

Mona Hatoum

Performance Documents, 1980-1987/2013

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Mona Hatoum, *Don't smile, you're on camera!*, 1980 (video still). Documentation of the performance at Battersea Arts Centre, London. Courtesy of the artist and Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. Photo: Stefan Rohner. © Mona Hatoum.

Galerie Chantal Crousel is delighted to host Mona Hatoum's newest solo exhibition in its second space at 5 rue de Saintonge, with a presentation of the major installation *Performance Documents, 1980-1987/2013*. This important work comprising photographs, sketches, drawings, notes, descriptions and videos, brings together rare archive material from a strategic and early point in Hatoum's career when she created performance in both a gallery setting and outside, on the streets.

Hatoum's performances are particularly striking since they are both dramatically visual and emotionally and politically engaged, characteristics which underpin all of her work thereafter. In these works we see themes that the artist returns to many times in her sculptures, installations and works on paper, with particular focus on the body, issues of gender and notions of conflict and displacement. Props such as furniture and domestic tools as well as confined, architectural structures create a textural background for actions that focused intensely on the body and, in particular, on the experience of being a displaced person.

The sketches are also remarkable in that they evidence the emerging sculptor that Mona Hatoum would become as well giving vivid insight into the working mind of an artist, showing both the initial ideas as well as the revisions and changes that are necessary in order to create a successful artwork. Mona Hatoum's decision to make performances at this time was partly due to necessity since she had limited funds, but also due to her active involvement in the fringe scenes of the London art world at the time, having recently graduated from art school. Since these works were often performed only once, this documentation provides the contemporary viewer with a unique, highly interactive engagement not just in an important period in Mona Hatoum's career but in 1980s art in general.

In 2020, Mona Hatoum has been awarded the Julio González Prize 2020 by the Valencia Institute of Modern Art, as well as the Praemium Imperiale prize for Sculpture in 2019, submitted by Japan Art Association, the most historical cultural foundation in Japan. She was presented with a number of additional prizes during her career, such as the Hiroshima Art Prize by the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2017), the Joan Miró Prize of the Fundació Joan Miró (2011), and the Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung Prize, Zurich (2004) among others.

In 2015, her major exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris travelled to Tate Modern, London, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki (2016).

Mona Hatoum has since then, shown her work in numerous international institutions such as the Magasin III and Accelerator, Stockholm (2022); Valencia Institute of Modern Art (IVAM), Valencia (2021); Menil Collection, Houston, (2017) that toured to the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St. Louis (2018); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2017). Previous solo exhibitions include: Fundación PROA, Buenos Aires (2015); Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo (2014); Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent (2014); Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha (2014); Kunstmuseum St-Gallen (2013); Arter, Istanbul (2012); Fundació Juan Miró, Barcelona (2012); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2009); Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2005); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (2004); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2004); Magasin III, Stockholm (2004); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca (2003); Centro de Arte de Salamanca (2002).

Don't smile, you're on camera!, 1980

The artist points a live video camera directly at the audience, panning up and down the rows, very slowly, sometimes stopping and focusing on parts of a person's body. Faces, torsos, crotches appeared on the monitor facing the audience. A shirt slowly fades away and a ghost image of bare breasts appears behind it, creating the illusion that the camera could see through the person's clothes. In the same way a shoe disappears and reveals a bare foot inside it. A man's jacket turns transparent and a hairy chest or a woman's naked torso is seen through. Another person's chest is overlapped with the ghost image of an X-ray of the same part of the body.

This performance was made possible with the participation of three assistants who were not visible to the audience. Two assistants used a second live camera to scan their own naked bodies while a third assistant mixed the images fed in by the two live cameras.

Video Performance, 1980

During the first part of the performance, the artist points a live video camera directly at the audience and scans up and down a couple of rows in detail. What the camera sees is simultaneously shown on a large monitor facing the audience. The artist then puts the camera down and draws a white chalk circle on the floor. She sits cross-legged in the middle of the circle, with her back to the audience. She picks up the video camera again but this time, unsuspected by the audience, she switches on a pre-recorded tape. Pointing the video camera towards herself she systematically scans her body from head to foot.

The monitor this time shows what the camera would see if the performer were unclothed. It is made to look as though the camera could see through the clothes but not through buttons, buckles, items in pockets, etc. The artist's movements with the camera are synchronised with what is shown on the monitor to create the illusion that the action is taking place in real time.

Look No Body!, 1981

The artist repeatedly performs the task of filling a cup with water, drinking the water and offering every other cup to a different member of the audience. Behind her a video monitor is placed, showing a view from a high angle of the toilet just outside the performance space.

Throughout the performance a sound tape is played. It consists of a monologue by the artist talking about an obsessive dream, reading a scientific and detailed description of the activity of passing water, and other thoughts, fantasies and questions related to it. Her voice is mixed with the amplified sounds of her heartbeat, breathing and loud stomach rumbles she had recorded using medical equipment.

Live work for the black room, 1981

The performance takes place in a room where all surfaces are painted black. It begins in complete darkness and for the first few minutes the action of the performer is heard but not seen. The artist repeatedly falls on the floor and draws the outline of her body in white chalk. She repeats this action several times until the floor becomes criss-crossed with lines, intersecting in a tangled mess. Each time she falls, the artist places a small, lit candle in the centre of the body-outline.

Under Siege, 1982

The artist's figure, reduced to a form covered in clay, trapped, confined within a small transparent structure, struggles to stand up, slipping and falling again and again. The live action is continuously repeated over a period of 7 hours and is accompanied by 3 different sound tapes (on loop) continuously blasting the space from different directions, creating a collage of sounds: revolutionary songs, news reports and conversations in English, French and Arabic.

The Negotiating Table, 1983

The room is dark, lit only by a light bulb lowered over a table on which the artist lies motionless. Empty chairs surround the table. Her body is bloodstained, covered with entrails, wrapped in plastic, and her head is firmly covered in surgical gauze. On the sound track news reports can be heard about civil war and speeches of Western leaders talking about peace.

Them and Us...and Other Divisions, 1984

While people sit out on the terrace during lunch, the artist, hooded and in black overalls, crawls dragging herself on her belly between the chairs, underneath the tables for the entire length of the 300-foot terrace.

As she finally reaches a recess in the garden wall, she begins dipping a brush into the bucket and scrubbing the stone step, but instead of getting it cleaner, it becomes covered with red paint. At the end, she sets fire to a screen of newspapers that burns away to reveal a wall chalked with racist graffiti.

Variation on Discord and Divisions, 1984

The floor and walls of the performance space are lined with newspapers. The performance consists of a series of vignettes: the artist, dressed in black overalls, an opaque stocking masking her face, slithers with some difficulty on the floor along the aisle between the rows of spectators into the performing space; she tries to scrub the floor but smears it with red-stained water; she tries to unmask her face by slitting eye holes through the stretched out stocking with a long-bladed knife; she circles a long table and chairs, and trying to sit down, she falls; she sets the table with plates, then, removing raw kidneys from under her clothes, cuts them up, puts them on the plates, and serves them, one by one, to the audience.

Roadworks, 1985

This video documents a performance that Hatoum made in Brixton, South London in 1985, where she walked barefoot through the streets, dragging a pair of large boots attached to her ankles by their laces. Brixton is an area of London that previously had witnessed violent race riots, therefore police presence was very prominent in the area. The boots that Hatoum chose to use were very particular: 'Dr. Martens', which have been traditionally worn by the British police, but were also adopted, at the time, by the skinhead movement that is commonly associated, with racist violence. Hatoum's movement was encumbered by the boots of the 'state' that followed her vulnerable steps like a continual, threatening presence or heavy shadow.

Unemployed, 1986

The artist, dressed in black overalls with the words "ARTIST AT WORK" stencilled in white on her back, walks from the Sheffield city centre to the unemployment office, stopping every few steps to spray the word "UNEMPLOYED" on the pavement, using a stencil in the shape of a foot and spray paint. A clearly visible trail of "UNEMPLOYED" footsteps is left on the pavement behind her.

Position: Suspended, 1986

The artist constructs a wedge-shaped structure obstructing the entrance between two galleries. Two sides of the structure are built out of wood and corrugated steel, the third side is screened with chicken wire. Inside, a variety of rusty hand tools are suspended. Covered in mud, the artist paces back and forth within the confined space brushing past the instruments. In doing so, a clanging metal sound can be heard and bits of mud get transferred into the instruments. The audience is forced to walk very close to the structure along the chicken wire screen coming into close contact with the artist trapped inside.

Matters of Gravity, 1987

For this performance, an alcove near the restaurant is blocked off with sheets of corrugated iron creating a shack or bomb-shelter. The artist can only be seen through a lens that not only makes her look remote, but also turns everything upside down making her look as if she is defying gravity. The space appears to be even more illogical because all the contents of the make shift shelter – folding bed, chairs, table, tray with coffee cups etc. – are attached to the opposite wall. Therefore, when the artist seems to lie on the bed, she is actually standing bent over against it and when she appears to be standing, she is in reality lying on the floor and it is though you are peeping through a hole in the ceiling.

When standing close to the structure you can hear a sound recording of the artist reading extracts from her father's diaries describing a repetitive daily routine of restrictive movement between house and shelter. Eight small speaker cones hang above the tables throughout the restaurant with the continuous sound of aeroplanes flying over head with intermittent air strikes and explosions.