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# Mona Hatoum

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THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Mona Hatoum and William Kentridge among international recipients of £100,000 Japanese art prize

The Praemium Imperiale Award will be presented in  
Tokyo in October

The British-Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum has won a Japanese prize worth £100,000 in recognition of her lifetime achievement in sculpture. She is among five international recipients of the Praemium Imperiale Award, presented by the Japan Art Association, under its honorary patron, Prince Hitachi. Born in Beirut to Palestinian parents, Hatoum has worked in London since 1975. She currently has a show at White Cube Bermondsey (until 3 November).

The South African artist William Kentridge, who has an anti-Apartheid background, was given a similar award. Although awarded for "painting", he uses drawing, sculpture, film, music and performance in his art. "Painting is actually the one form that I don't practice as an artist", he told *The Art Newspaper*.

The other three recipients are the German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter for music, the Japanese Kabuki actor Bando Tamasaburo for theatre/film and the US couple Tod Williams & Billie Tsien for architecture. Williams & Tsien designed the 2012 Barnes Foundation building in Philadelphia and the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago (due to open in 2021). The Praemium Imperiale prizes will be presented in a ceremony in Tokyo on 16 October.



Mona Hatoum in her London studio in 2019  
© Japan Art Association / The Sankei Shimbun

Martin Bailey

« *Mona Hatoum and William Kentridge among international recipients of £100,000 Japanese art prize* »,

The ArtNewspaper, September 17, 2019.



Ahead of the curve: Mona Hatoum at her studio in Dalston with a work set to feature in her exhibition Remains to Be Seen ( *Daniel Hambury/@stellapicsltd* )

## Mona Hatoum interview: 'If everything is predictable, then it's not interesting'

Most of Mona Hatoum's time over the past four years has been focused on big **exhibitions** such as her remarkable show at **Tate Modern** in 2016. These retrospectives are often the pinnacle of artists' careers but most artists are happiest when charting new courses, battling in the white heat of experimentation. And it's in this mood that I find Hatoum when I visit her studio in Dalston.

Ben Luke

« *Mona Hatoum interview : 'If everything is predictable, then it's not interesting* », Standard - Go London, September 5, 2019.

All around are materials she's using for the first time in her new show, *Remains to be Seen*, opening at White Cube Bermondsey next week. As she talks me through the works — including a vast map of the world fashioned from glass that will hang from White Cube's tallest space, sculptures made with reinforcement bars and clumps of rough cement, and stacks of perforated red brick — she points to details that remain uncertain until they're installed in the gallery. "It's exciting to be working towards a work without knowing what the final outcome would be," she tells me. "If everything is predictable, then it's not so interesting for me."

Characteristically, Hatoum is exploring contradictory forces and effects. The works are intimate and suggest domestic space yet evoke global events and historical ruptures. They're poised between order and destruction. They often entice and repel at once.

She honed her knack for balancing beauty and violence in *The Light at the End*, shown at the Showroom in 1989, as she shifted from her Eighties performance work into sculpture. It featured a "gate-like structure with bars, which you perceived as light", she says. Up close, you see that they're searingly hot electric heating elements. The hope in the title "was totally disrupted as you approached a dangerous and repulsive situation that conjures up images of imprisonment, torture and pain". At the same time, she adds, "it was quite seductive — everybody likes to play with fire".

And she has literally been playing with fire recently. In the White Cube show is *Remains of the Day*, first made for the Hiroshima Art Prize in 2017, featuring, she says, "a domestic environment that has been hit by a sudden, devastating disaster". Of course, it suggests "the sudden devastation" of the Japanese city in 1945. Hatoum took domestic furniture, covered it with wire mesh, and then set it on fire. "They look like ghost images of themselves with the charred remains barely held together by the mesh."

The installation that gives the White Cube show its title, *Remains to Be Seen*, emerged from a long desire to use rubble from razed buildings. It's constructed rather than found but the intention is the same. "This time, it looks like a skeleton of a demolished building which is still hanging by a thread," she explains.

"I'm really interested in modern ruins: ruins of architecture affected by war or urban decay or even buildings collapsing because they've been shoddily built, like factories in Bangladesh...It makes you realise how impermanent everything is, even those structures that are supposed to be solid, to contain you, they can collapse."

Human vulnerability in physical and social constructions has long been a Hatoum theme. In one of her finest installations, *Homebound* (2000), domestic furniture and objects are linked by lethal electric wire, viewable from behind a metal fence. It's ambiguous but loaded. "It's like a condemned space or even a denied homeland," yet also "problematizing the whole idea of the home as a haven", she says.

It's tempting to link this directly to her biography. Born in Beirut to Palestinian parents in 1952, she was in London in 1975 when civil war broke out in Lebanon. Her family were forced into exile and she has lived here ever since. But she doesn't set out "to illustrate my own biographical experience", she explains. "Often after making a work I might reflect on how it might relate to my experience or that of my parents losing their homeland, for instance. But I don't start off with this aim in mind. It's almost an afterthought." Viewers' own interpretations are crucial.

Hatoum's also wary of interpretations relating to literally to specific global events — she's obsessed by form and material, absorbing and evolving the art of the past as much as by geopolitics. A new sculpture called *A Pile of Bricks* riffs on the Seventies scandal around the Tate acquiring Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII*, that minimalist rectangle constructed of two stacked layers of bricks.



Yet her art inevitably conjures present crises. One work, *Remains* (cabinet), builds on the charred wood and mesh pieces. Hatoum wanted “to create an element that goes higher than human height, therefore aspiring to architecture” and found a kitchen dresser, more than two metres high, which she burned in the same way. I doubt anyone will look at it without being reminded of the tragedy of Grenfell Tower.

A version of *Hot Spot*, Hatoum’s globe fashioned from pulsing electrical wire, is also in the show — of course, it’s redolent of the climate emergency. She first made *Hot Spot* in 2006, “when I felt like there was unrest all over the world. It seemed that spots of conflict were no longer related to a specific region, like the whole world was up in arms. But it’s still happening — even more so now.”

Hatoum says the feeling of the new show is best captured by the word “precariousness” — it “sums up our current state of being and that of the whole planet”, she explains. “*Remains to Be Seen* suggests an uncertain future.”

*Mona Hatoum: Remains to be Seen is at the White Cube, SE1 ([whitecube.com](http://whitecube.com)),  
Sep 12-Nov 3*

## LES **6** ESSENTIELS DU JOUR

### PRIX

## William Kentridge et Mona Hatoum, lauréats du Praemium Imperiale

Le prix Praemium Imperiale a dévoilé, hier, les cinq lauréats de sa 31<sup>e</sup> édition à l'Institut de France. Il s'agit de l'Anglo-Palestinienne Mona Hatoum (sculpture) dont les installations sur l'exil lui avaient déjà valu d'être nommée au prix Turner en 1995 ; du Sud-Africain William Kentridge (peinture) pour ses dessins dénonciateurs de l'apartheid et du colonialisme ; du duo américain Tod Williams et Billie Tsien (architecture), qui ont, entre autres, piloté le chantier d'extension et de rénovation du Hood Museum of Art (voir *QdA* du 27 janvier 2019) ; du Japonais Bando Tamasaburo (théâtre-cinéma) et de l'Allemande Anne-Sophie Mutter (musique). Le dispositif d'éducation musicale à vocation sociale « Démon », mis en place par la Philharmonie de Paris, a pour sa part été sélectionné dans la catégorie « jeunes artistes ». Créé en 1988 par la Japan Art Association, le prix – souvent considéré comme l'équivalent du prix Nobel pour les arts – a été décerné à ce jour à 160 artistes, tels que Jean-Luc Godard, David Hockney, Anish Kapoor ou Renzo Piano. Les lauréats recevront chacun la somme de 15 millions de yens (environ 127 000 euros), un diplôme et une médaille le 16 octobre à Tokyo.

ALISON MOSS

[praemiumimperiale.org](http://praemiumimperiale.org)



Mona Hatoum dans son atelier de Londres, 2019.

# ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

## MONA HATOUM

September 10, 2019 • Mona Hatoum on uncertainty and allure in “Remains to be Seen”



Mona Hatoum, *Remains to be Seen*, 2019, concrete and steel reinforcement bars, 17' 3 7/8" x 17' 4 11/16" x 17' 4 11/16".

*Many of Mona Hatoum's installations employ just one or two materials (barbed wire, cement and rebar, steel, hair) to transform recognizable symbols and forms (maps, globes, spheres, cubes) into portentous iterations. The results can be seen as succinct metaphors for the world as it is—or as models of the future. In an exhibition at White Cube in London titled “Remains to be Seen,” on view from September 11 to November 3, 2019, Hatoum is debuting several pieces that move further in the latter direction, bringing together images of the world lit up by fire, a shattered map of floating continents, and a building whose plan incorporates its own destruction.*

Mira Dayal  
« Interviews : Mona Hatoum »,  
Artforum, September 10, 2019.



**MODERN RUINS** have long interested me—urban decay, destruction, ruins of architecture affected by war. Looking at the remains of buildings makes you reflect on the impermanence of all things, even what you think of as solid. Things that are supposed to contain you can also be fragile and breakable. People often talk about the sense of threat or danger in my work, but for me the feeling of precariousness is more important, especially in the current exhibition.

For *Orbital I*, a work made last year, I wanted to create something that appears to have been constructed from the remains of a destroyed building. It's a globe made out of bent lengths of rebar punctuated by clumps of rubble, suggesting a world in a permanent state of destruction. I continued this idea in a new large-scale installation, in which chunks of concrete, which look like fragments of flooring, hang from the ceiling on straight sections of rebar. The work is heavy and light, ordered and chaotic, very much like my past work *Impenetrable*, where suspended lengths of barbed wire seem to float in space. This new installation creates a very different atmosphere, because it looks like the skeleton of a destroyed multistory building that has been left hanging by a thread. If you were to walk inside the cube, in between the hanging columns of concrete and rebar, it would feel quite threatening.

"Remains to be Seen" is a title that I've had in my head for a long, long time. I first used it in the 1980s, for a postcard-size work. I used to have a cat, and I would collect the whiskers that fell off its face and the little nails that I would find stuck in the carpet, and I made them into a collage. (My own nails will appear in a different work in this show, *Nail Necklace*. I also made a hair necklace many years ago.) The title seemed to be a good fit for this exhibition in part because, if you read *remains* as a verb, it suggests something unknown, a precarious situation, like the conditions of vulnerability, insecurity, and uncertainty that we are experiencing now in England, a situation that really applies to the whole world. When I couldn't find a title for the new rebar installation, I decided to call it *Remains to be Seen*, too. This idea of *remains* as a noun is important to the work, but the title does not have to refer only to the remnants of a body or building—I like to use titles with double meanings to suggest that the work is open to interpretation.

I had previously considered using this title for what I then called “Remains of the Day,” a project first conceived for my Hiroshima Art Prize exhibition in 2017. I had visited Hiroshima in 2015 because I was asked to make new work for the exhibition. I decided to cover a whole set of domestic furniture with wire mesh and burn each piece to end up with ghostlike forms, where the charred remains are barely held together by the mesh. For this new exhibition, I challenged myself to make a piece that would be taller than a human, something aspiring to architecture, and I chose to work with a very tall cabinet. It was a challenge to destroy it but still have it stand up. It looks very much like a destroyed building. Its title is *Remains (cabinet)*. People in London will very likely relate it to the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire. Another work in the series features a crib and children’s toys and chairs. This one is called *Remains (play space)*.

The first time I used light in my work was in 1989, with *The Light at the End*. It was an installation made with what you perceived from a distance as bars of light. When you got closer, you started to experience intense heat; you then realized that what you had thought were strips of light were electric heating units that could burn you. The title prompted a hopeful expectation that was dashed when you got closer to the work. It read as a situation of imprisonment, torture, or pain. It was hard to tell if you were outside or inside of it: Are you jailed or are you the jailer? Are you the oppressed or the oppressor? At the same time, it was very seductive; everybody wants to play with fire. That’s when I began contemplating how a situation can be very attractive and repulsive at the same time. Beautiful, but dangerous.

*Hot Spot*, which I first created in 2006 and have made a different version of for this show, deals with a similar contradiction. *Hot Spot (stand)* is an elegant globe with delicate red neon delineating the continents. It is mesmerizing, but it also buzzes with energy that feels menacing. I wanted to suggest that hot spots, or spots of conflict, are not only restricted to certain regions. The whole world is caught up in conflicts and unrest. At the same time, the term *hot spot* can be read in the environmental sense, so the work could be seen as a reference to climate change.

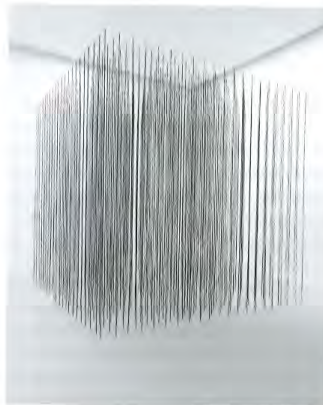
There are a lot of different tendencies in my work: delicate, expansive, handmade, found, straightforward, uncanny. In both fabrication and installation, I always think about the viewer, their body, and how they will encounter the work—what they will see from a distance and what they will see when they get close. It is very much like a performance, but for the spectator. And much of the work has to do with trauma, where one's experience of trauma can turn a normally innocuous object into one full of dread. During times of distress or displacement, people often attach their trauma to a specific object or environment. I try to reveal an undercurrent of hostility within something that usually looks inoffensive. It's a way of making people question everything around them.

—*As told to Mira Dayal*

MONA HATOUM  
Pulitzer Arts  
Foundation, St Louis,  
USA

Mona Hatoum's family fled Lebanon during the country's civil war in the 1970s for the relative safety of London. Had they not, the artist might have become a designer of exquisite torture devices for the Mukhabarat, or secret police, based on the evidence of the 30 sculptures and installations on view in 'Terra Infirma', her exhibition at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. A serrated cheese grater, *Dormiente* (Sleeping, 2008), is re-imagined as a skin-flaying single bed. A food grinder for morsels of meat and vegetables is rescaled as *La Grande Broyeuse* (The Large Grinder, 1999), as if made to shred the human body; while *Homebound* (2000), an installation in the museum's basement gallery, wires up chairs, bedframes, cutlery and tables to a live electric current that threatens to zap anyone bold enough to sit, lie or eat. The overall effect is reminiscent of the infamously booby-trapped KGB interrogation rooms in Moscow's Lubyanka Building, used to root out dissident impulses following the 1917 October Revolution. This dank take on modernity is complimented by the bunker-like quality of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation's Tadao Ando-designed building, in whose interior Hatoum's domestic installation can seem like a minimalist prison.

The earliest work on display appears in the building's concrete foyer. In *So Much I Want to Say* (1983), a 5-minute-long, close-up, video self-portrait, grainy slow-scan images of Hatoum flash alongside the work's title, as a mantra-cum-confession. The video anticipates modern livecam pornography or even the YouTube channel of shooter Nasim Aghdam, but also hearkens back to jerky CCTV footage of 1980s hostages like Terry Anderson pleading for mercy. As



Hatoum repeats the words 'so much I want to say', her mouth is masked by an assailant's hands, contorting her lips. She bites on various objects that prevent her from satisfying her desire to express. What, after all, does she have to say? Though it establishes the entire exhibition as a coy, calculated exploration of political uncertainty, displacement and domesticity, the video leaves that question deliberately unanswered. Paradoxically, the overall effect of all this heavy subject matter is not claustrophobic or depressive, but subversively funny.

*Impenetrable* (2009) and *Waiting Is Forbidden* (2006-08) are emblematic of Hatoum's pre-occupation with these tangible and textual negations. *Impenetrable*, installed in the bright, airy upper gallery, is an homage to Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto's 'Penetrables': cheery, tactile public sculptures that he began producing in 1967. Soto's hovering minimalist cubes – made from ranks of soft, fleshy, dangling latex tubes and designed to invite the audience to play and frolic – are recast as stiff iron rods wrapped in evenly spaced knots of barbed wire. Dare to penetrate this sculpture and it will issue a violent rejection. Such slick subversion of canonical minimalist forms with surreal or abrasive content is characteristic of Hatoum's work. A contemporary, a kind of impish leavening effect. Ultimately, though, displaced identity proves a far more powerful tool at her disposal, and Hatoum revels in contextual shifts, from Lebanon to London and St Louis. Hung up on a gallery wall, *Waiting Is Forbidden*, a blue street sign rimmed with white, states 'No Loitering' in Arabic script. Directly transliterated into English, the work's title appears below, as a banal mistranslation become poetic, like a Sura in the Koran or a line from Rumi's erotic 13th-century Ghazals. An injunction to a devotee or lover to act decisively or face the speaker's wrath.

Daniel McGrath



McGrath, Daniel  
« Mona Hatoum, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St Louis, USA »  
Frieze, Summer 2018.



FINANCIAL TIMES

# Mona Hatoum: a sense of unease

The Palestinian-British artist, this year's Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon, talks about displacement and ambiguity



Mona Hatoum in her studio in London © Gabby Laurent

## FINANCIAL TIMES

Rachel Spence

0

YESTERDAY

My first encounter with the work of [Mona Hatoum](#) was nearly 20 years ago, at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. After the shock-and-awe confessionalism of the Young British Artists, Hatoum's "Measures of Distance" (1988) was startling in its complexity. In this video, Hatoum films her mother in the shower behind a screen of Arabic script as she reads the letters her mother wrote to her during their war-inflicted separation, the whispers of love and exile flickering through the bars of their calligraphic cage like a faulty, seductive current.

"It was the one occasion when I thought I'd work with the biographical," Hatoum said earlier this week at her studio in London's Shoreditch. "When I finished it, it was a huge relief. I thought, I can put this away and concentrate on something more subtle and abstract."

Hatoum's gift for weaving glimpses of intimacy through a mysterious, crystalline formalism has made her one of the world's most respected artists. Now in her 66th year, the Beirut-born London-based practitioner has just enjoyed a major career retrospective in Paris, London and Helsinki. Last year she won the Hiroshima Art Prize; her work is currently on show, along with Turkish artist Ayse Erkmen, at the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig.

Our conversation, however, is to mark her most recent accolade: the Art Icon award from London's Whitechapel Gallery in partnership with Swarovski. The lifetime achievement prize has previously been won by such luminaries as Richard Long and Peter Doig.

## FINANCIAL TIMES



'Hot Spot III' (2009) © dotgain.info

Asked why Hatoum was chosen, Whitechapel Gallery director Iwona Blazwick points to her achievement of a “paradigm shift in practice and influence over successive generations”. Originally a performance artist, Hatoum has a gift for “marrying the exploration of body and subject” begun by artists such as Yvonne Rainer with a “sense of herself as a woman and a displaced person”.

Yet Hatoum has often asked viewers not to read her art as an expression of any particular histories, including her own. “I try not to make my work go into the realm of propaganda. Even when I did performance, I insisted on the visual as a way of communicating. My work is in the realm of connotation. You can’t point a finger at any specific conflict. It’s more a general unease of displacement. Of the uncanny,” she tells me.



## FINANCIAL TIMES

A slight, bright-eyed figure dressed in workaday black, her curly dark hair threaded through with silver, she conveys a winning blend of restrained discipline warmed through by a friendly, curious spirit that maps the paradox in her work. The sensation is deepened by the fact that our conversation is watched over by a spectral, monochrome image of Hatoum's mother sewing in her Beirut home. Originally a tiny photograph, Hatoum has blown it up, printed it on to layers of tulle and hung it in the centre of her studio. "It has this ghostlike feel," she murmurs, gazing fondly at the work. "Its been there since 2013 and I don't want to take it down."



'Performance Still' (1985/1995) © Patrick Gilbert

One couldn't blame Hatoum for being haunted by her history. Born in 1952, the daughter of Christian Palestinians who were obliged to leave their home in Haifa after 1948, Hatoum arrived in London for "a short break" in 1975. But civil war broke out in Lebanon while she was away and Hatoum found herself stranded in the British capital.

Although she was anguished for her family, Hatoum, who had a UK passport thanks to her father's job at the British embassy in Lebanon, took the chance to follow her dream of becoming an artist, a path from which her father had dissuaded her because he doubted its commercial prospects.



## FINANCIAL TIMES

Enrolling first at the Byam Shaw and then at the Slade schools of art, Hatoum's political flame was kindled by the fiery discourses of the time around race and gender. Even then, she cleaved to conceptualism and minimalism. But a predilection for running electrical currents through her installations proved troublesome. "The Slade said my conceptual stuff was too dangerous," she recalls with a grin as she explains why she originally moved towards performance.

By the 1990s she'd re-embraced minimalist, geometric forms. Her [Tate show last year](#) offered a spellbinding voyage through drawings, sculptures and installations that employed notions of grids, cells, cages and maps — many buzzing with menacing live wires — to suggest an inner world shuttling between profound disturbance and meticulous order.



'Grater Divide' (2002) © Iain Dickens

Hatoum's imagination feeds off those oscillations. Discussing "Light Sentence" (1992), which sets wire lockers either side of a swaying lightbulb, she describes how she aimed to make something that was "beautiful and mesmerising" but that would also — by "enmeshing you in the shadows" — make the viewer feel that "the ground is shifting beneath your feet." Is that how she feels? "I don't set out to express those feelings," she replies. "After [I've made a work] I think, 'Oh, maybe I'm feeling I'm on shaky ground.'"

## FINANCIAL TIMES

Perhaps inevitably, her first visit to her parents' homeland, in 1996, brought up strong feelings. In Jerusalem she was "outraged" by the presence of the Israeli soldiers. "It was the first time I'd experienced it — the occupation." Though "not at all religious", she wept at an Easter service. "I felt emotional about the land." Yet Hatoum also fosters her own displacement. An enthusiast of international residencies, she spent 12 years in Berlin after accepting a residency there in 2003. Back in London since 2015 she feels, she says, "a bit lost" and misses the "quietness" of the German capital.

“

**Hatoum aims to make the viewer feel that 'the ground is shifting beneath your feet'**

Her most fruitful moments happen in unfamiliar environments. "Very often the work is inspired by a situation or location when I'm working towards a new show," she says. "I visit a market or see local craft or manufacturing and I get an idea." To illustrate her words, she

whisks me around her studio where works include "Remains of the Day" (2016) — a table and chairs made from chicken wire and flecked with soot-black remnants of wood — made after visiting Hiroshima; a delicate grid that she singed on to parchment-like paper bought from a supermarket in Helsinki ("I thought it looked like skin"); and a group of exquisite, diminutive sculptures woven from pasta. "I found the right rice noodles in Berlin," she says, frowning as she fingers one that requires repair. "I hope I can find them again."

She sees herself first and foremost as "a maker" who "has to be engaged physically to be happy". Her drawing practice is a constant. "It's very grounding," she murmurs as she proffers a pencil frottage of what looks like netting in a prison compound but turns out to be lifted from bathroom tiles in a hotel in Houston, Texas.

In a polarised world, Hatoum's gift for ambiguity feels precious. But does she ever feel a responsibility to speak truth more explicitly to power? "I feel that the language of art is ambiguous — unless one is making documentary-style work. I like my work to offer a physical experience in the first instance and then certain thoughts, maybe about conflict, war or feminist issues can come out of this experience as a sensation that grows on you, almost as an afterthought."

*A lecture by Mona Hatoum, Whitechapel Gallery's Art Icon 2018, supported by Swarovski, takes place on January 25.*  
[whitechapelgallery.org](http://whitechapelgallery.org)

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PHAIDON

## Can you see Beirut in Mona Hatoum's metal blocks?

How the Lebanese artist looked back to her shattered home town via this brutal, evocative steel installation



Bunker (2011), 22 mild-steel tubing structures, dimensions variable. Installation view at White Cube, London, 2011. As reproduced in our new Contemporary Artist Series monograph

### RELATED



#### The dirty politics in Mona Hatoum's Cube

This Lebanese-born artist took US minimalism and added in a heavy subtext, as this book explains

Having been born in Beirut into a Palestinian family, but then having embarked on a long-term residency in London in 1975 when civil war broke out in Lebanon, the subject of 'home' has always been a fraught one for the artist [Mona Hatoum](#). She has generally chosen not to represent the geopolitical strife that has determined the course of her life – her performance art, sculptures and large scale installations have very often dealt with attitudes towards the human body, as a locus of social control and subject to what she saw as strange and amusing Western taboos.

Indirectly, however, politics and her own personal upheaval have fed into her work. This is given particular vent in her 2011 piece *Bunker*, a photograph of which is spread across two pages in our new Contemporary Artist Series book. *Bunker* is a monumental piece, made up of stacked sections of black rectangular, mild-steel tubing which are at once transparent and compact. To walk around the semi-abstract installation feels faintly like walking around a modern urban landscape in miniature, in which "skyscrapers" tower four-and-a-half metres in height. It's a black and cruelly barren landscape, however, intended to represent her home city of Beirut and the torments it underwent.

PHAIDON

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Detail from *Bunker* (2011), 22 mild-steel tubing structures, dimensions variable. Installation view at White Cube, London, 2011.



## PHAIDON

To simulate these torments, Hatoum put her building materials through a rigorous process, the details of which are essential to an appreciation of the overall installation. The steel was gouged and burned to create scars like bullet holes and metal riddled with shrapnel. Such were the trials undergone by the city, which, between 1975 and 1990 experienced a mass exodus of over a million of its citizens, Hatoum, included

Arranged in the gallery to invoke a district of modernist buildings – or at least the steel skeletons of such structures – the installation resembles nothing less than a bare urban battleground, which is exactly what her city, once fondly described as the Paris of the Middle East, had become.

To find out more about this important contemporary artist order a copy of our new Contemporary Artist Series book on Mona Hatoum [here](#).

## *The Talks*

### **MONA HATOUM: “IT’S ABOUT SHATTERING THE FAMILIAR”**

OCTOBER 19, 2016 | BY EMMA ROBERTSON

 LISTEN TO AUDIO EXCERPT



Photo by The Talks

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

**Ms. Hatoum, do you see darkness in your art?**

I think your personal experience shapes the way you view the world around you. With 15 years of civil war in Lebanon and conflict in the Middle East ever since I can remember, there is nothing very uplifting about it and this inevitably filters through my work. So, yes, there is darkness but there is lightness as well. There are often two sides to each piece, not just one meaning. Duality and contradictions exist in most of the work: darkness and light, heaviness and humor, beauty and danger...

**Humor? That’s surprising — I don’t see a lot of humor in a piece like *The Negotiating Table*, for example.**

Well, take my performance piece *Roadworks*, for instance. I walked around the streets of Brixton dragging heavy Dr. Martens boots — the boots that the police and skin heads used to wear — behind my bare feet so that you have the symbol of vulnerability, this woman being followed by the boots of the state and racist thugs. But it is a surreal and humorous gesture. People interacted with it! I kept hearing comments like, “Oh, the Invisible Man,” “Does she know she’s being followed?” I like using humor to deflate those heavy situations. There are also contradictions in the installation *Light Sentence*. The rigidity of the cages is contradicted by the fluidity of the moving shadows. It’s both mesmerizing, beautiful but also disturbing.

**“I am interested in exploring the phenomenology of space and materials.”**

## *The Talks*

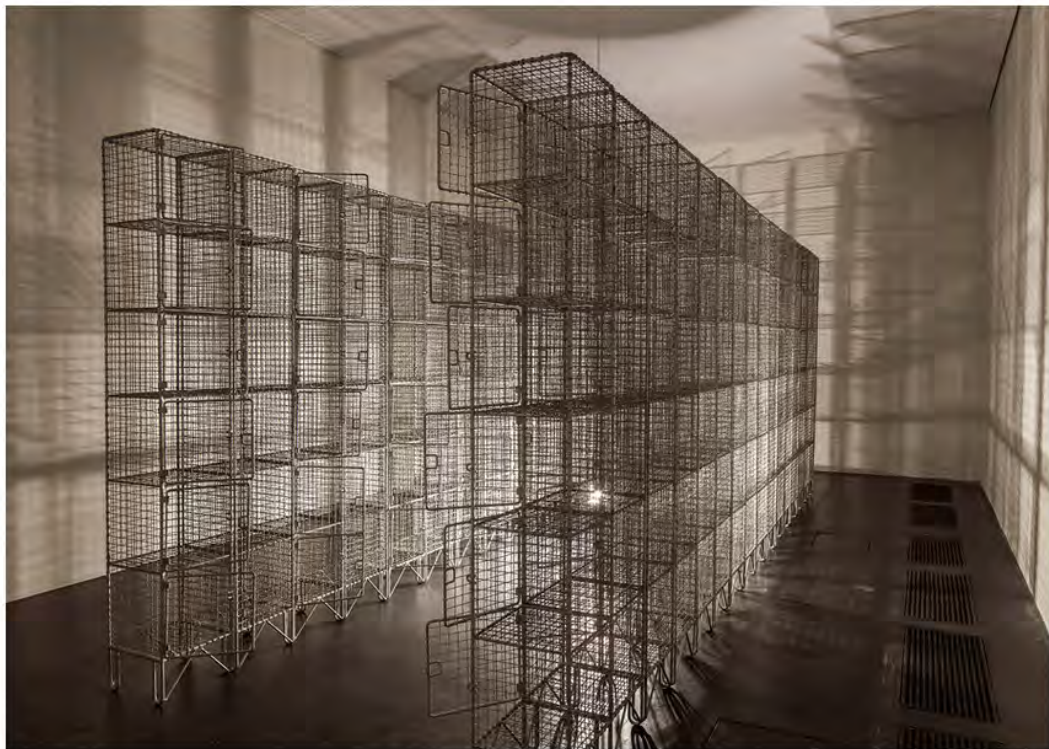
**Walking around that piece is a dizzying, unsettling experience... Is it your goal to make your audience somewhat uncomfortable?**

Light Sentence is about an unsettled space, about a space in constant flux with no solid point of reference... But I don’t know if I think about making my audience uncomfortable on purpose. I don’t have any specific strategy; I don’t sit there and say, “Oh, this is going to mean this.” I am interested in exploring the phenomenology of space and materials. I have really kept a very experimental attitude. I like to surprise myself and hopefully in that way, keep it surprising for other people. I think the work is open to interpretation. And I like to keep it that way.

**You must have heard a lot of different interpretations of your work over the years.**

You know, I’m always surprised when, years after I make a work, someone comes up and says, “Oh, this means this to me.” Just recently I was talking about Light Sentence in kind of negative terms... You know, it reminds you of the architecture of tower blocs in the suburbs of big cities, uniform and regimented architecture... But someone responded, “Oh, it’s funny because when I looked at the shadows, it gave me a lot of hope.” Wonderful! Absolutely amazing! (Laughs)

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Light Sentence (1992)  
© Kiasma

**It is important for your work to raise questions?**

Yeah, that’s very important for me. I’m working with feelings of displacement, disorientation, estrangement — when the familiar turns into something foreign or even threatening. It’s about shattering the familiar to create uncertainty and make you question things that you normally take for granted. I suppose this is what critical awareness is about.

## The Talks



A short clip from Mona Hatoum's *Corps étranger*, (1994)

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I read that the surveillance systems and institutions of 1980s London helped spark your own critical awareness of the world around you, and influenced your performance pieces very heavily.

The issue of surveillance was a recurring theme in my early performance and video work. *Corps étranger*, a video installation that I made using an endoscopic camera to film both the surface and the inside of my body, pushed this idea of surveillance to an absurd extreme — I was implying that surveillance can even penetrate inside you. There’s no place that remains unturned or unobserved. Those ideas have definitely permeated my work... And still do until now. But looking back, it’s clear to me that those years were very tumultuous, very intense, my performances were fueled with anger. They were vigil-like. I think they suited the way I was at the time.

### How so?

I was too impatient so the immediacy of performance suited me at the time. I couldn’t stay with something for too long, I couldn’t settle down, I was too too restless. Not that I’m not restless anymore... (Laughs) I was too self-critical and I could never put my own work on the wall or live with it, you know? At the time when I was doing these performances, I was quite young and fearless and I felt that I had nothing to lose.

### Has that changed? Do you feel now like you have something to lose?

Well... (Sighs) I don’t know. In those early days, I was this young unknown artist and it didn’t matter what I did because who cares? (Laughs) Does it matter now? I don’t know. With performances, you work so hard to prepare, you travel across the world to show the work in Canada, in New York, here, there, and maybe 50 people would turn

### Ms. Hatoum, do you see darkness in your art?

I think your personal experience shapes the way you view the world around you. With 15 years of civil war in Lebanon and conflict in the Middle East ever since I can remember, there is nothing very uplifting about it and this inevitably filters through my work. So, yes, there is darkness but there is lightness as well. There are often two sides to each piece, not just one meaning. Duality and contradictions exist in most of the work: darkness and light, heaviness and humor, beauty and danger...



## *The Talks*

**Humor? That’s surprising — I don’t see a lot of humor in a piece like *The Negotiating Table*, for example.**

Well, take my performance piece *Roadworks*, for instance. I walked around the streets of Brixton dragging heavy Dr. Martens boots — the boots that the police and skin heads used to wear — behind my bare feet so that you have the symbol of vulnerability, this woman being followed by the boots of the state and racist thugs. But it is a surreal and humorous gesture. People interacted with it! I kept hearing comments like, “Oh, the Invisible Man,” “Does she know she’s being followed?” I like using humor to deflate those heavy situations. There are also contradictions in the installation *Light Sentence*. The rigidity of the cages is contradicted by the fluidity of the moving shadows. It’s both mesmerizing, beautiful but also disturbing.

**“I am interested in exploring the phenomenology of space and materials.”**

**Walking around that piece is a dizzying, unsettling experience... Is it your goal to make your audience somewhat uncomfortable?**

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## *The Talks*

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Hot Spot (2013)  
© Kiasma

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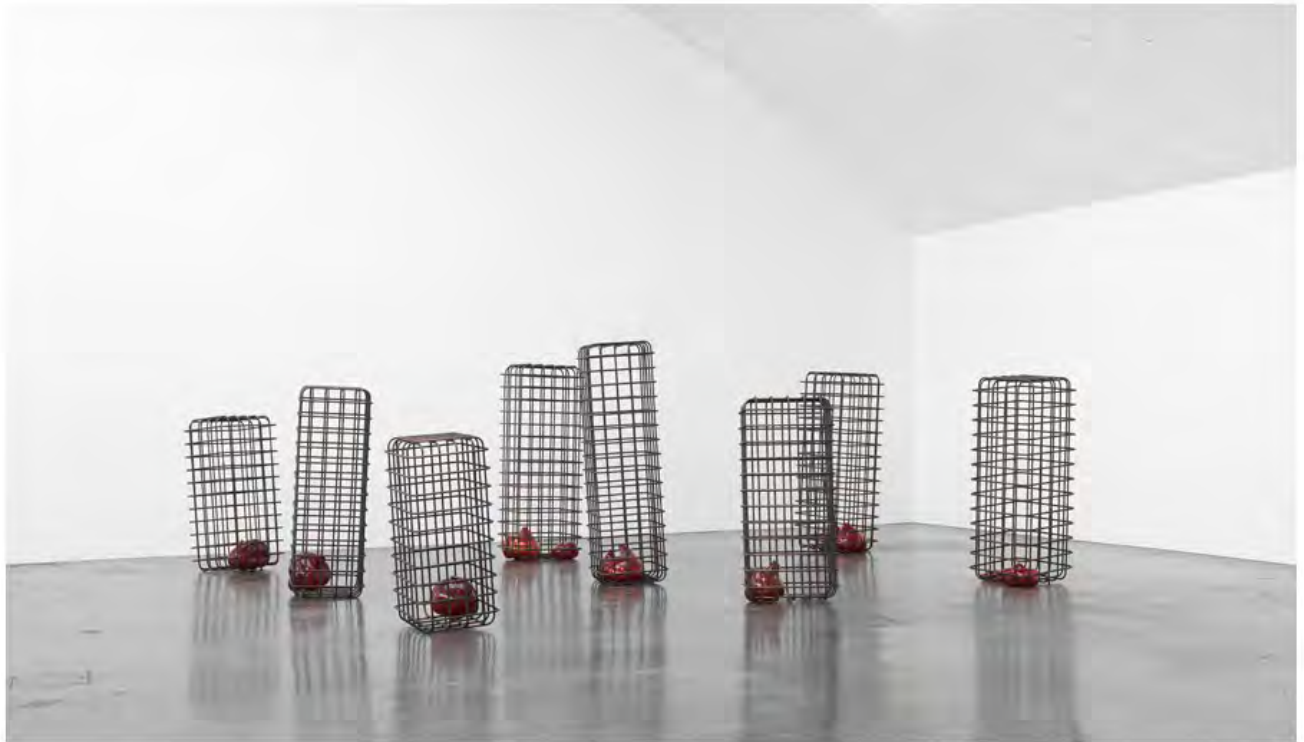
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## The Talks



Cellules (2012-13)  
© Kiasma

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Chantal Crousel

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**“Seeing those works again makes me both cringe and wonder how I had the guts to do it all...”**



## *The Talks*

### **Do you feel less “on display” now that you’re focusing more on installations and objects?**

With installation my own body has been replaced by that of the viewer. Impressions and thoughts come out of the experience of interacting with the space and materials. I am not there to perform or deliver a message. The work exists independently of me. Once it’s finished, it has a life of its own. It’s there for people to view, to interact with...

### **So is it possible for you to leave your past works behind completely?**

I can’t really say that because there are recurring themes in my work and a circularity and repetition of certain ideas even if they manifest themselves in different ways. Every exhibition or residency in a new location brings certain characteristics which sometimes lead to revisiting some concepts or ideas. Sometimes I look at some early works and I think, “This was an idea that I could have expanded on, I could have pushed this concept further or in another direction.” It can be very hard to look at work from 30 years ago because it brings out a lot of emotions, especially the performance work. Seeing those works again is always interesting. It makes me both cringe and wonder how I had the guts to do it all...

Spence, Rachel. «Mona Hatoum, Tate Modern, London, review — ‘Triumphant’»,  
*The Financial Times*, May 9, 2016.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/42d1e3de-13b0-11e6-91da-096d89bd2173.html#axzz48GUMzsAV>

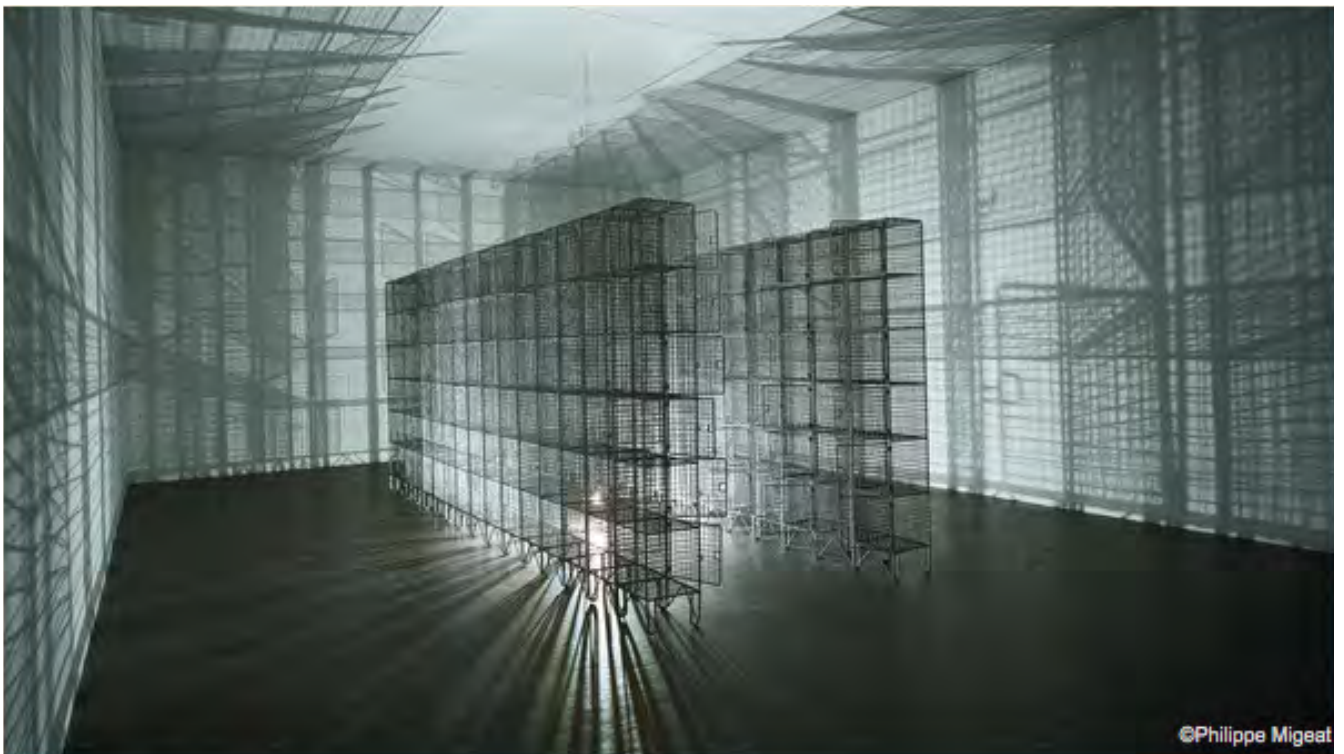


May 9, 2016 6:07 pm

## Mona Hatoum, Tate Modern, London, review — ‘Triumphant’

Rachel Spence

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Mona Hatoum's 'Light Sentence' (1992).

Photo: Philippe Migeat

Before there was Warsan Shire, there was Mona Hatoum. Shire's poem "Home", which opened with the lines "No one leaves home unless/home is the mouth of a shark," has made her the 21st-century cantor for exodus. Yet the Somali-British poet is heir to a lineage of artists who have wrenched lyricism out of relocation.

As Tate Modern's triumphant new show demonstrates, no one has expressed the terrible beauty of unbelonging better than Mona Hatoum. Born in Beirut in 1952, the artist experienced a double exile. Her Palestinian family were obliged to leave Israel in 1948 and "existed with a sense of dislocation", Hatoum has said. Then, in 1975, Hatoum found herself stranded in London when civil war broke out in Lebanon. She completed art school in the British capital and now divides her time between London and Berlin, though a nomadic gene sees her accept residencies throughout the world.



Despite her personal trauma, Hatoum is far from a confessional artist. Tate’s exhibition opens with “Socle du Monde” (“Base of the world”), a cube covered in black iron filings which cling to hidden magnets, which is named after a 1961 sculpture by Piero Manzoni.

The intellectual jester of conceptualism, Manzoni placed a plinth upside down to suggest that our entire planet was displayed on its surface. In a smooth metal which anticipated minimalism, Manzoni’s work echoed the Duchampian credo that all the world’s an artwork waiting for a museum to put it on display. Hatoum keeps the hermetic geometry, thereby declaring herself an artist who has no intention of letting her feelings overwhelm her form, yet her tactile pelt whispers of uncanny forces caged within, as if Carl Andre had been reimaged by Steven King’s Carrie.

By the time she made “Socle du Monde” in 1992-93, Hatoum had adopted minimalist form as her main grammar. Yet the first rooms remind us that her early language was performance. A black and white photograph of Hatoum’s bare feet tied to a pair of Doc Martens (footwear of choice for fashionable skinheads) as she trudges through Brixton is the legacy of a film — on screen in a later room — entitled “Roadworks” (1985) that sprang out of her anger at the era’s race riots.

A layer-cake of imagery assembled from contact sheets and grainy footage, “Don’t smile, you’re on camera” (1980), creates the illusion that male bodies are being surreptitiously stripped by a prying lens. The unsettling sleight of eye speaks of an artist revenging herself — for this violating gaze is hers — on an art establishment which has denuded women for centuries.

Taking her cue from a generation of feminist artists before her, Hatoum saw performance as a “revolutionary medium”. But by the 1990s she had outgrown its innate melodrama. Made in 1992, “Light Sentence” is one of her earliest installations. Consisting of two rows of wire-mesh lockers in between which hangs a single, swaying lightbulb, it envelops the spectator in an infinite grid of silky, fluctuating, wolf-grey shadows. At once prison cell, interrogation chamber and battery cage, yet also astoundingly, autonomously beautiful, it has an especially powerful resonance in a gallery where Agnes Martin, subject of a Tate retrospective last year, was a recent resident.

But the American painter declared that her lines were “innocent as trees” — private, transcendent expressions of her outer world. Hatoum puts her matrices to more pointed use. She knows that without the grid there can be no cage, no prison cell, no bed, no electric power and no map, all of which are recurring tropes in her oeuvre. (Tate’s show, sensibly, does not adhere to chronology and thus maintains the cyclical elegance of Hatoum’s material repetitions and recalibrations.) As such, Hatoum is in the vanguard of a skein of political artists, including Cornelia Parker, Nadia Kaabi-Linke and Hajra Waheed, who use the foundation stone of geometric abstraction to temper overt emotion.

However, Hatoum also sieves her sensibility through a surrealist filter. She often uses organic substances — hair, blood, urine — and has a predilection for household objects which makes her the daughter of Meret Oppenheim and Louise Bourgeois, feminist artists who also turned the tools of their oppression into weapons.



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<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/42d1e3de-13b0-11e6-91da-096d89bd2173.html#axzz48GUMzsAV>



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Mona Hatoum's 'Grater Divide' (2002).  
Photo: Iain Dickens, courtesy White Cube

At Tate, a gigantic cheese grater is blown up to resemble a hazardous daybed. A French garden chair ("Jardin Public", 1993) sprouts a triangle of pubic hair from the holes in its seat. The unsettling menace is intensified by the whine of "Homebound" (2000), an installation of objects — colanders, child's cot, hamster cage, assorted lightbulbs and furniture — electrically wired together so that they buzz, dim and flare with ominous indifference to our presence.

Time and again these Plath-like howls of fury are quietened by Hatoum's rationalist architecture. "Homebound", for example, is framed by a colony of exquisitely pared-down works including "Present Tense" (1996), a rectangle of golden soap bars which bears the faint tracing of a map of Palestinian territories as

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drawn up in the Oslo peace accords. On the wall, swatches of burnt toilet paper (“Untitled”, 1989) have been burnt with tiny perforations that form stuttering, singed rows suggestive of an indecipherable morse code.

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Mona Hatoum's 'Hot Spot' (2009).

Photo: Agostino Osio, courtesy Fondazione Querini Stampalia Onlus, Venice

These diminutive interventions balance out the brutal violence that simmers in Hatoum's monumental installations. The second half of this show introduces us to “Quarters” (1996), four metal beds with bare mattress frames stacked five high and arranged in the panopticon shape that, thanks to its capacity for surveillance, made for ideal Victorian prisons. Nearby is “Hot Spot” (2013), a stainless steel globe with the continents outlined in red neon as if the entire world was in flames. Just as it's all getting too apocalyptic, we have “Projection” (2006), another map traced in flocks of cotton on a white ground

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which imagines our planet as a pillowy, utopian phantom, the alter ego of those bleak, ascetic bunks.

As a songstress of home, clearly Hatoum is no Martha Stewart. Yet, despite critical attempts to pigeonhole her, she also isn't the visual equivalent of Edward Said. Although Said, the pre-eminent witness to the Palestinian displacement, wrote a beautiful essay about her work in 2000, reproduced in Tate's catalogue, Hatoum's concerns venture further. The plight of her parents' birthplace is always on her radar. But she's also telling us that domesticity is death to female empowerment. And that few of us, regardless of gender, ever truly find a refuge.

The show closes with "Undercurrent (red)" (2008), a scarlet mat whose tight weave loosens into tentacles plugged into lightbulbs, their intermittent glow reminding us just how much blood there is on everybody's carpet these days. It's a strong piece, reminiscent yet not derivative of the Aids-related light works of Cuban-American artist Félix González-Torres.

A more subtle coup de foudre would have been delivered by "Measures of Distance", which sits halfway through the exhibition. Made in 1988, this video is a palimpsest of sound and image, showing Hatoum's mother as she takes a shower, her body barely discernible behind a curtain of Arabic writing. Fluid as a river, spiky as barbed wire, as inspired a grid as Hatoum ever devised, the calligraphy makes a perfect formal container for the sadness in Hatoum's voice as she reads aloud the letters her mother wrote to her during their separation.

As lines such as "Dear Mona, I have not been able to send you any letters because the local post office was destroyed by a car bomb..." echo through the rooms before and beyond, we intuit that this exhibition will disrupt our own homecoming.

To August 21, [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)



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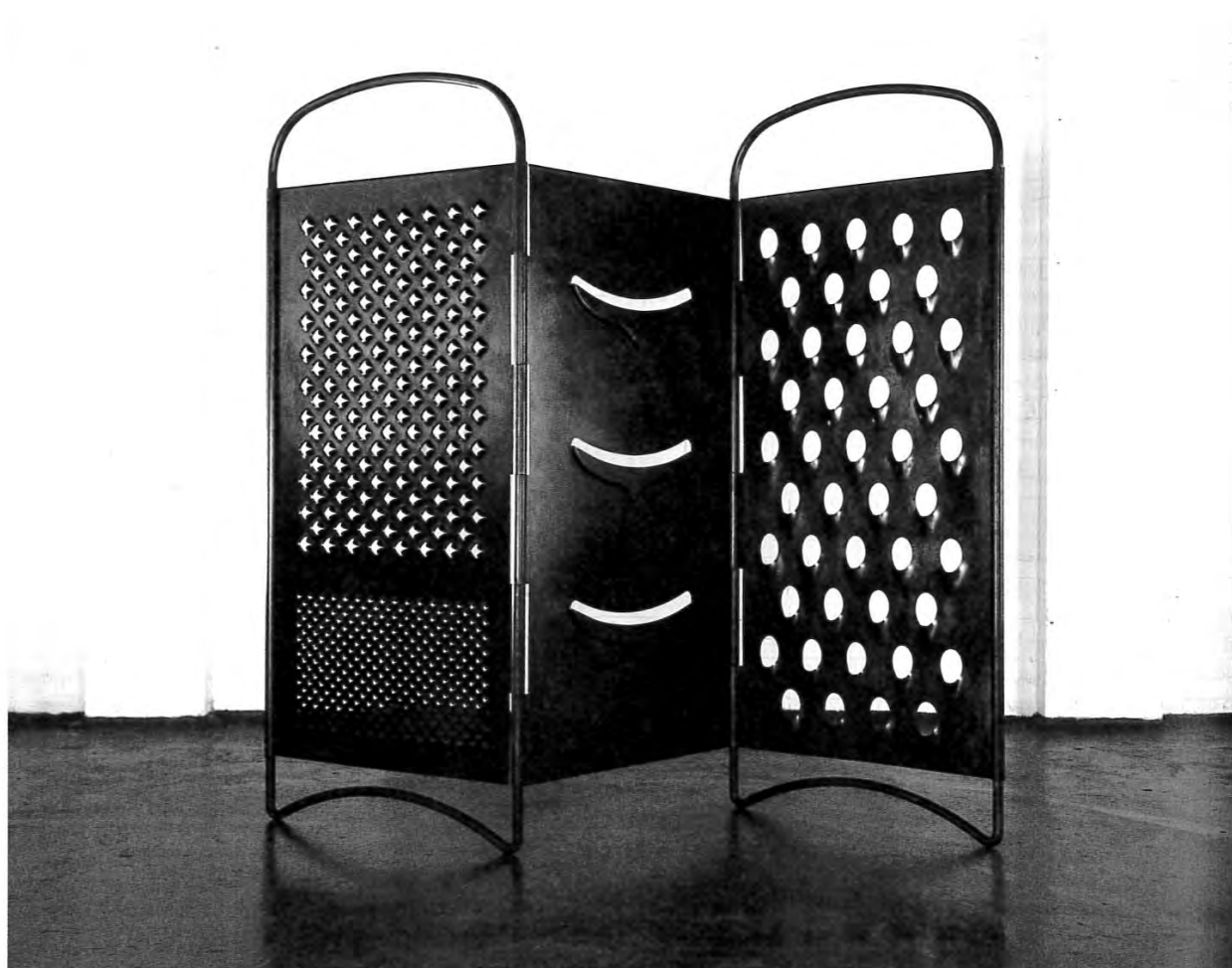
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TATE MODERN

# ‘Never take anything for what it appears to be’

Ali Smith on Mona Hatoum

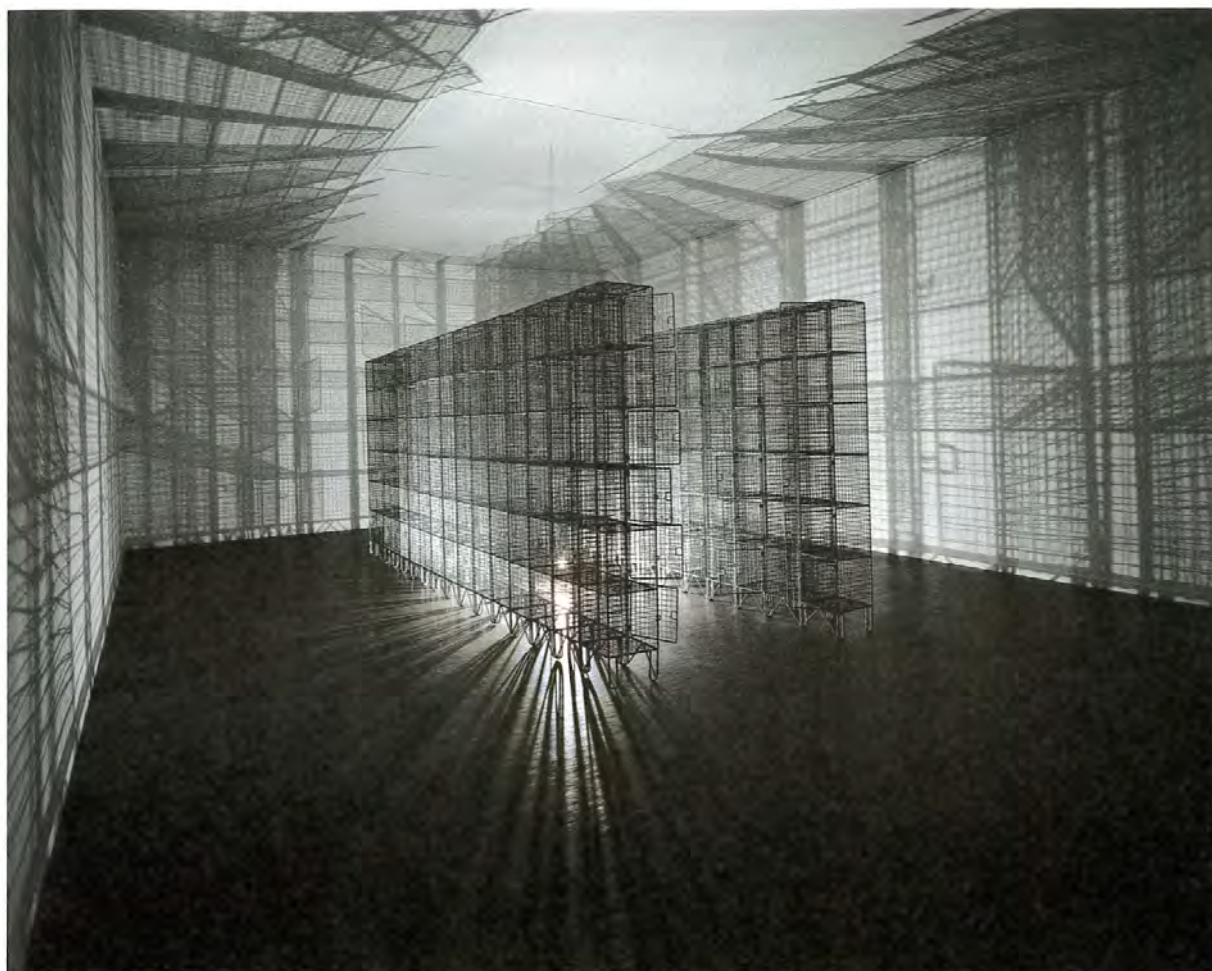
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# TATE ETC.

MONA HATOUM

81



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Mona Hatoum,  
*Light Sentence* 1992,  
galvanised wire mesh  
lockers, electric  
motor, light bulb,  
198 x 185 x 490 cm

line, plastic basin, suitcase, inflatable slightly deflated see-through globe – always on the move. It's unbearably – yes – moving. It's a singular vision of an everyday deflating of millions of people's worlds. It's a vision of our triviality, our briefness, and of the ways in which *all* human beings are reduced and unfixed by histories and circumstances which reduce, unfix and unhome any of us.

'In the age of migrants, curfews, identity cards, refugees, exiles, massacres, camps and fleeing civilians,' as Edward Said wrote, Hatoum's is an art of 'belligerent intelligence', one that's 'hard to bear' *and* necessary, one that offers 'neither rest nor respite'. Certainly there's no resting on a Mona Hatoum *Daybed* 2002 – wake up! Since her earliest works, such as *Self-Erasing Drawing* 1979, where one arm makes eternal circles in a small box of sand while the other attached directly opposite a moment later smooths the circles away again, she's been

examining the creative and the destructive drives in the human state. Again and again she reveals the extremes of human capacity, how every day in the world we're strung between a state of torture, pain, the inflicting of pains, and a state of eye-opening creativity. One state is lethal. The other's all we've got. It's fierce, it's shared, it's a mobile home in itself, and – if we'd let ourselves rewrite the world – it's a kind of heroic.

*Mona Hatoum*, supported by AGC Equity Partners, Tate Modern, 4 May – 21 August, curated by Clarrie Wallis, Curator of Modern and Contemporary British Art, Tate, with Assistant Curator Katy Wan, and Christine Van Assche, Honorary Curator, Centre Pompidou, Paris. The exhibition is organised by the Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, in collaboration with Tate Modern and the Finnish National Gallery/Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki.

Ali Smith's latest novel is *How to Be Both* (Hamish Hamilton 2014). Her latest collection of stories is *Public library and other stories* (Hamish Hamilton 2015)



# TATE ETC.

80

TATE MODERN

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Mona Hatoum, *Hot Spot III* 2009, stainless steel and neon tube, 234 x 223 x 223 cm

Wordplay, multiple resonance and multiple meaning run all through Hatoum's use of language. *Light Sentence* 1992 puns in both its title and its form on cages, prisons, electricity and a forced weightlessness in the world – 'the feeling of not being able to take anything for granted, even doubting the solidity of the ground you walk on', as Hatoum put it in an interview in 1997. Likewise, the two versions of *You Are Still Here* 2006 – with exactly these words of its title engraved on their mirrored surfaces, one elegant in Arabic, one more perfunctory in English – act as stimulus to a layered existential kind of reflecting as well as literal reflection. After all, are these words proof that you're 'here', or alive? A reminder that you won't always be? A reassurance? An admonition for your not having moved on already? An answer to a question you didn't even know you were asking, in a casual glance at yourself in a mirror on a wall?

She often deals in household stuff, chairs and cots and kitchen things, pasta, glass. In *Drowning Sorrows (wine bottles II)* 2004, a scatter of wine bottles seems to be sinking through the floor as we watch, as if the floor is quicksand. Or *Marble Slicer* 2002, a giant-sized egg slicer capable of slicing through stone, suggests that transformations are possible, that there are untapped powers of sharpness everywhere in the everyday. Her deceptions on the eye can be merrily confrontational, defiant, tragic, or all of these at once. In *Mobile Home* 2005, a pulley system keeps a series of household objects – a bed-roll, table, chair, cup, plate, child's toy, washing on a

Mona Hatoum, *Over My Dead Body* 1988–2002, inkjet print on PVC with eyelets, 204.5 x 305 cm





# TATE ETC.

MONA HATOUM

79

Mona Hatoum's *Grater Divide* 2002 is a cheese-grater nearly seven feet high. Either it's a kitchen utensil for giants or human beings have suddenly been reduced in stature. Or both. On the one hand, it's laugh-out-loud funny. On the other, it's lethal. It takes the form of a paravent or room-divider, one full of huge holes, and it demonstrates that an everyday kitchen object might be a kind of screen. What *aren't* we seeing any more, if things are too familiar? It also suggests that screens aren't just about division, they're also maybe capable of real damage – this one could slice us into bloody shreds in seconds.

Like so much of Mona Hatoum's work, it's a question of simultaneous thinking and feeling, and of a fused realisation, when scales shift. In the shift, unexpectedly giant forces are at play. Hatoum, whose biography is historied and layered by exile, in that she is a British artist who was born in 1952 into a Palestinian family exiled in Lebanon, has been creating works for more than three decades which ask us to re-see the world, re-understand notions of territory, fragility, humanity, scale and power. Her work is about the recalibration of the forms, shapes, words, phrases, demarcations, artefacts – all the things we take as known, the structures we think we recognise, the geographies by which we imagine we know where we are.

A globe shape – what does it mean? Does it make a world? How easily a world is implied, designated, tipped to one side. But what if the whole world is glowing a dangerous neon-red (*Hot Spot III* 2009)? What if a map of the world is made up of thousands and thousands of tiny glass globes (*Map* 1998)? Is the shape the world takes really that fragile? That unstable? What if something sets those balls rolling? Are they marbles? Is the mapping of the world some kind of fragile game?

Her works create liminal space that has the capacity to blast those who encounter it into a renewed state of visceral hereness, one where concepts such as object and natural, clinical and filthy, droll and terrifying, threatening and innocuous, industrial and humane, political and aesthetic, exist as symbiotics, parts of each other. They call to mind seminal passages in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* 1985, where the rooms human beings mundanely inhabit can be turned against them by their torturers, so that a lived-in room becomes itself part of the torture: walls, ceilings, windows, doors, door handles, tables, chairs, light fittings, baths, fridges, filing cabinets, even 'family-sized soft drinks bottles', all 'converted to weapons', and 'in the conversion of a refrigerator into a bludgeon, the refrigerator disappears; its disappearance objectifies the disappearance of the world... it is the very facet of its disappearance, its



Mona Hatoum, *St Gallen*, 2013, photographed by Andri Pol

transition from a refrigerator into a bludgeon, that inflicts the pain'. But at the same time Hatoum conjures the powerfulness of playfulness in the face of all the absolutisms and determinisms, a state of possibility and creativity, voiced, for instance, in a book such as Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* 1938, where playfulness creates a different order, and where, when modern warfare is a disconnect from the deeply human and spiritual act of play, Huizinga takes pains to show, like Hatoum does, that 'real civilisation cannot exist' in its absence.

In *Over My Dead Body* 1988–2002, in a literal face-off, Hatoum balances a tiny toy soldier on the bridge of her nose, the bayonet pointing at her forehead. War is reduced in a single image to a near-nothing in the face of such defiance. In *Misbah* 2006, the very title, the Arabic word for *the light that shows the way*, is a play on words – and the light that's thrown out by the artwork on to the walls of a dark room, as if by a children's nightlight or an improvised oriental lantern, through the cut-out forms of soldiers and explosives, plays on the modern light-show that war is, the closeness of war to comfort, to entertainment, and how close to home, how deep *in* our homes it is, how foully such images play light.

Facing page:  
Mona Hatoum,  
*Grater Divide* 2002,  
mild steel, 204 x 3.5cm  
(variable width)

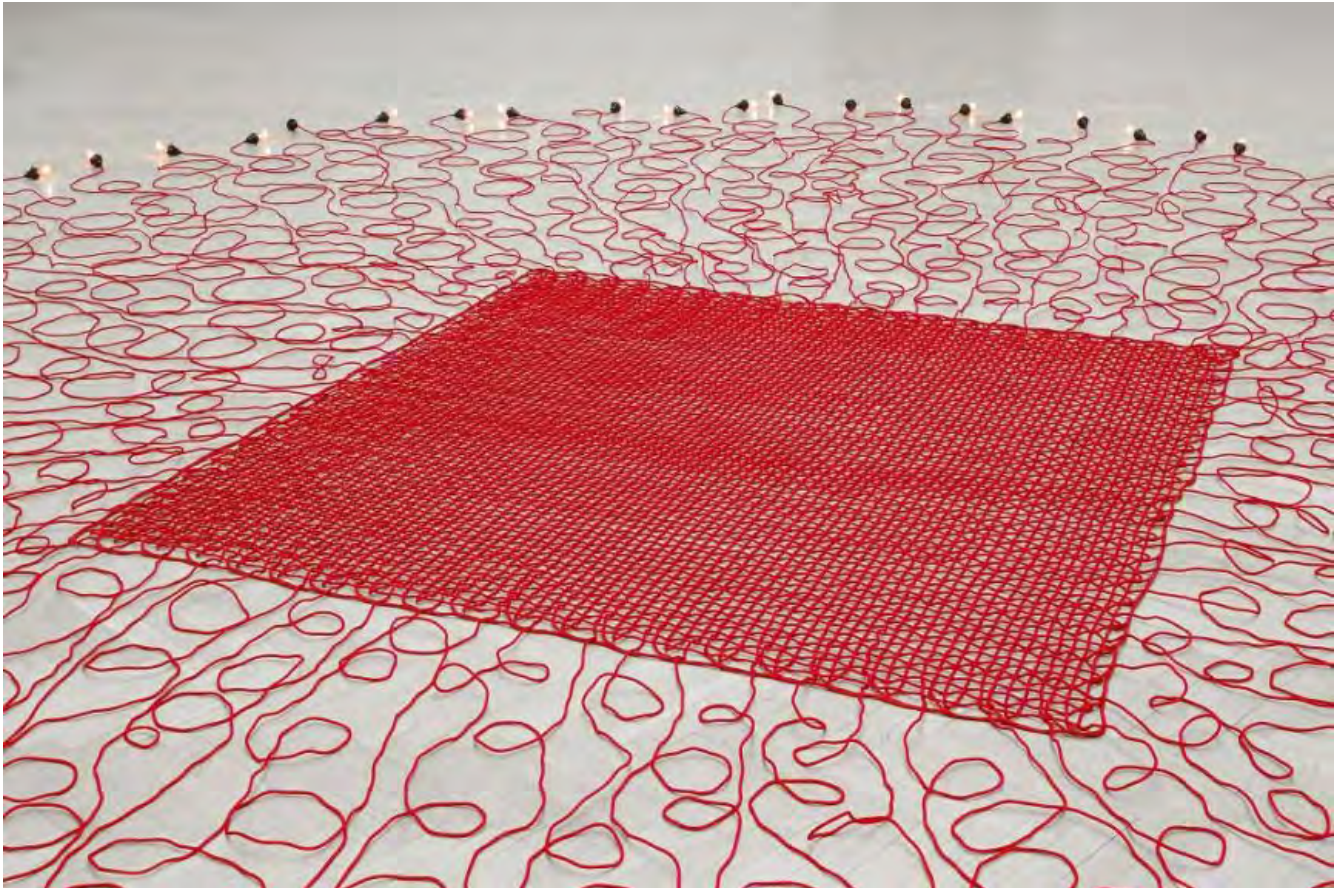


BLOUINARTINFO

## Review: Mona Hatoum Blends Abstract, Agitprop at Tate Modern

By SAMUEL SPENCER | MAY 05, 2016

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



«Undercurrent (red),» 2008, by Mona Hatoum  
(© Mona Hatoum. Photo Stefan Rohner, Courtesy Kunstmuseum St. Gallen)

London's Tate Modern is presenting the first UK retrospective of Lebanese/Palestinian Mona Hatoum, which runs until August 21.

Rather than going in chronological order, the curators have chosen a sort of thematic display that in the accompanying brochure they call “a series of juxtapositions.” In theory, this means that the many strands of the exhibition, the abstract and the agitprop, the personal and the political, are woven together, not unlike the number of weaved works made of human hair and other unconventional materials that feature.

In practice, however, this can make for a muddled, yet always compelling, experience. If there are two things that Hatoum likes as an artist they are simple, bold political statements (like the footprints featuring the word “unemployed” she stamped across Sheffield in one work), and bad puns, particularly sexual ones. This is an artist equally at home making comments on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and making a work like “Jardin public,” 1993, a chair featuring a ball of hair whose title is a pun on “public/pubic,”

## BLOUINARTINFO

creating a randy readymade like Marcel Duchamp with a dirty mind.

Seeing these two sides of the artist together is certainly interesting, but it serves to cheapen the more political works. Documents for performance works like “Negotiating Table,” 1983, in which the artist lay seemingly mangled and bloodied under a sheet as the sound of war reportage plays, must rely on their bluntness to make their impact, and when shown near less serious work like “Van Gogh’s Back,” a photograph of a man’s back hair arranged into Starry Night-like swirls, they just seem overly simplistic and on-the-nose. However, perhaps this is appropriate, as the nose is one of the many body parts Hatoum uses in works in the exhibition, photographing herself with a toy climber on her face like a mini military mountaineer. In fact, visitors will see works not only on-the-nose, but on-the-breast, on-the-back, and in the case of one work, inside-the-body.

However, it is when the artist gets away from the personal and the political that the exhibition has its best moments. One such work is “+ and -,” 1994-2004, a yin-yang sculpture in which a circle in sand is constantly furrowed and smoothed over in a revolving circle to create a definite exhibition highlight. These abstract works can also be her most effective political works, as with “Impenetrable,” 2009 a cube comprised of hanging barbed wire strands. Other successful works take a more oblique look at issues, like a series of works that show the terror implicit in domesticity, a comment both on women feeling trapped in the home and the house arrests political enemies can find themselves subject to all over the world.

Always skillfully done but occasionally shallow, the exhibition is worth seeing for its best moments, which glow incandescently, sometimes literally so as in the last piece in the exhibition.

“Mona Hatoum” runs until August 21 at Tate Modern.



Spencer, Samuel. «Review: Mona Hatoum Blends Abstract, Agitprop at Tate Modern», *Blouin Art Info*, May 5, 2016.  
<http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1393986/review-mona-hatoum-blends-abstract-agitprop-at-tate-modern>

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Galerie  
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Mona Hatoum

Homebound 2000

Kitchen utensils, furniture, electrical wire, light bulbs, dimmer unit, amplifier and two speakers

Dimensions variable

Courtesy Rennie Collection, Vancouver © Mona Hatoum

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Mona Hatoum

Hot Spot III

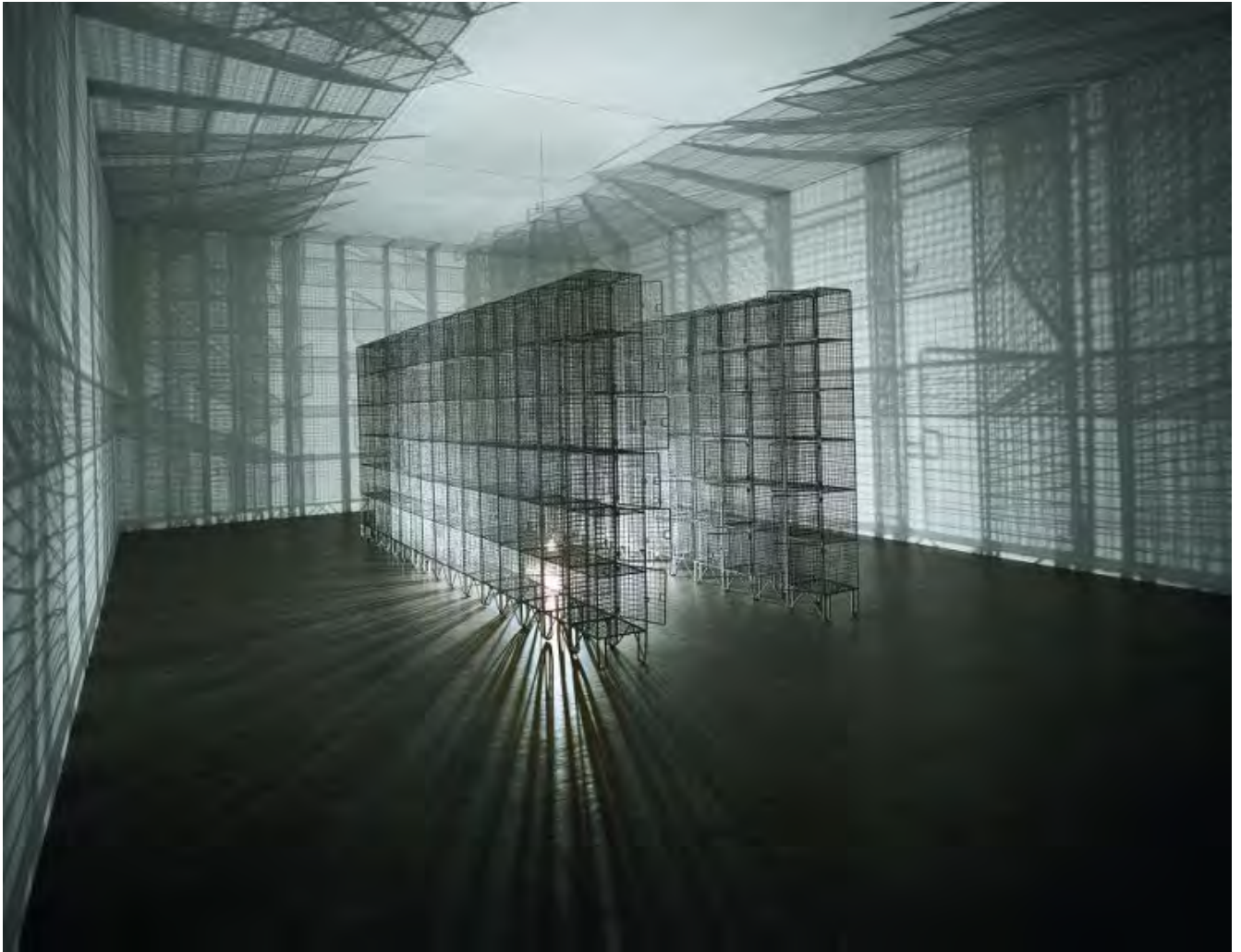
2009

Stainless steel, neon tube

Photo: Agostino Osio, Courtesy Fondazione Querini Stampalia Onlus, Venice ©Mona Hatoum

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Mona Hatoum

Light Sentence 1992

Galvanised wire mesh lockers, electric motor and light bulb

198 x 185 x 490

Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris: Mnam-CCI / Dist RMN-GP

Photo: Philippe Migeat © Mona Hatoum



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# OVER MY DEAD BODY



Mona Hatoum  
Over My Dead Body  
1988  
Inkjet on paper  
204 x 304  
© Courtesy of the artist

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Mona Hatoum  
Grater Divide  
2002

Mild steel  
204 x 3.5 cm x variable width

© Photo Iain Dickens, Courtesy White Cube © Mona Hatoum

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Mona Hatoum  
Measures of Distance  
1988  
Video, colour and sound, 15 min 30 sec  
Tate. Purchased 1999  
©Mona Hatoum



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Mona Hatoum

Performance Still 1985/1995

Gelatin silver print on paper mounted on aluminium

76.4 x 108

Tate. Presented by Tate Patrons 2012 Photo Edward Woodman, Courtesy White Cube © Mona Hatoum

DAMN°42 magazine / MONA HATOUM

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# Taking it Personally

*The ins and outs of Mona Hatoum*



Exploring an array of subject matter via different theoretical frameworks, Mona Hatoum addresses the body as a commentary on politics, gender, and difference in relation to the dangers and confines of the domestic world. Her work can also be interpreted through the concept of space, as her sculptures and installations depend on the viewer to inhabit the surrounds in order to complete the effect, which always lends the work multiple readings. Hatoum very much wants her work to appeal to the senses or to somehow affect the viewer in a bodily way. Intriguingly, the connotations and concepts that are behind the pieces often have as their source that original physical experience.

ANNA SANSOM

Mona Hatoum combines the political with the personal in her artworks, many of which reverberate with several meanings, connotations, and contradictions. While some works are metaphorically suggestive of exile, displacement, and vulnerability, others express nothing political whatsoever. On the contrary, they can even be humorous and employ beauty and lightness as means to lure the viewer in. "I try to encourage people not to make too much of my origins, because explaining the work in relation to where I grew up becomes very reductive", says Hatoum. "Sometimes I feel sad when people don't laugh at Van Gogh's Back. People are always surprised when they see humour in my work. They think: Mona Hatoum is Palestinian, her work is much more serious. I really hate that. People don't allow themselves to enjoy, or don't expect that someone like me could have multifaceted interests." Van Gogh's Back (1995) is a photograph of a hirsute man's back, the swirling, soapy patterns of sensuously massaged hair reminiscent of the brushstrokes

in Van Gogh's paintings. The image was first shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1997. "Jay Jopling [the owner of White Cube gallery in London] was at the opening and told everyone that it was him", Hatoum says, laughing. "I didn't want everyone to think I'd had an intimate relationship with him so I said to him, 'Why are you saying that?'"

DAMN° meets up with her at the opening of Hatoum's exhibition at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris, which is presenting a variety of works made by the artist over the last couple of decades. Hatoum is wearing a Pucci blouse with maps printed on it, an apt choice given the artist's interest in international borders and the movement of people. The basic facts of her biography are well-documented: she was born in Beirut in 1952 to Palestinian refugees who had fled their home in Haifa in 1948 following Israeli intimidation during the first Arab-Israeli War. Since 1975, she has been based in London, where

VAN GOGH'S BACK, 1995  
© Mona Hatoum



Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



MONA HATOUM, 2013  
Standing inside Reflection, a work based  
on a photograph of her mother sewing.  
Photo: Daniel Ammann  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris

REFLECTION, 2013  
Exhibition view at Galerie Chantal Crousel,  
Paris  
Photo: © Florian Kleinferrn  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris



DAMN°42 magazine / MONA HATOUM



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Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

the cells of the human body. The objects are trying to push themselves through the bars, like prisoners seeking to express their liberty. The idea was initially conceived by Hatoum for her participation in a group exhibition in Marseilles, and for a solo show at Arter, an art space in Istanbul. "My visit to Istanbul left me with this impression of people being obsessed with the earthquake [of 2011] and the instability of the ground they walk on, which is a very common theme in my work", Hatoum explains. "So I started to think about unstable structures and had this idea of things being trapped inside them. I wanted the shapes to look as if they're trying to inch their way out, or to escape." The reinforcement bars also remind Hatoum of a recurring sight in the Middle East. "On the roof of some of the [residential] buildings, you see rebars sticking out. People call them 'spears of hope' because they hope that in the future they'll have enough money to build another floor, but sometimes they stay that way forever, and the buildings look unfinished."

as an art student she intended to stay briefly, but ended up remaining there after the breakout of the Lebanese civil war. In spite of her background, her work resists being hard-hitting and is often allusive.

#### ALL THE TRAPPINGS

The main new work being shown is *Cellules* (2012-2013), an installation comprised of eight tilting structures of varying heights, some of which are human scale. They are formed of rigid steel grids, and trapped inside them are blood-red, blown-glass amorphous shapes, smooth and organic. The work is expressive of confinement and imprisonment, the title being evocative of both a prison cell and

In the same room as *Cellules*, is *Turbulence* (2012), a square formed of thousands of transparent glass beads, spread out on the floor. The juxtaposition of differently sized marbles lends a sense of irregular movement, and walking round the piece and viewing it from multiple perspectives gives the impression of altering shadows being cast across it. Hatoum first worked with transparent glass marbles in 1995 for her show at the British School at Rome, where she covered nearly the entire floor with marbles. "As you walked in the room, you had to walk around the edges in order to circulate," Hatoum recalls. "So it was a very invasive installation, although it was

CELLULES, 2012-2013 (1)  
Mild steel and blown glass  
(8 elements)  
Variable dimensions

PROJECTION (VELVET), 2013 (2)  
Silk velvet and mild steel  
97 x 162 cm  
Edition 4/15 + 5 AP

Photos: © Florian Kleinfenn  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie  
Chantal Crousel, Paris



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minimal. There was something quite threatening, as well, because you felt that if you stepped on it you would fall and slip. This whole thing about attraction and repulsion, or something that's beautiful and dangerous, was very much in my mind when I made it." The patches of light and dark that were created through the arrangement of the marbles "made it look like a map", Hatoum adds. This realisation in-

spired another work, *Map*, for which she arranged the same marbles "in the shape of maps with very precarious boundaries, because the marbles were not fixed to the floor and, as people walked around, the whole thing was shifting." *Turbulence* is the third manifestation of her idea. "For me, there is tension between that very rigid, formal square that has a formal relationship to the architecture and, at the same time, there's this kind of turbulence on the inside."

#### EDGINESS

Hatoum's preoccupation with boundaries also informed *Projection (velvet)*, 2013 – a velvet surface that evokes the Peters Projection World Map, created by German cartographer Arno Peters in 1973. The landmasses have been laser-cut out, thereby



**TURBULENCE**, 2012 (1)  
Clear glass marbles  
4 x 400 x 400 cm  
Edition 3/3

**UNTITLED (COAT HANGER)**, 2013 (2)  
Painted steel, plastic covered  
aluminium and vinyl  
54 x 53 x 28 cm  
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP

**YOU ARE STILL HERE**, 2013 (3)  
Sandblasted mirrored glass, metal  
fixtures  
38 x 29,20 x 0,80 cm  
Edition 12/15 + 5 AP

Photos: © Florian Kleinert  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie  
Chantal Crousel, Paris.

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DAMN°42 magazine / MONA HATOUM



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eroding the borders between countries, while the seas and oceans protrude. Hatoum informs, "It was made with silk velvet produced on looms dating from the 18th century in Florence. It's a very fragile, anciently produced fabric, subjected to a modern intervention." On another wall, a shredded map has been assembled like a shopping bag and hung on a coat rack alongside a deformed coat hanger. At first glance, it seems like a whimsical piece, but it is actually highly symbolic. It transpires that this is an old map of Palestine, printed on PVC, that features the Arabic names of Palestinian villages. "After Israel was established, the villages either disappeared or were not recognised as entities by the Israelis", says Hatoum. "The piece is like an element of somebody who carries their identity or origins with them everywhere, like a shopping bag."

This theme concerning the ramifications of the creation of the State of Israel continues in *Reflection* (2013). A photograph of the artist's late mother sewing has been printed on three layers of superimposed tulle, each one lighter than the one before, to give a three-dimensional, delicate, and slightly ghostly look inspired by atmospheric perspective. The photograph had been taken by Hatoum's uncle in 1948, in her mother's first home in Beirut shortly after having fled Haifa. "Sitting on the back of the sofa is this coat hanger with the mirror", says Hatoum. "What intrigued me was whether it was waiting to be put up or whether my uncle put it there to be in the composition. It has this reflection that shows you the window, so it has the feel of another room behind." Her mother passed away in 2002; Hatoum did not revisit Beirut until 2008, when the American University there awarded her with an honorary doctorate. "In 2006 I desperately wanted to go back, but the Israelis started bombing Beirut", she says. In 2010 she presented *Witness*, an exhibition at the



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Beirut Art Centre, and has been going back more frequently since then. "I promised myself to spend a month every year in Beirut and to get myself a place, because we don't have a home there anymore", she clarifies.

#### HIGH-VOLTAGE

Other of Hatoum's works stem from investigations that she made as a student. Her installation *Electrified II* (2010) is composed of metal kitchen utensils, such as a grater and a colander, that are attached to each other, suspended from the ceiling and linked to an electric light bulb. In theory, any visitor touching the piece would receive an electric shock. While studying at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, Hatoum made similar kinds of pieces using metal objects, to experiment with the invisible force of electricity. However, her teachers objected, and Hatoum subsequently went into performance instead. Her irritation is still palpable today. "I was making experiments which were quite dangerous, and they wouldn't allow me to use a full 240-Volt light bulb so I had to research little battery-operated bulbs", she recalls. "I wasn't very happy; the effect wasn't nice enough. I was only allowed to put these experiments up for a short time, for an invited audience, so they became like a demonstration, but also like a performance." During her student days,

CAPPELLO PER DUE, 2013 (1)  
Straw  
11.50 x 70.50 x 42 cm  
Edition 5/6 + 1 AP

ELECTRIFIED II, 2010 (2)  
Metal, electric wire, lightbulb, transformer  
380 x 40 cm

Photos: © Florian Kleinfenn  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris





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## Galerie Chantal Crousel

Hatoum also began making works using 'things coming out of the body', such as strands of hair that she would sew across pieces of toilet paper, or nail clippings and individual hairs that she would incorporate into works on paper. Since 1995, she has been making necklaces composed of balls of her own hair, as well. "It was a case of taking something that's abject, dirty, and discarded, and making a necklace out of it", she says, adding, "I have many different tendencies in my work – I love fabricated works [like *Cellules*], I love working with assemblage, with found objects and readymades."

Looking ahead, Hatoum is currently preparing for a survey exhibition at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar, opening in February. "I'm finally being given a prominent space in the Arab world", she exclaims. "I've always felt that I made my name and my way outside of it. What would be most rewarding is that local people would see that someone, who is a woman, has gone out and made a huge career and an impact on the Arab world, and hopefully that could be a model for the young women and aspiring artists." <

*Mona Hatoum: Reflection* is at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris until 18 January 2014; [crousel.com](http://crousel.com)

*Mona Hatoum* is at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen until 12 January 2014 [kunstmuseumsg.ch](http://kunstmuseumsg.ch)

*Turbulence* is at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, 06 February - 18 May 2014 [mathaf.org.qa](http://mathaf.org.qa)

**UNDERCURRENT (RED)**, 2008 (1)

Installation view

Photo: Stefan Rohner

Courtesy of Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland

**STREAM (WAVE)**, 2013 (2)

Human hair on toilet paper

10 x 20 cm / 27.50 x 37 x 3.50 cm (framed)

**HAIR NECKLACE (WOOD)**, 2013 (3)

Human hair on wooden bust

29 x 21.50 x 16.50 cm

Edition 3/3

Photos: © Florian Kleinferrn

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

In three decades of haunting sculpture, performance and video, **Mona Hatoum** has refined her often psychologically brutal practice, but she has not blunted its power.

Six solo shows in the past 12 months mark 2009 as a banner year for Hatoum, an artist whose cool-headed yet gnawing reflections on the nature of violence have a growing contemporary currency. Though the Beirut-born artist lost out to Damien Hirst at the 1995 Turner Prize exhibition in London, the then-controversial Hirst's embalmed animals now have a well-worn familiarity while Hatoum has maintained her work's sense of urgency.

At a solo exhibition at Alexander & Bonin Gallery in New York (1/17-2/21), Hatoum presented *Dormiente* (2008), a handheld kitchen grater enlarged to the size of a bed. *Undercurrent (red)* (2008), which appeared in “Measures of Entanglement” (7/2-5/3) at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, the artist's first solo exhibition in China, depicts a woven and snaking web of dozens of red extension cords with lit bulbs around its perimeter, a carpet and circumscribed energy field of coursing electricity. Exhibited outside the Vienna Kunsthalle (5/6-9/30), *Hanging Garden* (2008) is a 25-foot-long sandbag barricade sprouting grass and weeds. *Nature Morte aux Grenades* (2006-07), hand grenades made of delicately blown glass, featured in an exhibition that traveled from the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice (6/4-9/20) to Turin's Fondazione Merz (9/26-11/22). In Venice, Hatoum's “Interior Landscape” also featured the artist's works displayed alongside the Fondazione Querini Stampalia's collection, revealing the classical strains in even the most acerbic pieces. Galleria Continua in San Gimignano gathered recent works in a commercial setting (9/13-11/7). The artist's most comprehensive retrospective, “Mona Hatoum: Collected Works 1989-2009” (10/24-1/28/10), was held at the Rennie Collection in Vancouver.

Mona Hatoum  
installing her work  
in the Wing Sang  
Building of the Rennie  
Collection, Vancouver.





# the politics of home

Known for her politically charged works that deal with home, exile and the human body, Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum is experiencing a re-awakening of interest in her native Middle East, following a successful career in Western circles. A new exhibition at Jordan's Darat Al-Funun brings her intense, questioning and probing works to a new audience; an audience more open and capable of understanding her work than ever before.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



This page: 'Misbah',  
2006-2007. Brass lantern,  
metal chain, light bulb and  
rotating electric motor.  
Dimensions of lantern: 56 x  
32 x 28.5 cm. Photograph  
by Marc Domage.  
Courtesy of Galerie  
Chantal Crousel, Paris.





In the context of Amman's growing visual arts scene, Darat Al-Funun - the Khalid Shoman Foundation is taking the lead in putting together shows that push the boundaries and expectations of artists and audiences alike. Maintaining a measured focus on keeping arts enthusiasts up-to-date with the movements of today's art world, the Foundation pays particular attention to Contemporary artists from the Arab world. In line with a diverse yearly cultural agenda comprised of exhibitions and workshops, Darat Al-Funun is starting its autumn 2008 season in October with one of the Middle East's most successful international artists - Mona Hatoum.

A name that speaks for itself on the international Contemporary arts scene is exciting news for Jordan, yet,

surprisingly, it seems that Palestinian Hatoum's presence in the region may not equal the attention her name receives on the global stage. In fact, Hatoum's activities in the region have been rather limited and include her 1996 solo show at Jerusalem's Gallery Anadiel and a 2006 show at Cairo's Townhouse Gallery (part of 'Kairoitic', an exhibition with three artists in the three separate spaces of the gallery). In addition, her works have been on show at the Cairo and Sharjah Biennials in 1998 and 2007 respectively, as well as the Ayloul Festival in Beirut in 2000, alongside screenings of her videos in festivals throughout the region. In Jordan, Hatoum's works are not familiar to the public, although one of her video works, 'So Much I Want To Say' (1996), was screened as part of a





show of the Darat Al-Funun's collection in 2005. This October marks the first solo show of the artist's work in Jordan.

Darat Al-Funun founder, Suha Shoman, explains that this upcoming exhibition is not only important on a national level, but on a regional one as well, saying, "we have been working towards this exhibition for a long time now, almost 10 years until the dates and the timing worked... a show for Mona Hatoum is a must." This is in line with the Foundation's goal to enhance cultural exchange by showing artists that are, "major contributors in Contemporary arts in the Arab and international worlds."

Facing page: 'Hanging Garden', 2008. Jute bags, earth and grass. Dimensions variable. Photograph by Marc Dommage. Courtesy of Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Above:  
Left: 'Koffieh', 1993-1999. Human hair on cotton fabric. 120 x 120 cm. Photograph by Kleinfenn. Courtesy of Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.  
Right: 'Round and Round', 2007. Bronze. 61 x 33 x 33 cm. Photograph by Jason Mandella. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.

Hatoum's work is very much grounded in the materials and objects she encounters, resulting in a vast repertoire including video, performance, installation and

sculpture. Investigating ideas that revolve around the body, human entrapment, dislocation and exile, Hatoum also deals with the concept of home. This theme is probed through her 2005 work, 'Mobile Home', which incorporates several household objects such as a chair, table, suitcases, a toy truck and items on several washing-lines. The objects are held by wires that move them back and forth between two imposing street barriers. The comforting familiarity of objects one would much rather see firmly anchored to the ground is lost in their slow, deliberate movements, resulting in an eerie sensation of instability.

In other works the materials sometimes poke fun at the viewer, as in the 2006-2007 'Nature Morte aux Grenades'. Beckoning the audience with its cheerful colours and shiny surfaces, one only realises upon closer inspection that they present the opposite of what they seem, the happy colours in



## preview

fact belong to a table-full of crystal grenades. The themes and issues presented through Hatoum's works have been an ever-present reality in the Arab world, either as first-hand encounters and stories, or as slightly distant screams, arguments and longwinded debates in the media. Yet, her work presents the very essence of some of these issues in an acutely intimate experience, combining a mental, and sometimes even a subtle physical, sensation.

Despite trying to avoid looking at the artist's work from only one perspective, and therein linking it to certain reference points, one cannot help asking: given that Hatoum has been residing in Europe for over three decades, does that context play a particular significance or importance in her forthcoming exhibition? "Showing in Amman has a different significance... because I am working in a context that I identify


with culturally, therefore I hope that people will feel closer to the work and to what it is I am trying to convey," explains Hatoum. On the one hand, Hatoum's work contains a universality, through her questioning of themes and issues common to all human experience and understanding, while on the other hand, a solo exhibition in Jordan also opens the door for new interpretations, contexts and audiences. In fact, many will probably have firsthand experience and understanding of the issues presented in her work.

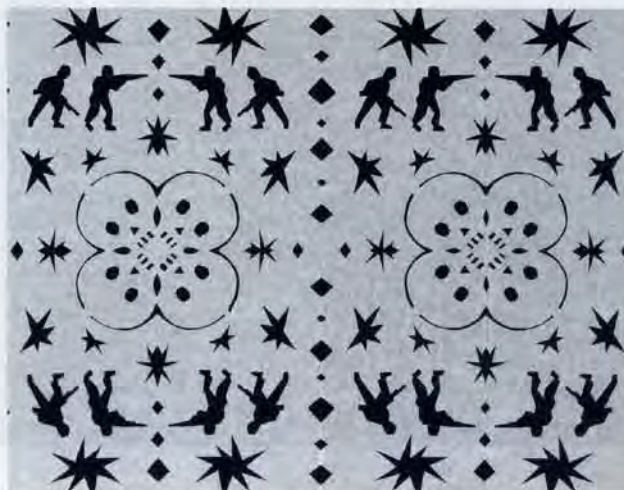
For this exhibition, a dialogue will be created between works that are already part of the Khalid Shoman Private Collection and others that will be flown in for the show. Together with new works created through her residency period at Darat Al-Funun, these pieces come together to create an interesting

mixture of old and new. Hatoum elaborates, "I usually try to choose works that have an interesting dialogue or some connection between them... the nature of the gallery space and the context are of course important and are often the starting point." The works chosen include 'Misbah' (2006-2007), 'Measures of Distance' (1988) and 'Round and Round' (2007), all which are part of the Foundation's collection. Others include the now instantly recognisable 'Keffieh' (1993-1999), which was most recently on display at the Parisian Galerie

Chantal Crousel during Art Basel 39. "(I) want to show the *Keffieh* which is embroidered with human hair because it is a work I really like and because it is of course very relevant to the context [of the exhibition]," adds Hatoum. Other ideas will be realised during her residency, such as works in clay which the artist would like to create in collaboration with El-

Amir, a local ceramics workshop in Iraq.

This residency, taking place one month prior to the exhibition, is part of the process in which Hatoum develops new works towards a show. In conversation, she explains a little bit about her practice and the role of context and material in her work: "Although the context may be the starting point that inspires the ideas... The way I work is much more abstract; I try to convey things through the use of materials and form, and any content is referred to in an oblique way and remains open ended." 



Untitled, 2005. Tissue paper, 38.1 x 44.5 x 2.8 cm, Photograph by Stephen White. Courtesy of White Cube, London.

**Mona Hatoum will exhibit at Darat Al-Funun from 11 October - 22 January 2009. For more information visit [www.daratafunun.org](http://www.daratafunun.org)**