

## Representing Violence in Colombia: Visual Arts, Memory and Counter-Memory

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**T**his essay's discussion takes place at the intersection of several topics: the Colombian visual arts of the 1990s, their representation of violence, and the arts market and its interest in topics of violence and trauma. It follows a circuitous route that begins with an examination of works dealing with violence by two well-known Colombian artists, both of whom routinely exhibit their work outside of Colombia: Doris Salcedo and Fernando Botero. The analysis focuses on the way the artworks articulate memory and national identity by exploring not only the content of the artwork, but also the context of its production and the mode of display. While belonging to different generations and having very different artistic trajectories and styles, a comparison of their particular approaches to issues of violence offers useful perspectives into the diverse modes of representation of a very delicate subject-matter that connects with topics of identity and individual/collective memory and simultaneously, with the inclinations of the arts market.

Latin American artists gained greater visibility in international art circuits in the 1980s-1990s (as the vast increase in the number of publications and sources of information, as well as touring exhibitions, attest) due to events such as the quincentenary of the "discovery" of America (or the "Encounter of Two Worlds" as it was promoted) and the consequent critical responses regarding issues of colonialism and neo-colonialism from artists and intellectuals throughout the American continent (Goldman and Camnitzer 16-20). Certainly,

the quincentenary alone could not have attracted such attention if it had not fallen on the fertile ground comprised of a postmodern interest in the artistic production of, once excluded, “others”—vernacular and non-Western cultures; of the onset of multiculturalism as a major framework of study and cultural politics in the 1980s; and of the transition from dictatorship to democracy of some Latin American countries in the 1980s (Genocchio 3).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the image of Latin America set forth within this “greater visibility” conjured views of absurd, mystical, or surreal images, which coalesced in the notion of an essential, uniform Latin America, as several art exhibitions of this period show. This is also associated with the romantic vision of an “authentic” Latin American cultural expression, which rests upon European imaginaries regarding the New World. In the exhibitions that adopted this strategy of display, “Latin American art [was shaped] according to notions of exoticism, primitivism, authenticity and the fantastic” (Amor 248).

By the 1990s, the notion of a homogeneous “Latin America” was “maintained but problematized” (Mosquera, “Good-bye” 26). This implies a departure from the idea of “Latin American art” in favor of “art in Latin America” and “art from Latin America” (31), which represents yet another danger, that of coining “a postmodern cliché of Latin America as a realm of total heterogeneity” (26). Indeed, throughout the decade the region’s image transformed into a realm of “the multicultural, the hybrid, the diverse, the fragmented [in another] essentialist approach whereby Latin American art is considered diverse, plural, a ‘harmonious melting pot’” (Amor 250).

It is within this changing context that the choice of the two artists analyzed here, emerge: Botero, from the “fantastic” vision of Latin America, and Salcedo, from the postmodern one. Hence, this essay discusses first, Fernando Botero’s international career in connection to discourses seeking to represent Latin America, particularly magical realism, which naturalizes violence as folklore. This issue is explored in more detail with regards to his 2000-2001 unveiling of a series of paintings focusing on violence in Colombia, which significantly departed from his more usual subject-matter, and the subsequent international tour of the controversial series. Next, a discussion of the work of sculptor Doris Salcedo—whose art practice openly takes on issues of violence, memory and identity—is used as an example of the emergence of new ways of representing violence that seem to attest to the alignment of the market with the traumatic and with specific artistic styles such as minimalism and conceptualism. Finally, the implications of both types of artworks are discussed in relation to issues of identity and memory—individual and collective.

### *Margin to Center: Magical Realism and Violence as Folklore*

The international career of Fernando Botero (b. 1932) had a slow start with a figurative and volumetric style blossoming in the era of abstract expressionism. In the late 1960s, however, a breakthrough came when he sold his *Mona Lisa, Age Twelve* (1959), made in his signature style, volumetric, “fat” figures, to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. At that time, the subject matter of Botero’s artwork ranged from appropriations and reworkings of well-known European masters like Velázquez, Mantegna, and Van Eyck to critical works depicting political and ecclesiastical authorities as well as the bourgeoisie. Throughout the late 1940s to late 1980s, the topic of violence appeared intermittently in his work in the form of references to local crimes or to the period known as “La Violencia” (1948-65), when the country was ravaged by a bipartisan conflict. This period has enormous resonance in Colombian history and memory, as the killing of the adversaries involved gruesome tortures and massacres and it is often seen, as I discuss later, as a preamble to current violence.

Botero’s breakthrough in the art world coincided not only with the aftermath of “La Violencia,” but also with the Latin American boom in literature and his work was quickly associated to that of his fellow countryman Gabriel García Márquez, in what became the token for artistic productions originating in Latin America—magical realism. In Colombia, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) became a *foundational fiction* of a new conception of national identity.<sup>1</sup> Departing from the historical elite view of a white, literate, Catholic country, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* depicted a Caribbean, syncretic and ethnically diverse Colombia. The underside of this more inclusive view was a literal reading which tended to unproblematically diffuse distinctions between tradition and modernity, past and present, myth and reality. In this view, historical memory is obscured and consequently, irrationality is taken as a part of an essential identity and violence can be explained through myth.

Decades after the climax of magical realism, Botero’s work continues to instill a notion of a folkloric, familiar “Latin America” that appears in texts on “Latin American art” that refer to his work. Dawn Ades’ *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980*, for instance, connects a number of tropes from Botero’s work directly to magical realism:

Magic realism [. . .] has echoes in such works by Botero as the levitating priest [. . .]. Botero’s work reveals a particular fascination with ‘types’ representing on the one hand the Church, on the other the army and government officials: the last two united in the figure of the dictator—the one myth, García Márquez once remarked, that Latin America has given the world. (292-93)

Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser's *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* makes a similar comparison:

We do not need the smoking volcano in the background or the odd piece of luscious tropical fruit to tell us that this is Latin America. The rich ladies, tin pot dictators, bishops and generals, all wrapped up in comfort and corruption, the whores and salesmen, are the characters that strut the streets of Latin American cities and the pages of García Márquez's novels. They may ape European mannerisms and snobberies but they remain a peculiarly indigenous breed. (Baddeley and Fraser 61)

These same authors later add: “[Botero] depicts a series of clichés from Colombian society that, as in the writings of García Márquez, are also recognizable throughout Latin America: well-fed, self-satisfied bishops, dictators and their first ladies and undoubtedly obnoxious offspring” (64). These two texts appeared in the aftermath of the “Latin American art” boom, but the quintessential Latin America prescribed by the formulas of magical realism dies hard, as this quote from *The Economist* in 2001 shows: “the world [Botero] paints—with its brothels and guitars, its tiled roofs and melons, its guerrillas and generals—is recognizably Latin American, and, to those who know, Colombian” (“Filling out the form” 7).

### ***Monumental Gestures***

Through magical realism, Botero made a long march from exclusion to tokenism in the art world and succeeded in linking both his work and his public persona to Latin America and to Colombia despite the fact that he has lived out of his home country, voluntarily, for nearly 50 years. Botero has kept obvious links to Colombia by constantly referencing it in his artwork, but also by visiting the country and donating works to Colombian museums and cities, as was the case with the 1998 donation of his personal collection.<sup>2</sup> An incredible display of publicity, photos and interviews surrounded the event. The media portrayed Botero as an international jet-set figure—sharing his time between a villa in Italy, where he maintains a sculpture studio, and apartments in Montecarlo, Paris and Manhattan, where he paints. Simultaneously, Botero was depicted as a warm and generous Colombian, since the donations were seen as providing some “cultural” relief for a war-weary country.

While his donations created a general outpouring of gratitude, Botero's series on violence was received with mixed emotions. In July 2000, the Colombian magazine *Diners* published a few paintings where the subject matter ranged from more recent events like drug lord Pablo Escobar's death (in

1993) and terrorist attacks with car bombs (a common occurrence during the violence of the 1980s-early 1990s) to depictions of the guerrillas of the 1950s. A brief article entitled “Botero and War” expressed Botero’s commitment to Colombia’s political history. Nevertheless, in an interview with *The Miami Herald*, Botero commented that the series was not meant as a political commentary, but rather as a “reflection of the black folklore of my country, with all its violence, killings, kidnappings and massacres” (Tamayo 1A). Nine months later (March 2001), the same magazine published the photos of eleven paintings belonging to the series. The cover of the magazine featured a detail from one of the paintings (*Untitled*, 1999), a corpse being eaten by vultures, and a caption reading “Oh, my God!”

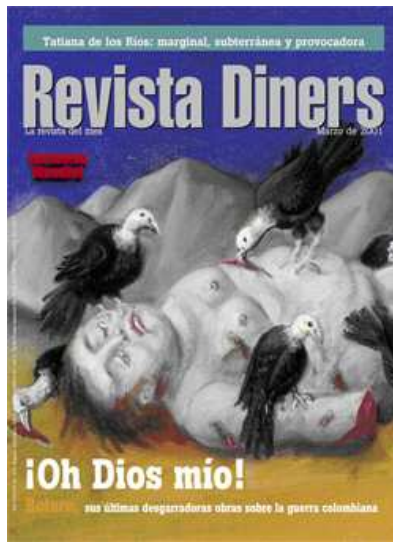


Figure 1: *Diners Magazine* cover, March 2001.<sup>3</sup>

Inside the magazine, a text written in white letters on a dramatic black page announced, first, that Botero is the most important living painter; second, that Colombia’s war would now be “sculpted from here to eternity;” and third, that galleries in Mexico City, Stockholm, and Paris were to exhibit his “artistic testimony” in what could be qualified as a “will to monumentality”—an expression that points to a clear intention of inscribing in the public sphere (via the media, in the first instance, then via the international tour, and, finally, via the donation to a “national” museum) the gesture of “immortalizing” Colombia’s upheaval as a unified national memory. Thus, the collection itself was endowed with *monumental* status (from the Latin *monumentum*, memorial, and *monere*, to remind), converted into a representative artefact meant to forever

remind Colombians (as well as the international public) of the situation of violence by focusing on the commemoration of events that have profound links to Colombia's recent history and memory of violence, and therefore to collective memory.

The same issue of the magazine featured a short interview with the artist, entitled "Pain for the Fatherland," where Botero explained what had motivated the series. He stated that his motivation was the feeling of the "moral obligation to leave a testimony of an irrational moment of our history." Again, Botero commented in the interview that his intention in portraying violence was only to express rejection since his art is not political. His position was underscored in a contiguous text in which Botero was qualified as a critical and impartial party, "free from ideological ties" (Arcila 24).<sup>4</sup> Soon after the publication of the images, the magazine was swamped with requests for copies from overseas publications while the actual series was received with a mixture of praise and criticism. The comments on the artwork ranged from positions stating that the series accurately represented the state of the nation, to other comments claiming that the images were only worsening the country's tarnished international image.

As was stated in the magazine, on March 2001, a collection including several paintings from the series on violence initiated an international tour whose first destination was a retrospective at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City, curated by the artist himself. The next destination was Stockholm's Moderna Museet (September 2001-January 2002) where Botero and David Elliot, then director of the Moderna Museet, co-curated the exhibition: "Doubtless the political content of the Colombian's work provides appeal for Elliot" (Shone 92). The exhibition then visited the ARKEN Museum in Denmark (February to June 2002), where it was shown under the title *Fernando Botero, Painter of the Incredible*, which recalls the titles of the exhibitions of Latin American art in the 1980s. The collection then travelled to The Hague's Gemeentemuseum (June 2003–September 2003) and to the Musée Maillol, Paris (November 2003–March 2004). The final destination was Colombia's National Museum (which houses ethnographic and historical collections as well as art collections—and which attests to the effort to monumentalise the collection), to which the fifty works on violence have been donated in spite of the fact that it does not have enough space to exhibit them permanently.<sup>5</sup>

The artistic monument represented by Botero's series on violence is problematic as the monumental faces a crisis of legitimacy, reflecting both aesthetic and political revolutions, as well as wider crises of representation, such as the ones regarding Latin American art in the 1980s and 1990s. Placed in an intersection between public art and political memory, this collection also represents politics of memory sustained on a relationship of power, which allied to the

institution of the museum and of the art critic, privileges a version of the events while excluding others (Burke 108). The calculated publication of the series coupled with Botero's donation of his personal art collection entwines spectacle, official memory and financial interests.<sup>6</sup> In a globalized world not only do objects circulate, but also artists, exhibitions, curators, private sponsorship and entrepreneurial collectors and the control of the exhibition/auction house circuit by promotional and financial interests embodies symbolic capital and marketing tools for the Latin American political and economic elite (Ramírez; Goldman). This can be exemplified by the exhibition in Sweden, which had the support of Colombian public and private sectors, represented mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Federation of Coffee Growers, a collaboration that implies the construction of a particular national imagery with financial and political interests that convey multiple, contradictory meanings.<sup>7</sup> Under this logic, Botero's work becomes another brand that stands for Colombianness—Colombian coffee promotional figure Juan Valdez and his mule can sit comfortably next to the dead peasants of the painting, "Massacre in Colombia," as they all belong together, unproblematized, in the pantheon of "national identity." Similarly, the tour simultaneously represented opportunities for cultural tourism and investment in the renovated "Ciudad Botero," and a "naturally" violent, although colourful, Latin American country.

Besides the contradictory symbolic constructions of these exhibitions, the monumentalizing of the series on violence obscures the history and context of production of the artworks, their distance from actual victims, the economic and political interests vested in their mode of display. Facts, like Botero not living in Colombia, are obscured and the narratives surrounding the series consistently employed misleading terms such as "witnessing" and "bearing testimony"—as if the artworks were derived from firsthand accounts or experiences. Consequently, images are rendered ideologically innocent and even their condition as commodities is blurred. As curator, Mari Carmen Ramírez, has noted: "art exhibitions are privileged vehicles for the representation of individual and collective identities, whether they consciously set out to be so, or not" (229).

In terms of representation, the "political content" of the collection (as was advertised for the international tour) is contained in the works pertaining to the series on violence; the abusive, yet stereotypical figures of power (dictators, bishops) that appeared so prominently in an earlier Botero are now absent, replaced by grieving and suffering bodies often subjected to more anonymous violence. The nation is visually constructed as a social body struck by calamity in which the shadow of loss, grief, and death looms large.



Figure 2: Fernando Botero, *Masacre en Colombia* (2000).



Figure 3: Fernando Botero, *El Desfile* (2000).

### ***A “Culture of Violence”?***

From the point of view of visual poetics, the idea of an iconic Colombia—ranging from exuberance and sensuality to ruthless violence—is reinforced within tropes of exoticism and otherness. Violence here is merely the nature of the “other,” “national folklore,” as Botero himself asserted, instead of being the outcome of certain historical conditions and of deep and ongoing political, social and economic problems. In visual terms, these homogenous, undetermined, interchangeable “others” seem to inhabit a perpetual past; they never seem contemporary, despite representing living subjects or recent events. This is conveyed by the depiction of similar-looking subjects in garments of 1950s fashion, collapsing past and present with anguishing circularity.





Figure 4: Fernando Botero, *Un secuestro*, (2002).

This form of painterly representation, consecrated by the museum and the gallery, acting as agents of nation-building, makes terror omnipresent and anonymous; violence is “transformed into a subject of apocalyptic, universal and timeless dimensions, which conform to the modernist privileging of visibility and contemplation” (Rose, qtd in Mereweather “Zones” 116). This is particularly true in the case of Colombia, a country that has experienced political violence almost uninterruptedly since the mid 1940s until the present day. Hence, violence is central in the production of collective identity, not only as the past is punctuated by violent events, but also because they are frequently followed by veils of official oblivion that make the construction of social memory difficult (Pécaut; Sánchez). Violence is highly visible in a number of spaces: from academia to mass media, from literature and the visual arts to the ambiguous space of rumour, but there is an evident lack of monuments, public rituals and commemorations. These spaces play a key role in the articulation of the multiple narratives of violence, which, however, ended up producing a “dense forest with deceptively homogeneous contours” obscuring the layers of significance present in violence (Coronil and Skurski 333).

Consequently, within the country, violence is often perceived as a pervasive, mythical force that engulfs everything. Michael Taussig, in an essay that refers to Colombia and is significantly entitled “Terror as Usual,” comments on how violence can reach such a status: “Forces become disembodied from social contexts as one enters a world in which things become animated paralleling both the impossibly, contradictory need to both establish and disestablish a center, a motive force, or a reason explaining everything” (19). In this widespread view, itself a symptom of cultural anaesthesia, Colombia becomes “a

culture of violence,” fated to an endless, inescapable cycle of collective guilt and individual impunity. The perception of violence as inexorable has definitely been heightened by the pervasiveness of violence in the mass media (particularly in television), which erodes public sensitivity in the face of extreme acts of violence acting as providers of daily horrors that have to be subsequently forgotten, only to be replaced by new ones. As Peter Wollen asserts, an excess of display provides the viewer with a stream of images that act as if they can reveal the real when in fact they occlude it—the viewer can see everything but understand nothing (8).

### *Witness to Absence*

So pervasive and commonplace is the incidence of violence that Colombia may be distinguished by its lack of engagement with the subject of commemoration. This would conjure up the idea of the absent referent, the phantom public sphere of a spectral reality and spectrality of the media, that structures our social imaginary. In this context, the public sphere, including the museum, becomes the site of collective amnesia. (Mereweather 22)

Amidst this complex panorama of spectacle, otherness, and market economy, artists are conscious of the double quality of their work as commodity and as a symbolic carrier. Can this double quality be reworked to offer a useful critique? In order to try to answer that question I would now like to turn to the exploration of alternative ways of addressing violence in the arts, in particular the work of sculptor Doris Salcedo, whose art practice shows a conscious reflection on the topics of display, memory, and identity.

The subject matter of Salcedo’s work bears witness to grief, absence, and loss, and it is concretely linked to political violence in Colombia. This topic appeared in her work in the late 1980s, in an untitled series often referred to as “white shirts” (1989-90), in which long metal rods impale neat stacks of white shirts. The work alludes to the 1988 massacres at *La Negra* and *La Hondura* banana plantations, where male workers were dragged out of their beds and shot dead in front of their families. Her *Atrabiliarios* (1991-96) is an installation that consists of a series of wall niches in which the shape of women’s shoes alone or in pairs is barely visible under a screen made of animal skin and sewn to the wall with surgical thread. The shoes originally used were those of victims, “female *desaparecidos* [who] were often subjected to extended periods of capture before execution” (Princenthal 49); those shoes used in later installations have no proven connection to acts of violence.



Figure 5: Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios* (1996).<sup>8</sup>



Figure 6: Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios* (1996).<sup>9</sup>

Comparisons can be established with the exhibition of mounds of clothing, shoes, or other personal items displayed in Holocaust museums and also to Christian Boltanski's work (Merewether, "To Bear" 18). Boltanski's use of signifiers of the Holocaust—blurry photographs, lamps, and rusted biscuit tins containing cloth fragments—overtly manipulate the viewer's emotions. These works succeed in arousing emotions not by relying on truth-telling documents but rather by drawing on the powers of association. They suggest that the post-war memory of the Holocaust is disconnected from the actual events through its display by the media, thus converted, into an "imagined memory" (Huysen 27).<sup>10</sup> By employing a similar strategy, Salcedo participates in the

same feeling of mistrust in monumentality and in the mediated memories that inform official history. According to Salcedo, traditional public monuments are “the very failure of memory” (“Displacements”).

In *La casa viuda* (“The Widowed House”) (1992-94), Salcedo touches upon the topic of displacement. The pieces in this series, placed in, in-between or decentered spaces in museums and galleries, are a conjunction of materials, furniture, clothing, bones, cutlery that are often perceived only after a careful look. “Bearing traces of violence, the objects are [. . .] witnesses. The house that had been a shelter, that concealed and protected, is violently altered into the tomb and burial site of its inhabitants” (Merewether, “To Bear” 21). Here, she also compares her own condition as an artist to that of the displaced, “Displaced is the most precise word to describe the position of the contemporary artist” (Basualdo 35), and I will return to this notion when I touch upon Salcedo’s work in connection to the arts market.

*Unland*, a work inspired by the poetry of Paul Celan, is composed of three pieces: *the orphan’s tunic*, *audible in the mouth*, and *irreversible witness* (1995-98). Here, split wooden tables are sewn back together using silk and human hair. The three pieces are meant to be seen together and each relates to a specific incident of violence in Colombia, but the information is not provided for the audience: “I do not illustrate testimonies,” stated the artist in an interview (Merewether, “Interview” 82). The more recent *Tenebrae, Noviembre 7 1985* (1999-2000), shown at *Documenta 11*, refers to the disastrous counter-offensive of the Colombian army against the M-19 guerrilla movement at the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. The work, however, is not intended to represent the event, but rather memorializes it, as did the 2002 commemorative action, where the artist hung 208 chairs from the walls of the reconstructed Palace of Justice exactly seventeen years after the fatal siege.





Figure 8: Doris Salcedo, *Tenebrae. Noviembre 7, 1985* (1999-2000).<sup>12</sup>

The salvaging of repressed memories—“individual cases [. . .] of little interest to historians and to the Colombian justice system,” as Salcedo states (“Traces” 29), and the collapsing of the private and public spheres in a ritual of shared remembrance which opens up a “political space not only of commemoration but of an ethics based on collective memory and continuity” (Franco 14), makes Salcedo’s work “counter-monumental.”<sup>13</sup> The term, coined by James E. Young, in the context of contemporary German artists dealing with the issue of remembering the Holocaust, describes the intention of moving away from traditional memorialization by subverting the traditional *formulae for pathos* inherent in national symbolic institutions and their expression in public monuments. The counter-monumental challenges, the sense of closure of the traditional monument, which acts by separating the viewer from the actual past, thus hindering remembrance; as Pierre Nora puts it, “the less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs” (13). Salcedo, departing from the sheer superficiality of traditional monumentality, seeks to engage the viewer in an act of remembrance.

### ***Marketing Trauma within “Contemporary Latin American Art”***

The ethical implications of this work have made Salcedo a relatively anonymous figure within Colombia, where she lives and works but where she has not exhibited since 1993. Few photographs, interviews, or texts about the artist are

available in Colombia. For Salcedo, anonymity provides critical distance and is crucial in maintaining the confidence of her collaborators—the artist obtains testimonies from victims of violence, who generally live in rural Colombia and interviews them personally; thus, she considers her practice as bearing “witness to the witness,” becoming a secondary witness. Outside Colombia, however, Salcedo is very active, participating in artists’ talks, exhibitions, and numerous biennales and her work has achieved considerable reputation as well as commercial success.<sup>14</sup>

Authors like Paul Celan, Primo Levi, and Emmanuel Levinas, among others, have influenced Salcedo’s approach on trauma, memory, and monumentality, an influence she acknowledges by quoting them in catalogues and interviews. These references, as well as the subject matter of Salcedo’s artwork, position it within contemporary discussions on topics such as trauma and memory.<sup>15</sup> The aesthetic language of her work, on the other hand, makes reference to minimalism and conceptualism, which have become, according to Gerardo Mosquera, the pillars of a postmodern international language “instituted and globalised during the nineties [. . .] prevailing over the so-called international scene even while its coinage as a dominant code denied de facto the pluralist perspective of postmodernity” (“Alien-Own” 164).

Hence, while discourses of globalization and multiculturalism have somewhat contributed to erase the label “Latin America” (or “Africa” or “Asia”) from artworks, they also contributed to the creation of a *lingua franca* for international exhibitions and particularly for biennales (Mosquera, “Good-bye” 27). Biennales are key events in the international display of artworks and have been particularly useful in giving the impression of expansion and new inclusiveness of the art world. It is the transit between international exhibitions that Salcedo has in mind, partly, when she refers to the artist as a displaced person:

I believe that contemporary artists are displaced people [. . .] I feel I am scattered in many different places. As a woman and a sculptor from a country like Colombia (regarded by outsiders as having a pariah status), working with victims of violence and showing my work in different places around the world, I find myself encountering extreme and contradictory positions, both on a large and small scale. (Basualdo 12)

Salcedo’s work possesses not only an appropriate aesthetic language, but participates also in discourses of gender and cultural difference: “Globalization, the postmodern opening, and the pressure of multiculturalism have moved us toward a greater pluralism. But in general, and above all in elite circles, globalization has responded less to a new consciousness than to a tolerance

based on paternalism, quotas, and political correctness” (Mosquera, “Alien-Own” 165). On the part of the international art market, these dual aspects of Salcedo’s work serve to maintain a self-satisfying image of openness and pluralism, while increasing the supply of merchandise (Camnitzer 219-20). In such a market, Salcedo will sell under “contemporary Latin American art” (while Botero will sell under “Latin American” art), indicating the tendency of the market to break into niches aimed at different audiences.

The reference to Colombia in Salcedo’s work, which serves as a mark of origin in international exhibitions and in the market can have diverse repercussions within the country, where pride often turns to the fact that the artist “made it in the art world” rather than to his/her contributions to the community. Camnitzer notes, for instance, how some artists:

like Romare Bearden or Fernando Botero [. . .] are more respected in their communities for the prices they command in the market than for any possible changes in vision they may have introduced to their national or ethnic constituents. A clear symptom of colonization is the tendency to see the shift from subordinate to hegemonic culture as a sign of progress and success. (219)

Salcedo has been able to circumvent the ethical problems posed by the nature of her work by remaining almost anonymous in Colombia, which hinders the reception of her work from the audience it refers to (which cannot develop into a proper interlocutor), and displaces its discussion elsewhere. She, however, recognizes both the need and the utility of exhibiting abroad as well as the market/identity niches in which her artwork can be classified:

My work can be exhibited abroad, because the Colombian situation is a capsule of condensed experience that is valuable to the rest of the world [. . .]. That is why knowing that these works come from Colombia, and that a woman from Colombia produced them, is important. Both are premeditated strategies, and I think my artworks have a journey to make, and they will return when the time is right. A civil war obviously doesn’t provide the right timing. (Basualdo 35)

### ***Conclusion***

Images, artworks, and public displays are sites of contested, ambiguous, and multiple meanings which shape public discourse and memory—as much as they are shaped by them. Placed within the public sphere, these visual artifacts are capable of evoking or denying memory, a key piece in the making of identity. In this sense, a discussion on selected works dealing with violence by

two very different artists leaves us with one side of the equation. The viewer, on the other side, is capable of making meaning.

On the side of the equation tackled by this analysis, an effort has been made to link the formal and iconographic qualities of selected works dealing with violence as their subject-matter, the biography of the artist, and the construction of their public persona, as well as the context of display. In the first case, Botero's series on violence, spectacularly promoted by the media, and the art institutions, sought monumental status by affirming itself as an impartial, positive testimony of events of relevance to collective memory. The collection, however, equated violence with folklore and represented it within the logics of the "culture of violence" (characterized by endowing violence with quasi-magical qualities). Moreover, it dangerously aligned itself with official memory by weaving together the political and economic interests of the Colombian mainstream. The work of Salcedo, on the other hand, started dealing with violence from the late 1980s and on, alluding very often, to concrete events of violence that include the involvement of victims or their families, breaking away from the mere representation of the event, and leaning towards its memorializing. In this space, Salcedo reveals a deep mistrust of the monumental, in stark contrast with Botero, and opens up new possibilities for remembrance and collective memory. This, however, does not hinder the capabilities of the market to co-opt Salcedo's work, as the postmodern wave was instrumental to supply it with new merchandise. Salcedo's work is of interest to "contemporary Latin American art" because of its subject matter and its ethical implications, as well as its inscription within the contemporary visual styles sanctioned by the arts market.

In this dense context, visual artists must be aware of the interplay of a number of interlocking elements—identity, market, aesthetics, audiences—within a sphere of shifting practices. Under these conditions, representation, entwining issues of memory, identity and ethical responsibility that take place in a complex arena inhabited by the arts market, the public, the public persona of the artist and current discourses (particularly globalization and multiculturalism), becomes a delicate matter with obvious political implications. The arts, however, can productively work within the sphere where the commercial and the political collide. A deeper engagement with critical views (aware of the complex interplay of image, market, public sphere, on the one hand, and violence, collective memory, and identity, on the other) could provide better grounds not only for representation, but also for the comprehension of actual events through an understanding of the past.



## NOTES

1. The term *foundational fiction*, coined by Doris Sommer in her study *Foundational Fictions: the National Romances of Latin America* refers to a series of nineteenth-century Latin American novels where star-crossed lovers, representing different regions, races, parties or interests, serve to illustrate the numerous difficulties found in the nation-construction project.

2. In 1998, Botero announced the donation of over one hundred of his own works and eighty-five works by nineteenth and twentieth-century masters from his private collection to the cities of Medellín (Colombia's second largest city and Botero's hometown) and Bogotá. Millions were spent in re-fitting the museums to house his works, which, in the case of Medellín, also required the gentrification of the area where the museum is located. The Medellín project, Ciudad Botero, which includes the renovation of four blocks, had a great social impact on the area. While major hotels are expected to benefit from projected cultural tourism, the situation of the smaller businesses and of the sex workers of the area remains unclear.

3. Courtesy of *Diners Magazine*.

4. My translation.

5. For a view of some of the works donated, see: <<http://www.museonacional.gov.co/botero04b.html>>.

6. *Spectacle*, for Guy Debord, refers, on the one hand, to the consumption of images, commodities, and staged events, but more generally, to the institutional and technical apparatus of contemporary capitalism, to all the means and methods power employs, outside of direct force, which makes subjects passive and obscures the nature and effects of capitalist power and its deficiencies.

7. Examples of joint ventures of the public and private sectors in the promotion of the arts are not uncommon. An often noted example is the 1990 exhibition, *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, supported by the Mexican government and the Mexican transnational media Televisa, which can be read as a nationalist assertion as well as a "symbolic" expression and promotion of the Mexican government's privatization policies (Goldman; Yúdice).

8. Wall installation with drywall, shoes, cow bladder and surgical thread (three niches). 120 X 150 cm. © the artist. Courtesy of Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

9. Wall installation with drywall, shoes, cow bladder and surgical thread (three niches). 120 X 150 cm. © the artist. Courtesy of Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

10. Huyssen recognizes that this is a problematic notion since all memory is imagined, but it is useful to the extent it distinguishes memories grounded in living experience from memories taken from the archive of the mass media.

11. Lead and steel, dimensions variable. © the artist. Courtesy of Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

12. Lead and steel, dimensions variable. © the artist. Courtesy of Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

13. Regarding the aesthetic rendering of traumatic memory, Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo has suggested that what makes sense memory valuable is the fact that it resists historicization and preserves in memory the affective experience itself.

14. Sydney (1992), Venice (1993), Sao Paulo (1998), Liverpool (1999), *Documenta 11* (2002), and Istanbul (2003).

15. Interlacing the public and the private, memory underscores the constructed quality of the past, characterizing it as subjective, selective, filled with emotion. Trauma and traumatic memory, on the other hand, focus on the painful traces left by events. Current interest in these topics is evident—from critical studies such as the ones by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Cathy Caruth, and Dominick LaCapra, to mention just a few, to popular culture venues (talk shows, Hollywood films, literature); to commemorative events and the restoration of historical sites. This can be traced to political events starting in the 1960s such as decolonization, fueled later by fall of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, the end of apartheid and the return to democracy in many Latin American countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Huysen 23).

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