



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

*Mieke Bal*

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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.

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