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*Doris Salcedo: Plegaria Muda*. Prestel, 2011. 191pp. ISBN 978-3-7913-5173-5

Doris Salcedo's installations seek a means of representing atrocity without the vanities of permanence and personality. She distinguishes between monuments and memorials, the former commanding us to remember, the latter allowing us to enact our own remembrance: placing limits on the possibilities of commemoration, she admits only fragile links to the past, creating humble, mutable spaces, which remind us that mourning must properly take place within ourselves.

The affective resonance of Salcedo's work often derives from its delicate metonymy: she draws our attention to the wounded surfaces of ordinary objects, so that we wonder who made these marks, and where they are now; absence is made visible. *Plegaria Muda*, or silent prayer, is composed of rows of tables upturned upon tables, sandwiching a layer of earth between them. Too many to take in at a glance, they form an unmarked, suspended burial ground, each unit the length and width of a standard coffin. But though at first glance each appears identical, blades of grass – sharp green amid the grey and brown – pierce unevenly through holes in the upper tables' undersides, allowing for some particularisation.

*Plegaria Muda*, like so much of Salcedo's work, grew out of research into violence in her native Colombia. Between 2003 and 2009 around 1500 innocent young men from the country's poorest regions were murdered by the Colombian army in response to a bounty placed on the heads of opponents of the government's regime. The devastating anonymity of the work reflects the unrecorded nature of the deaths, but so too it allows the work to reach out to speak of violent death on a global scale; in recent years Salcedo has been preoccupied with investigating the phenomenon of 'social death' in deprived areas across the world, which has rendered the very poor anonymous even in life.

This is work that struggles to communicate in photographic reproduction, but Prestel's catalogue does its very best, with a multitude of close-ups and overviews; and it includes an important essay from Mieke Bal, suggesting how, despite the bleakness of its past and present, this work might also mark a space in which to rethink the future.