focuses not on the victim's body but on the perspective of those who suffer with the absence, their lives deformed by this tragic void. She chose this strategy rather than highlighting the faces, wounds and stories of countless victims as her emphasis centers on marking the fact of violence's occurrence, its devastation and the contortion of the lives of innumerable victims, bodies and witnesses. "My work speaks of the continuation of life, a life disfigured, as Derrida would say. Memory must work between the figure of the one who has died and the life disfigured by the death." [180]

[180] Merewether, "To Bear Witness," 140.

In her *Unland* 1995-98 series (Figures I.2, 3.9, 3.18), anthropomorphism and the uncanny operate in a particularly pointed address on political violence, realizing a principal tenet of Salcedo's practice. These pieces palpably realize the space between the absent body, the victim of the war and the scarred survivors. As the artist stated: "...I believe that the major possibilities of art are not in showing the spectacle of violence but instead in hiding it.…It is the proximity, the latency of violence that interest me. But also the affective dimensions associated with the latency of terror…."[181] She places the viewers in the position of witness of the witness by terms subtly, but profoundly disturbing. This series includes three monstrously elongated tables, each created from the fusing of two extended, simple, rectangular wooden dining tables. When installed together each commands a space distant from the others and, as with her other series, although the pieces bear aesthetic similarities, each table is an independent sculpture. Of particular importance in these works are Salcedo's choice of materials and the manner in which they reveal her hand and impart the deeply haunting and infinitely fragile balance filling the space and lives of survivors of this violence.

Unland: the orphan's tunic 1997 (Figure I.2 and 3.19), is one of the three tables. Its title is related to a poem by Paul Celan, the exiled Jewish poet whose writings evoke the depths of post-holocaust despair. Salcedo refers to Celan's writings, ideas and their resonance with various issues she explores in her work on political violence. His bare, deeply troubled utterances move to get beyond Adorno's statement regarding post-holocaust expression, as her pieces such as this sculpture, *Orphan's Tunic,* again give material voice to the enduring depth of pain experienced by those who witnessed war's brutality within the safety of home. The piece is based on the artist's interactions with a six-year-old girl who, tragically, witnessed the murder of

[181] Villaveces-Izquierdo, "Art and Media-tion," 238.

her parents. Salcedo saw her daily and each day the little girl was wearing the same dress. When the child was asked about the horror she witnessed, she was unable to remember anything prior to their deaths. However, Salcedo learned that the dress the little girl wore day after day was one, her Mother made for her.[182] A vivid sense of the child's dress, and trace of the absent body of the Mother and her surviving daughter Salcedo evokes by melding anthropomorphic elements into the table's wooden surface.

This sculpture, apart from all others in Salcedo's oeuvre, incorporates a level of specificity to an individual victim, however nameless, that generates an affective dimension that operates upon the viewer's close scrutiny of the piece. Upon viewing the work from afar, it appears an unwieldy, forced conjunction of two tables held together to create a disproportionately extended table, one beyond human scale. As one draws closer to the piece, it becomes apparent that the short end of the table bears a skin of pale cloth marked by countless holes where the fabric was sewn, thread by thread into the wood, needles puncturing the hard surface, sealing the cloth flush and taut to the wood, like skin covering a body, the grain revealed beneath the surface. Where the two tables join, the cloth frays and unravels but remains held against the wood by hundreds of thousands of dark human hairs catching the cloth, then weaving over and over into the countless, minute holes marking a swath of wood, across the top and spilling over the sides of the table in a dark, shiny, ephemeral textile embedded in the surface. The human presence palpably registered by the cloth, powerfully enhanced by the hair, not only generates the sense of the uncanny in this utterly strange table, but projects a literal suggestion of the little girl's dress. The hair, by its very nature displaced from the body where it grew, presents the index of the victim's absence. Typical of Salcedo's address, is the painstaking, obsessively

[182] Merewether, "To Bear Witness," 22-23 and Andreas Huyssen, "Unland: the orphan's tunic," in *Doris Salcedo*, 96.

fastidious process of incorporating these traces as a kind of skin, a deeply embedded element of the table, one, given the innumerable stitches securing hair and cloth to the wood, impossible to remove without flaying the table. And this process is one which evidences the artist's hand, the human touch in an effort of compulsive, repeated actions ad infinitum to attach that cloth, those hairs, to create the "skin." The viewer realizes this when near the table; it is an effect unnerving and profoundly affective. It, too, relates to the Celan poem to which the title refers:

Night rode him, he had come to his senses,
the orphan's tunic was his flag,

no more going astray,
it rode him straight—

It is, as though oranges hung in the privet,
as though the so-ridden had nothing on
but his
first
birth-marked, se-
cret-speckled
skin.[183]

Salcedo harbors in the unnervingly vivid materials, and in the relentless process to adhere them and the table together, not the event that destroyed the parents, but the sense of the child who lives on, mourning, her world forever changed.[184] It relates to the idea that, as Cathy Caruth states in her work on trauma studies, the actual experience witnessed often cannot be directly comprehended by the viewer, "Traumatic experience… suggests a certain paradox: that the most

[183] Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1972), 287.

[184] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Boston, MA. The artist when asked about the painstaking and impossibly challenging processes she undertakes in making her work, such as sewing threads and hairs into the table in her *Unland* series said that she focuses on the image she is trying to make, and the processes and materials she uses are what she needs to get to the image she seeks to create. She also said she repeats the act of mourning in her processes, her sewing of threads and hair into wood, the acts of mourning the surviving parent or loved one lives through.

direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it…"[185] There is a latent sense of war's effects, the horror is not revisited but the orphan girl, wearing the dress sewn by her slain Mother, figures palpably upon this strangely elongated, conjoined dining table, and the unflinchingly, ceaseless stitching of hair and thread forced into wood generates a space where violence has been.

3. The Materiality of Surface

The materiality of surface evocatively conceived in the *Unland* series, is a third visual strategy integral to Salcedo's practice evident from her small furniture pieces to her enormous public installations. Surface is manifested through her working process in various ways over the course of her project. Trained initially as a painter, attention to surface has long dominated her practice. From the beginning materials and the ways in which they are juxtaposed, interwoven, disassembled or altered through processes that contort, wear, age and may weaken their inherent qualities, figured in the exterior, the surface of her works. Salcedo focuses on the surface, I would suggest, as a kind of skin, one that is at once scarred, enduring and elastic, as well as sensual, precarious, seemingly fragile and bearing beneath its surface the damage violence inflicted.[186] *Unland: Irreversible Witness* 1995-98 (Figure 3.9 and 3.20) another of the three tables in the series conjoins two long, lean tables in an awkward fusion. At one end a diminutive, worn iron crib lies on its side, its frame embedded beneath threads and hair into the table top. A fine, ephemeral skein of cloth, held by countless threads literally sewn into the wood with innumerable stitches, covers the two disjointed pieces of the tables, creating a pale

[185] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 91-92.

[186] Salcedo in Herzog, *Cantos Parallelos*, 163. Salcedo states, "…I think a surface is the most essential aspect and I always connect it to vulnerability, to our fragility and our human condition. For this reason I make textures that, in spite of being in cement or steel, are fragile. It is that fragility I want to point out so that it leaves a permanent legacy…"

shroud over the wood. Long dark hairs flow delicately sewn over the pale cloth across the width of the table, nearly imperceptible as human hair except where they are layered heavily, securing the crib frame into the table. The worn white metal of the infant's bed bears a tender skin of cloth as well, evident by long, rough sutures marring the lengths of each curving bar.

Surface as a visual strategy in Salcedo's work operates on various levels in this sculpture. The subtle, painstaking layering of elements typical in painting: the canvas covered repeatedly to produce a ground built by pigment of viscous to fluid consistency and of hues varied one, upon the next, resulting in a complex, irreducible depth of tone, Salcedo produces through similarly intricate means. She employs a language of materials juxtaposed, blended and manipulated to produce a surface evocative and unsettling. The delicately threaded fabric and human hair enclosing the wood and the metal crib, conveys the surface as a skin. It is a membrane fragile but resilient, one in which wounds can be sutured closed, embedding the violent assault inside, hidden from view. The materials that Salcedo quietly but deliberately accentuates to create this skin: the organic, fine pale fabric tethered to wood grain by dark, long hairs, repeatedly woven in a pattern of seemingly endless duration, contrasted with the cold, impervious metal crib, (that nonetheless, failed to secure the helpless baby within its protection), project a palpable presence that draws the viewer's contemplation, generating an instinctive response to the implicit but absent victims.[187] Subtle as the surface appears upon first glance, the complexity of the various materials the artist layers and interweaves, as well as the technical challenges faced to produce the skin of thread and hair upon wood, slowly unfolds beneath the viewer's eye. Upon reading this complexity, the viewer gains the unnerving sense that not only are these tables oddly

[187] Merewether, "Naming Violence," 38-39. Merewether discusses the idea that meaning in Salcedo's work is created through "…attention to the tactile, visceral quality of the material and the interventions to which it has been subjected."

proportioned, they bear a surface that speaks to a history in which materials, not words, convey the deaths unseen.

Related to the effect created by the materiality of the surface is the nature of Salcedo's working process in its repetition of actions and the notion of ritual implied by the sewing of thread after thread, hair after hair into wood. The artist's seemingly tireless efforts to create a surface conceived of layers of unlikely materials impossibly melded and interwoven including: cement, bones and buttons sunken within cracks to patch furniture and hairs mending wood, impart an obsessively focused process of reworking. Moreover, these processes of sewing, filling and patching are labors one could associate with caring and healing, as well as with aesthetic creation. Hence, as Madeleine Grynsztejn proposes, they impart a ritualistic element.[188] I would suggest that the repeated actions not only relate to domestic and healing rituals; but that the repetition of processes, because they are so obsessively belabored, at once symbolize the relentless horror of the violence and strive for release through the fastidiously constructed, material presence the surface reveals.[189] There is an inhuman quality to the dogged, compulsively repeated sewing, binding, melding and interweaving of materials; it is an aspect that through the ceaseless repetition departs from the notion of ritual and teeters towards obsession. These are actions that the disorienting conditions of violence inspire.[190]

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[188] Madeleine Grynsztejn, "Voice of the Invisible," *Tate Etc.*(Autumn 2007): 47-8.

[189] Merewether, "Naming Violence," 40. Referring to Salcedo's *Untitled* 1989-90, piece of plaster-coated, stacked, folded white shirts pierced by a steel stake, Merewether talks about the artist's early interest in "…exploring the gestures and labor that went into the production of the piece as a metaphor for the processes of violence." In this installation violence is vividly suggested by the sharp metal stake impaling the stack of men's shirts and the piece was one created following and in the context of the 1988 massacres at the La Negra and the La Honduras plantations in Colombia. Hence it bears a historical link to a violent event in which numerous men were killed, the shirts evoke those victims in terms far more directly than the bones or buttons inserted in *La Casa Viuda* sculptures or the hairs and threads sewn over the crib and into the table in *Unland: Audible in the Mouth* or the hand carved, gouged stainless steel chairs, spliced, fused and twisted in *Thou-less.*

[190] Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA. Salcedo when discussing her process and the fastidiousness she requires of herself, said that this was part of the process of getting back at violence's effects.

Surface conjured up through the juxtaposition of varied textures and material traces not only produces an effect of freckled, scarred and worn skin, but it operates as a topography of violence in Salcedo's work. In the *Unland* series, *Orphan's Tunic* or *Irreversible Witness* or the third table, *Audible in the Mouth,* 1998 (Figure 3.18), all of similar proportions and surfaces with cloth, hair and stitches, as well as *Thou-less* 2001-2002 (Figure I.15 and 3.10), in which the surface requires close looking by the viewer to read the extent to which materials have been manipulated to unsettling effect, forms and mediums conjure up pieces with elements in disjunction, with fragments pieced together in a disorienting whole. No central focal point draws the viewer's attention; these are works to be seen from all angles. No narrative builds as one's eye moves from one section to the next; no climax is to be found. Instead there are parts that intersect, separate, discontinue and bend, in a surface that speaks to the rupture, irrationality and silence wrought by violence.

Thou-less 2001-2002, which includes nine different parts, simple chairs created from gray stainless steel joined in an assemblage or alone, reveal surfaces taut with the traces of war's effects upon household furniture. One of the pieces includes six chairs broken, crushed, ripped apart then fused, melded, forced together, legs twisted and abutting other legs, proportions destroyed, fronts and backs confused, irrelevant. Each chair is based on a simple design in wood that she cast in stainless steel. Three pieces of stainless steel resembling the scale and surface of rough wooden boards nailed together, compose the seat which rests upon narrow steel legs without adornment; and two pieces of similar scale and simplicity rise from the back two corners of the seat. Regardless of the extent to which the body of each chair is mangled, the seats torn, crumpled and/or adhered to other battered chairs, the piece bears a surface that witnessed and

recorded the violence. [191] Each chair, despite the cold, seemingly impenetrable stainless steel, registers the fine grain on each of the boards, the seat and legs, the gouges, chips and splinters in the wood, nails that were pounded to secure legs and seat, and occasional knots in the wooden boards. Together with these painstaking details of worn wood, are places in which the chair is crumpled like thick paper along a corner and the leg beneath is bent feebly. Another chair sustains a buckled corner and a seat ripped wide as if spliced by powerful blades where an adjacent chair has been forced between the severed pieces.

The stainless steel registers the sensual textures, blemishes and scars of wood like a skin that sustains the weight and evident wounds of violence in its buckled, torn seats. Salcedo's working process with stainless steel is one of deliberately creating a surface by rendering into, rather than building upon, the pieces' outer layer from cloth, hairs, bones and threads. Unlike the previous work discussed, these sculptures are not constructed from found furniture, but a single chair is the basis for all of the chairs in the work. It is an old chair, chosen for its straight lines and simple form. It was created in wax then cast in stainless steel in parts that were then hand-carved with dental tools, rendering the grain, the gouges, knots and splits in the wood, then reconfigured and assembled into one or a confluence of chairs.[192] Hence, the evocative, tactile surface Salcedo painstakingly conceives in her works, is one composed entirely of her manipulations of the stainless steel, the sole material from which surface is constructed in these pieces. No layering of organic materials, traces sewn or submerged into wood or cement figure

[191] Basualdo, "A Model of Pain," 31-32. Basualdo describes Salcedo's stainless steel sculptures as"…their own troubled materiality forces them to be at once witnesses and proof of the procedures that made them what they are."

[192] Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA and Salcedo's assistants Carlos Granada and Joaquin Sanabria, interview by author, Mexico City, April 9, 2011. The original chair used as the model for chairs in the stainless steel sculptures was an old chair chosen for its straight lines and simple structure. As Salcedo described it, there was nothing left after the siege and fire at the Palace of Justice, in Bogota, in 1985, so she "…had to make something from nothing…" and this old, chair of straight lines was the model she chose.

in the palpable presence these works evince. The direct efforts of her hand, upon a material not readily amenable to carving, creates a surface evoking the palpability of wounded skin.

Although the forms of the chairs claim the viewer's attention for the strange manner in which they abut and collide, forcefully melded into a body of many parts, alike but disjointed and incompatible, the surface of the work projects the traces of life lived and the nature of existence after violence. The fastidiously carved grain, chipped, cracked and worn along the edges measures the domestic routine in which these chairs were engaged with absent victims, their touch lingering on the surface. The damaged sides, corners, legs and the severed seats impart the injuries sustained from war, searing wounds without treatment, suturing or salves, blighting the exterior of these chairs with scars that mark the sites of violence, like the skin of victims. The surface is disorienting, as Salcedo describes the situation of living in war: it is all the same gray, semi-shiny hue, equally understated in effect, with no dramatic, eye-catching site of bloody wounds nor focal point. Hence, when close scrutiny reveals the smashed corner, the gouged wood and severed seat, all but masked in the silvery materiality of stainless steel, it startles and unsettles the viewer. Along this surface she conveys where the normal conditions of life end and war begins, she maps that change, that margin.[193]

Salcedo's attention to surface and the material presence assumes a varied but equally central role in her large scale public installations. I include the commissioned, monumental public installations within the analysis of the artist's visual strategies. I will explain the particular institutional and political context underlying each installation, as the nature of these

[193] Doris Salcedo, "Proposal for unrealized project: Marsum Churchyard in Groningen, The Netherlands, March 2002," in *Neither*, 27. Salcedo writes in her proposal about creating a "Typography of War" that I would compare to the ways in which she conceives/constructs surface in her sculptures. As she proposes in her sculpture "The presence of the subject in this piece will be removed…. It will be made up of several parts that conjoin and intersect with one another, to the point where both logic and order collapse. The piece will be devoid of a centre or a climax…"

works differs from her individual sculptures because they are conceived in dialogue with a specific physical and historical setting and constructed in the studio and in situ. Consequently factors beyond her control contribute to the realization of the piece and the scale of the work entails a different set of challenges. That said, Salcedo pursues the same visual strategies essential to her project, albeit in expanded proportions.

In *Installation, 8th International Istanbul Biennial,* 2003 (Figure I.9 and 3.22), Salcedo filled a vacant lot between buildings on three sides of four stories or more, with 1550 brown wooden chairs in a soaring pile appearing at once haphazardly and deliberately placed. Salcedo chose a site, a void where a building was missing, a negative rather than a deliberately designed opening created to present and project itself as an entrance, a gathering place or framed crossroads space. Her decision of site in Istanbul stemmed from her intention to conceive a piece referencing the ethnic conflict that marks Turkey's history during and after World War I. The massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Greeks and the ensuing tensions between these groups with the Turks that linger palpably today, underlie Salcedo's installation. That the place she first chose for her piece in Istanbul was located in an area of the city where Greeks once lived but were removed by the Turks, indicates Salcedo's deliberate approach to this violent past. The Biennial's organizers rejected that first site due to its history. In the site ultimately agreed upon, Salcedo's work was an insertion within an overlooked, unused gap between buildings which made the presence of the numerous chairs surprising, not only because this interior furniture was outdoors, piled together in a mass of hundreds, but because it occupied a space unseen and forgotten on a street of hardware stores, distant from cultural sites.[194]

[194] The location used was not Salcedo's first choice when she visited Istanbul to find her site, but was suggested to the artist because the history underlying the vacant lot she chose was deemed problematic within the context of the large, public biennial. Her initial choice of abandoned lot between buildings was located in the area of Istanbul where it was known historically, that Greeks owned homes that were forcibly seized by the Turks. Given the nature

The worn chairs rested one upon another facing every direction, forward, backward, upside down, sideways at all angles, interwoven and suspended in place creating a tapestry of wooden legs, backs and seats inter-connected like threads of wood. Each chair was a simple form of straight lines, without curvilinear details or shaped arms or backs; overall the effect was of countless chairs of similar structure and hue.[195]To the passersby on the street in this Istanbul neighborhood the heap of chairs began at their feet, literally on the ground, and soared several stories above: innumerable chairs, each familiar and worn, and most importantly, layered, with no leg, back or seat jutting into the sidewalk. Salcedo's installation bore a surface that smoothly flowed from ground to over ten meters high like a curtain of woven wood; an improbably flat side faced the sidewalk where the viewer peered into the static jumble of chairs. She constructed the installation by carefully placing chairs one upon another on the street side against a wall that was later removed and behind filled the vacant lot with more chairs.[196] Neither pattern nor visual rhythm of forms characterized this installation. It projected a towering cacophony of wooden chairs, a teeming chaos in sharp contrast with the smooth exterior plane that faced the street.

Hence, similar to her sculptures of smaller scale, surface was fastidiously constructed, the effect of layered, interconnected materials a strategy deliberately sought, even on this monumental scale. Although a wall of chairs faced the viewer, it was a wall in which each chair,

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of Salcedo's installation as a statement to those victimized by political violence the location was deemed polititically complicated by the biennial organizers, consequently, an alternative site was chosen. Carolyn Alexander, telephone interview by author, April 5, 2013.

[195] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA. The artist explained that she searched throughout Turkey to find the 1550 chairs of simple form, a task that was difficult because she said most Turkish chairs are embellished with curves and a visual lyricism that was contrary to the form she sought.

[196] Ibid. Salcedo explained that it was essential that the side facing the Street was perfectly flat and she created this by building a wall towards the street then began to place the chairs, by hand, one after another in a growing mound against the wall, such that the chairs tower higher towards the street and are lower in height receding into the back of the vacant lot. When she had placed all of the chairs, with the help of mountain-climbers who taught her how to rappel, and climb higher, the wall was removed and a flat surface of chairs faced the street.

worn from the touch of someone missing, is distinguishable and the multitude of chairs stacked behind the outer wall is palpably evoked. The furnishings from the interior rooms of home she placed in the exterior, forced into a space vulnerable to both natural and sinister elements, pressed between buildings filling the vacant, ill-defined cavity left after a building's destruction. Salcedo explains this work as a kind of topography of war, one that, as I suggested *Thou-less*, imparts, strikes at the blurred line between where everyday life begins and where it ends when war is part of daily existence. She linked this work to historical events of war and violent, ethnic oppression in Turkey, such as the Greeks and Armenians, as well as to historical incidents in Colombia, although without articulating specific dates and events. Within the Turkish context, with or without the artist's specific reference, the hundreds of empty chairs were charged with the historical weight of the country's massacres. Salcedo's address on violence focused on the ethnic strife, between Greeks, Armenians, Turks that defined the power structures in the Turkish state. "It is an image of war inscribed in the very center of our lives….All those of us who know violence can relate to this work. It has an architectural scale, even though it is a negation of architecture. It is not a work that occupies a space with tranquility, but it is forcibly inscribed in a crack…."[197] Implied in the mangled mass of chairs were the many victims and the discontinuities that mark life in war and, ultimately, the surface of this installation projected a kind of fragile skin that held this life together and bore the scars. Viewing the work, one wondered how it remained stable. It was a precarious pile of chairs, its planar surface could have ruptured at any moment, and the façade spilled into the street, the skin ripped open in a violent collapse. Fragile is the surface she painstakingly conceived and built layer upon layer of enduring materials.

[197] Doris Salcedo, *Guerra y Pa,* 139.

4. Time as Material Presence

A fourth visual strategy fundamental in Salcedo's practice is structured in terms of time, which, I suggest, operates as a material presence in her work. The artist talks about the manner in which the perception of time is dramatically altered by violence; that living in war, time alternately slows for those held captive for whom hours weigh heavily, seemingly immobile, and perversely, accelerates for those who experience repeated violent events and measure time's passage as compressed between these assaults.[198] The sense of time's measurement and its importance profoundly changes in the daily life of those who have experienced violence firsthand. When one awaits the return of a disappeared spouse or child, hours, days, weeks blur one into another, no distinction marks the passage of time until the victim's fate is known. . Salcedo's story of one woman exemplifies the experience of countless survivors of Colombia's political violence: "…I met a very beautiful woman two years ago. A mother who had been waiting for ten years for her son to appear. In ten years she has never come out of the house in fear that her son might call or come to knock at the door when she is not around....His dish is always on the table. There are hundreds of cases like hers."[199] Time knows no end and is meaningless when uncertainty and desperate hope define the survivor's every day. The distortion of time and awareness of its altered qualities during war, permeate Salcedo's project, operating in varied ways throughout her work from her cement-filled *Untitled* furniture sculptures (Figure 3.4 and 3.7) and *La Casa Viuda* series (Figure I.3) to her public performance/installation *Nov. 6-7*, 2002 (Figure I.11) and recent piece *Plegaria Muda* 2011 (Figure I.10). Time assumes a

[198] Salcedo, interview by author, April 9, 2011, Mexico City and Salcedo in Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos*, 160-161.

[199] Villaveces-Izquierdo, "Art and Media-tion," 241.

material state through the processes enacted by the artist to achieve the aesthetic results borne on the surface in the form and the construction of each piece.

The extended observation entailed to perceive decisive elements of Salcedo's work: the insertions of bones and zippers, of sewn hair in furniture, the poignant details of a lace collar in cement and grass growing through wood, demonstrates one aspect of time's role in her address. Her sculpture requires the viewer's careful scrutiny at close range, in order to discern and, in essence, witness the material effects, the aesthetic details and ponder the processes undertaken to achieve these ends. Upon intimate, lengthy study of the surface, the viewer recognizes the unsettling fragments marking her works, women and children's clothes buried in cement, a zipper and bones inserted in furniture cracks, hair woven into wood, etc., which leaves one disturbed to imagine the violence that wrought these effects, as if by viewing these details the viewer witnessed the aggression.

Mieke Bal labels this aspect of Salcedo's work, the time required to approach, to study closely and to read the details visible on the piece at close range, as "duration," stating that the works are "barely visible as art" unless one looks carefully, slowly, and finds these visual elements.[200] As an example, she states that, "The *Unland* sculptures work on the basis of the *performance of duration.* They slow the viewing down, to the extreme."[201] I suggest that the time entailed to fully view the precise details and the effects generated through her painstaking, repetitive process unfolds with a deliberation mirroring the lengthy steps and actions she pursued in the making of the work. (Figure I.2 and 3.9) Comparable to the strangely extended or dramatically compressed nature of time during war, viewing Salcedo's pieces incites one to

[200] Mieke Bal, "Earth Aches," 49 and Mieke Bal, *Of What We Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 134-141.

[201] Bal, *Of What We Cannot Speak,* 140.

view, engage and contemplate well beyond an initial impression. It is only through the viewer's decision to take time, to allow its extended passage, that one perceives the extent to which the bureau or the table has been altered, abraded, filled, spliced and punctured with needles, nails, slices of bones. I propose time as a measure necessary to recognize what the artist has done to the everyday furniture and how the surface of her sculpture in its layered, fragile complexity creates affect and reveals the strangeness. Her pieces require time to unfold and the minutes studying the work are punctuated for the viewer by brief, staccato points of visual clarity when what one sees, i.e. bones, worn lace, hair in wood or cement, stand apart as moments of sharp realization, piercing one's consciousness like a strike of violence.

Time operates in two ways in Salcedo's practice, as a moment or instant and as an extended, unending state, the condition one experiences when living with the uncertainty of political violence. *Untitled* 1998 (Figure 3.4), one of her cement filled furniture pieces from the 1990's demonstrates the point. The towering (72 ¼ inches tall) dark wooden cabinet with double doors, each with four large panes for glass, presents a striking figure of rich mahogany, a piece of furniture one would admire and draw close to touch in someone's home. As the viewer approaches the piece, the spaces between the wooden panes command one's attention, as instead of glass protecting stacks of pressed and folded garments and linens, cold, gray concrete fills the space. As one slowly studies the cement-filled cavities, trying to comprehend how and why someone's fine furniture could hold the weight of cement, one recognizes in the top left pane a wrinkled mass of flowery embroidered fabric, perhaps a blouse bunched above a swatch of tightly patterned shirt sleeves. The viewer then observes metal bars submerged in the wood, securing the doors and a fine line of cement gluing them in place. Upon realizing that whatever is within this piece of furniture is permanently imprisoned inside, the viewer recognizes deeply

submerged, yet barely visible on the surface, the collar of a man's shirt, and a red and gray plaid swatch of another shirt fighting to break from the cement. The most haunting insertion in the concrete filling this cabinet is the round collar and tiny buttons, one left open, of a little girl's flowered dress. The whole of the delicate garment lies on its side, suffocated but visible in the cement, as if the child to whom it belongs floats silently beneath its folds. It is upon slow, fixed viewing of this sculpture that the presence of these absent bodies is revealed. Time unfolds the layers of process and significance in this work. The victims are silenced, entombed in cement within familiar furnishings, their traces vivid but masked, shrouded within the impervious density of gray cement. Moreover, time's passage led to the fixed, frozen traces of clothing; the worn garments are suggestive of time that has passed; the cabinet holds a history, but one without names or a specific narrative.

Time as a material presence figures in Salcedo's address as it weighs upon and within her sculptures and installations. The little girl's flowered dress or the men's worn shirts bear the burden of time, sunken beneath the concrete, the bodies they covered long gone, but the stains, lost buttons and tears measure their history; the garments exist as traces of the lives lived before. Time pervades her work in the palpable surface of woven threads and hairs or the now forgotten chipped metal crib in the *Unland* series, and the melding together with cement of steel and wooden frame and legs, in her early table *Untitled,* 1990. Some of the most vivid examples of time's material presence surface in Salcedo's monumental installations, such as *Abyss* 2005 (Figure 3.19) and her performance/installation *Nov. 6-7,* 2002 (Figure I.11).

Abyss is a site-specific work created in a room at the Castello di Rivoli in Turin for the Triennial of Contemporary Art in 2005. In the 18th century, this room served as the place where

Carlo Emanuele III confined his father, King Vittorio Amedeo.[202] Hence this large, brick-vaulted room, with several windows stretching to the floor, functioned as a space of imprisonment and the power that imprisonment demonstrated. Salcedo lowered the vault, in effect, by constructing thick, beautifully-built brick and mortar walls that extended from the vault down the original walls, stopping four feet from the floor. This wall of brick covered much of the entrance door, framing the threshold so that the viewer was forced to bend slightly while entering the space; the light entered from the base of the windowed French doors well below eye level. It was a feat of construction, a massive, but palpably constructed layering of reddish bricks, harmonious with the original brick vault, but of brighter tone and bearing on its surface a lattice of cement and epoxy resin, lending a carefully layered material presence. The lengths Salcedo pursued to create this seamless growth of brick from the vault towards the floor entailed searching throughout Colombia for bricks of the same hue, texture and size which her assistants found as parts of ovens dotted throughout the country. She bought and took apart these ovens, sliced the bricks in half lengthwise, then layered each brick with mortar, creating walls each of which was held within a large metal frame. The brick "walls" were then sent to Italy, then placed and secured in the room appearing as if they were the natural 18th century outgrowths of the vault. To create an installation in which one could not discern the old from the new was a process of painstakingly laborious effort, of physical as well as mental extremes.[203]

This space projected the literal, material weight of time, not only related to its 18th century history as a site of confinement, but measured by the dense curtain of bricks Salcedo constructed in the process of seemingly entombing the room, shutting out the light, the entrance, the life

[202] Ibid., 230-231.

[203] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Boston, MA.

inside. The four feet of space beneath the walls to the floor allowed one to see the suspended state of this thick skin of brick, sparking one's awareness of time's passage, of this room's transformation over time, raising the deeply unsettling question of the wall's continued growth and one's possible entombment while observing this threatening space. The viewer was placed in a space of imprisonment and in the state of what Salcedo describes as the experience of those kidnapped "…Time is radically detained and becomes an unsustainable weight on the hostage….time becomes immovable."[204] The weight of these brick walls conveyed time, particularly in this historical site, as a material presence that burdens, and cannot be forgotten.

In *Nov. 6-7,* 2002 (Figures I.11, 3.24. 3.25 and 3.26), time is decisive, measured by minute and enacted with that specificity. It is a performative piece, distinct from any other work by Salcedo, and it was realized through a discrete or measured period of time. Although it could be any Nov. 5 and 6, as no year is stated, that period is understood and remembered by almost all Colombians. Salcedo conceived this piece as a remembrance of the tragedy and deaths that occurred in a horrific event of political violence that erupted in Bogotá after she returned from New York in 1985. The Palace of Justice, home of the Supreme Court and across the street from the Presidential Palace, was taken over by M-19 guerrillas who held hostage the justices and the building's occupants. The military responded with a brutal attack, smashing a tank through the front doors among other actions. A fire ignited and over the next twenty-seven hours burned much of the building, melting windows. Between the inferno and the fighting, over one hundred Colombians were killed, including eleven of the twelve Supreme Court justices.[205] Salcedo's piece embodies these dates, fixing that period of time through a progressive or sequential

[204] Salcedo in Herzog, *Cantos Cuentos Colombianos,* 161.

[205] Ibid., p. 158 and Marcos Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002,* trans. Richard Stoller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 206-207, 206-207.

materialization in space on the site of the tragedy that measures not only this history, but the politics and enduring loss. This performance/installation was driven by her conviction that she needed to create a public memorial to this horrific event in Colombian history. No one invited her nor commissioned her to conceive this work. She planned, and then executed this highly complicated piece upon the roof of the newly reconstructed Palace of Justice, under enormous constraints during the rainy season, with limited access to the building, without financial support, completely on her own.[206] To this day, the Colombian government has not publicly acknowledged this national tragedy in word or deed. Salcedo responded to this silence of the State, focusing upon the exact dates and duration of the tragedy, using time as the measure and the means by which the material presence was realized.

Following the siege, Salcedo sought remnants from the event, objects that remained, traces to be used in a work commemorating those two days in November. She was not allowed access to any objects; most were destroyed as was the building. Instead, she says, only the date remains, Nov. 6-7, and with this time she created an ephemeral work that measured and changed over the passage of hours.[207] Set at the new Palace of Justice, beginning precisely at 11:25 am, the time at which the siege began, when the guerrillas entered the building and killed a guard on Nov. 6, 1985. At this time in 2002, a chair attached to imperceptible wire began to be lowered down the building's façade. Slowly, deliberately gauged to the real-time evolution of the battle as Salcedo devised in a reconstructed model of the two days, one used chair after another began to gradually descend down the two adjacent walls of the façade. No clear pattern, or center point

[206] Salcedo, email to the author, July 22, 2013. In reference to her piece, *Nov. 6-7*, 2002, Doris stated, "La obra la hice porque necesitaba hacerla, nadie la comisiono, nadie me invite y no tuve ningun tipo de ayuda economica, todo lo hice yo sola." "I made this work because I needed to make it. Nobody commissioned it, nobody invited me to make it, I did not have any type of economic support, everything I did on my own." Also, Salcedo, interview by author, April 24, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

[207] Salcedo, *Guerra y Pa*, 145.

framed the descent of chairs, they appeared sideways, upside down, backwards and facing forward as if someone had just left the seat. Salcedo orchestrated the pace and the number of chairs that cascaded down the façade to the hours and minutes when people died, in those twenty-seven hours in 1985. Two hundred eight victims were claimed by the siege; the same number of chairs descended in her performance. It began with a single chair that first morning slowly descending (twelve meters per half hour), then from afternoon into evening, a chair, or pair or cluster of chairs descended silently, some slowly, others more rapidly, all separated and spread over the adjoining walls, unnoticed by most passersby until a number of chairs hung precariously against the facades. No public notice was given announcing Salcedo's piece; people were unaware, and photographs recording the performance reveal pedestrians staring up intrigued and unsettled as the empty chairs descended. No narrative accompanied the work, as Salcedo explained it, "The work was a blank sheet, an empty space where the spectator could remember…."[208] The empty chairs like those in the Istanbul biennial installation, represented so many bodies. But in this piece, presented on the 17th anniversary of the tragedy, on the site of the event (although the original edifice of the Palace of Justice was destroyed by the fire), the chairs timed to descend when each victim was killed, portrays individuals known by name and

[208] Salcedo, interview by author, April 24, 2013, Cambridge, MA. Salcedo explains that there was no announcement of the performance as it was not until the afternoon of the day before the performance that she received official permission to create the piece. Given the exactitude of the work, following precisely the sequence of minutes and hours in which the siege transpired on Nov. 6-7 1985, it was with extraordinary pressure and good fortune that she and her team were able to realize this piece on the day and time it had to occur. As the piece occurred during the rainy season, the apparatus Salcedo's assistants built and placed on the building's roof were especially complicated structures. The devices needed to allow for the weight and consequences of heavy rain, as well as to bear, hold and secure the extremely measured descent of each chair or group of chairs. They were designed to withstand and produce under conditions and in a manner untested in the center of the city and the nation's capital, under the scrutiny of heavy security forces. The actual process of designing these devices to lower the chairs and of installing them on the roof of the Palace of Justice, was limited to specific hours on Sunday, as, not surprisingly given the history of what had occurred at the building, the Palace was under severe restrictions for access. In short, it is nearly unbelievable that Salcedo was able to create this onsite installation, and that she did so on the exact days and over the same hours as the siege is extraordinary. Again, Salcedo created her work under exceedingly complicated conditions.

mourned by the nation, although unidentified in this performance. During the enactment of her piece, the Supreme Court building became a site of pilgrimage in the center of Bogotá, where people stopped to remember that tragedy.

The material presence of time lies in the lowering of each ordinary, interior chair in sequence, at a precise hour and minute, of a specific day, on the exterior of this Palace of Justice. By creating this installation as a performance, unfolding, layer upon layer of cascading chairs, Salcedo conceived a "real time," reliving and remembering of what had occurred there seventeen years earlier; it stands apart from her other, fixed works. It changes with the hours as more chairs descend, and time materializes as the measure of its passage. It ends with the deaths that accumulated by the close of Nov. 6, signified by the large cluster of chairs hanging on the wall at the conclusion of the performance. Her other works bear no visual cues of a beginning or an end one should see and follow in order to understand the piece. This work incorporates the sequential change as an element, the movement of time is central to the materialization she creates.

5. Body to Scale

The idea that each chair in *Nov. 6-7,* 2002 (Figure 3.24), suggests the absence of a victim killed in the Supreme Court siege demonstrates a fifth visual strategy fundamental to Salcedo's practice, that of the correspondence of body to scale. The notion of the body as related to scale, operates in three ways in her work: the physical proportions of the viewer's body to the scale of the sculpture and resulting correspondence between the two, the trace of the absent victim's body implied by the piece and the form or substance of the sculpture itself as a kind of distinct being, independent of the artist who created it. In the first instance, the chairs in the ephemeral installation *Nov. 6-7,* 2002 present the accessible, familiar scale of a person's body in each

wooden form, implying the absent trace in each worn seat. The found chairs Salcedo has incorporated throughout her practice readily evoke human proportions, with some smaller than an adult form. The artist's *Untitled* cement-filled, conjoined furniture pieces from the 1990's such as *Untitled* 1995 (Figure 3.7) in the Hirshhorn Museum collection, provide a further example of the manner in which body and scale operate in the sculpture's address. This piece projects a menacing profile; a bedframe bisects the heart of a concrete-filled bureau, piercing the cement and extending out the back where the bed's headboard looms like a shadow behind the cabinet. Although the double-bed-sized frame appears slightly sinister because it splices the chest, it is of a common, not exaggerated, domestic scale, as is the bureau. Thoughts of the bodies that once slept upon the mattress held by this frame linger; absent bodies are evoked by the worn headboard. Conjoined as they are in this strangely compromised structure, the bed and chest each remains familiar furnishings, approachable in scale and presence to the viewer, hence engaging rather than distancing the audience. The viewer's relative physical correspondence, body to bed and bureau size, encourages one's approach to the piece, so that despite the dark collision of forms and entombed interior, one draws near to the bed frame, to the drawers and to the cement-smothered, flowered-lace garment traces of body within the openings, thus accessing the implications of violence embedded within. The approachability of scale to body allows the viewer access to a work which, if monumental in scale would not engage at the same level of intimate study.

Tenebrae: Nov. 7, 1985, 1999-2000 is another example of Salcedo's strategy addressing the correspondence of body to scale in which architecture figures prominently, as in *Nov. 6-7.* (Figure I.13 and 3.27). Body to scale operates through a language of forms at once familiar and strange, confronting and barring the viewer from a proscribed space. Like *Nov. 6-7,* the piece

refers to the Supreme Court siege and an ominous quality pervades it. The installation incorporates chairs of basic form and size, but they are chairs transformed and made monstrous, lying on the floor on their sides, backless, some of their legs elongated excessively, stretching across the room and piercing the walls. In no sense is this chair familiar in its lead and steel incarnation/form, it is however, of the scale that one remembers. The installation exists in two rooms, with a large opening between the adjacent rooms. The space contains two overturned chairs on either side of the opening into the next room; long, narrow lead beams, the monstrously extended legs of the chairs, crisscross the doorway, traversing the walls and impeding one's further passage. In this second, smaller and more brightly illuminated room, eleven chairs lie jammed together in a line along the floor, their numerous, hyper extended legs reaching up and across the room puncturing the wall they face. The viewer's space is fragmented by these long lead legs that prohibit passage, but one can approach and through the barricade see the mass of upended chairs within. These chairs with their threateningly peculiar appendages illustrate the third notion of body outlined above; they resemble a kind of creature or distinct being. Similar in their oddly disconcerting composition to the stainless steel chairs conceived with legs folded, twisted and contorted in her later series *November* 6, 2001, the resulting *Tenebrae* forms recall creatures rather than domestic furniture. Their seats knocked over upon the floor, their legs no longer hold a sitting occupant but extend and drive through the wall, like those of a being with outsize force.

The architectural intrusion of *Tenebrae* creates a kind of surrounding installation seamlessly using the rooms' structure, drawing, confronting and fixing the viewer in a space of approachable scale. Salcedo conceived this piece in such a way that the viewer sees the lead chair legs puncturing the lateral walls and cannot read the mechanics behind this installation.

The whole of the two rooms, like many of her pieces, appears impossibly but fully finished; a temporary installation somehow bisects walls, steel chairs balance precariously, all pieces are fixed in place. In fact, steel plates imperceptible to the viewer, are attached behind the gallery walls to support the heavy lead chair legs.[209] Within this setting some writers propose that the barrier and the intrusion of the lead chair legs across the doorway and into the walls literally places the loss caused by violence inside the viewer's space. I would go further and suggest that similar to Salcedo's other pieces, *Tenebrae* materializes not only the loss but the perverse, inhibiting and uncontrollable nature of violence, the strangeness that pervades existence and the spaces and objects once familiar.[210]

The title, *Tenebrae: Nov. 7, 1985* sheds further light on the sense of body and scale in this work. Tenebrae refers to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the final days of Holy Week, and Salcedo's choice of this word along with the exact date when the tragedy culminated in the siege of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, informs the visual expression of chairs and barricade of lead legs. The artist mentions *Tenebrae* as the first work of several she created in response to this tragedy.[211] No narrative is stated, but the presence of chairs, a reference she makes two years later in her *Nov. 6-7*, 2002 performance/installation of chairs descending the walls of the Supreme Court building, evokes both the absent Palace of Justice victims and the body of Christ

[209] Alexander, interview by author, April 16, 2012. Alexander and Bonin first installed *Tenebrae: Noviembre 7, 1985*, 1999-2000 in an exhibition in 2000. In author's conversation with Doris Salcedo, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA, Salcedo mentioned that *Tenebrae* was her first piece that was fully cast. Typically she constructed, joined, carved, worked by hand on her sculptures, such that the surface demonstrates this focused creative expression and process, however that did not occur on this piece. She stated this fact in the context of discussion about the otherworldliness of this sculpture, in that the author mentioned that she found the piece strangely disturbing, a clear expression of "the Other" and Salcedo agreed and commented regarding the working process as if it was not entirely one in which every aspect was under her hands, her control.

[210] Edlie L. Wong, "Haunting Absences: Witnessing Loss in Doris Salcedo's *Atrabilarios* and Beyond," in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture,* ed. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 183-184.

[211] Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA.

in those final days, while the elongated chair legs, menacing in their wall piercing placement, subtly imply the long beams of the Cross. The body is a presence missing but acknowledged in this work, and the chairs manifest a kind of body that is as much of this world as of the unknown.

A third installation that addresses body to scale informed by particular acts of political violence in Colombia is her piece *Plegaria Muda* 2008-2010 (Figures I.10, 3.28, 3.29). This work fills an enormous room, literally enclosing and surrounding the viewer with 166 sculptures, a seemingly endless series of tables each the length of a person's body.[212] One table is upended upon the other, each identical and of simple construction, the wood stained a weathered gray hue. Between the table with legs to the ground and the table flipped upside down placed upon it, sits a wedge of dense, dark soil from which vivid green shoots of live grass sprout improbably through the wooden tabletop. Like many of Salcedo's works, the tables convey the unlikely, defiantly achieved expression with hairs sewn into wooden tables, grass growing through wood. Against expectations and odds she creates an aesthetic statement one cannot understand, nor believe one sees, melding materials with diverse properties.

Plegaria Muda fills a room with table after table in specific order, one after another facing the same direction, some parallel, some closely set, others apart, one alone, but visually similar, an endless repetition of silent, haunting forms differing only in the number of blades of grass sprouting irregularly through the upside table top. The proportion of each table deliberately compares to the scale of a person, Salcedo stated that their measurements approximate that of a standard coffin.[213] The pale gray shade of wood and the simple boards

[212] The installation size of this piece can vary. At a minimum 5 tables must be included and the largest configuration includes 166 tables within an indoor space.

[213] Salcedo, interview by author, April 9, 2011, Mexico City. Also, Mieke Bal, "Waiting for the Political Moment," in *Doris Salcedo: Plegaria Muda*, ed. Magnus Jensner and Isabel Carlos (Malmo, Sweden and Lisbon, Portugal: Moderna Museet Malmo and Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011), 79.

recall rudimentary wooden coffins, the kind in which the bodies of the unknown or of those on society's margins are buried. *Plegaria Muda* when one enters and walks through, between and around the tables palpably reminds one of a cemetery with gray tombstones of comparable scale marking the landscape; these sculptures each with four table legs projecting upward define each site, each body, each death. Unlike gravestones, the tables lack names and dates, only the bright green tufts of grass distinguish one from the other, like the grass growing around and over cemetery plots. The blades of grass project a vibrant hue, sprouting from within the tables; within these "coffins" emerges a vision of life apparent. Moreover, unlike at a gravesite, this growth appears at a level just above the viewer's waist; there is no need to bend down to touch the grasses. The coffins and blades of grass surround the viewer's body not his/her feet.

The body/scale correspondence is a visual strategy Salcedo deliberately pursued in this work, the impetus stemming from a particular incident in the first decade of this century with unburied dead in Colombia, as well as from the spiral of violence fueling civil war and conflict throughout the world. The piece began through research she conducted in Los Angeles in 2004, focusing on Southeast L.A. and the cycle of violence by gangs and the ambiguous relationship between victim and perpetrator in marginal areas where violence predominates. *Plegaria Muda* is informed by the kind of "social death" in which people have little hope and no sense of what is a community that according to Salcedo, exists in L.A., Colombia and many places in the world where people live in precarious economic and social conditions and where anonymous deaths from the consequent violence prevails.[214]

In addition the work pointedly and poignantly addresses a specific incident in Colombia. From 2003-2009, as Salcedo explains, nearly 1500 young people from marginal areas of

[214] Salcedo, interview by author, April 11, 2011, Mexico City and Salcedo, "ArtisTalk," lecture at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 23, 2013.

Colombia were murdered without reason. At the time, the Government had implemented a reward system for the military if the army could verify that they had battled and killed a growing number of guerrilla insurgents. Given these incentives, it was reported that the military hired young people from poor areas, transported them to other regions, murdered them and claimed their bodies as "unidentified guerrillas: discharged in combat."[215] Salcedo was intimately aware of these incidents, which received widespread condemnation in Colombia once discovered, because she spent months accompanying the mothers as they searched graves the murderers had revealed, trying to find their disappeared sons among so many bodies. She then joined the mothers, "…in the painful and arduous process of living out their mourning…."[216] As Salcedo states in her essay for the exhibition, "I believe that Colombia is the country of unburied death, the mass grave and the anonymous dead. For this reason, it is important to highlight each tomb individually in order to articulate an aesthetic strategy that allows us to recognize the value of each lost life and the irreducible uniqueness of each grave. Despite not being marked with a name, each piece is sealed and has an individual character, as if to indicate a funeral that has taken place."[217]

6. Disjunction and Disorientation.

The final visual strategy integral to Salcedo's project is the notion of disjunction and disorientation. The artist manifests this strategy through her choice and juxtaposition of materials, the processes she employs to manipulate this wood, fabric, concrete and steel and through the installation of her pieces in space and particular settings. From the outset Salcedo's

[215] Salcedo, interview by author, April 11, 2011, Mexico City. Salcedo, *Plagaria Muda*, 25-26.

[216] Salcedo, *Plagaria Muda*, 26.

[217] Ibid.

work has presented an incongruence, an unsettling aesthetic statement born of the disjunction of materials, processes and placements that she pursues as part of the image she seeks to create.[218] From the sculpture composed of a single chair or bureau burdened with cement to a monumental installation filling a public space, Salcedo's address deliberately conveys a notion of disjunction and deliberately disorients.

One of her early pieces, *Untitled* 1988 (Figures I.14), a crib with a chipped metal frame, sharply demonstrates the notion of disjunction integral to Salcedo's practice. A forlorn metal crib of small scale (96 x 79 x 45cm) stands uncertainly on four chipped, terribly worn legs placed incongruously in a gallery. Its presence is painful to observe because the piece projects a raw quality through its battered metal frame, diminutive size and the harsh metal screen and wires enclosing the baby's bed. Where the side rails would be to protect the slumbering infant, Salcedo constructed a metal cage composed of dark, rusted metal mesh, reminiscent of window coverings in prisons. It is sewn in place with countless, individual rusty wires threading into the section of mesh, and weaving in, out and over the metal crib frame. A cloudy swatch of worn translucent plastic is entangled in the woven wires along the base and sides of the crib; accretions of pale wax collect on the frame, palpable amidst the interstices of wires. It is a deeply disturbing sculpture; its effects fostered by the imposition of the rough, rusted steel-mesh and wire cage imprisoning the crib, by the disjunction of purpose and materials, and by its placement in a public space. That is the last location one would choose to settle a sleeping infant.

The brutal juxtaposition of contrasts in this piece sharply conveys Salcedo's use of disjunction as an aesthetic strategy in order to address political violence. This sculpture was

[218] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Boston, MA. Salcedo stated when asked about her choice of materials, in discussion regarding her early piece, *Untitled*, 1988, crib wrapped in metal mesh and wire part of the MFA collection, "…The materials and the process are not what I'm thinking about so much as the image I'm trying to create, it's the image I know I need to make that I'm thinking about…."

created in response to a horrendous massacre that occurred in Segovia, and an account Salcedo read regarding a mother who searched for, and then found her murdered son and brought him home, where she lovingly began the rituals of mourning, slowly cleaning his wounded body, then dressing him in his best clothes, struggling through her grief to say goodbye properly. This heartbreaking story Salcedo recalls as she remembers vividly the sense of the Mother's searing pain and sorrow. The sadness that the artist experienced infused her process as she made this sculpture. As Salcedo describes it, "What I do is, in my process of making I go through, repeat the act of mourning of the person who survives but suffers the loss of their child."[219]

In her first stainless steel pieces *Nov. 6,* 2001 (Figure I.5 and 3.31), disjunction is realized in the disorienting forms she created from manipulating the basic chair, the placement of these sculptures in space and the ways in which stainless steel bears the texture of wood and the malleability of rubber. Like her other stainless steel chairs, these pieces stem from a model wooden chair of straight lines and no decorative flourishes carved into the legs, seat or back. It was cast in stainless steel in pieces; she then reconfigured the parts of the chair creating a deliberately disjunctive sculpture, disturbing for its uncanny qualities.[220] These pieces are at once familiar but strangely threatening, resembling creatures rather than domestic furniture.

Nov. 6 includes a pair of pieces, each consisting of two back-to-back, stainless steel chairs closely joined, elevated above the floor by the crumpled, split seats and skewed legs of several backless chairs seemingly forced beneath them. The indistinguishable mass of legs and truncated seats barely visible, slightly spilling out beneath the formidable pair of solid chairs

[219] Ibid.

[220] Salcedo, interview by author, April 22, 2013, Cambridge, MA. Salcedo describes the process of making the stainless steel sculpture as "It's not a cast, set piece. It was cast in pieces then reconfigured. And every single detail was hand carved with dental tools."

imparts a striking incongruence between the mangled forms and the straight lines and commanding presence of the chairs they shoulder. It is a juxtaposition that evokes the rupture and wounded results of political violence buried beneath social controls.

Installed apart from these two sets of chairs, a single perversely malformed "chair" balances precariously on two legs, a third contorted appendage providing slight support. That this is a chair is a point of provocation, as it is so dramatically altered that it resembles that domestic object only in that it contains the seat and four legs of her other stainless steel chairs. However, only one of those legs serves as support on the floor, the rest are suspended in space, and what were the chair's two back pieces are bent, folded over by the hands of some unknown force, one pulled to touch the floor the other stretched but missing the ground.[221] It is an utterly dysfunctional chair, but a thoroughly potent image of the effects of violence. By negating the very properties that define a chair, this piece addresses the lasting repercussions of war, psychological and physical.

On a large scale, Salcedo's installation *Neither* 2004 (Figure I.16 and 3.24) operated through disjunction, employing a visually understated vocabulary to disorient space and the viewer's sense of grounding within. Created to fill the principal gallery at White Cube, Hoxton Square, London, the piece appeared to grow from within the walls, a work like many of Salcedo's installations that seamlessly evolves within the setting in which it is presented. In this work the spotless white, windowless walls of the space revealed meter upon meter of floor to ceiling expanses of razor sharp, chain-link wire fencing that cuts through the plastered walls, in

[221] Basualdo, "A Model of Pain," 30-31. Basualdo compares these chairs to an unused, imaginative of antique language, "…Their dysfunction calls to mind absurd vowels, vestiges of an archaic or invented language capable of assuming a glossological seriousness; they are terms the meanings of which have been eschewed, the parts subjected to the pressure of being put in an unprecedented and absurd context, alter assembled with a a violence that rejects the imprecision of brutality. What animates the chairs is that they have not lost the will to continue to mean something and yet, whatever they mean has become hopelessly incomprehensible."

places deeply submerged and barely discernible except as the repeated, shadowy pattern of link after link. In other areas the metal links just cut into the surface, creating diamond shaped pieces of white plaster sliced by the wire, palpably dissecting the wall and constraining the space. Finally, sections of chain-link fencing jutted menacingly off the wall within the gallery and restricted the entrance into the space, the sharp wire edges threatening to puncture or tear the fabric or flesh of the viewer who drew close.[222]

This installation incorporated within, what belongs outside. The material ubiquitous worldwide in areas of confinement, a material one associates with prisons and areas where people are under control. Salcedo's title, *Neither,* suggests that the space is uncertain, but clearly without freedom. One entered, passing through the jutting wire edges into a space with no focus, no narrative; only the sense of disjunction was palpable. The perfect space of the gallery was now shrouded in the physical weight and lacerating edges of the rough chain-link fencing that imprisoned the gallery viewer. The psychological connotations associated with the chain-linked fencing, with razor-sharp edges, do not belong in the pristine room of the gallery. Salcedo conceived a space to disorient through this incongruence, creating a visually minimalist room, one that stopped the viewer in an immobile, literal cage. It was a space between imprisonment and freedom; the fencing was visible, but was embedded in some sections to the point of disappearing. It lurked threateningly, on the edge of confining the viewer, suggesting a place and a sense of time that was frozen and distinctly separate from the active environment of the street

[222] Salcedo, interview by author October 21, 2012, New York, NY. The artist explained that she selected a specific kind of chain-link fencing that is used in prisons and places where people are imprisoned that has has extremely sharp, knife-like edges that slices one's hands if touched, and served in this case to cut through the drywall used for the walls in this installation. Hence it was a fencing deliberately chosen to recall that which is used in internment camps and it served to slice into the wall creating the effect of being embedded and puncturing the walls that made up the installation in the gallery. See also, Rod Mengham, "'Failing Better,'" 11, Mengham describes the plasterboard with fencing embedded into it, as placed in front of the gallery walls, but seeming to be part of the gallery's walls.

outside the gallery. The sense of disjunction created was not only in the installation's materiality but in the notion of time, suspended and immobile as she has described what plagues those held captive. Salcedo stated that she created this piece in reflection on the inhuman, uninhabitable other worlds of concentration camps, those zones of confinement outside of laws: not only those from World War II, but throughout time and cultures, from the Soviet Gulags to former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Guantanamo, and the jungle sites holding kidnapped victims in Colombia.[223] Although the linked fencing conjures up the sense of enclosures forced or voluntary, the idea that this installation referred to concentration camps and holding pens from diverse eras and cultures was not readily apparent within the pristine, White Cube space. *Neither* did not specify whom, where or when it addressed; but it imparted a space of silence, at once ominous with its sharp, chain-linked walls, and contemplative, where thought about the imminence or the consequences of violence transpire.

Conclusion

Doris Salcedo's project focuses on political violence, it informed her first sculptures using everyday objects with surfaces complexly rendered and remains integral to the single pieces built from domestic furniture to her monumental site specific installations conceived today. Her emphasis on the violence fueled by political conditions of civil war grew from her experience as a Colombian artist, living in her country seeing and listening to the victims, absorbing the devastation, the uncertainties and the silence of a State that fails to acknowledge the deaths, the mourning and the nation's history as it is bound to a particular condition of violence. Salcedo began her practice focused entirely on the victims and politics of Colombia, conceiving sculptures that addressed the source of her experience and the certainty of the

[223] Doris Salcedo, "Proposal for a project for White Cube," 109.

unacknowledged horror thousands of her countrymen lived and felt helpless to change. Many Colombians felt complicit in the cycle of violence that was perpetuated year after year from the 1980's through the 2000's. As her work gained international attention in the 1990's, although she continued to live in Bogota, her sculptures addressed the political violence that rages in many cultures and across time in the world, specifically expressed in public, site specific commissions such as the Istanbul Biennial, the Castello di Rivoli in Turin, and most recently *Shibboleth,* 2009 in the Tate Modern, Turbine Hall. No narrative element, no pictorializing appears in Salcedo's pieces. The issues of political violence she addresses are not always legible to the viewer, and this is, at once, a risk she takes and a formidable quality that defines her practice as a major international artist.

In order to make her address on political violence and do so through means that do not rely on figurative images of wounds and victims, Salcedo employs specific visual strategies that together impart the absence/presence of those lost and the uninhabitable world of civil war through materiality. From the beginning, she chose sculpture as her means of addressing the conditions and consequences of political violence, her country was and continues to be the source central to the objects she constructs. Using the everyday object, furniture, first bedframes, then tables, chairs and bureaus as the base, she fastidiously labored over the surface, layering, scraping, inserting, melding various materials into and upon it creating a skin evoking past violence and revealing bodily traces, and finally, joining and fusing pieces of different furnishings, using metal and cement to secure and suffocate them, both literally and metaphorically. Although Salcedo's pieces have assumed monumental proportions in the case of site specific installations, each detail, as well as the painstaking process of building a layered,

richly textured surface remains essential. Her interest in the everyday object and materials remains central to her practice as well.

Buttressing these integral aspects of Salcedo's work, are the six visual strategies that have evolved over the course of her practice, the means by which she conveys her address on political violence. Salcedo fastidiously approaches every detail of each sculpture and installation, and this focus is essential to the deliberateness of her statement on the politics and violence of civil war. The suggestion of space to place, the sense of the uncanny and anthropomorphism in her door bearing bones, the materiality of her heavily worked, almost painterly surfaces, the weight of time as a material presence in her performance piece, the correspondence of body to scale in her bent and piled chairs and the disjunction and disorientation of her fused furniture pieces facing the far corners of the room, are a set of visual strategies that together and separately work to make the complex conditions of a violence fed by a history and a politics, apparent in Salcedo's pieces. It takes these different means of making to convey the issues and consequences of political violence in her project. Her work does not figuratively portray political violence, it expresses this condition and reality in a series of ways of making the viewer see, understand and experience through the materials as she conceives and constructs them.

And with that means of making, without pictorializing, Salcedo takes the risk that her statement will not be legible to the viewer. For all of her lengthy and exhaustive research, planning, building and creating her work, her intentions do not always succeed in conveying the issue at stake and around which she conceived her image. *Shibboleth*, 2007, (Figure 3.12 and 3.33), the monumental crevice splitting the floor of Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern, is a work Salcedo painstakingly constructed, built segment by segment, carved with dental tools, inserted into the cement, ultimately creating a fissure dividing what appeared to be the very foundation of

the space. The technical skill required to achieve this chasm, the wonder of it spreading from one end to another of the vast hall, drew the attention and earned the widespread interest of viewers and critics. However, the issues addressed by the image: the title specifically referencing a biblical practice described as using language to determine one's inclusion in a group, an issue Salcedo linked critically to the long legacy of racism, the continuing fracturing of societies and the exclusion of a huge underclass worldwide, were not focused upon by most viewers.[224] As the artist herself has discussed, it was a piece that did not achieve what she intended; the artifice was greater than the art.[225] This is the challenge posed by her choice of charging materials not figural images with the weight of expressing her address on the political violence that claims victims in Colombia and the world.

[224] Sarah Lyall, "Caution: Art Afoot," *New York Times*, December 11, 2007, is one example, in which great detail is placed on the interest in how the crevice was created and people's enthusiasm for the Tate's lack of rules or restrictions on viewers so that they could walk near and over it. Focus was on those who tripped and fell into or beside the crack, the focus of the article on the wonder of contemporary art, that a split in the floor took one's eyes away from the walls and down to one's feet. This is but one of various articles with similar observations focusing less on the content of her piece than on the marvel of its making. See also, Richard Dorment, "Doris Salcedo: A Glimpse into the Abyss," *The Telegraph*, October 7, 2007. Accessed June 26, 2013. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3668416/Doris-Salcedo-A-glimpse-into-the-abyss.html

[225] Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge,. She discussed her intentionality and this example as a piece that did not achieve what she sought in its address to the viewers.

Chapter Four:

Political Violence and Materiality

This dissertation has analyzed Doris Salcedo's practice and, in particular, her attempt to address victims of political violence in Colombia and by extension, in the world. The analysis examined a specific body of her work perceived through the lens of: the socio-political context she has experienced while living since birth in Colombia, the artistic practices of Beatriz González, Josef Beuys and Marcel Duchamp which figured to varying degrees in the issues explored in her work, and finally, the visual strategies she employs to convey with materials, without pictorializing, the enduring effects of civil war.[226] She deliberately focused on sculpture as her means of addressing the conditions of violence that rupture societies and wrench apart the lives of victims throughout the world. But her choice of medium was coupled with the certainty that no narrative or figurative image of a violent event and the assaulted bodies would she incorporate. Instead, she presented the trace of the absent body, the suggestion of what occurred, creating affect through the meticulously conceived and constructed sculptures and installations made of worn domestic furnishings and belongings. She did this by engaging the aesthetic strategies of: space and place, the uncanny and anthropomorphism, the materiality of surface,

[226] The body of work I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation includes pieces from all of her series, that is sculptures created in a similar manner at different time periods, i.e. wooden furniture filled with cement from the 1990's and 2000's, as well her major individual and site specific works. Mention was made of other work such as her earliest furniture pieces from 1987 composed of worn hospital bedframes wrapped in plastic and animal fiber. The works prior to 1987, of metal furniture frames, animal fiber and wood were not discussed. One important piece not included in this thesis was her *Untitled* 1989-90 installation of plastered shirts bisected by menacing metal stakes. I did not include this piece because, unlike the other works that are the focus of this thesis, in this piece she renders a figurative image implied by the folded men's shirts pierced by a literal stake. Created after the massacres of workers in 1988 at the La Negra and Honduras plantations, this piece makes a more direct statement of the male bodies and their brutal death, imparting a narrative in the tower of pressed shirts on stakes. By comparison, *Los Atrabilarios* 1993, the only other work discussed which included an entire piece of clothing (shoes) rather than a fragment, a literal trace of what is missing, presented the shoes embedded in the wall, in funerary-like enclosures, presented as relics but veiled beneath a thick, cloudy animal bladder sutured across the opening. Hence, reading the shoes as the belongings of specific bodies was complicated by the skin shroud. The body of Salcedo's work which I selected for this thesis conveys the suggestion, the trace, not the literal, direct statement of the absent victim and the violent act.

time as a material presence, body to scale and disjunction and disorientation. She relied and focused on materials, as well as on her exhaustive process of planning and building each piece to impart the weight and act of remembrance for the unburied dead. Although her political statement is not always legible to the viewer, she does not hesitate to take this risk in her efforts to impart her statement through materiality.

Salcedo's recent work stakes new ground; it pushes beyond her previous tactics, deliberately challenging the temporal limits of materials and the definition of sculpture and the object. *A Flor de Piel* 2012-13 (Figure 4.1) is her most audacious and important work-to-date. It is founded in the issues of the political and the material, but tests the parameters of organic materiality, arresting its decomposition in a suspended but uncertain state. This piece composed of thousands of rose petals sewn together in an enormous textile spreading across the floor, continues the artist's trajectory centering on political violence addressed through material means without narrative or figuration, but it charts new ground with its fragile physicality composed of delicate blossoms challenged to endure in an untested condition. From the beginning, Salcedo has pursued a project focusing on civil violence and the politics behind it, and as this thesis has proposed, she rendered the absence, sorrow and uncertainty left by war, through everyday objects and materials intricately melded and changed, employing a series of aesthetic strategies to convey her address. Although the subject of her work, acknowledging the unburied dead and surviving victims from political strife, remains central to her practice, she continues to explore new means of articulating the loss.

Salcedo chose sculpture as her medium, the material expressed through installation or the object, but as *A Flor de Piel* demonstrates, she challenges the parameters by deliberately blurring the line between the physical and the ephemeral, between sculpture and performance. Salcedo's

latest work steps beyond her previous pieces by making material the wounded flesh of the disappeared victim through fragile flora, rather than incorporating the body's trace signified by a zipper or torn shirt. Although she continues to create each piece as witness to the experiences of those whose loved ones were claimed by political violence, her process is not static. Her emphasis on the properties and possibilities of materials to realize her vision, lead her to stretch the limits of the medium in a powerful expression: one that both sums up her approach and moves beyond, raising more questions than answers.

She creates sculpture and installations as the expression and the site of memorial, but what defines Salcedo's project, centers on her dialogue with political violence rendered without vivid images of brutal acts and human suffering. Unlike the legacy of Joseph Beuys, whose ideas she studied but whose project addressed the German atrocities in World War II, their memory and catharsis, her work is not about a past to be reconciled but an ongoing problem of civil violence. Employing materials charged with particular histories, her exhaustive process often begins with the testimonies of those who witnessed the violent conflict of power between Guerrillas, Paramilitary forces and the Colombian military. Her choice of materials, from the possessions given to her by survivors, to her search for chairs, wire mesh, buttons or bones, stems from the image she seeks to realize, one fed by her innate ability to absorb and take on the victim's experience.

Salcedo's approach, conjuring the imminence of violence, not by blood soaked images of its effects, as rendered by Argentine artists such as Alberto Heredia or Graciela Sacco, but conveyed solely through an evocative material presence, exemplifies the singular nature of her work. Linked to this proximity of violence, a sense of the absent body, its trace and the experience witnessed, finds measure in the domestic furniture, the everyday objects and

materials, the threads, hairs, wires and cement from which she constructs her pieces. Materials define her approach, and every choice, from the wooden furniture to the stainless steel, to the layering, the melding and the fusing of elements inside, outside, beneath, between and upon the work is exactingly determined. From the manufactured to the organic, that range of materiality as the means of address, in sculpture and installation of human or monumental proportions, characterizes her expression. In the diverse array of materials she employs, how does she continue to indicate the local, that specific context of violence? Her career-long preoccupation centers on the act and space of mourning, of remembering the unburied dead and the memory of the experience that threatens to disappear without acknowledgement; each Salcedo sculpture or installation makes public measure of what political violence wrought on minds and on bodies.

Salcedo's project deliberately avoids the use of images that recall brutal events, or the specific victims, unlike fellow Colombian artists such as Oscar Muñoz, whose practice dwells on the civil war. She takes on the war by conceiving pieces that she deems oppose the power that violence wields in society.[227] The more than half century of violence that has plagued Colombia, from the 1948 assassination of presidential candidate Gaitán, the emergence of leftist guerrilla groups, the growth, wealth and influence of narco-traffickers , the power of the military and of the State, and the rise of the paramilitary forces speaks to a persistent condition of civil violence that has become habitual and is viewed as an element of national identity. For Salcedo, the imminence of violence not its figurative elaboration, dwells in the meticulous interweaving of materials, found furniture, cement and organic elements; this is her focus and what defines her project. By purposefully combining particular materials, the used kitchen chair, the torn shirt, the long wooden tables and soil, Salcedo explains that she imparts elements the viewer

[227] Doris Salcedo, "ArtisTalk," lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 23, 2013.

recognizes, thus allowing one an accessibility to the piece that a vivid image of a bloody corpse would eclipse. Depictions of the violent act and of murdered bodies, Salcedo describes as "hyper representation." They reveal all, leaving no space to absorb and consider the experience and its lingering consequences; they convey spectacle rather than the violation, the enduring grief and the echoing absence that fills the survivor's lives. Salcedo seeks to impart the memory of the experience of civil war, realized upon the viewer's deliberate contemplation of her pieces. The latency of violence is legible upon careful study, along with the discovery of embedded bone fragments and woven hairs. Moreover, since she does not portray specific violent events or reference particular victims, she conjures up instead, a fragmentary, multi-layered textile of histories shared with her over time by countless victims. She draws together these various threads into a perspective on violence and the ongoing mourning. Her furniture sculptures embody acts that fix the memory of the experiences from civil war in a material presence, acts of mourning through an address at once familiar and strange.

Within the context of her nation's civil war, of relentless, random political violence over countless years, Salcedo chose a means of giving voice and measure to the horror, grief and absence through the everyday objects and materials given and found that impart or evoke the traces of victims. Her choice was nurtured through studies with the sculptor Beatriz González and the seminal influence of Josef Beuys' practice and ideas of social sculpture. González presented domestic furniture as sculpture; the beds, tables and bureaus deliberately represented a particular socio-economic class and were painted with national icons and popular figures rendered in flat sections of garishly bright pigments. Her pieces incorporated a biting undercurrent of socio-political criticism, statements not lost on the authorities, or on Salcedo. The latter absorbed this example, as well as the rigorous theoretical and art historical grounding

she learned from González. Salcedo went on to explore and embrace the issues Josef Beuys proposed regarding the capacity of materials to convey socio-political meanings, and the possibility of sculpture as a social statement, not a purely aesthetic exercise. Beuys' embrace of common objects and substances intrigued her as well. His use of the everyday is central to her work and can be linked to Marcel Duchamp's readymade, although Salcedo's objects are far from banal, impersonal manufactured items; they are specific, worn, private belongings that she abrades, rubs and splices in her process of building and complicating their surface and their form to create affect and the sense of those victimized.

As this thesis proposed, Salcedo conveys her address on political violence through six visual strategies. She employs the domestic furniture, everyday objects and elements to give measure to the effects of civil war, the personal as well as the societal consequences unspoken and enduring. Salcedo's sculpture and installation is defined by an evocative, complex surface and a material presence conceived to bear traces but without fixed specificity and vivid imagery. To convey the issues and victims of civil war solely through materials she engages the aesthetic strategies of: space to place, the uncanny and anthropomorphism, the materiality of surface, time as a material presence, body to scale, disjunction and disorientation. Without pictorializing, Salcedo relies on these means to impart her address.

Over the course of her career, Salcedo has centered primarily on two principal concerns: one, socio-political issues; her work is about political violence, and two, materiality; her project focuses on the material presence, making materials speak. Her most recent piece, *A Flor de Piel* 2013 (Figure 4.2 and 4.3), embodies both priorities, but pushes materiality beyond its expected parameters to a new state. As presented in this thesis, Salcedo's work dwells on the memory of the victim's experience of violence and capturing that memory before it vanishes. Her pieces

built from almost obsessively repeated actions of suturing, stitching, patching and filling, seek to make the memory present. Evidence of the artist's hand in the creation of each piece is important, although often difficult to discern without close scrutiny of the work and the surface she meticulously builds. With time, she has chosen increasingly delicate and ephemeral materials to render the trace of the absent body, expressing the fragile threads of the victim's past through similarly, impermanent materials.[228]

A Flor de Piel makes the ephemeral, the temporal of mind and material, endure. It distills Salcedo's visual and political priorities in a statement of startling materiality that straddles the line between genres in a breakthrough work. It challenges the artist's own attempts to make material the effects of trauma and the delicate elements used to mask it. *A Flor de Piel* fills a room. Salcedo conceived the piece as a flower offering to a woman who was tortured; it is the funerary ritual that she was denied. Thousands upon thousands of deep red rose petals were sewn by hand, one to another, creating a delicate textile of soft, veined petals sutured together in an expanse of over 17 by 15 feet. It spreads over the floor gathered in folds like a heavy sheet, the flowers sealed within a transparent coating, allowing the veins, petal edges and stitches to mark the surface like creases, freckles and scars on a body. Recalling skin, the piece bunches and stretches, the surface delicate but semi-elastic, and like flesh, it reveals some of what lies underneath. Her piece is the wound made material. This ephemeral work, the hue of dried blood, revealing veined petals visibly stitched together as if closing a deep cut, embodies the wound as an enormous red stain expanding across the floor. She created the tortured woman's wound as a shroud, evoking the absent body within and beneath *A Flor de Piel*. The weight, the scale, the

[228] For example, *La Plegaria Muda* 2008-10, although conceived of pairs of wooden tables, is defined by the soil and grass seed, difficult to control and maintain, the tender blades of grass pushing through the pine are essential to her statement.

blood-stained and veined surface spread and gathered in folds, projects a pregnant silence, as if it is both the live skin and the rumpled sheet that covered her body and so many bodies before hers. One longs to kneel and touch, then shrink from the evocative, improbable nature of the membrane that constitutes this piece. It comes as close to realizing the skin, the presence of the unburied victims as any work Salcedo has conceived. And the impossibility of bringing back those victims is mirrored by the unlikely, improbable feat of sewing together thousands of rose petals and maintaining them in a suspended state. Science and logic teach that this quilt of roses cannot last, that this piece performs for a brief period, as the absent body made flesh; it will then disintegrate and disappear, as does the corpse. She makes every victim whose torture and absence she has marked vividly reachable in this work, but she does so by creating the act of remembering, not the permanent memorial. This is not sculpture, this is materiality at its most ephemeral; and creating that physical presence in its convincing, seemingly impermanent state is Salcedo's achievement.

The importance of *A Flor de Piel* within Salcedo's practice lies not only in the vivid means and intensity of her statement regarding political violence, but the technical risks and the challenge she faced by forcing ephemeral materials to endure. She endeavored to make this work lasting in spite of the delicate nature of its organic elements, not knowing the result beyond today. From the beginning, the site factored into her conception, the materiality was to be presented, allowed to fill but be contained within a space with walls, the floor and the ceiling framing it, allowing a focused perspective on the blood red, sutured petals. The artist worked over many months with scientists to formulate a process by which the rose petals could be maintained, in color, in form sewn and spread, as a fragile textile with enough elasticity for the flowers to bend and gather into folds over an expanse of seventeen by fifteen feet. The process

of stitching the rose petals required the help of numerous assistants working countless hours, sewing one petal to the next with infinite care. The effort necessitated slow, laborious, repeated actions reminiscent of the exacting work undertaken to produce antique tapestries. Without the suturing by hand, Salcedo's rose petal textile could not have been made and the implication of this labor-intensive process, essential to its creation, lends further weight to its aesthetic and political statement.[229] This piece and most of her works are created through a series of steps necessitating the help of skilled manual labor by numerous assistants, and the resulting creation, such as *A Flor de Piel*, reveals the demanding process upon viewing its surface. Salcedo created a first and second version of this piece in 2012. The third version was made in 2013 incorporating petroleum, as well as glycerine, collagen and waxes to preserve the flowers. In addition, a flexible membrane composed of biofilm was sewn beneath the stitched quilt of petals to provide a stable backing.[230] The interweaving of the hand-stitched flowers with the chemicals refined to maintain the labors of many fingers, epitomizes the singularity of Salcedo's practice:

[229] This need to employ numerous assistants literally to build the piece, using the traditional skill of sewing by hand, raises a series of questions relating to the artist's work as a memorial to the anonymous victims, those largely ignored and on the margins in society, as one built by the helping hands of numerous assistants. Her chosen means of production necessitates the efforts of many workers, she could not create this work on her own due to the complicated nature and laborious method of production required for its realization. At no time does Salcedo suggest that she constructs her pieces alone. From her cement filled furniture of weight and scale impossible for her to construct without help, to the building of tables with soil between and to the sewing of flower petals, the work of assistants in her studio has been essential to the creation of her pieces, over the last 15 years or more. She creates her pieces largely within her studio in Bogotá, where the economic feasibility of hiring the number of assistants necessary is more readily attainable than it would be in major metropolitan areas in the United States and Europe. Having said this, it is worth noting that she creates pieces which address those forgotten by society by relying on the hands of many assistants, most of whom are architects, engineers and artists by training. Salcedo's awareness of political violence stems from her experience living in Colombia and her complex working process , requiring skilled, manual labor by numerous helpers is possible because she lives in a culture in which workers are plentiful and affordable.

[230] Doris Salcedo, interview by author, April 23, 2013, Cambridge, MA and June 25, 2013, New York, NY. Carolyn Alexander, email to author, September 7, 2013, explains the working process entailed in preserving the sewn rose petals in the state of softness and deep red hue apparent in the final work. The petals go through: "1st stage: immersion in a petroleum solution with a hint of pigment for 20 days in dark area. 2nd stage: pressed between two sheets of cardboard with silicon added which gradually replaces the petroleum. 10-15 days. Press used. 3rd stage: petals are taken to a second press. Glycerine, collagen and water based pigments added. 20 days. 4th stage: Each petal goes through sealing process using 3 types of waxes."

the demanding process of creating by hand, the focus on the qualities of chosen materials and the application of research to frame and fix her creation. Her work, on one level, demonstrates the dichotomy that characterizes her country: the extremes of historically driven, political violence and the continuing quality and skills of production that result in a work of art that has been fastidiously created, utilizing cutting-edge technology.

A Flor de Piel, although grounded in the issues and approach Salcedo has embraced throughout her artistic career, pushes the definition of sculpture and the object, the idea of the temporal, and the limits of materiality in a work that shifts between these lines. For these reasons, this piece is the strongest and most audacious of her career. Sculptures she has conceived from the experiences of individuals and the memories victims share, are created as an expression of the private mourning the survivors, the families and the loved ones bear. The image she envisions and the process she undertakes to build each piece, are her gestures towards these individuals who embody the loss faced by many. Salcedo developed the idea for *A Flor de Piel* following similar steps, but she chose the most fragile material she has yet employed in her practice, and she devised a way to force this fugitive matter to remain in a suspended state neither dead nor alive, neither fresh nor withered. She chose a material connected to the ritual of honoring the dead, the flowers placed on the grave or given to the surviving loved ones, symbolizing the remembrance of the deceased with a vivid, momentary gathering of fresh blossoms. Salcedo selected the flower with particular significance in Colombia, the rose, which is one of the country's principal exports and as such important to the national economy. And she chose a process suited to the realities of her nation, where hand wrought work is a staple part of the culture and help is abundant and affordable; she hired numerous skilled assistants to hand-stitch the thousands of petals into a vast quilt.

The rose resonates for Salcedo on various levels. It is the flower she and a group of fellow artists hung in sorrow, along the wall outside the home of the humorist, Jaime Garzon after his assassination during the drug wars in August 1999. They placed 5000 red roses along a 150 meter wall as a public gesture of homage, in what Salcedo described as "…an ephemeral site of memory."[231] *A Flor de Piel*, conceived for an enclosed, indoor space suggests a memorial as well, framed by the walls and the ceiling, the quilt of stitched, blood red petals appears uncanny, like a skin rumpled in folds, as if shrouding the victim's body beneath its spread over the floor.

Hence, the artist chose that which signifies an act of impermanent memorial and mourning, but sought to make the gesture one that defies the flower's natural properties and the related social expectations. By doing so, she challenges the medium and literally gathers the ephemeral, suturing it together into a membrane that without the intervention of science could not endure. As it is, the longevity of the shroud's hue, suppleness and scale remains uncertain. It is, in a sense, a performative piece; it exists as an act of remembrance that may wither, leaving the scar from the wound she made flesh. She took that risk in her push to make materials alone, without pictorializing, convey her address on political violence. Each step of her trajectory, Salcedo has sought challenging sites, materials and issues, those nearly impossible to resolve technically as well as aesthetically; and this artistic approach imparts the struggle of existence within a world burdened by civil war. She uses materiality to express what cannot be said or has not been acknowledged in the public sphere.

Salcedo's remembrance of the unburied dead and the site of mourning has grown from the worn, domestic furniture and objects interwoven with the threads, zippers and bone traces of

[231] Carlos Basualdo, "Interview: Carlos Basualdo in conversation with Doris Salcedo," in *Doris Salcedo*, ed. Nancy Princenthal, Carolos Basualdo, Andreas Huyssen (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 33.

the victims, to increasingly ephemeral and performative expressions. The installation/performance *Nov. 6-7* 2002, the works, *Shibboleth 2007*, *Plegaria Muda* 2008-10, and *A Flor de Piel* 2012-13, are pieces that change with time, like the memories and sorrow experienced by survivors which evolve over the passage of weeks and years. In *Nov. 6-7* the chairs kept descending until a collection of many of them covered the sides of the Colombian Palace of Justice at the conclusion of the performance. The fissure that split the vast expanse of the cement floor of Turbine Hall, in *Shibboleth* at the Tate Modern, was filled upon the show's closure, leaving a discolored scar across the concrete comparable to a sutured wound. The grass continued to grow, and had to be cut as it slowly altered the tables in *Plegaria Muda.* Finally, the rose petals in *A Flor de Piel* could change in color, texture and shape, thus affecting the structure, materiality and the nature of her expression. This last piece has become and is becoming, as the Spanish title translates, something is about to appear, to happen; it is imminent. The rose petals ephemeralness imparts the fragility of the wound and the possibility of its disintegration despite the scientific processes she undertook to preserve the membrane of deep red petals in a suspended state. This potential for physical change in the shroud, exemplifies the artist's statement of presenting but denying the chance for one to touch the tortured body. The delicate textile of veined, red petals, this materiality conjures a presence beneath the folds. But it is an absence, nothing is there and the language of materials both realizes the wounded victim and the impermanence of the means conveying this loss. It is the impossibility of securing the presence of the absent body and the skin of petals in a lasting physical state that confounds the viewer, and defines the success of this work.

A Flor de Piel, grows from her previous pieces but challenges everything she has done before. It defies the lines separating one genre from another and reflects on the visual proposals

and notions of sculpture and materiality she has explored over the last twenty-five years by projecting a bold, palpable realization of what cannot be expressed. There lies its success, both on its own and within the context of her oeuvre. She forces a delicate, short-lived presence to undergo radical measures and to endure. She pierces the delicate veined petals of roses with a needle, pulls thread through the holes and sutures one tender petal to another by hand, creating a monumental tapestry. She finds a way to suspend the natural properties of roses, allowing them to be sewn, then to be held in a state neither fresh nor decaying, in a deep red hue and flexible within a transparent film. The piece embodies time as a material presence; it is the moment just before the decay begins, similar to the theme of *vanitas* in the Dutch still life paintings when mortality was suggested through the rendering of a bountiful array of fruit, vegetables and game on the cusp of spoiling.[232] Salcedo's rose petal textile evokes times passage through the unnaturally fixed state of the fragile blossoms; the fact that they have not decomposed suggests that time has stopped. However, the possibility that the rose petals will dry and disintegrate makes this piece a momentary expression which, unlike a temporary installation, she deliberately sought to preserve but whose permanence cannot be assured. Hence the skin of roses appears as an ephemeral materiality, not quite an object, but a work that acts as a performative expression of the absent body, almost within reach, but ultimately, impossible to touch in its impermanent state. *A Flor de Piel* builds from her previous work, although it crosses genres, testing not only the limits of materials, but her capacity to convey under these constraints the hidden wounds wrought by political violence.

Over the course of her career, Doris Salcedo has created sculptures and installations focusing on civil war in Colombia and in the world, relying on materials to impart the

[232] Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 149.

imminence of violence and the hidden wounds and victims that remain. This thesis examined the means, the process and the aesthetic strategies defining her practice, analyzing the ways in which she conveys: the sense of absence and the memory left by violent, political ends without pictorializing, but managing to impart the loss to viewers across cultures and countries. Living since birth in Bogotá, the source for her work stems from this experience within a nation of historical and continued civil violence: listening to the testimonies of victims, tragic accounts that she absorbs, then draws upon to conceive the piece and select the materials she obsessively melds, scrapes, layers and stitches to realize her vision. The ideas of Beatriz González, as well as of Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp were considered to varying degrees, and either embraced or contested by Salcedo as they suited her sculptural project. She chose sculpture as her medium and throughout her career, Salcedo's emphasis on materials and the process undertaken to create her statement have defined her practice. The six aesthetic strategies I present in this thesis explain the ways in which she addresses violence wrought by politics without narrative or figurative images. They establish a framework by which to perceive her language of materials.

Materiality is central to Salcedo's address, as she confronts violence and the politics behind it; materials and the surface she meticulously builds from them reveal her process and the trace. What she creates is like a skin, as *A Flor de Piel* demonstrates. Salcedo's legacy centers on political violence, and the visual weight, scope and challenge she poses by working with materials, ephemeral or solid, defies the line between genres. She conceives a skin and a presence, a memorial to the unburied dead of quiet but fierce materiality. Ultimately, Salcedo's sculptures realize what one of her favorite poets, Paul Celan, evokes in his verse:

A strange lostness was
palpably present, almost

you would
have lived.[233]

[233] Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan,* trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1972), 149.

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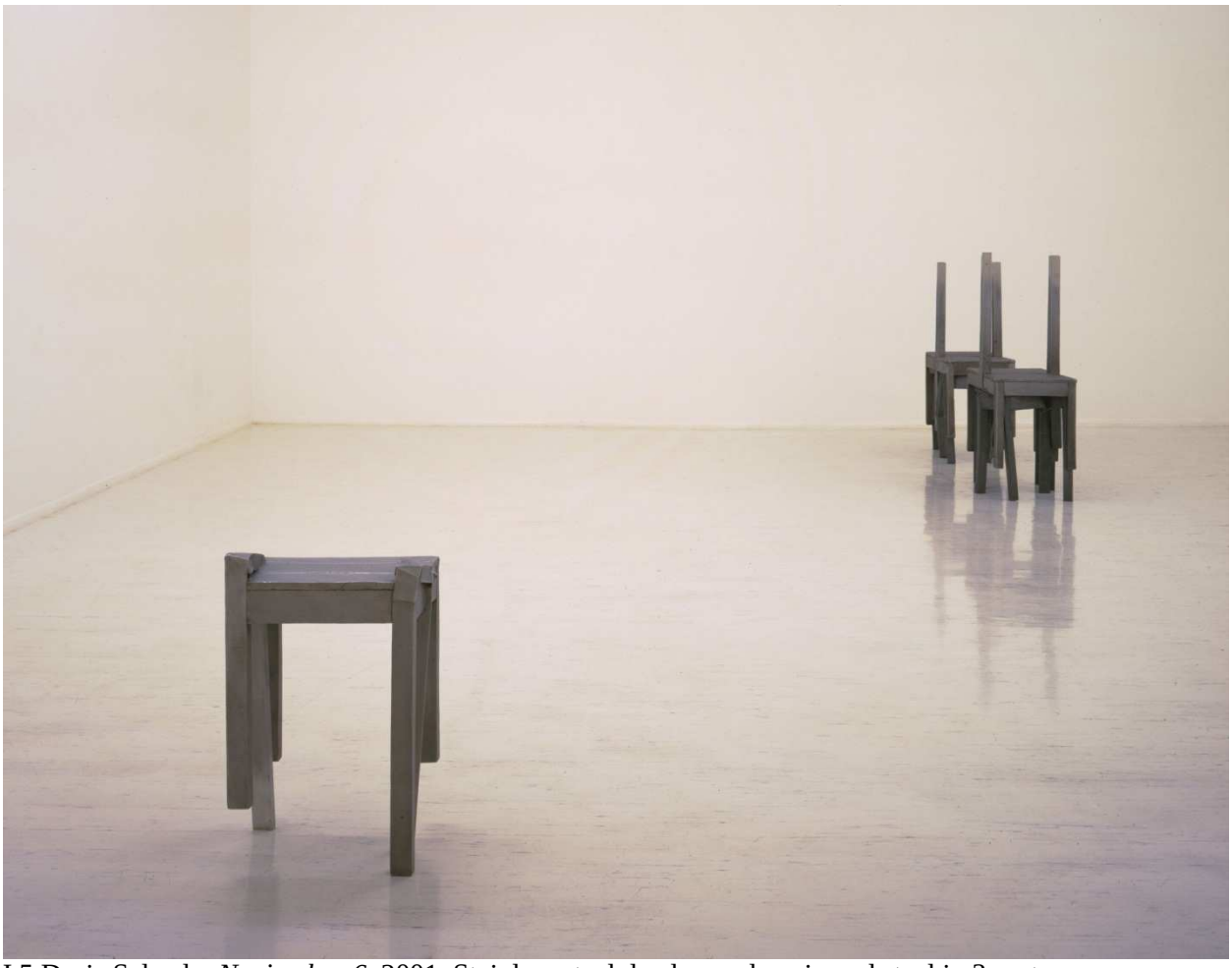
Images

I.1 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1995. Wood, concrete, steel, cloth and leather. 241.3 x 104 x 45.7 cm

I.2 Doris Salcedo, *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (detail), 1997. Wood, cloth, hair and glue. 80 x 245 x 98 cm.

I.3 Doris Salcedo, *La Casa Viuda IV* (detail), 1994. Wood, fabric, and bones. 257.5 x 46.5 x 33 cm.

I.4 Doris Salcedo, *Atrabilarios*, 1992-2004. Shoes, animal fiber, and surgical thread



I.5 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6*, 2001. Stainless steel, lead, wood, resin and steel in 3 parts

I.6 Beatriz Gonzalez, *Naturaleza casi muerta*, 1970. Enamel on laminated metal on assembled metal furniture. 125 x 125 x 95 cm.

I.7 Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*, 1964. Wooden chair with fat. 90 x 30 x 30 cm.

I.8 Doris Salcedo, Installation, Carnegie International, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1996

I.9 Doris Salcedo, installation for the 8th international Istanbul Biennial, 2003

I.10 Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda*, 2008-2010. Wood, mineral compound, metal, and grass

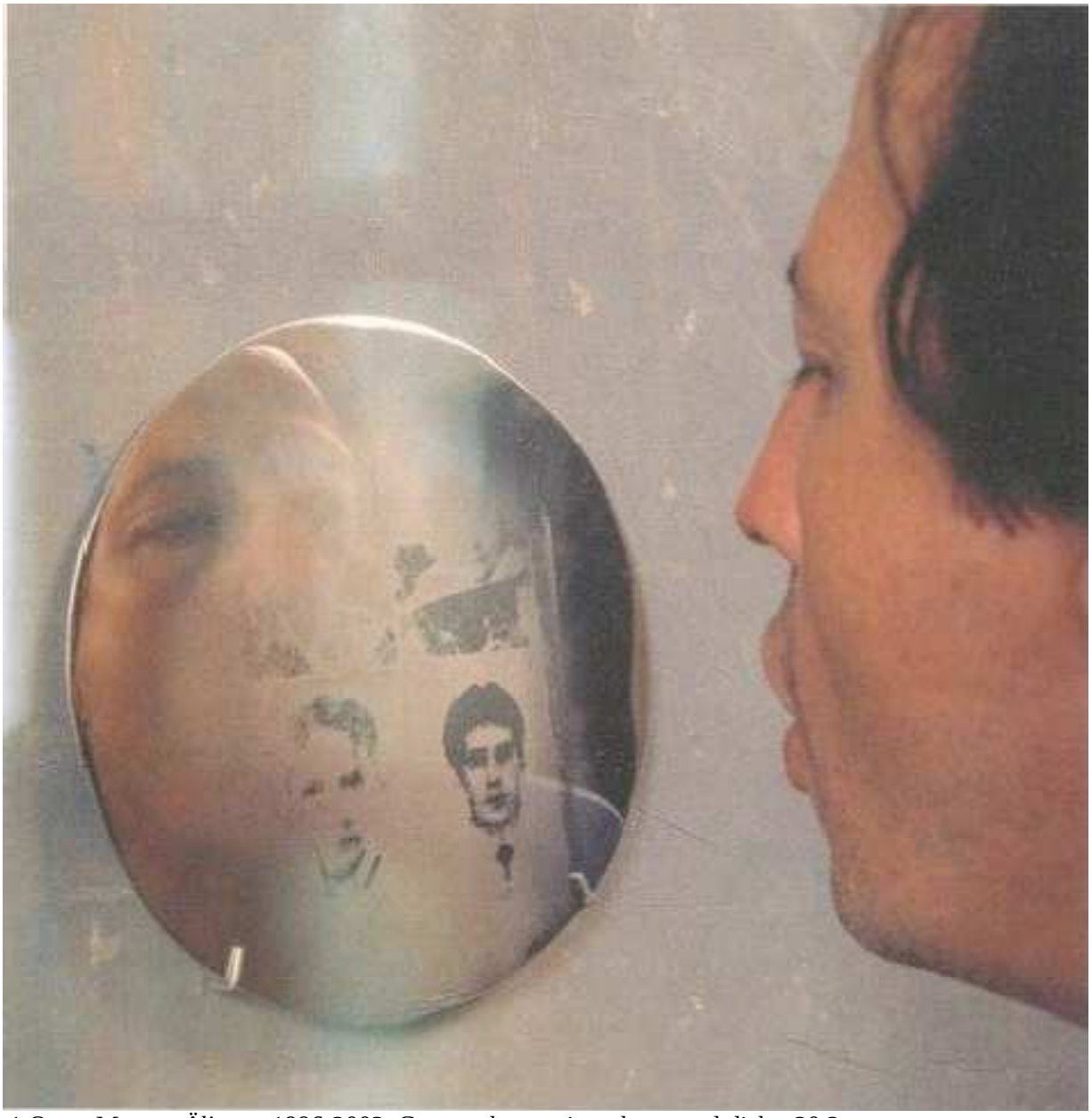
I.11 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002. Bogotá, Colombia

I.13 Doris Salcedo, *Tenebrae Noviembre 7, 1985*, 1999-2000. Lead and steel in 39 parts. 4.16 x 5.27 m.

I.14 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1988. Iron, steel, wax, and fabric. 96 x 97 x 45 cm.

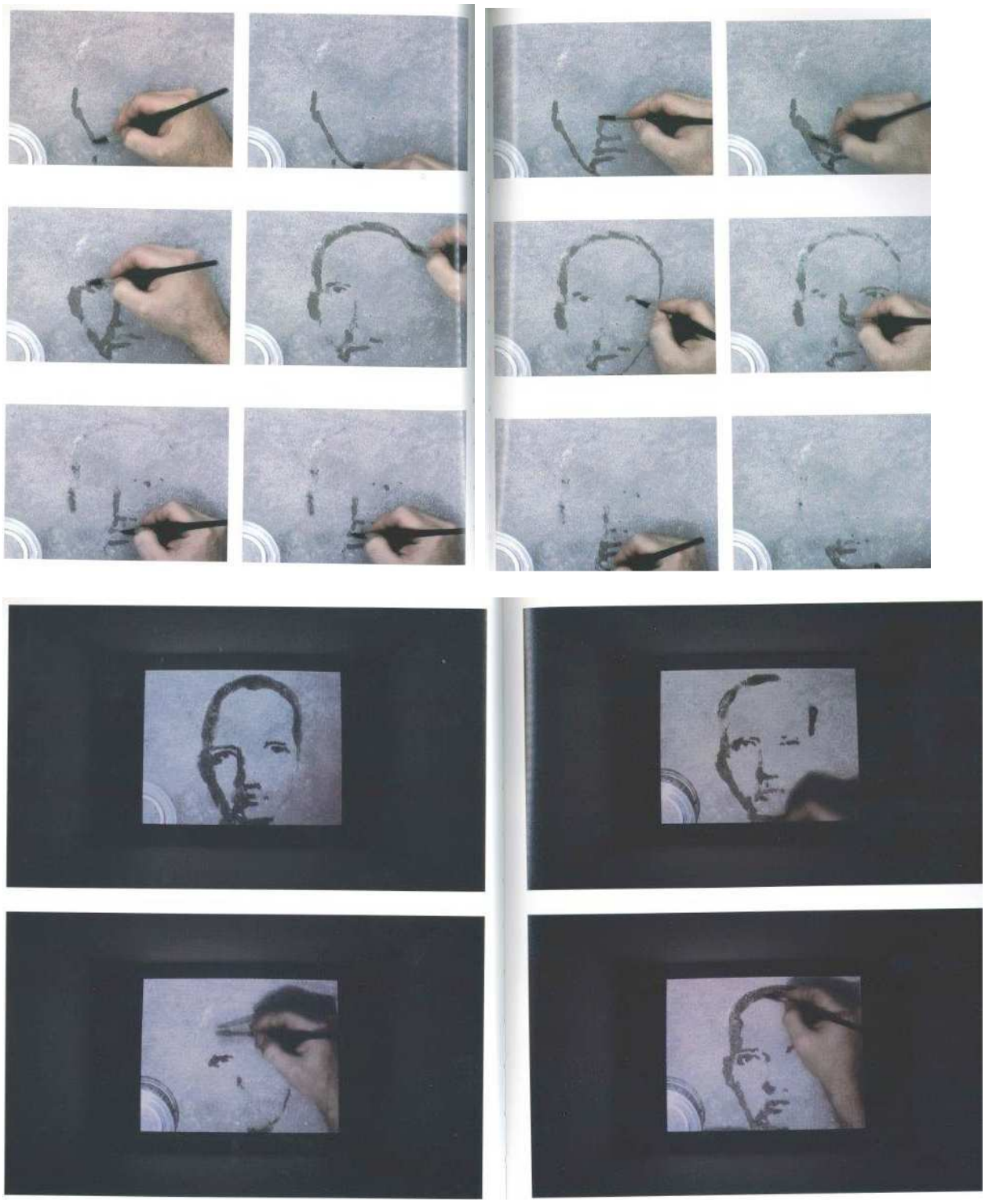
I.15 Doris Salcedo, *Thou-less* (detail), 2004-2005. Stainless steel. 107 x 41 x 38 cm.

I.16 Doris Salcedo, *Neither*, 2004. Painted drywall and metal

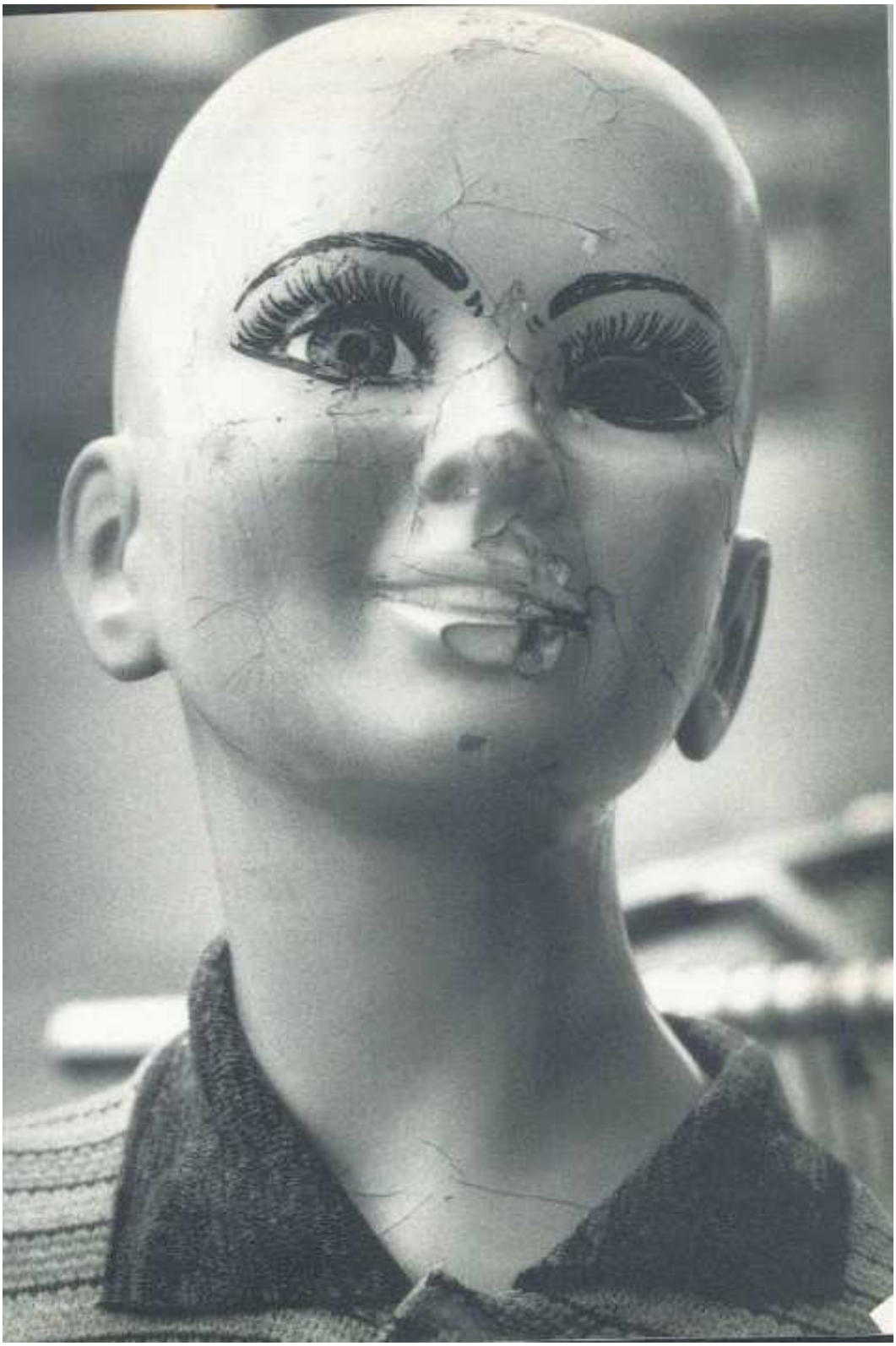


1.1 Oscar Munoz, *Äliento,* 1996-2002. Grease photoserigraph on steel disks. 20.2 cm.

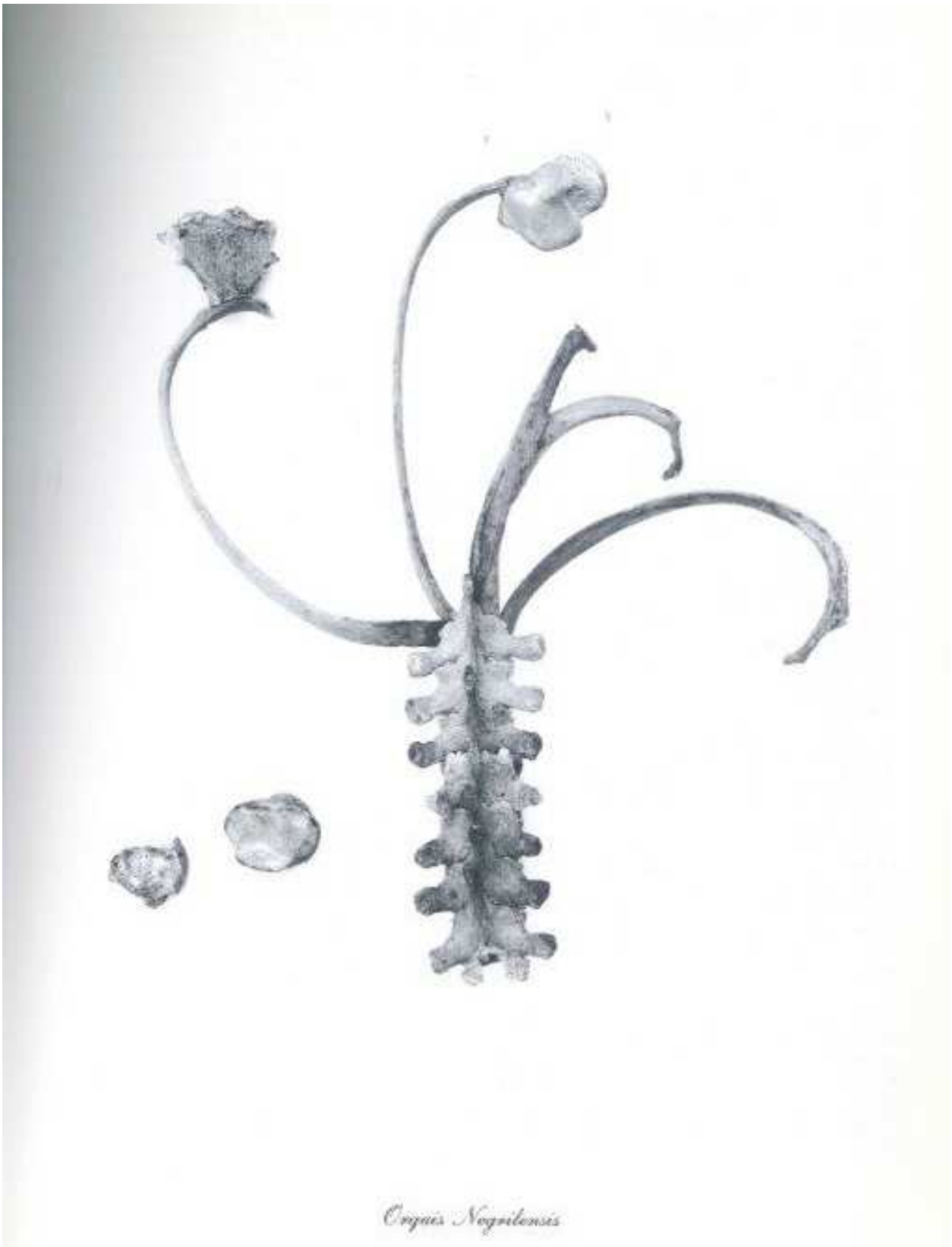
1.2 Oscar Munoz, *Biografias No. 3* and *No. 6*, 2002. Video installation, aluminum sink, wooden base, loudspeaker. 32 x 132 cm.



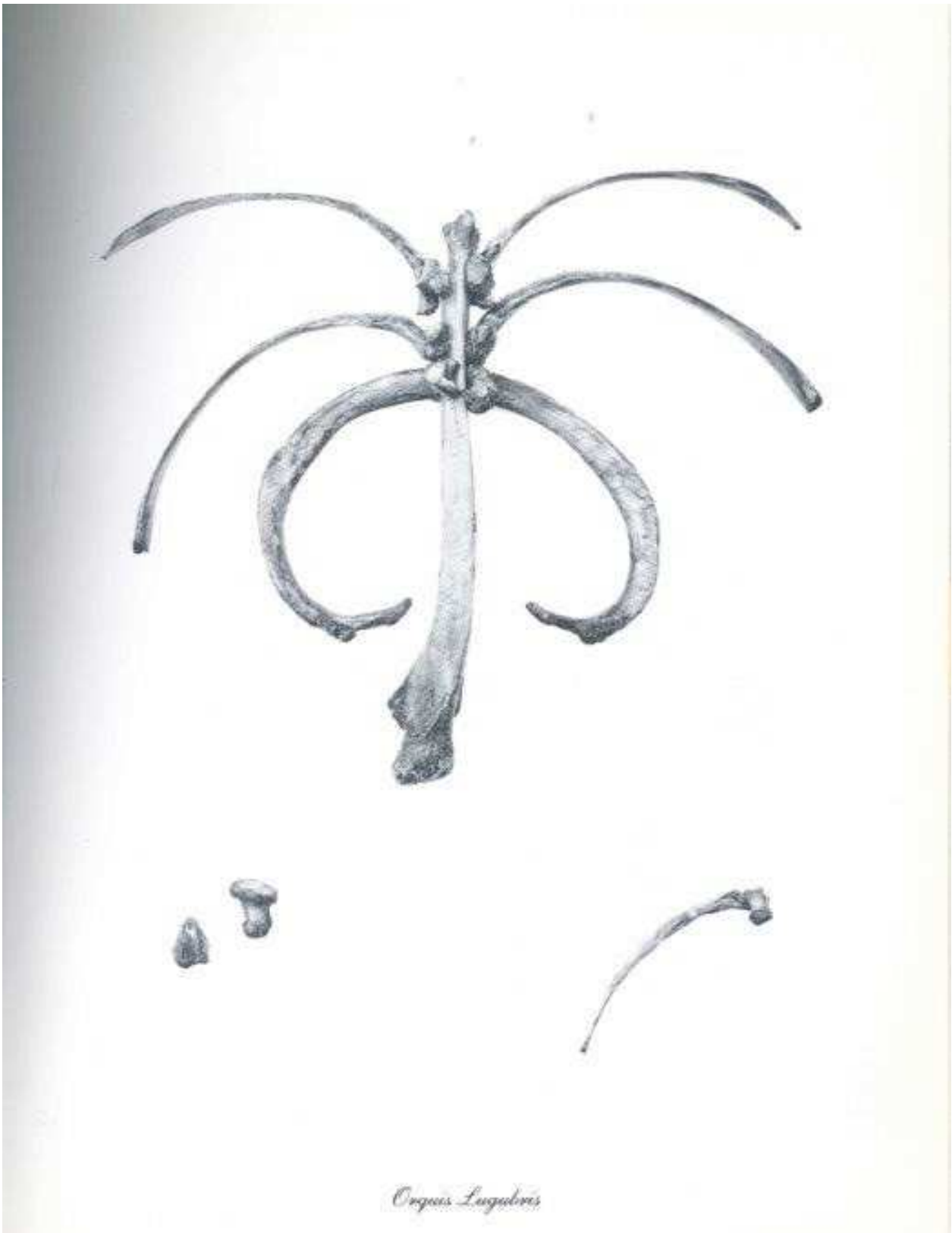
1.3 Munoz, *Re/Trato*, 2003. Video stills



1.4 Juan Manual Echavarria, *#1*, from the series *Retratos/Portraits*, 1996. Gelatin silver print. 35.4 x 27.9 cm.



1.5 Juan Manual Echavarria, *Orquis Negrilensis*, from the series *Corte de Florero/ Flower Vase Cut*, 1997. Gelatin silver print. 50.5 x 40.7 cm.



1.6 Juan Manual Echavarria, *Orquis Lugubris,* from the series *Corte de Florero/Flower Vase Cut,* 1997. Gelatin silver print. 50.5 x 40.7 cm.

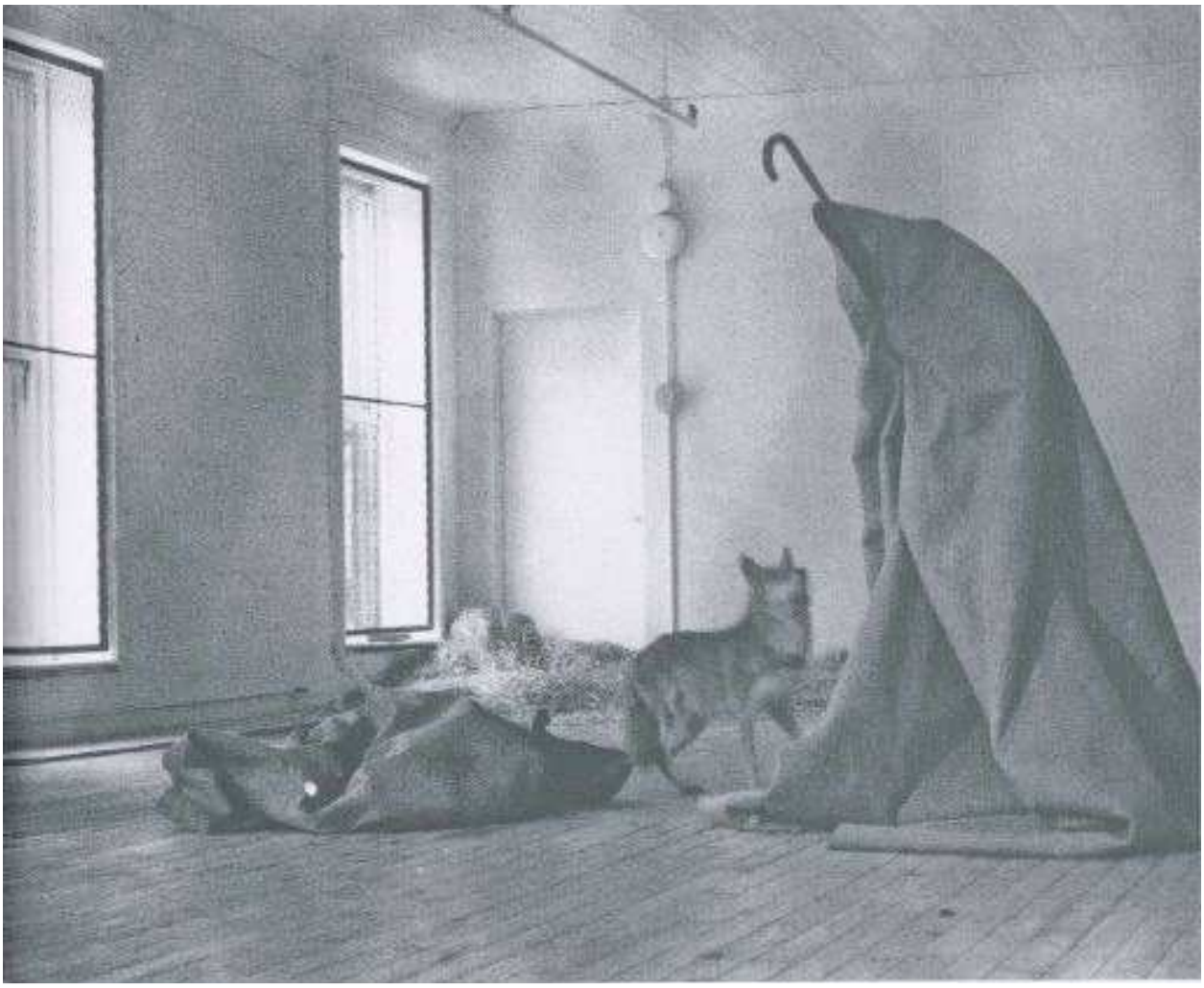
1.7 Juan Manual Echavarria, *Bandeja de Bolivar/Bolivar's Platter*, 1999. Video stills

2.1 Beatriz Gonzalez, *Photo Studio 1*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 70 x 80 cm.

2.2 Beatriz Gonzalez, *Apuntes para la historia extensa I*, 1967. Enamel on metal plate. 100 x 80 x 8 cm.

2.3 Beatriz Gonzalez, *Apuntes para la historia extensa II*, 1967. Enamel on metal plate. 100 x 80 x 8 cm.

2.4 Beatriz Gonzalez, *La Ultima Mesa/The Last Supper*, 1970. Enamel on laminated metal on assembled metal furniture. 105 x 205 x 75 cm.



2.5 Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974. Performance

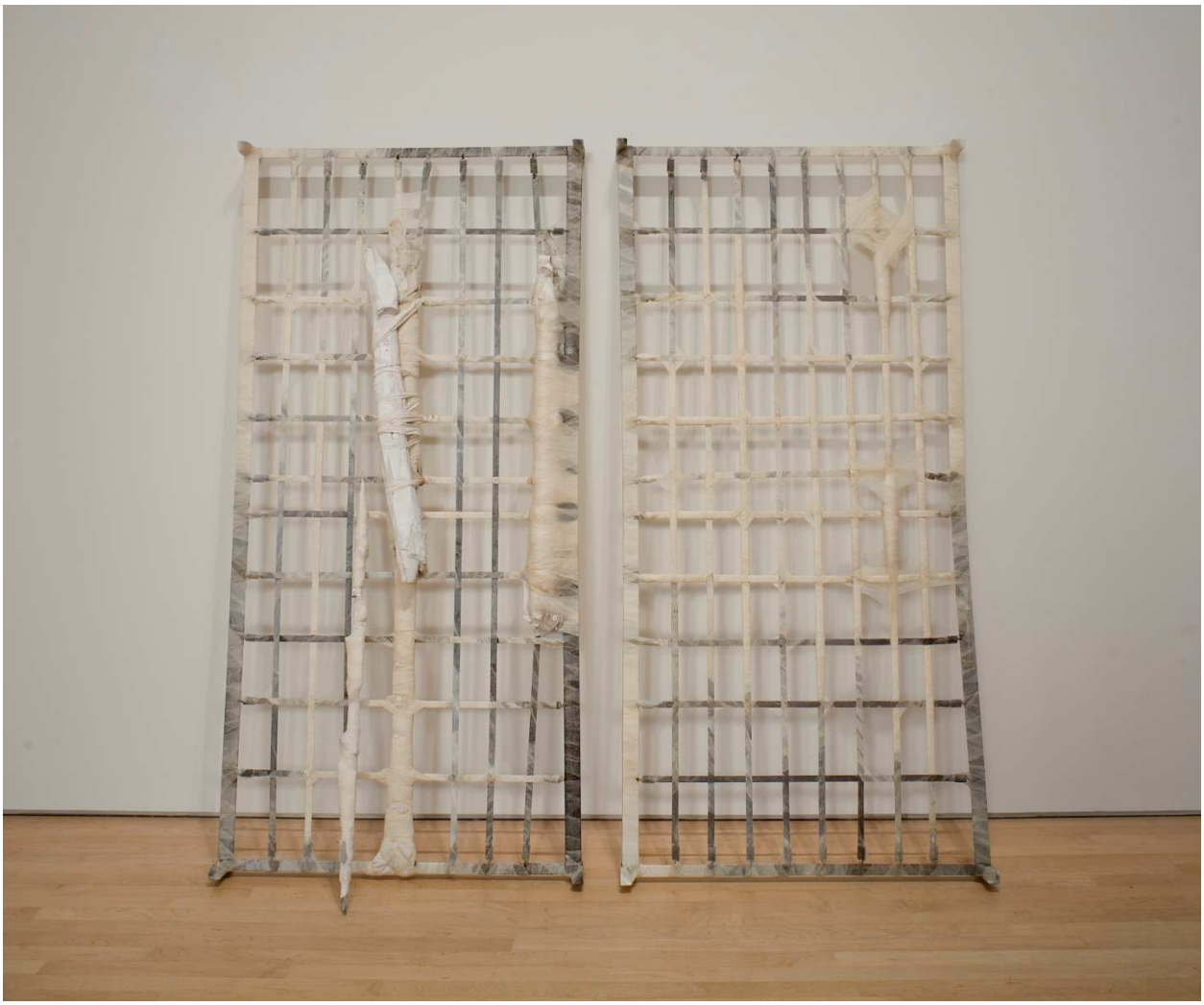
2.6 Joseph Beuys, *Felt Suit*, 1970. Wool felt with ink stamp. 177 x 100 cm.

2.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1963. Porcelain. 33 x 42 x 52 cm.

2.8 Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913/1960. Wood and iron. 135 x 63 cm.

3.1 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1986. Metal, plastic, and animal fiber. 188 x 241 x 44.5 cm.

3.2 Doris Salcedo, *Casa Viuda II* (detail), 1994. Wood, fabric, and bones. 259.7 x 79.7 x 60.3 cm.



3.3 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1989-1993. Animal fiber, plaster and steel in three parts. 200 x 177.8 x 10.2 cm.

3.4 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998. Wood, concrete, glass, cloth and metal. 183.5 x 99.5 x 33 cm.

3.5 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998. Wood, cement, and metal. 214 x 149.5 x 57 cm.

3.6 Doris Salcedo, *Casa Viuda II* (detail), 1993-1994. Wood, fabric, metal and bone. 259.7 x 79.7 x 60.3 cm.

3.7 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1995. Wood, concrete, cloth and steel. 197 x 120 x 188 cm.

3.8 Doris Salcedo, *Casa Viuda I*, 1992-1994. Wood and fabric. 257.8 x 38.7 x 59.7 cm.

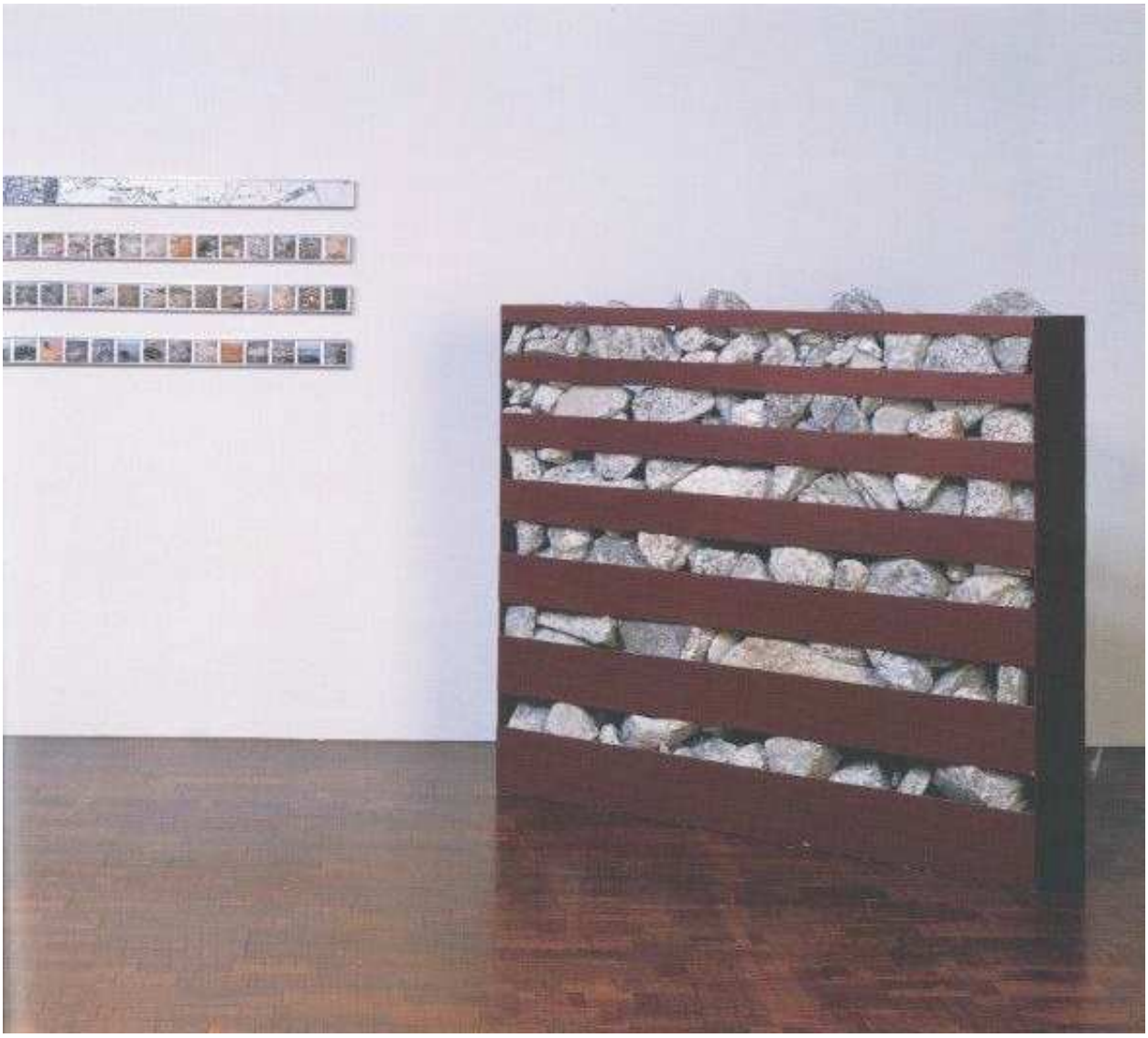
3.9 Doris Salcedo, *Unland: Irreversible Witness* (detail), 1995-1998. Wood, cloth, metal, and hair. 112 x 249 x 89 cm.

3.10 Doris Salcedo, *Thou-less* (detail), 2004-2005. Stainless steel. 107 x 122 x 70 cm.

3.11 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1990. Wood, concrete, and steel. 72.5 m 55 x 45.5 cm.

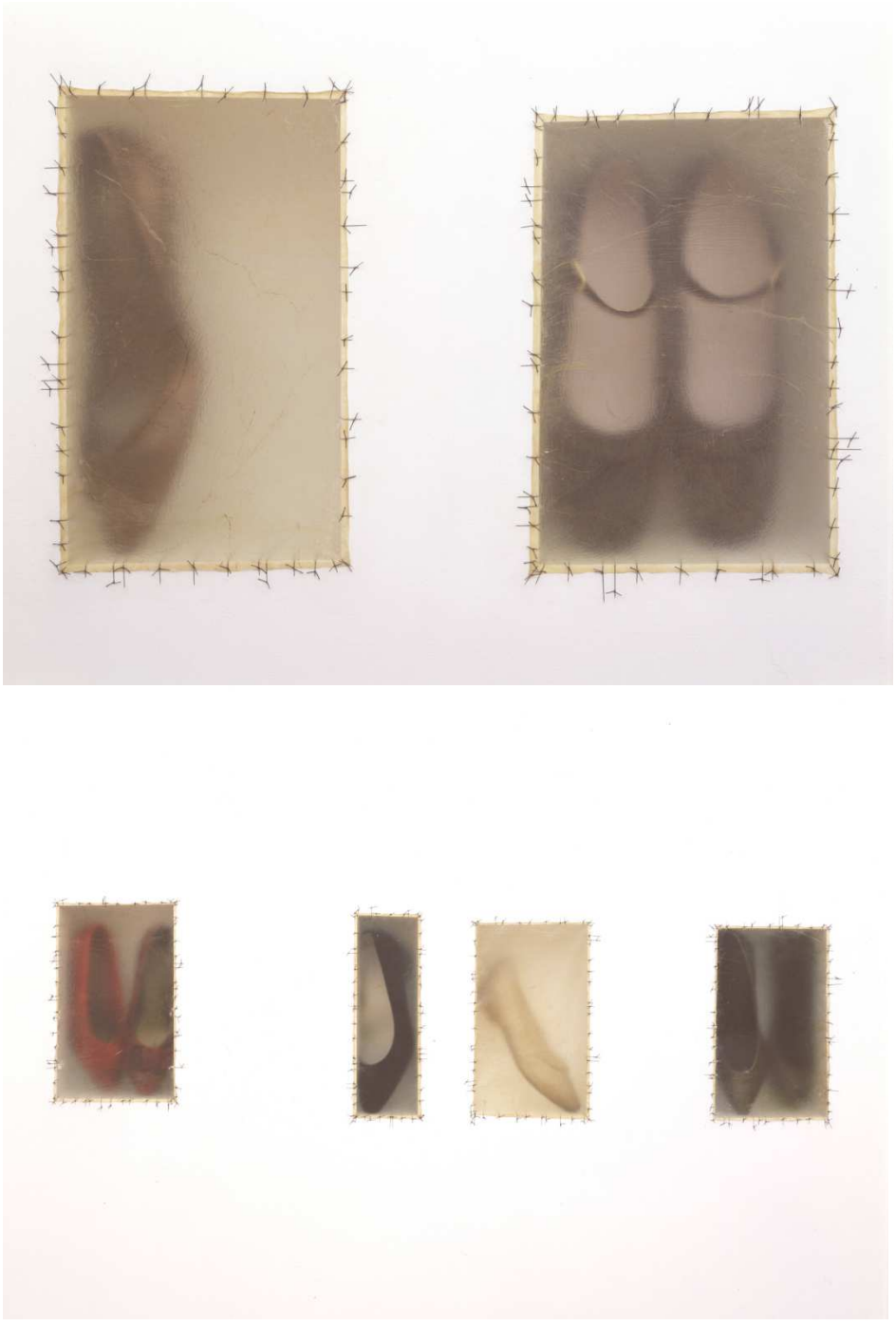
3.12 Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007. Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. Concrete and metal

3.13 Doris Salcedo, *Casa Viuda IV*, 1994. Wood, fabric and bones. 257.5 x 46.5 x 33 cm.



3.14 Robert Smithson, *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage"' Bayonne, New Jersey*, 1968. Painted aluminum container with broken concrete, framed map, and photo panels. Cage: 149.86 x 177.8 x 31.75 cm. Panels: 9.5 x 124.5 cm.

3.15 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998. Wood, concrete, and metal. 181 x 124.5 x 63.5 cm.



3.16 Doris Salcedo, *Atrabilarios* (details), 1992-2004. Shoes, animal fiber, and surgical thread.

3.17 Christian Boltanski, *Untitled Reserve,* 1989. Clothes, black and white photographs, wires and lights. 282 x 163 x 17.8 cm.

3.18 Doris Salcedo, *Unland* installation, 1998. SITE Santa Fe

3.19 Doris Salcedo, *Unland: Orphan's Tunic*, 1998. Wood, cloth, hair, and glue. 80 x 245 x 98 cm.

3.20 Doris Salcedo, *Unland: Irreversible Witness*, 1998. Wood, cloth, hair, and glue. 112 x 249 x 89 cm.

3.21 Doris Salcedo, *Thou-less*, 2004-2005. Stainless steel

3.22 Doris Salcedo, installation for the 8th international Istanbul Biennial (detail), 2003. Wood

3.23 Doris Salcedo, *Abyss*, 2005. Brick, cement, steel, and epoxy resin. 441 x 1386 x 1624 cm.

3.24 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002. Bogotá, Colombia. Performance still

3.25 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002. Bogotá, Colombia. Performance still

3.26 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002. Bogotá, Colombia. Performance still

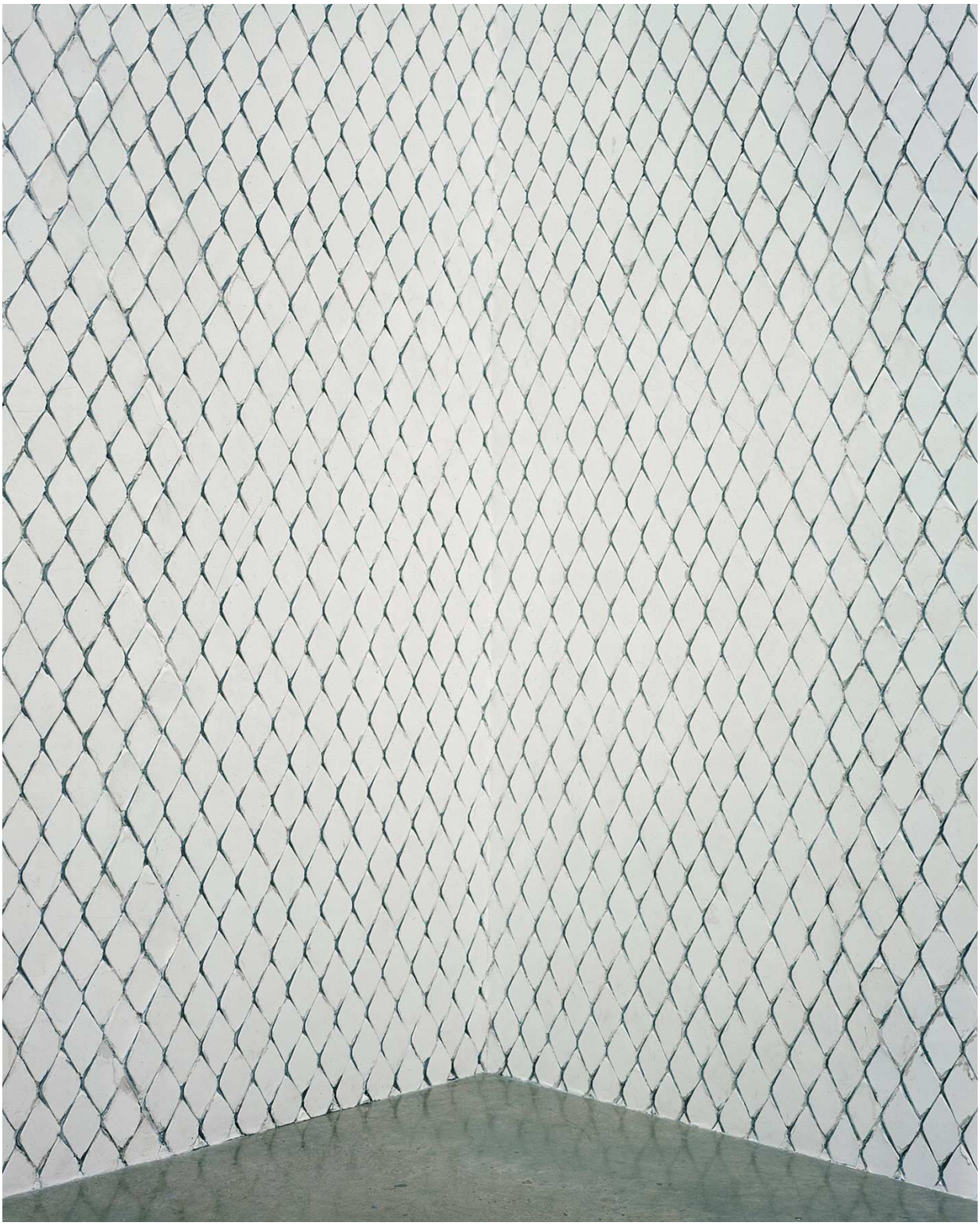
3.27 Doris Salcedo, *Tenebrae Noviembre 7* (detail), *1985*, 1999-2000. Lead and steel in 39 parts. 4.16 x 5.27 m.

3.28 Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda* (detail), 2008-2010. Wood, mineral compound, metal, and grass

3.29 Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda*, 2008-2010. Wood, mineral compound, metal, and grass

3.30 Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda* , 2008-2010. Wood, mineral compound, metal, and grass

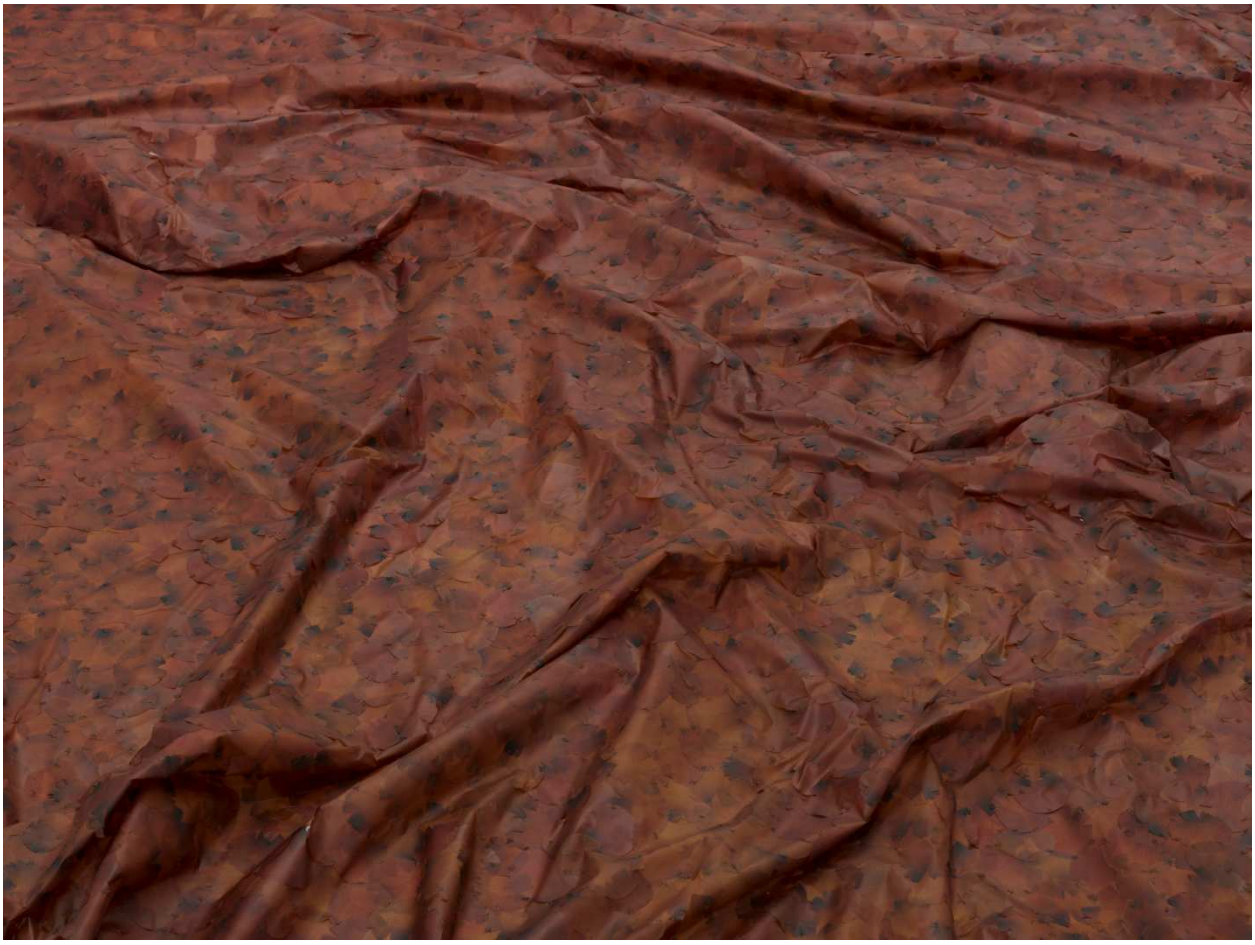
3.31 Doris Salcedo, *Noviembre 6*, 2001, Stainless steel, lead, wood, resin, and steel in 3 parts. Dimensions variable.



3.32 Doris Salcedo, *Neither* (detail), 2004. Painted drywall and metal. 494 x 740 x 1500 cm.

3.33 Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2007. Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. Concrete and metal

4.1 Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel*, 2012. Rose petals and thread. Dimensions variable.



4.2 Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel* (detail), 2012. Rose petals and thread. Dimensions variable.

4.3 Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel*, 2012. Rose petals and thread. Dimensions variable.