

WHITE CUBE

Doris Salcedo

28 September – 11 November 2018

White Cube Bermondsey

'The experience of an individual is always my point of departure. But during the process of making an artwork, I must maintain a distance in order to leave that person intact, untouched. And from there, as soon as I begin working, everything enters into the paradoxical terrain of art.'

– Doris Salcedo, *A Work in Mourning*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Chicago University Press, 2015

White Cube is pleased to present a major exhibition of work by Doris Salcedo at Bermondsey. Featuring the large-scale installation *Palimpsest* (2013 – 17) and a new series of sculptures entitled *Tabula Rasa* (2018), the exhibition reflects Salcedo's continued focus on the experience of mourning and the connection between violence, anonymity and public space.

In her work Salcedo questions and exposes trauma by exploring its capacity to reveal and connect with grief, carving out a space for mourning that is both poignant and insistent. 'My work is about the memory of experience, which is always vanishing, not about experiences taken from life', she has said. In *Palimpsest*, presented in the South Galleries, she deals with the subject of Europe's migrant crisis and the many who have fled from Africa or the Middle East over the past 20 years and drowned in the Mediterranean or Adriatic attempting to cross into Europe. Produced initially for the Palacio de Cristal, Centro de Arte Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, the installation consists of a floor of rectangular stone slabs covering the entire gallery space, on which the names of over 300 victims temporarily and intermittently appear. The names are first spelled out in sand (for those who died prior to 2010) and then in delicate droplets of water (for those who died between 2011 – 16); a constant state of inscription and erasure that transforms the gallery into a potent and active memorial. Bringing to mind the image of a 'crying' earth, *Palimpsest* attempts to expose the inability to collectively mourn, highlighting the way memory functions in a society which is trained to forget, where each new tragedy erases the previous one.

For Salcedo, artistic process, research and the very act of making – often highly complex and technically difficult – is fundamental to the meaning of the work. In this case, a process manifested through five years of research to obtain names and stories that could offer up potential avenues of exploration. Through its literal act of naming, *Palimpsest* marks an important shift away from the artist's earlier work in which the individual particulars

of a victim's experience were not made explicit. Moreover, the work refers not just to the migrants who died, but also to those who live and mourn them, reminding us how loss defines life forever on. In an essay published in the accompanying catalogue, Andreas Huyssen has written: 'This is the palimpsest of memory itself, embodying the temporality of writing and erasing, the temporality of memory and forgetting, the temporality of intense and subsiding grief, even the temporality of the event of death itself...'

In the North Galleries, five new sculptures, part of a series entitled *Tabula Rasa*, deal with the theme of sexual violence and the loss of identity and fractured sense of self that will inevitably follow the act. Consisting of worn, wooden domestic tables subjected to a brutal and complex cycle of destruction and reconstruction, the sculptures suggest how, after such experiences, one can never be whole again since the self will always be changed or 'lacking'. After being strategically damaged and splintered, each table is painstakingly 'repaired', glued back together fragment by fragment over a lengthy period of time. Although at first glance appearing complete and 'whole', they remain, in fact, a fragile composite of tiny parts, rebuilt as faithfully as possible in an impossible act of recreation. In some, legs appear aggressively fractured, mended but still not properly registered and full of cracks and gaps, as if they have been worn through or eaten away, while their surfaces reveal a tactile network of fissures, like a map of past damage. Salcedo has described her sculpture as a 'topology of mourning'. 'The only possible response I can give in the face of irreparable absence is to produce images capable of conveying incompleteness, lack and emptiness', she has said.

BIOGRAPHY

Doris Salcedo was born in Bogotá, Colombia in 1958 where she continues to live and work. Her solo exhibitions include Palacio de Cristal, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2017); Harvard Art Museums, Massachusetts (2016); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, touring to Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and Pérez Art Museum, Miami (2015 – 16); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan (2014); Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico, touring to Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, White Cube, London and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (2011 – 13); Tate Modern, London (2007); Camden Arts Centre, London (2001); Tate Britain, London (1999); and New Museum, New York (1998).

Salcedo has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2014); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); Hayward Gallery, London (2010); MoMA PS1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York (2008); 8th International Istanbul Biennial (2003); Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (2002); and 24th Bienal de São Paulo (1998).

White Cube Bermondsey is open
Tuesday–Saturday, 10am – 6pm and Sunday, 12 – 6pm.
Admission is free.

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