

# MONA HATOUM

24 JUNE–28 SEPTEMBER 2015

The Centre Pompidou presents Mona Hatoum's most comprehensive exhibition to date giving an overview of the diversity and scope of her work from the late-70s to the present. It gathers together over 100 works in media as varied as performance, video, photography, installation, sculpture and works on paper. Hatoum initially attracted public attention with performances and video works in which the body gave expression to a divided reality, besieged by political and social control. In the 90s she gradually moved away from this form of narrative work and began to focus on sculptures and large-scale installations. Furniture and other familiar objects feature prominently in these works, which when modified or scaled up, represent a reality that reflects a suspicious, insidious and hostile environment. These works

appear vulnerable or disorientating, and present us with a world characterised by conflict and contradictions. All this is articulated through the formal language of Minimalism, Kinetic and Conceptual Art and a reference to Surrealism. The works are not shown in a chronological order but rather as a series of juxtapositions that mirror the complexity through which the artist manages to challenge and disturb our assumptions about the world around us. Born in Beirut in 1952 to Palestinian parents, Hatoum was on a short visit to London in 1975 when the Lebanese civil war broke out. Unable to return, she attended art school in London. British by nationality, she remained in the UK after her studies and, since 2003, divides her time between London and Berlin.

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### **1. Present Tense** 1996/2011

This work was first created for Gallery Anadiel in Jerusalem and is made of 2,200 blocks of traditional olive oil soap from Nablus, a city north of Jerusalem. The drawing on the soap blocks, created by tiny red glass beads pushed into their surface, depicts the map of the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The lines of beads delineate the territories that were supposed to be handed back to the Palestinian authority, but here they appear like hundreds of separate islands with no continuity or territorial integrity between them.

### **2. Cube** 2006

Constructed from wrought iron, this sculpture is made using an ancient interlacing technique that was used for barring the windows of medieval buildings. With no entrance or exist this metal cube turns into a cage with the material it is made of bringing in connotations of incarceration and medieval torture.

### **3. Sprague Chairs (REDUNDANT)** 2001

These two chairs were found on site at Mass MOCA, a museum housed in the building of the old Sprague electrical factory in North Adams, Massachusetts. The stools that had belonged to the workers, have been placed on top of each other and sewn or permanently bound together seat-to-seat with copper electrical wire, rendering them unusable. Inscribed into the seat, the word "REDUNDANT", meaning superfluous or useless, is here a reference to the history of the factory that was shut down and all its workers dismissed.

### **4. Over my dead body** 1988-2002

In this billboard-sized work, Hatoum depicts herself in profile, looking at a toy soldier positioned on her nose. It is a humorous yet complex and contradictory image. It plays with scale to reverse the power relationships by reducing the symbol of masculinity to a small creature, like a fly, that one can flick off.

### **5. Corps étranger** 1994

This installation originated from the first series of performances that Hatoum made in the early 1980s, which focused on notions of surveillance. A circular video image is projected onto the floor of a circular room with two narrow doorways. Specialist medical procedures, such as endoscopy, coloscopy and echography were used to probe and explore the artist's own body. The camera acts like a scientific eye that surveys the body and invades its boundaries, mapping internal and external surfaces to the point where they become abstracted, unfamiliar and dis-embodied. Close-up and enlarged, the body's internal and external surface becomes abstracted, unfamiliar and dis-embodied through the procedure of mapping.

### **6. Grater Divide** 2002 / **Daybed** 2008

Hatoum takes innocuous domestic objects and turns them into threatening sculptures by scaling them up to human proportions. *Grater Divide* is based on a Victorian foldout cheese grater that has been scaled up to the size of a room divider that cuts aggressively across the space. Similarly, *Daybed* is based on a vegetable grater enlarged to the size of a bed that promises discomfort and pain.

### **7A. Bukhara (red and white)** 2008

### **7B. Projection** 2006

### **7C. Projection (velvet)** 2013

In these works, which present a positive-negative reversal of the world map, the continents appear like fissures or gaps as if they have been eaten or worn away. These works present an unfamiliar view of the world since they use the 'Peters' projection' – an egalitarian representation of land mass in true proportion – as opposed to the more familiar image of the world drawn from a dominant, northerly perspective.

### **8. Measures of Distance** 1988

The video is constructed from a series of grainy stills shot in extreme close-ups of Hatoum's mother in the shower of the family home in Beirut. The images are overlaid with a mesh of Arabic writing, like a curtain or a veil, which represent her mother's letters from Beirut to her in London. On the soundtrack is an animated conversation between Hatoum and her mother overlaid with Hatoum's voice reading a translation of the letters into English.

The video is concerned with the artist's separation from her Palestinian family and in particular, her relationship with her mother against a backdrop of traumatic social rupture, war, exile and displacement.

### **9. Light Sentence** 1992

The title is a wordplay implying a prison sentence that is not too heavy. The installation is made up of square wire mesh lockers stacked up to create a 3-sided enclosure above human height. The lockers have the appearance of animal cages but can also relate to the institutional, uniform and box-like architecture that lines the suburbs of large cities. A single naked household light bulb hangs in the middle of the structure and moves slowly up and down, like a search light, casting large, constantly moving gridded shadows on the walls. This movement creates an unsettling feeling and a sense of instability and disorientation, as if the whole room is swaying.

### **10. Recollection** 1995

This work was made for the 'Beguinage' in Kortrijk, Belgium, a 13<sup>th</sup> Century building which housed the Beguines, a community of single women who dedicated their lives to welfare and lace work. The delicate balls of hair strewn all over the floor and the single strands of hairs hanging from the ceiling at 15cm intervals are Hatoum's own hair, which she carefully collected over a six-year period. The small roughly made wooden loom on the table contains a piece of weaving that has also been made with the artist's hair.

### **11. Static Portraits (Momo, Devrim, Karl)** 2000

This series of photographs were made with a unique, large-scale Polaroid camera during a residency at MasArt in Boston. Outside the frame each subject holds onto a Van der Graaf generator that creates a static current, causing his or her hair to stand on end.

### **12. Quarters** 1996

The title suggests official, institutional lodgings like army or prison quarters. Each unit has five bunk beds that look more like shelves or racks. There is an architectural dimension to this work. It gives the sense of people living in layers above one another in urban environments. This is an environment where uniformity and regimentation are predominant.

### **13. Socle du Monde** 1992-1993

Conceived as a homage to Piero Manzoni's work of the same title, this sculpture is a large cube entirely covered in iron filings that adhere to hidden magnets in dark, entrap-like contortions creating an ambiguous texture. Although a minimal cube, the sculpture is alluringly tactile, reminiscent of something bodily like entrails, hair or fur, a subversion of the clean, industrial and machined surfaces of minimal sculptures.

### **14. Map (clear)** 2014

A world map made with crystal-clear glass marbles 20mm in diameter. The marbles are not fixed to the floor making this map vulnerable and unstable as the vibration caused by the viewer's movement can shift parts of it and threaten to destroy it. At the same time it makes the floor surface treacherous and impassable.

### **15. Home** 1999

In this work a group of kitchen utensils, placed on a table, are connected together with electric wire that runs to a series of light bulbs hidden under colanders and graters. The electric current is controlled by an electronic device that fluctuates it making the bulbs constantly flicker and fade up and down. The hum of the electric current is amplified creating a crackling, buzzing sound that adds

a sense of threat to the installation.

The title is ironic since this domestic scene has been electrified and barricaded behind a fence of stretched wires, suggesting entrapment and violence rather than a place of warmth or belonging.

### **16. Silence** 1994

This work takes the form of a traditional child's cot made of glass laboratory tubing evoking the fragility of the body. This symbol of innocence here looks like the skeleton of a bed or an empty circulatory system, becoming quite clinical or ghost-like.

### **17. + and -** 1994

In this kinetic work, a rotating motor-driven arm sweeps slowly over the surface of a large sandpit, simultaneously creating and erasing circular lines in the sand. This work is a representation of the interplay between two opposite forces that are making and unmaking, building and destroying in a continuous cycle.

### **18. Keffieh** 1993-99

Based on the traditional Arab headscarf with its distinctive black and white pattern this *Keffieh* has been embroidered using long strands of human hair creating a strange and surreal object that is full of contradictions. The delicate embroidery of long, female hair, a subversion of this symbol of masculinity, suggests the time-consuming labour of some kind of controlled anger and a quiet protest.

### **19. Hot Spot** 2014

This is a steel cage-like globe that tilts at the same angle as the earth. Using delicate red neon to outline the contours of the continents on its surface, the work buzzes with an intense, mesmerizing yet seemingly dangerous energy. The work suggests that 'Hot Spots' or spots of conflict these days are not limited to certain areas of disputed borders, but that the whole world is caught up in conflict and unrest. It can also be seen as a reference to global warming, an impending concern.

### **20. Twelve Windows** 2012-2013 (Mona Hatoum with Inaash)

These twelve pieces of Palestinian embroidery are the work of Inaash, the Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps (a Lebanese NGO founded in 1969 to provide employment for Palestinian women in refugee camps in Lebanon). Rigorously planned by Malak Hussein Abdulrahim, the result of decades of dedicated research and design featuring Palestinian needlework, the panels were meticulously embroidered by Inaash's experienced craftsmen. The aim was to preserve this traditional skill in danger of extinction because of the dispersal of Palesti-

nians across the region. The act of embroidery here becomes like an act of resistance against the discontinuities of exile. Each 'window' represents, through its motifs, stitches colours and patterns, a key region of Palestine. Installed in a space that is crisscrossed by steel cables, they become like a visual map of Palestine and a metaphor for this divided territory.

### **21. 3-D Cities** 2008-2010

The installation is a trio of street maps of Beirut, Baghdad and Kabul, mounted onto tabletops linked by wooden trestles. Delicate concentric circles have been cut into the surface of the maps to create concave and convex areas suggesting both the positive and negative impact of war and the constant cycle of destruction and reconstruction that these cities have undergone. The recessed areas can be seen as bomb craters or construction sites and the protrusions as explosions or architectural structures rising from the ground.

### **22. Impenetrable** 2009

A large hanging cube measuring 3 x 3 x 3 meters is made entirely of rods of barbed wire. It is a light and airy structure that hovers about 10 cm above the floor, as if levitating. Minimal and precise, yet the material it is made of has heavy and sinister connotations. In the title '*Impenetrable*', Hatoum makes reference to the Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto's series of '*Penetrables*', hanging cubes made from colourful rubber tubes.

### **23. Incomunicado** 1993

A child's cot made of bare steel. It is cold and harsh with the metal bars turning it more into a confining structure rather than a protective one. Instead of a solid base for the mattress, thin wires are stretched across the frame and are reminiscent of cheese wire or an egg-slicer. Hatoum has subverted this familiar object associated with warmth and homeliness into an object that is terrifying and dangerous.

### **24. Natura morta (medical cabinet)** 2012

Here Hatoum has reproduced the forms of hand grenades in colourful, mirrored, Murano glass. These decorative and seductive objects with their forms reminiscent of sensual fruit are ambiguously poised between something deadly and explosive and something alluring and tactile. Displayed in a medical cabinet, they are presented as precious objects with sinister connotations.

### **25. Changing Parts** 1984

One part of the video refers to an organised, privileged and ordered reality and the other to a reality of disorder, chaos, war and destruction. But this opposition turns

out to be full of contradictions as these two spaces become interchangeable and in the disorder can also be seen an expression of birth and the sensuousness of life.

The work has been constructed using shots taken inside the artist's family home in Beirut and some footage from the documentation of a live performance entitled *Under Siege* (1982). The soundtrack uses Bach's *Cello Suite no. 4* which fades into a multi layered track of noises, busy street sounds and news reports.

### **26. Jardin Public** 1993

This is a classic French garden chair sporting a neat triangle of pubic hair that looks as if it is growing out of the holes in the seat. Its punning title refers to the etymological relation between the words 'pubic' and 'public'. A humorous and light-hearted work, *Jardin Public* conjures up the Surrealist spirit and wit of Magritte.

### **27. Undercurrent (red)** 2008

This is a floor piece, made from bright red, cloth-covered electrical cable that has been woven to form a large square mat. Out of the central square, a long fringe snakes across the floor, each strand ending in a 15-watt light bulb that silently brightens and dims at a slow "breathing" pace hinting at a malevolent presence underfoot or an animate, medusa-like creature.

### **28. Cellules** 2012-2013

The installation consists of a group of eight cage-like structures, made from steel rods. Inside each unit there is one or two amorphous shapes made from deep red hand blown glass. The upright structures are slightly tilted giving them a sense of precariousness and instability and the glass shapes, which look like bodily organs or ambiguous creatures, appear to be oozing or squeezing their way out of their confinement.

### **29. Jardin Suspendu** 2008-2010

The title *Hanging Garden* is a reference to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Sand bags are a familiar site in the Middle East, normally used as temporary wartime architecture. Here the implication is that they have been around for so long that plants have begun to take root. The sprouting grass in this most inhospitable of environments suggests something positive and the possibility for regrowth, renewal and hope.

# PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTS, WORKS ON PAPER, PHOTOGRAPHS

Works in these different media are dispersed throughout the exhibition.

## **Performance Documents** 1980-1987 / 2013

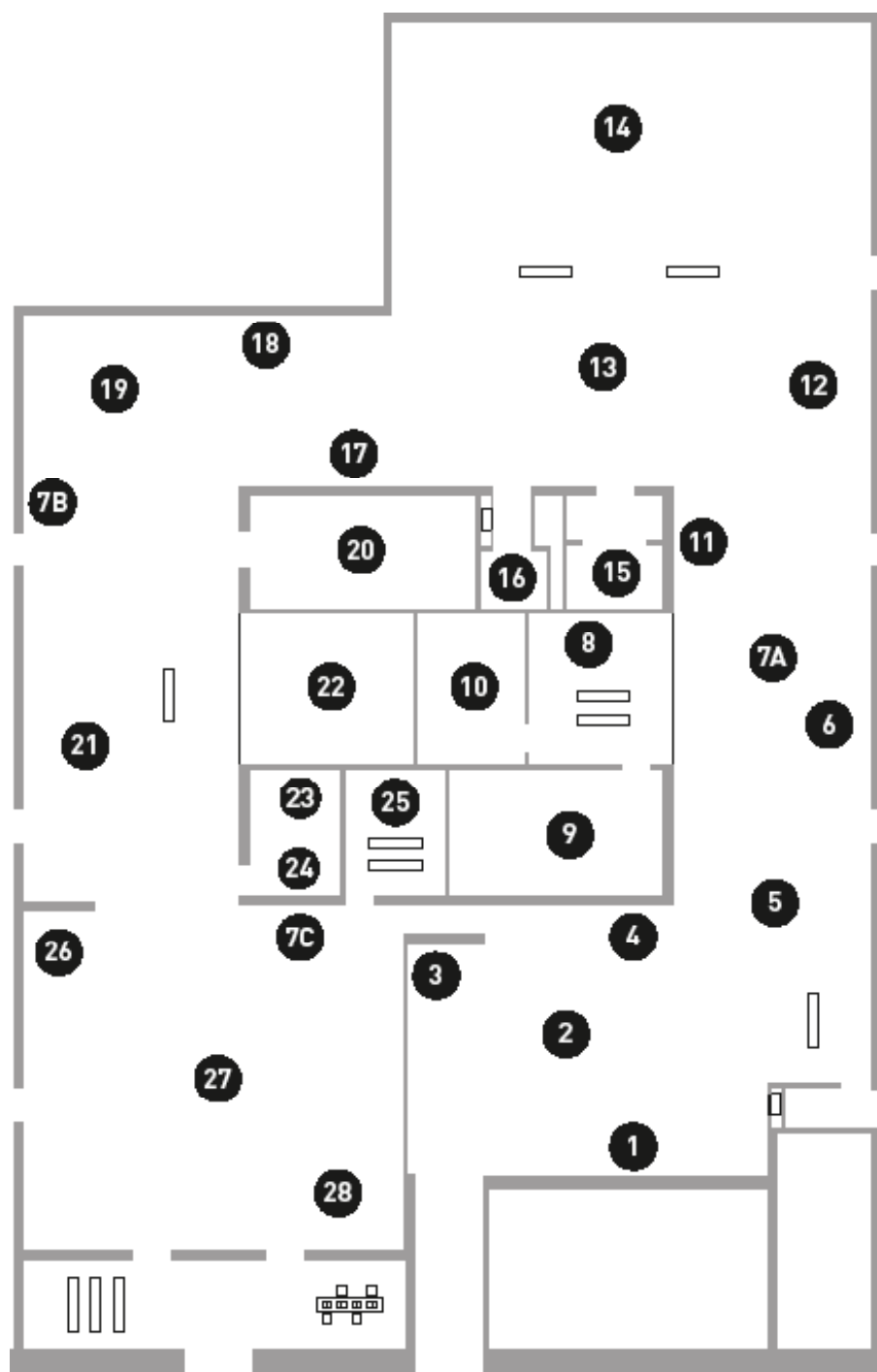
This work brings together a rare archive of material, in the form of 10 digital prints and 4 videos that document some of Hatoum's early performance works created in gallery settings or in the streets. The framed digital prints include sketches, notes, descriptions and photographs. Since many of these performances were only performed once, this material gives a vivid insight into a strategic and early moment in Hatoum's career.

## **Works on paper** 1977-2013

Since the 1970s a key part of Hatoum's practice has been her works on paper that incorporate some of the elements used in her sculptures. In several drawings, remnants of her own body such as skin, hair and nails are mixed with hand-made paper pulp to form random patterns and compositions. Paper pulp was also used to create images in low relief. In other drawings, lines are created by burning, cutting or sewing hair into the paper. Another ongoing series of drawings are made using Japanese wax paper pressing it against graters and sieves to make tactile impressions of these perforated surfaces. The resulting white-on-white images are delicate, like a faint trace of something accidental.

## **Photographs** 1996 / 2002

These photographs were taken spontaneously on Hatoum's travels and capture humorous, repellent, or surreal situations. The photographs are almost like sketches, presenting an exploration of the themes and concerns in the artist's videos, installations and sculptures.



**29** On the terrace

## EXHIBITION

### CURATOR

Christine Van Assche

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Assisted by Jules Brière

Media partnership

LOBS

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TimeOut  
Paris

TROIS

## CATALOGUE

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## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### GUIDED TOURS

5h30 p.m. - Saturdays and Sundays

(1h30 mins.)

€4,50, reduced price €3,50

+ reduced price

"Museum and exhibitions" ticket.

### TAILOR-MADE TOURS

Saturday 4 July

11h00 a.m. - Lip-reading tour

2h30 p.m. - Tour in French sign

language

€4,50, free for carer

### CONFERENCE

Mona Hatoum

Friday 25 September

7.00 p.m. Petite salle, free access

## INFORMATION

01 44 78 12 33

[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

### EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

24 June to 28 September 2015

Galerie 1, level 6

Every day except Tuesdays

from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

Late night opening:

Thursdays until 11.00 p.m.

Ticket offices close at 10.00 p.m.

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to each area at the Museum, for all

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and for those under 18

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(full price tickets only)

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