



Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

DORIS SALCEDO

APRIL 22, 2013

Interviewed by:

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro

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Founding Director Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums,
and Mary Schneider Enriquez
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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the Artists Documentation Program (ADP). Since that time, the ADP has recorded artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The ADP has recorded interviews with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums. In 2009, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection to establish the ADP Archive, formalizing the multi-institutional partnership and making ADP interviews more widely available to researchers.

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Harvard Art Museums; Doris Salcedo, Artist; Mary Schneider Enriquez, Harvard Art Museums]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:50]

CM-U: Today is April 22nd, 2013, and we are here with Doris Salcedo. Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

D. Salcedo: Thank you.

CM-U: This is an artists' documentation program interview with Mary Schneider Enriquez, and I'm Carol Mancusi-Ungaro. The purpose of our conversation is to discuss this piece at Harvard, *Untitled*, 2004/5. And so I'm just going to start our general conversation.

[00:01:15]

CM-U: One of the things that, as I read through your comments and different things that you say about your art, one thing that seems to be an underlying tenet is that where violence is involved, one is displaced. One is disoriented. When the conservators first looked at this piece, especially those that specialize in metals and materials, they immediately sensed that we have a metallic surface, and yet we have the configuration of wood, the wear of wood, something like that. We have a sense of something that, even though it's heavy, it's this heavy metal piece, it's been crushed by a force much stronger than it, in a way that a material unlike metal would have been crushed. And there's also the sense of it being a chair, and yet the elongation of the rails and other things about it make it really not be a chair. So there's an actual disorientation. So in your choice of materials, this must be an overriding or very important aspect. Do you choose your materials based on an incongruity of them?

D. Salcedo: Yes. In this case, it was the first time I was making—around this time, it was the first time I was making pieces out of nothing. Because usually I was working with found objects, or given objects. And when I was addressing the particular event that took place in Bogotá in 1986, there were no remains. Everything had been destroyed, or the few pieces that had remained after this catastrophe, I had no access. There was no way I could access them. So the first time, I was working from raw materials—materials that...so I had to make the whole thing. So the element of sort of immateriality, first of all, came from that. I was working a piece that is like a—it is a fake everything, because it's not casted. But parts of the piece are casted. But we cannot say that it is a cast piece. And it's basically handmade. It is hand-carved.

CM-U: So parts of it are cast first?

D. Salcedo: There were parts that were cast.

CM-U: So does the process start with the drawing from you?

D. Salcedo: The processes start with—there was a real chair that was taken apart, and those parts were cast. So the parts that are straight are, in some way, cast. But then the rest of it was...I made a maquette, not just a drawing but also a maquette, that was made out of paper. You can see there's a quality—a little bit of the lightness of paper. So as you were saying, I think that you questioned—you said everything that I had to say.

CM-U: Good, but please say it.

D. Salcedo: It was very complete. Very complete, because it is the sense of disorientation. Once a violent event has taken place, life is not the same. You are disfigured by that. Violence is totally ignorant of the life that it assaults. It knows nothing and it doesn't care and it doesn't want to know anything. So that being that has been assaulted will carry the traces of violence for the rest of his life. Jean Améry, a survivor of Auschwitz, he said that he was not a person who had been tortured—who was tortured. He said that he is tortured person—

CM-U: He is tortured, yeah.

D. Salcedo: —and he will always be a tortured person. So the traces are always there. But the idea of disorientation is very strongly present in this piece, because it's not wood, it's not metal, it's not a—it is a chair but you cannot use it. So it is—how do you start your life? What is the aftermath of a tragic event? How do you walk about? How do you find where you are if your house is not there or your family's no longer there; if the place that was home to you, all of a sudden is (inaudible).

[00:06:00]

CM-U: When you look at this and you are faced with the—you recognize the strength of the metal and then you see the crumpled fragility of the paper, how was that cast? Was that something that was done separately, or --?

D. Salcedo: Each part was done separately. The ones that were straight could be—were cast, and the rest were hand-carved. So let's say I had all the, like—a wooden chair that was cast. Then the parts were cut, welded in different positions, and then hand-carved. And then the wooden marks were also—

CM-U: Cold-worked? Etched, and so on? Cold-worked after?

- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: That's what was recognized.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: And did all this occur in Bogotá?
- D. Salcedo: Yes. Well, the casting was done in New York, but all the rest of the piece was done in Bogotá. The cutting and the carving.
- CM-U: All the hand work.
- D. Salcedo: All the hand work.
- CM-U: And in New York State, upper—
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: In New York City?
- D. Salcedo: In New York State.
- CM-U: And is there a reason—is there a particularly good fabricator?
- D. Salcedo: There was a good foundry there. Because it's quite complex to cast stainless steel. It's not simple. So it was very specific.
- MSE: And you went through several stages, did you not?
- D. Salcedo: Yes, yes, yes. But they couldn't finish it there, because I think in the States people are not used to the kind of labor we deal with in the Third World. So this is for a foundry in New York State, the work I wanted to do was insane. They simply—it is not possible for them.
- CM-U: That's so interesting to me, because it's sort of talking about cross-cultural experiences anyway.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: Which your work embodies.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.

CM-U: It's so interesting to think about the laboriousness of the work and all the hand-working; this must take an enormous amount of time.

D. Salcedo: Enormous amount of time.

CM-U: And you do it as well as your fabricators?

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

CM-U: And you have a large team of fabricators on (inaudible)?

D. Salcedo: I do, but in this case it was very few people. It was only just, like, three of us working on a piece—on this piece.

CM-U: And how many of these chairs are—these are singly made. You said you have your own one yourself.

D. Salcedo: Yeah. There are three of them.

CM-U: Three of them. And you own one yourself.

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

[00:08:40]

CM-U: You've talked about how you make the image and then your fabricators work very hard to materialize it—your image, and what you're doing. And they talk about it being sometimes an impossible task. I mean, that aspect of it is very important, that reworking and continually working. Is that something that you always did as an artist before you had a team of fabricators as well?

D. Salcedo: Of course.

CM-U: That's your nature of working.

D. Salcedo: Of course, of course. I have always—I always think that making a piece, it's an absolute essential. Because it's not a matter of having an idea. A work of art is not an idea. It's something that comes out of a different set of conditions. And it's something that is coming out as you—for me, at least—as I work, the piece becomes possible, and then I know what to do with the change. But it's not like at the beginning of the piece, it's exactly the same from beginning to end. At the beginning I might have an idea that will evidently change enormously during the process of making the piece. And then the result, it's totally independent from my original idea. Which would always be poorer.

CM-U: Will always be...?

D. Salcedo: My original idea will be poorer, I think—more simple. And so the piece acquires complexity as we work on it.

MSE: And it becomes—you've often talked about how it becomes something you didn't know would—unexpected, in a sense, and it takes on a life of its own as a material, as a...

D. Salcedo: I think so. I always refer to these pieces as creatures. I think they are a specific creature. It's what it wants to be. And my task will be to somehow be helpful, so it can become what it wants to be. I can provide space, people, tools, whatever, for the piece to be what it really needs to be.

[00:10:52]

CM-U: I've been interested in your talking about the work of art that way, as an entity—as a living entity, as something changing. And I think quoting **[Salon?]** is—because as conservators, we look at works of art that way too, from a different way. Once it leaves you and it's out there, then we step in and they become living entities to us. And so our role—

D. Salcedo: Absolutely.

CM-U: —our role is always to decide how far to take the work of art back to what it was originally if it's changed or aged, or how much of the aging to accept as part of the life of the work, and it's now embodied in that. How about with your works, and thinking about it in that way? If there are subsequent scratches to this or subsequent intrusions, is that something that one accepts as the life of the object, or should we work to get it back to this state as much as possible?

D. Salcedo: Well, I would like to work on it to get it back as it was as much as possible, yes. Yes. Because I don't think...if some damage occurs, I don't think that being assaulted several times is good. It's like the violent act happening over and over and over, and I don't think that's—I cannot accept that easily. I mean, it is a painful process, I think. So if it's possible to keep it the way it originally was, I think it would be wonderful. That's what I wish it could be. It could be (inaudible) to the piece.

CM-U: OK. No, it's complicated, and it's a hard one, I know. So in that regard, when we were talking about—how does this piece look to you, then? We were talking a little bit about the sheen; maybe you could talk a little bit more about that?

D. Salcedo: Yeah, I think it needs a little—when I mentioned the sheen, it's because I think it needs a—it will come alive. And I like—the sheen of this piece and the color of the piece makes it almost invisible. It has a very discreet presence. And especially the parts that are shiny at the top blend with whatever space—with the color of the space. It really blends into space. And that's what I pretty much wish it could convey, yeah. Yeah. It's almost not there. It's a presence that is so discreet that it is almost not there. And it's almost not. And maybe would not be recognized as a work of art. Something that is kind of abandoned—is clearly abandoned, and nonetheless it has a life, it aspires to something. I don't know. Sublime, if I can use that word.

CM-U: No, it is.

MSE: Very much so.

[00:13:56]

CM-U: The surface seems to have a particular importance to you, both in terms of appearance and also about the work and its exterior as opposed to inner.

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

CM-U: Could you talk a little bit more about surface?

D. Salcedo: Well, I'm a sculptor who loves surfaces. I think I work as a painter more than a sculptor, really. So the surface, I think, is everything. All the meaning, all the strength of a piece is right there, because it is in that interface that you can connect to whatever is happening there. I mean, the life that this piece is referring to somehow would be able to connect with experiences and memories of you it brings, if that surface, if that interface, is there to allow that contact or that communion to happen. So that's why I think all my work is on the surface. All of my work. The essence of the work is right there on the surface.

CM-U: Have you seen, in the course of your making work, surfaces change over time in a way that you didn't like?

D. Salcedo: Mmmm... Yes. They do change. Especially some fragile pieces that I make out of animal fibers. Those change. And of course there is always dust and there is always... But it's not a dramatic change. Not a (overlapping conversation; inaudible).

CM-U: And in those cases then you just have them treated or cleaned? You don't remake them?

- D. Salcedo: Cleaned, cleaned, cleaned. When possible, cleaned. But it's something I have to learn to live with as I'm working with more fragile materials now. It's just something that I have to accept. I didn't think it was possible in the past. Now I have to live with it, and I have to acknowledge that if I'm working with extremely fragile materials, like rose petals, for example, something is going to happen.
- CM-U: It's true. It's a different dimension of thinking about material—thinking about work.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: It's true—it's drawing on something very different inside of you.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah. So it has pushed me to accept things that I didn't accept before and to look at it in a different way. Yeah. Less rigid. I'm quite rigid, (laughter) but a little bit less.
- CM-U: (laughter)
- MSE: (laughter) There's an element of your use of surface which to me has always been a skin—you know, a skin literally in a really visceral sense of a human being.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.
- MSE: And that this scarring is part of carrying the violence, the effects of violence, and also as you choose organic materials in particular, but also with the stainless steel and with the concrete and the wood, that that life that the object is living carries with it as skin does. There's so many meanings that you put into it.
- D. Salcedo: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think Jean-Luc Nancy says that the work of art is—of course, if you're thinking of just Western tradition, it's all about flesh and skin. So art has always been—that is the most profound tradition. So it's always skin. It's always flesh. And there's, of course, in the Christian world, always a wound that is being represented. So art has never left that spot. It lives right there. And he comes to the conclusion that every work of art is like a flower in its fragility. And I think I very much ascribe my work within that frame of thinking.

[00:18:02]

- CM-U: I have a question, and it has to do with *Shibboleth*, at the Tate.

D. Salcedo: Yup.

CM-U: I was interested in the making, and I think your fabricators—and you spoke about it, I don't know, from one of your interviews, about how you went about choosing it, and—maybe it was an *Art 21* interview, I don't remember making it and so on—and I believe now—I mean, now it's been filled in at the Tate, and there's a scar left on the floor. Was that part of your intent?

D. Salcedo: Yes, yes, that was very much part of the project. And I think that's why it's all amazing that the Tate accepted to live with it. They knew that.

CM-U: So right from the beginning, you said that that was part of the piece.

D. Salcedo: They knew it. It was clear. So it was incredibly generous and liberal and open on their part to accept the piece, yes.

CM-U: So then in keeping with what you were saying earlier about—my understanding of what you said is that the state of the work ideally would be as it was when it leaves your studio, when it leaves—I mean, that's the state in which you would like it to remain.

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

CM-U: And any damages that occur, we should do our best as conservators to remake, rebuild to make it look as it did originally. So in that way of thinking, in the case of the Tate piece, that was completely understood in the beginning that that's the way it would end up looking, with the scar on the floor.

D. Salcedo: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: That was part of the piece, in fact.

D. Salcedo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was part of the piece. It was clear that it was an ephemeral piece and it would leave only as a memory, as a trace, scar. Because the piece was referring to the kind of scar that is being inflicted on a vast majority of human beings. So that's why it should remain there.

CM-U: It was very moving at the time.

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

CM-U: And still is.

D. Salcedo: But this piece has a lot to do with it.

CM-U: Oh?

D. Salcedo: I think this and the other pieces I made at the time, I think the beginning of the crack—not in this one, but in the next one after this piece—is there, is very much there. It's a surface that is being attacked, and somehow finally is open, straight open. But the beginning, the fact that it's been damaged, that it's an object that's—it's a surface that's been attacked, it's very much there, very much here. And everything I did there, the inside of the crack is very similar to the surface. Very, very similar. So I always see a relation between this piece and that one. Very intimately connected.

MSE: But the scale is so vastly different. How challenging was that? I mean, to do it on this scale and then to scale it—because you do a lot of installation work—

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

MSE: —that is enormous and monumental. How did working in that scale versus this scale—does that create a set of problems in...

D. Salcedo: No, it's exactly the same. It's exactly the same. Even the carving on the floor, on the concrete floor, to install the piece that was made in my studio, was made with dental tools.

CM-U: Hmm. Really.

D. Salcedo: And even though we had a piece that was 168 meters long, our chance for mistake was only two millimeters.

CM-U: Wow. Sure. I guess it would have to.

D. Salcedo: So they were made in the studio and they had to fit exactly in the carving we did. And that carving was just like this. So it actually was no different. It was simply bigger. But there was no difference at all in the way we worked.

[00:22:08]

CM-U: Can we just talk a little bit about installations, in the sense of space being almost one of the material elements that you work with as a sculptor? Are you—I've read this idea of an installation being a restoration of a sort, and I don't think I really understand that. Does that mean, it's—when you've reinstalled a piece, you're rethinking it, or...?

D. Salcedo: Say that again?

- CM-U: Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm confusing because I'm confused myself. Space being such an important part of how anything is installed, and especially in your installations, when—have you ever reinstalled one of your pieces in another place? No.
- D. Salcedo: No.
- CM-U: So it's not that question of rethinking an object in another space?
- D. Salcedo: Oh, an object, yes, but the installation, the large-scale installations, no. Those are—
- CM-U: No, right. Those are site-specific.
- D. Salcedo: Site-specific.
- CM-U: But for an object, certainly, they are installed differently.
- D. Salcedo: Yes, yes, of course, according to the space, they will change. According to the space, it will be transformed. But the other ones are just one-time, site-specific. So they're made for a space—even for a city. And then relating to events that take place in a specific place where the piece will be shown. And those are ephemeral. Not to be reinstalled.
- MSE: And an important aspect, I would say, of Doris's work, which, of course, you can correct me, is she does an enormous amount of research prior to any piece she does—I mean, whether it's a single piece or an installation in a particular site. So when you talk about, like, for example, the Istanbul Biennial, it was very clearly that you chose where and what was going to be there—
- D. Salcedo: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
- MSE: —going into it. Prior to seeing what was amazing that you were able to create—it was very much in response to a dialogue.
- D. Salcedo: Absolutely. Absolutely. To what was happening and to the history of the place. Yeah. And to history of the neighborhood. And it was very specific, and every one of the pieces is absolutely specific. Otherwise I think we wouldn't be able to establish a dialogue. Because it's difficult for an artist who comes from whatever, different society, and just parachute through that and impose an image. I think an image has to be related somehow to whatever happened there. It need to be anchored in a reality. So I need to be respectful towards that reality: researching, learning and finally doing something that I hope

really has a meaning, that comes out of the relation with the space, with the history, whatever has been lived there.

[00:25:17]

CM-U: Are you working with different materials—more fragile materials? You said that. You said that as you work with more fragile materials, it changes.

D. Salcedo: Yeah. Well, I was making—a work, a piece that is called *Plegaria Muda*, and it had grass that is growing in the piece during the exhibition period. So the piece changes, and it needs an enormous amount of care. So if it's not properly taken care of, it looks sad, and it dies. So it needs to be taken care of. So I have to oversee how each museum is taking care of the piece. And you can see at the end of the installation, the result as to whether it was properly attended and looked after or not. And it's quite painful to see when that doesn't happen. And then after that I made a piece that—it's made out of rose petals that are treated in a way that they remain in a particular state that is not withered, not fresh flowers; it's an in-between stage.

CM-U: So they're coated in some way with a material?

D. Salcedo: Yeah, I work with it, changing—taking the sap and all the organic—the natural oils out and replacing those with some other oils. And then, yeah, seal them. But it's extremely fragile. So I don't know what's going to happen. It's a little over a year old, and it is in perfect condition, but I don't know...

CM-U: Is that tied into your laboriousness of working in others...

D. Salcedo: It's tied—yeah, especially because I think a huge effort, a huge effort, it's very important in my work. Because I'm referring to waste. To the waste of life; lives being wasted. So many lives being wasted. I mean, the worst possible, the worst (inaudible) waste you can think of. So I think my work—I try to honor these kind of lives, these extreme situations where lives are lost. My work needs to do the same thing. Like, I don't know if you could talk about a secular prayer or something like that, something of that sort. But it demands devotion to honor these lives. So the absurd techniques that I made up for each piece are the essence of the work. And in a sense, that's what I need to do.

CM-U: I understand.

D. Salcedo: So whether it is carving, trying to make wood out of stainless steel, or sawing through wood with hair or making a huge shroud out of rose petals, each piece

has the same intention, and it has to be made with the same devotion, and it's endless. It's a huge effort.

MSE: I should add to the piece that she's talking about with the roses, the petals are sewn together, correct?

D. Salcedo: Yeah.

MSE: And we're talking—it is a shroud of how many meters?

D. Salcedo: 120 square meters.

CM-U: Oh, wow.

MSE: So it's not small—I mean, it's vast, and installed as a—allowing for, you know, draped and drawn and filling the floor at White Cube.

CM-U: As I imagine that, I can understand why you—why the original appearance is so important. It's important to try to retain that original feeling that was the result of all of this work. Even though in truth, that may not be possible over time.

D. Salcedo: No, it's not possible. It's not possible. And I think, also, the more natural the piece looks, the better. You don't really want to rework it, and—no, it's just basically cleaning. Basic cleaning.

CM-U: Yeah, just kind of natural aging. I mean, it's one thing when there's human intervention and there's damage; that's one thing. But natural—

D. Salcedo: Yeah, that's another thing.

CM-U: —it's something different—

D. Salcedo: That's something different.

CM-U: But natural aging is just—

D. Salcedo: Otherwise it should be just as natural as possible.

CM-U: Yeah, now I understand. It makes sense.

D. Salcedo: Yeah. To keep the surface as...

[00:30:05]

- CM-U: Is there anything you would like to say specifically about the appearance of this Harvard piece to your eye now?
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, what I was saying at the beginning—I think it needs to be—it needs time. It needs to come alive a little bit so the gray is not the—it's not—the matte surface is not all over. It has to have variation. So I think all the edges of the piece, like all of this—there's all the edges around the piece—can be treated in the most simple way. If you start cleaning it with a piece of rubber, just go like this.
- CM-U: Just a normal piece of—
- D. Salcedo: Yeah.
- CM-U: —rubber cloth, or rubber eraser type, or...?
- D. Salcedo: No, no, I think of—hmm. I'll make sure—I'll send you the exact type of rubber that we use in the studio.
- CM-U: Oh, that would be helpful. Uh-huh.
- D. Salcedo: When I go back, I'll mail you the exact type.
- CM-U: Thank you.
- D. Salcedo: But yeah. And it should be over the whole thing, so we can get rid of the fingerprints, and—
- MSE: As well as the peaks of the crumpled area?
- D. Salcedo: The peaks, yes. Yes.
- CM-U: So the high points.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah. Yeah.
- CM-U: I mean, really, they should have a sheen to them.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- CM-U: Comparable to what's on the back of the chair rails, or even higher the sheen than that?
- D. Salcedo: No, no, less.

- CM-U: Less. OK.
- D. Salcedo: Less. Not so much. I can...I think I can send you images of the one I have in Bogotá.
- CM-U: That would be helpful.
- D. Salcedo: I think that would be helpful to work with, so you have some material to work—so it's not just an indication.
- CM-U: Yup, that would be --
- D. Salcedo: So you know how far you can take it.
- CM-U: Yes. Yeah.
- D. Salcedo: I will do that.
- CM-U: No, that—thank you, that would be really helpful, and it would be—because our intent is to have this as true to your wish, and the Harvard Art Museums is really very careful about the care of their works. And so it would be nice to have this one looking just the way you want it—
- D. Salcedo: Wonderful.
- CM-U: —for others to see—
- D. Salcedo: Wonderful.
- CM-U: —and for students to see as an example of what you want.
- D. Salcedo: Thank you. Perfect. Yeah, but I will send you all the materials that we use, so you know.
- CM-U: Thank you.
- D. Salcedo: Make sure.
- [00:32:36]**
- CM-U: Are there other comments or questions that you have?

- MSE: I have a question about the actual chair that you said it was based on, because talking with Joachim, I was led to understand that it was a very particular chair. Was that true, or was I mis--? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- D. Salcedo: It was not a—it was an old, kind of old and abandoned chair. Because as I say, I could not have access to any of...this piece was based on the—on a violent event that took place in Bogotá on November 6th and 7th, 1985, and the palace of justice where the Supreme Court work was taken over by a guerrilla called M-19. And the army retaliated, and so the justices were caught between the guerrillas and the army. And they were all killed. So if you can imagine what it means for a country to have the judges of the Supreme Court murdered, it's a huge loss, and on a symbolic level it's truly unthinkable and unbearable. And I don't think the country ever recovered from that. It's impossible. And it marked a turning point in Colombian history. We had had a civil war for 40 years after that; it became completely brutal. So it really was the turning point. So I think it's the most important historical event for Colombian history, and it was based on that. I made several attempts to grab whatever was—I entered the building and I filmed. And I was requesting to use objects, and nothing—they did not allow me to take anything. And for years I tried and I was never allowed. So absolutely everything was destroyed, because it was convenient for them to have this memory completely obliterated, completely effaced. So not—and at the end I was going for anything, anything they had in the building, anything—nothing. And I was writing letters to the Ministry of Culture, I was writing letters to the judges—I tried every way I could and I was not allowed. I was never allowed. So I had nothing. I had the date and that was it. Not even ashes. I had nothing. So that's why I used this chair, but it was not—it was just specifically in the sense that it was kind of old and simple and abandoned, but it didn't have a specific history—
- CM-U: Significance, mm-hmm.
- D. Salcedo: —because the history was taken away, was totally erased. So I couldn't do it. So I had done with the same chair a previous piece, *Tenebrae*, and then with the same kind of chairs, I made a piece afterwards that was on the façade of the new building. I made that seventeen years after the actual event.
- MSE: So the chair (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)—
- CM-U: On the exact day, yeah.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, but I was not allowed to have anything. So it didn't have such specific history, the object itself as such. And it was very difficult for me to start working out of nothing, being used to always, always, always starting a piece with a found object. It was the first time.

- MSE: And these were created soon after your—or right at the time you were here at Harvard, or just so that there's a link as well?
- D. Salcedo: Yes, yes. Yes.
- CM-U: Oh, I didn't—(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
- MSE: That's when I first met Doris, actually, when she came a resident artist in early 2000.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, exactly the time it was happening, yeah. It was very helpful to be doing the research in this wonderful library. Yeah.
- CM-U: Well, a complete erasure of everything that had to do with that event certainly is felt in your work. I mean, that absence—maybe that negation, when you talk about negation, maybe that's part of that, you know, absence.
- D. Salcedo: Yeah, I think the work has to stay in a—in terms of time, it occupies a time that is different, because it's like it refuses to forget and it refuses to move on. So it's—
- CM-U: Mm-hmm. Stays.
- D. Salcedo: —not very clear what time the piece occupies. But it is—I think there is a need to stop and think. So in a way this—in a separate time, it's not the time we're living that is continually changing and overlapping, events, no. This stays there in a separate time—where I think most of the victims or the survivors will always remain. Somehow on this side of continuous linear time. They occupy different space and different time.
- CM-U: Mary, do you have any other questions?
- MSE: That one actually leads me to a point I would make—maybe a question, but also a point, which is I see time as a material in your work, and it's very much—you sculpt with materials, but time is very much, not only with this work or not only with the performance piece that was on the outside of the new Supreme Court building, but, you know, you've woven the thread and the hair into this tabletop of the (inaudible) in that series. And those are things that measure a before and an enduring, outside of linear time to me. Because each of these—both the focus on the work that's done by hand by you that is so fastidious and painstakingly done obviously measures time as well. So in all of your work, the way in which these materials work together, time is, to me, an actually palpable material that is integral. And I don't know if you have a—am I on target in that? Do you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --?

D. Salcedo: Yeah, no, that's very important. In the talk tomorrow I will talk about it. And I—the other quote of *Hamlet*, saying that time is out of joint—and I think the time of violence is somehow—it's a dislocated time, it's a broken time. It's not the same time—if we come out of these tragic events that took place here last week, then you're not perceiving time the same way afterwards. It has changed. And the closer you are to the epicenter of the catastrophe, the slower time will move. For whoever was not affected, next Christmas will be Christmas, next Mother's Day will be a Mother's Day, but for the families affected, they will be missing their loved ones. They will not have the opportunity to move on. So it's a weird time. And they live with all these different tenses that are juxtaposed continuously. The sense of future is quite uncertain if you lose your son or your daughter, and you lose that, but nonetheless, you have—there will be a tomorrow that you have to go through, and you are pretty much stuck with your memories in the past. And so you press on this (inaudible), sort of compressing between that; it's totally insane. It's a different time, the time of violence.

CM-U: Yeah. In closing, I'm struck by—I think you said somewhere that if you had a word to describe your work it would be “impotence”. And you have explained impotence and your inability, of course, to change history. History happened; there was nothing that you can do. And I've heard you say, or read what you've said, that you speak from a person—from a position of not having power, of being a person without power. And as someone who sees your work, meeting you for the first time but seeing your work, I think your work is very powerful, and I think you are very powerful in a way that's different, I know, from your definition of—you said the word “impotence,” but I just wanted to say that that's the way it strikes me, and we are honored to look after your work.

D. Salcedo: Thank you so much.

CM-U: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]