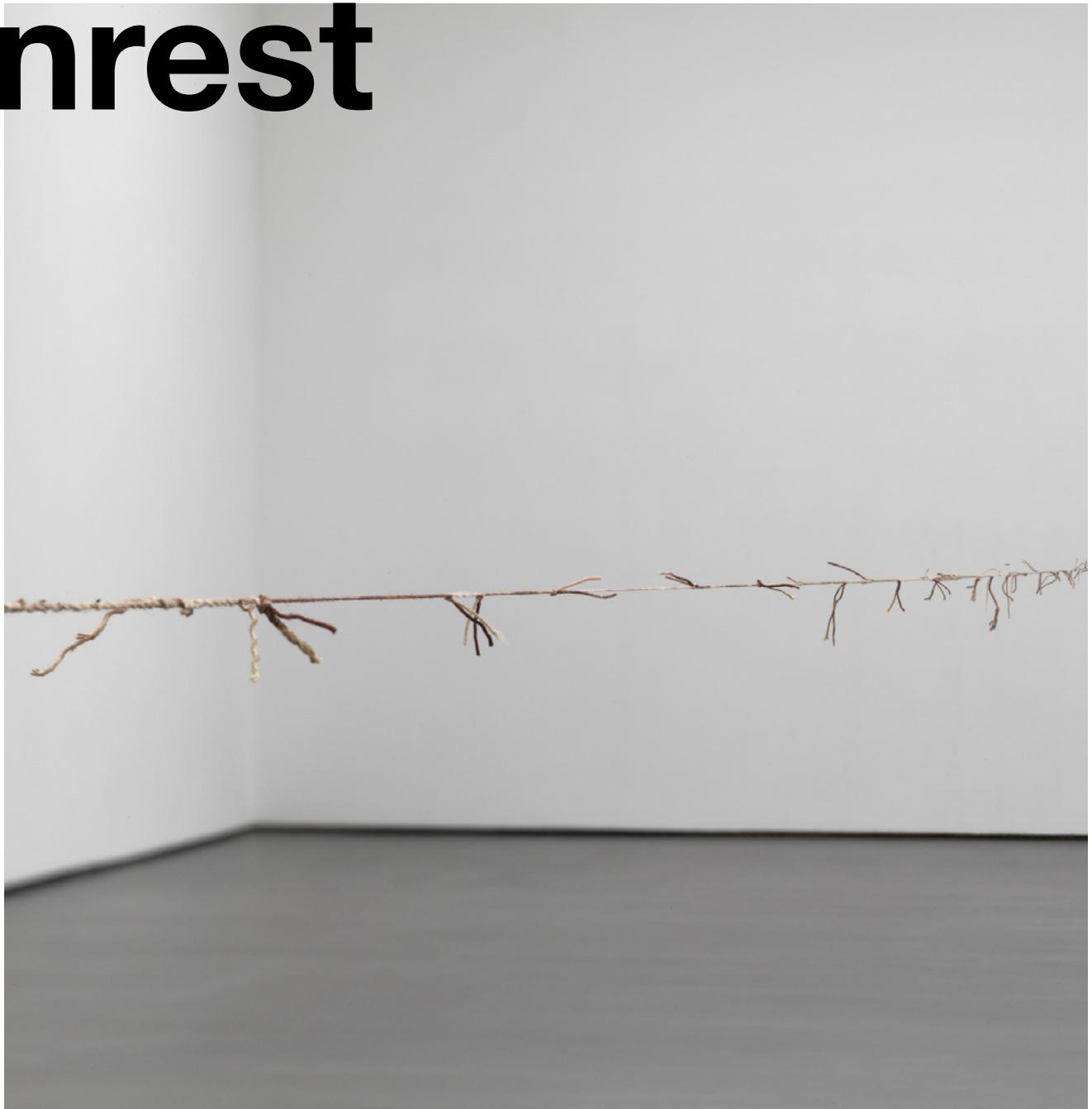


# Invisibility • Unrest



An exhibition  
curated by  
**Tina Zhou**

# Curator's Statement

In his 2014 essay on art activism, Boris Groys states that what modern and contemporary art desires is "...to make dysfunctional things out of functional things, to betray expectations, to reveal the invisible presence of death where we tend to see only life."<sup>1</sup>

Invisibility: A weakness. A shelter. A weapon.

In our era overflowing with excess information, the societal attention span has reached an all-time low. Yet at the same time, the abundance of social injustice reminds us that our attention is needed more than ever. When the world doesn't have time to read a ten-page opinion piece, it is up to the artist to provide a new visual and situational stimulation, to bring the invisible into the limelight. Constantly surrounded by human tragedies and natural catastrophes, our addiction to the specularization of reality has led us to lose our empathies. We choose not to be burdened by the pain of others, so we bury them in the depths of oblivion to carry on with our day to day lives; yet as we choose to let the invisible remain invisible, we forget how good it is to just let ourselves feel.

An art exhibition is a safe space. Within this white cube, we are transported into another reality, surrounded by nothing but the atmosphere the artist has created, and endless silence. To able to look at something and not just shrug off a fleeting sensation of pity, but to stand for a moment with the victims, and wallow in the sea of emotions.

This exhibition looks at a group contemporary artists who tackle the means of invisibility, and who unveil said invisibility of the social and political worlds for which they are situated in. The discovery of invisibility leads to an upheaval as we are awakened. As citizens, we hold power within us. We stand with the art not to merely address the critique, but to change conditions in the real world, by means of art.

Perhaps we only need to worry about times where there is no artistic intervention, for those are truly times without humanity.

<sup>1</sup>Groys, Boris. "On Art Activism." *E-Flux*, June 2014. No. 56. Web. Dec 15 2017.

This exhibition includes works from the following artists:

Teresa Margolles

Ai Weiwei

Harun Faroki

Doris Salcedo

Andrew Tider & Jeff Greenspan

Chiharu Shiota

Based on

*But we are not the same*

*Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art as the Return of Institutional Critique*

*You're More Powerful Than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen*

*Panopticism*

*Pay for Your Pleasure*

13th

# Teresa Margolles



Teresa Margolles is an artist from Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico. As one of the foremost Mexican artists of her generation, Margolles creates installations to respond to the epidemic violence in her country. Margolles's artistic practice is heavily influenced by her studies in forensic medicine, as most of her works rely on collecting raw materials from crime scenes, such as blood and wastewater. Margolles's works reject the monumental object, focusing not on the direct display of death itself but the physical traces left behind. Through the aesthetic process of diffusing, vaporizing, solidifying, obstructing, Margolles reduces the necrological materials to its purest and most intimate forms, hinging on its abjection and forcing the viewer out of their moral comforts.

All of Margolles's bodies have died a violent death, many of which are connected to the country's drug trafficking. In the contemporary context, deaths in a cartel-heavy environment such as Mexico is, as poet Cynthia Cruz points out, heavily exoticized and fetishized in relation to America. As "part and parcel of colonialism," the American understands the Mexican as "less-than, part savage, part animal." And so forth as a Mexican artist, Margolles compacts class and ethnicity conflicts within Mexico and femicide of women and young girls as results of the US-Mexican war into minimalist sculptures that warrant an emotional response regardless of the viewer's background. As Pascal Beausse concludes, the bodies are truly "the corpses of those Walter Benjamin called 'the eternally vanquished, the victims of hunger and poverty.'" Yes, Margolles's works are an aestheticization, but they leave a haunting mark by recalling the invisibility that the world prefers not to see; we are reminded of our ignorance as we take the safety of death's absence as granted.



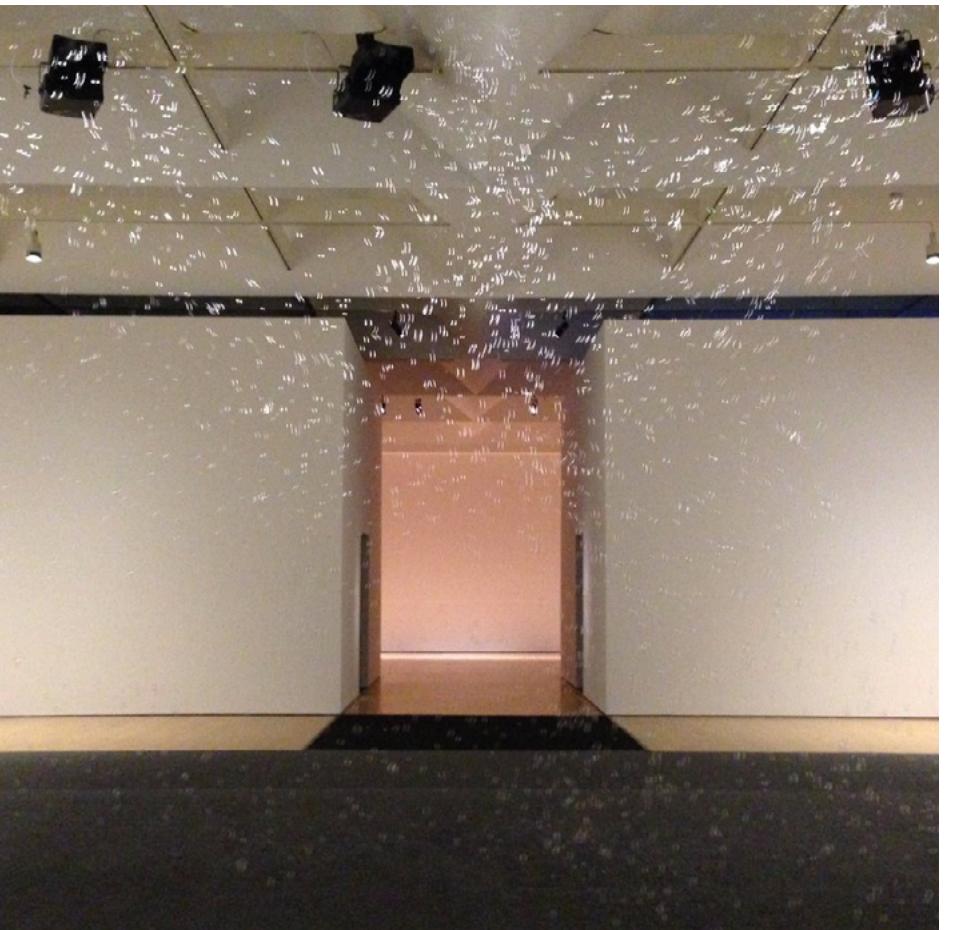
**36 Cuerpos**  
**2006**  
Installation

This is a string composed of suture threads used to stitch the bodies of those who have suffered a violent death. 36 threads correspond to 36 bodies, stained with the blood of the victims.



**En El Aire**  
**2003**  
Installation

In this installation, waves of soap bubbles cascade from the ceiling, each bubble made of water used to clean corpses in morgues. The bubbles journey through the air and disintegrate on our skins, forming a spectacular view as we become one with the bodies of the dead. This work embodies the fragility and the transience of lives that are lost, and we are confronted with the stigma of the contamination of mortality.



**Plancha**  
**2010**  
Installation

A plaque of heated steel plates stretch across the gallery floor, and above it is a tube of water—also sourced from morgues—that drips sporadically onto the plank, producing a gentle sizzle and almost instantly, evaporating into the air. As time passes, the steel becomes discoloured, witnessing the decomposition from liquid to steam, from presence to absence, from visible to invisible. There is a critical cycle of circulation as the deaths of the victims are reabsorbed into the status-quo, and we as bystanders take their last traces of living into our lungs, along with the violence, into our bodies.

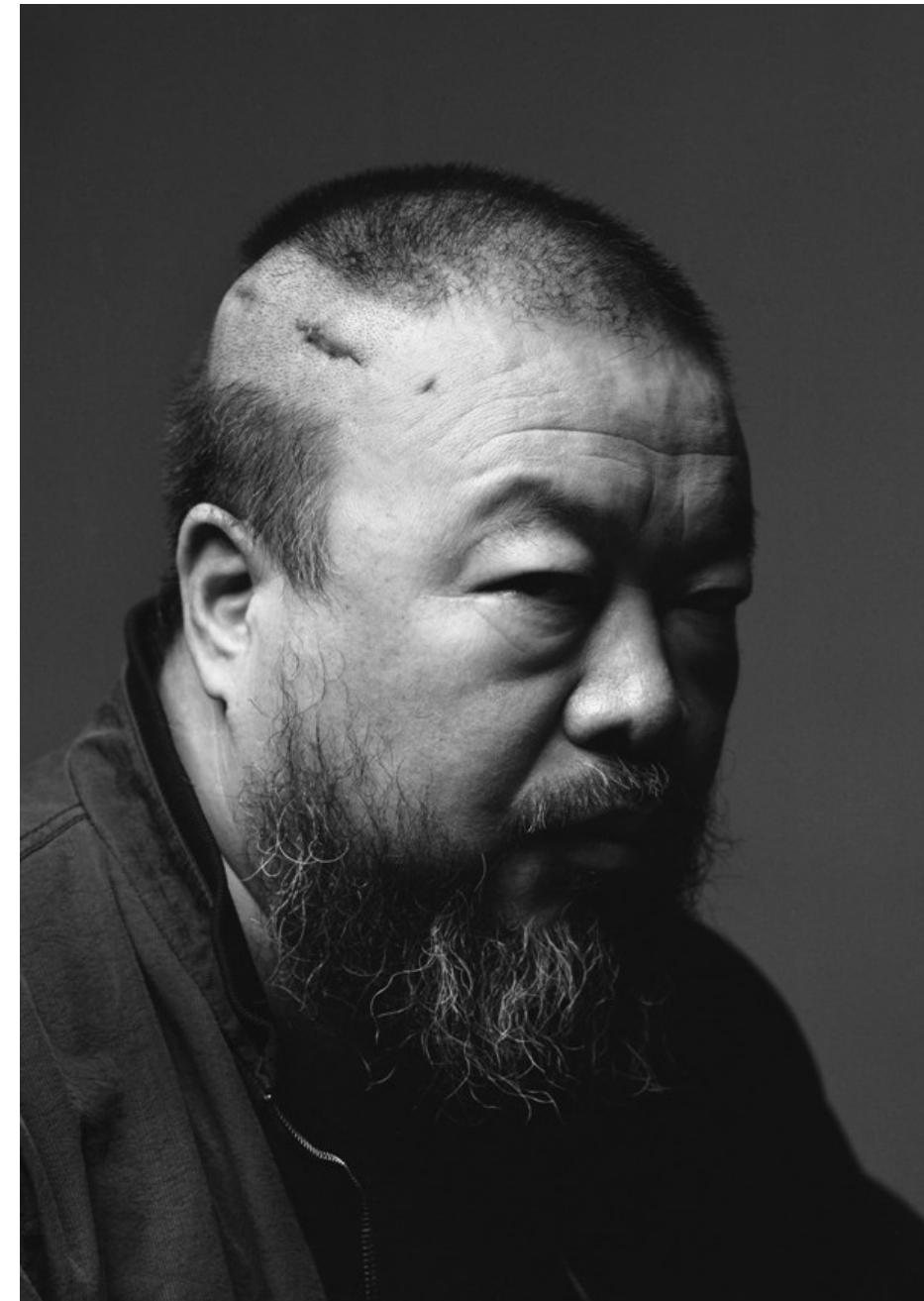


## **Pesquisas**

**2016**

Mural installation

These 30 prints chronicle 30 of the tens of thousands of women who have disappeared from the late 90s to present. These victims are most likely to have been abducted, sexually abused, then tortured, murdered, and discarded in the deserts. Posters like these are all over the streets of Mexico, with each trace of wear reducing the hopes of them ever being found.



# **Ai Wei wei**

As I type the name "Ai Weiwei" into Baidu.com, China's largest search engine, upon the first results page, only three links referred to the artist, of which two were about Ai's tax evasion case from 2011. Meanwhile, on Google, searching the same term produced more than 8 million results.

It is not every day that we encounter an artist so disowned by their motherland in the contemporary society. Long known as China's dissident artist, Ai Weiwei is most notable for his Citizen Investigation Project after the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake. After one of the deadliest earthquakes in recent Chinese history, the local government refused to acknowledge the actual number of victims and made multiple attempts to cover up the real reasons behind the large death toll, which is poor construction. This resulted in an upheaval as activists nationwide called for investigation, yet most were soon silenced, Ai being lucky enough to be protected by his international fame. Despite being placed under house arrest, called into questioning, and receiving death threats, Ai carried on, and with the help of many volunteers, eventually produced a large body of works exposing the underbelly of the Sichuan earthquake. Yet even after all he's done for the victims, Ai is still largely considered a traitor to the nation, unspoken of among media and despised by his citizens. In rendering those who lost their lives visible, Ai himself has become invisible to his people.



### ***Straight***

**2008-12**

Installation

This is a collection of 90 tons of steel bars salvaged from sites of collapsed schools following the Sichuan earthquake. Each rebar, originally warped and twisted, has been straightened by hand, neatly arranged in stacks as if a wave, or a mountain. What is most impactful is its mere scale and weight, thousands of rods as like the thousands of lives lost.

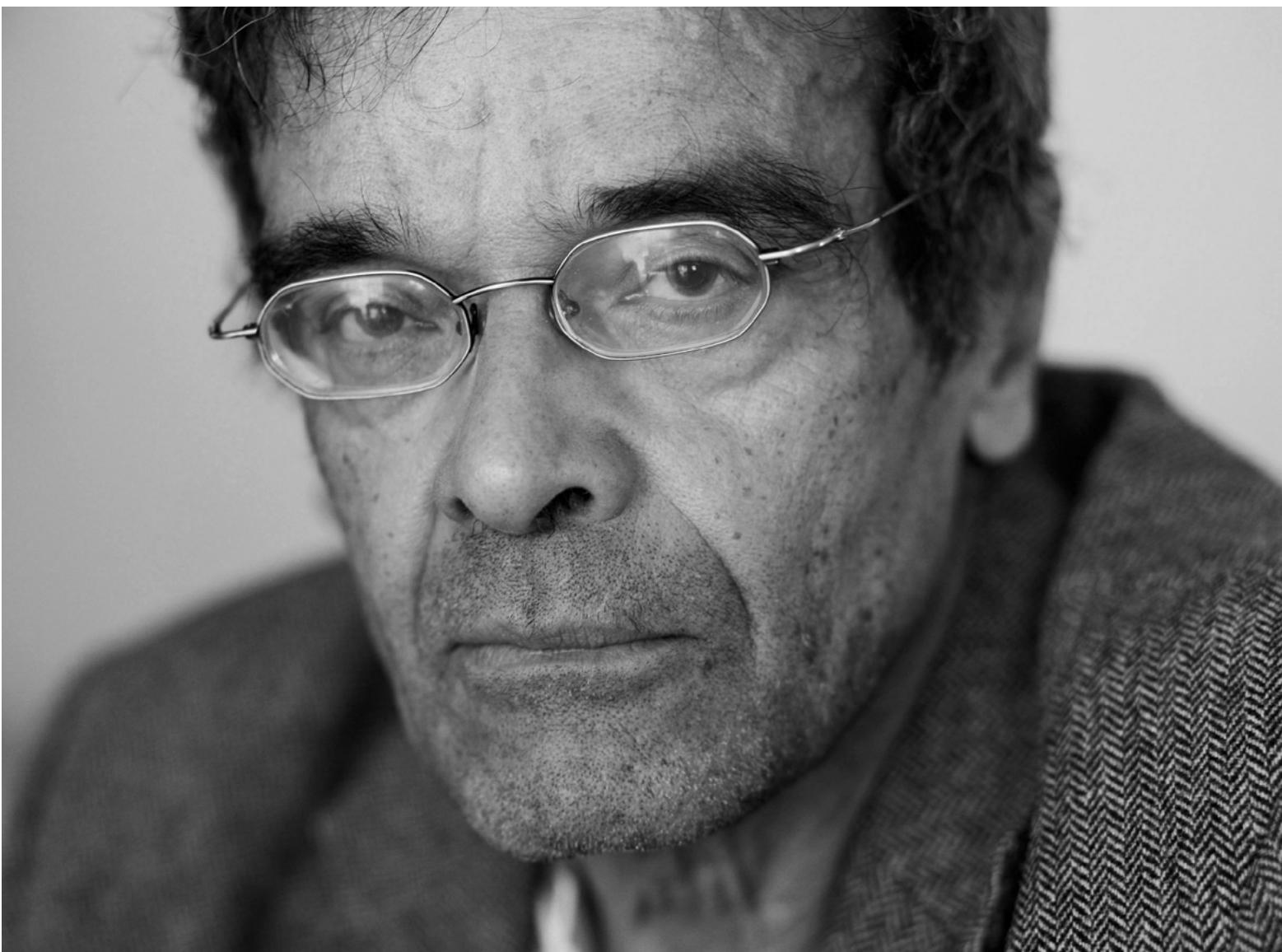
### ***Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation + Remembrance***

**2008-11**

Inkjet print

Unsatisfied with the Chinese government's official statistics, Ai took to himself as he recruited a team of volunteers and conducted a three-year research into the aftermaths of the 2008 Earthquake. Ai and his team spoke to every family affected by the tragedy and eventually compiled a list of 5,385 students who lost their lives as the school buildings collapsed due to poor construction. Along with the print that occupies the entire gallery is a recording Remembrance, where Ai invited internet users from all over the world to each read a single name from the list, and the 3-hour-41-minute recording is broadcasted in the gallery space, commemorating the deaths on the hands of the government.





# Harun Faroki

Harun Faroki is a German filmmaker who makes political essay films that explore themes of capitalism, consumerism, technology, war, and entertainment, challenging the borders between cinema and art. Faroki tears down the traditional structure of the timeline and narrates through repetition of images and fragments of commentary, redirecting the audience's gaze to an assemblage of scattered montages. Then, "repetition is not the return of the identical, the reoccurrence of the same in and of itself. The force and the grace of repetition is the novelty it brings, it is the renewed possibility of that which was. Repetition restores the possibility of that which was, and makes it possible once more." (Voltzenlogel) Commentary becomes not a narration, but a supplement, and as film critic Thomas Voltzenlogel concurs, Faroki's audience acts not as a receptacle, but as a co-producer of knowledge, free to circulate within and between its images.

Under the influence of technological advancement, footage produced by the media has long changed our capacity as observers; we become estranged to images of war, of suffering, of dehumanization, as they become facts and numbers, first validated then destroyed. As Voltzenlogel then points out, there are two invisibilities: the invisibility of the hand that manipulates, and our eyes that gaze; both leading to an erasure of human presence. What Faroki asserts is that the media images show nothing about the real brutality of power, and to truly be in position to grasp the implication of these discourses, we must emancipate ourselves from the significations and functions of their predisposal.



## Gefängnisbilder

2000

Documentary

Corcoran, California. Maximum security prison. Yard. A prisoner attacks another, the rest of the prisoners wander leisurely. They know the protocols when a fight breaks out. One, warning. Rubber bullets. Two, live ammunition. The attacker collapses. Each frame of surveillance footage is prolonged to save on space, and so the chronicle of the not-at-all dramatic death appears like a cheap video game, yielding an abstract existence.

*Gefängnisbilder* is a film composed of prison documentary and surveillance footages, intermixed with quotations and clips from fictional films such as *Un Chant d'amour*(A Song of Love) (1950) and *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé*(A Man Escaped) (1956). As presented in the more recent documentary film 13th, the prison is yet another institution where surveillance and dehumanization occurs. In *Gefängnisbilder*, the prison is presented as a site where humans must forge themselves as workers and performers, succumbing their bodies to the pleasures of the guards. Although the era of incarceration as public display is long gone, we are reminded that the prisoner still falls victim to the gaze of the panoptic spectator.

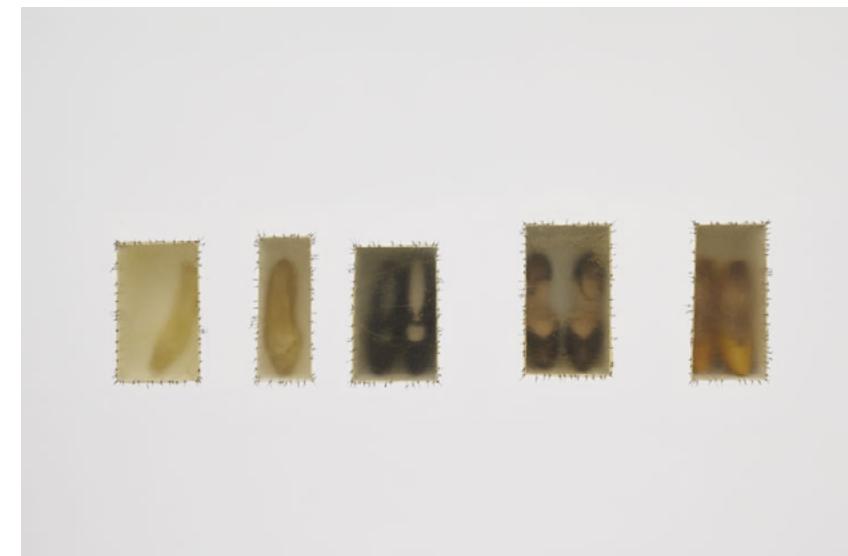
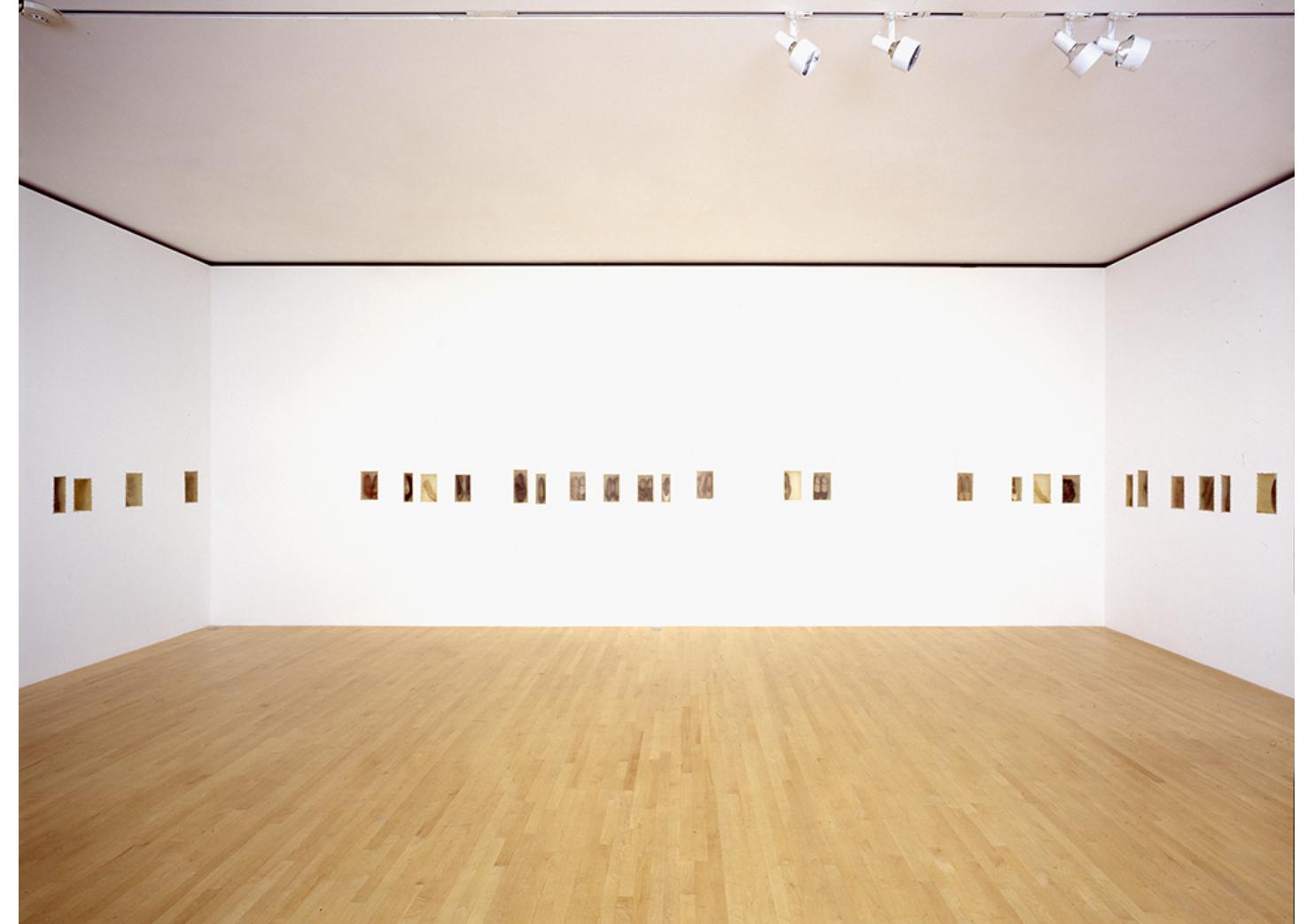
# Doris Salcedo



Doris Salcedo is a Colombian artist most known for creating works responding to political violence in Colombia. Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has said, "Politics begins and ends with bodies." Using common everyday objects such as chairs and clothes, Salcedo honors and mourns those who have lost the battle against oppression, many of whom are Salcedo's family members. In Salcedo's own words, her work is "...the vacuum generated by forgetfulness, an attempt to grasp what is no longer present."

Every year, tens of thousands of young people disappear in Salcedo's homeland, unacknowledged by the government whilst their families are left in the face of grief and forced absence. Salcedo sees her practice as funeral oration, returning the form and meaning that violence had robbed to its victims, more specifically, to the unmourned dead of the past. To Salcedo, the human limit is in a way defined by our immensity of mourning, and so Salcedo bridges the space between the inaccessible and incomprehensible for remembrance to take place. There is a relationship between images that of violence and the memories pertained to the deceased, and connected is a fragile line between a confrontation and an embrace. By materializing the invisible, the absence is made present, simultaneously separating and uniting these images.

In the end, "An aesthetic view of death reveals an ethical view of life, and it is for this reason that there is nothing more human than mourning." (Salcedo)



## Atrabiliarios

1992–2004

Installation

This installation is a collection of shoes once owned by people who have now disappeared. Worn shoes are often used to identify the bodies or remains of those who have suffered violent deaths. Encased in niches, the shoes are sealed with a membrane of semi-translucent animal fiber, literally embodying the internalized memories and grief of those who were once among us. The shoes within the boxes are then obscured, hauntingly evocating their absent owners.





## The Captured Project

*People in prison drawing people who should be*

### 2016

Drawing

Invisibility concerns not just the victim, but also the perpetrator. *Captured* is a year-long project conducted by Jeff Greenspan and Andrew Tider, in which inmates were invited to draw company executives guilty of corporate crimes yet still walking free. The result produced 29 portraits of present and former CEOs of Walmart (bribery, looting the public, public endangerment, wage theft, tax evasion), JP Morgan (conspiracy, corruption and bribery, illegal credit card practice, price fixing, scamming investors, securities fraud), BP Oil (environmental crimes, manslaughter, obstruction of Congress, securities fraud), and many more. On a rap sheet, the crimes of both the executives and the inmate artist are listed side by side.

The two ends of “untouchable,” as Greenspan and Tider points out, are put on exhibit: One being the leader of these companies, given they are able to masquerade crimes as commerce and make their own rules; the other being the incarcerated, who even after paying their debts to society are still treated as unworthy. All artists who participated in this project were rightfully compensated.



# Chiharu Shiota

Chiharu Shiota is a Japanese artist who creates large-scale installations using yarn and used possessions. Many everyday objects can be found in her works, be it keys, shoes, beds, or even the artist herself. Shiota skilfully threads these pieces together while creating a monumental architectural space.

The threads are always either black or red: "black as representative of the universe and the mind; red for the bodily, the social, the human."(Acret)

Different from other artists in this exhibition, Shiota's remembrance is more to a personal sense, yet it still evokes resonance with the audience. To Shiota, the objects embody the characters of their owners; once removed from the body, they are ridden of their representations and become susceptible to a new semiotization. "The weight of the nostalgia exceeds the desire to represent it...the absent body invokes the death of the subject and, at the same time, the life of the objects."(Shiota) By delineating a universalized space, invisible interconnected relationships can be observed as a whole.



## *The Key in the Hand*

2015

Installation

To Shiota, "keys are the embodiment of something that is very personal, very important in every individual's life. Without your key, you are lost...the giving of a key to a friend or relative—or, particularly, to a stranger—is a sign of trust." (Acret) After facing a number of deaths of her family members, Shiota associated her feelings to all the possible connotations of the key and collected 180,000 keys from all over the world. The boat underneath the jungle of dangling threads carry and embody the emotions that coexist, and together the piece accumulates the webbed memories that dwell within us, moving forward.



# References

- Acret, Susan. "The Primacy of Matter: Chiharu Shiota." *ArtAsiaPacific*. Jul/Aug 2016. Web. Dec 16 2017.
- Beausse, Pascal. "Teresa Margolles: Primordial Substances." *Flash Art*, No. 38. July/September. 2005. Web. Dec 15 2017.
- Cruz, Cynthia. "All that's left: the art of Teresa Margolles." *The Critical Flame*. 25 July. 2017. Web. Dec 15 2017.
- Faroki, Harun. "Controlling Observation." *Imprint: Writings*, pp.306-320. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001. Print.
- Power, Nina. "The art of protest." *Tate Etc.*, 22 Feb. 2016. Issue 36: Spring 2016. Web. Dec 15 2017.
- Salcedo, Doris. "A Work in Mourning." *Doris Salcedo*. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Web. Dec 16 2017.
- Shiota, Chiharu. "Stitching the sublime: Chiharu Shiota's threads of time – interview." *Art Radar*. 24 July. 2015. Web. Dec 16 2017.
- Voltzenlogel, Thomas. "Harun Farocki (1944-2014), or Dialectics in Images." *Senses of Cinema*, Dec 2014. No.73. Web. Dec 16 2017.
- Tider, Andrew, and Jeff Greenspan. "CAPTURED: People in Prison Drawing People Who Should Be." *The Captured Project*, thecapturedproject.com. Web. Dec 16 2017.