

A Crack in Tate Modern.

(from 'Linea and Colore' Magazine)

The current exhibition at Tate Modern, sponsored by the soap manufacturer Unilever, is neither a painting, nor a sculpture, nor even an 'installation'; it is a large crack in the floor. It is called 'Shibboleth' and is by a Doria Salcedo. The crack zig-zags along and has steel mesh fencing in it. It's the kind of thing that kids might call: 'Cool' and the curious ones might ask: 'How do they do that, Dad?' Art, it is not. How could it be - a crack in the ground? Well, that's a good question; and the Tate curator and Ms Salcedo attempt to help us understand the significance of this particular crack.

'Shibboleth', we are told, asks questions about the interaction of sculpture and space, about architecture and the values it enshrines, and - here comes the usual flummery - about the shaky ideological foundations on which Western notions of modernity (why are we in the West always picked on?) are built. Have we all got that clear? Good.

In particular, Ms. Salcedo confides, 'Shibboleth' addresses a long legacy of.... (now I know you've heard all this before, but Ms. S clearly thinks she has a right to remind us) ...a long legacy of racism and colonialism. There! What do you say to that?

We have not been informed in the biographical notes that Ms. Salcedo is also an historian. But so it seems. 'The history of racism', she writes, 'runs parallel to the history of modernity and its untold dark side. For hundreds of years, Western ideas of progress and prosperity have been underpinned by (here we go again) colonial exploitation and (not finished yet) the withdrawal of basic rights from others'. It's unfortunate that Ms. Salcedo and her Curators never attended classes on the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution and a few other matters that did some underpinning too.

Finally, to add to our shame, we are reprimanded, and told that the work encourages us to confront uncomfortable truths about our history and about ourselves with absolute candidness, and without self deception. My! If it were not so risible, one might be a little peeved at the complacent arrogance of these people.

However, it is a work which will have little value in a few years (if indeed a crack can survive as an artefact) any more than the abstract blobs of Henry Moore who was once regarded as one of the world's greatest sculptors. At least he stuck to his last and didn't try to teach us tiresome, revisionist history.

It's an amusing exhibition for Unilever to take its clients to, but one might have hoped that the accompanying, dreadful balderdash which we have all heard before, had been excised before the doors opened.