

Teresa Margolles

(Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, 1963)

The sound is that of an electrical tool, like a drill or a saw, with sometimes shrill vibrations. The rhythm is that of a manual operation, with moments of pause or greater persistence. *Trepanaciones (Sonidos de la morgue) (Trepanations - Sounds of the Morgue)*, 2003, a sound work by Teresa Margolles, consists of the faithful recording of sounds emitted by the medical instrument used during an autopsy, in particular for opening up the skull. As with other works by the artist, the title provides some information that, while crucial for initial comprehension, still leaves many significant details open to personal interpretation. Reactions of horror, disgust, morbid curiosity, scientific attention or compassionate empathy are, in fact, equally possible, making the encounter with the work a strongly personal experience to which it is difficult to remain indifferent.

For many years the morgue was Margolles's designated place of artistic and social investigation, above all in the context of work she did in the early 1990s with SEMEFO (Servicio Médico Forense), a collective of Mexican artists involved in addressing serious subjects of endemic proportions, such as crime and poverty. In more recent years the growth of violence caused by the spread of drug trafficking in Mexico, has taken Margolles outside the morgue and more literally into the public space of the city. Here, following news published in the papers, speaking with witnesses, and going to places where crimes have just been committed, Margolles collects traces and fragments. The resulting works, many of which are derived from incidents that have occurred in Mexico City or border cities such as Ciudad Juárez, rather than recomposing what has taken place, seem to dwell on the tragic dimension of lack, loss, and void that the horrendous, quotidian nature of crime imprints on society. As the artist herself has stated, her work centers on what is happening in Mexico at this precise historical moment, with a rate of homicides and violent crimes that exceeds that of certain countries that are at war. Nonetheless her art, without compromises, does not just describe what is happening in a specific part of the world, but rather exposes the final links of a violent chain that ties together economic interests that now have global reach. (MB)