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Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art

Mieke Bal

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Mieke Bal : Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art:

5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Long-winded, repetitiveBy smDoris Salcedo is a very interesting Colombian artist and really deserves an intelligent monograph on her work and how it bears witness to political violence. Unfortunately, this is not it. The book by Mieke Bal is not without insight, the chapter headings suggest some very interesting issues about the artist's work: Acts of memory, metaphor, anthropomorphism. The style of writing, however, is incredibly long-winded and often very repetitive. Bal seems to circle round the work, making much of approaches and ideas she is not going to follow or analyse, but there is little by way of solid explication of her method. When she does engage directly with Salcedo's art the analysis is laboured but ultimately fairly pedestrian. Much of the book is trying to explain Salcedo's approach to political art, but this issue remains vague and ill-defined. At one point in the book (p, 179), Bal finally indicates that the closest she will get to articulating why the work is political is that it allows one to respond in whatever way one feels is appropriate. This is hardly ground-

breaking stuff. The Phaidon book on the artist and the catalogue Unland offer better scholarly interpretations of the artist's work.¹ of 3 people found the following review helpful. Haunting review of difficult work By Carolin K. Shining
The author's review, begun at the J. Paul Getty research center, is a mysterious and elegiac work. As an author, Bal does not discuss the-Columbian born Doris Salcedo's entire body of work, but instead dissects particular pieces and the themes they bring into a discussion of emptiness, death and mourning. In the section on "Untitled Furniture (Armoire)", the use of concrete filling a glass armoire raises many rhetorical questions on death, existence who exactly is buried in the spaces created inside and outside of the concrete. Mixing personal experiences with the artist's work and incorporating an understanding of the artist's own traumatic past, this book is a jumping-off point into the study of modern art, loss and grief. While not an encyclopedia, there is plenty of grist to chew on, and I recommend this book for anyone seeking to further their study of the "why" and "what" of the politics of memory.

Doris Salcedo, a Colombian-born artist, addresses the politics of memory and forgetting in work that embraces fraught situations in dangerous places. Noted critic and theorist Mieke Bal narrates between the disciplines of contemporary culture in order to boldly reimagine the role of the visual arts. Both women are pathbreaking figures, globally renowned and widely respected. Doris Salcedo, meet Mieke Bal. In *Of What One Cannot Speak*, Bal leads us into intimate encounters with Salcedo's art, encouraging us to consider each work as a "theoretical object" that invites—and demands—certain kinds of considerations about history, death, erasure, and grief. Bal ranges widely through Salcedo's work, from Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios* series—in which the artist uses worn shoes to retrace *los desaparecidos* ("the disappeared") from nations like Argentina, Chile, and Colombia—to *Shibboleth*, Salcedo's once-in-a-lifetime commission by the Tate Modern, for which she created a rupture, as if by earthquake, that stretched the length of the museum hall's concrete floor. In each instance, Salcedo's installations speak for themselves, utilizing household items, human bones, and common domestic architecture to explore the silent spaces between violence, trauma, and identity. Yet Bal draws out even deeper responses to the work, questioning the nature of political art altogether and introducing concepts of metaphor, time, and space in order to contend with Salcedo's powerful sculptures and installations. An unforgettable fusion of art and essay, *Of What One Cannot Speak* takes us to the very core of events we are capable of remembering—yet still uncomfortably cannot speak aloud.

After illuminating the work of Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Louise Bourgeois, Balthus, and other modern artists, Mieke Bal again demonstrates her extraordinary flair for cultural criticism in taking on the work of Doris Salcedo, exploring the philosophical and aesthetic stakes of this committed political art and the relation between beauty, violence, and memory. A tour de force.