



Mona Hatoum. © Mona Hatoum, 2013 ©Andri Pol 2013.

PARIS, FRANCE

A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

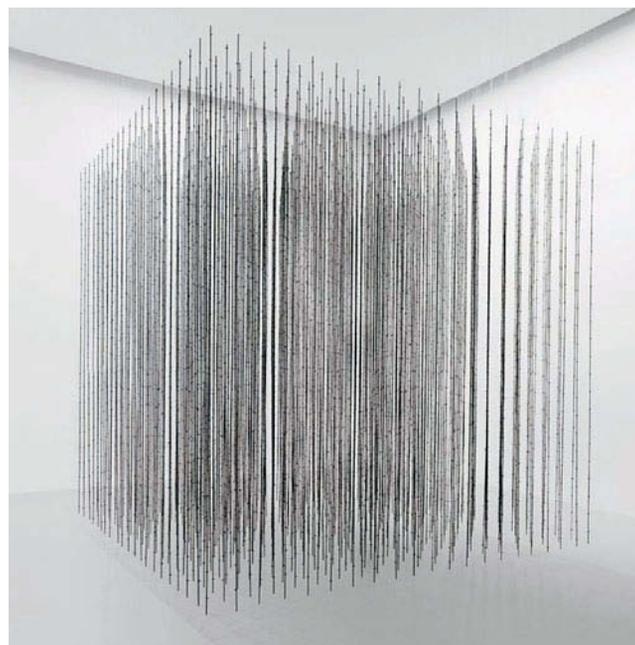
Four decades of work by Mona Hatoum are on display at the artist's Centre Pompidou retrospective. **Rajesh Punj** gets closer look at her intimate and tense creations.

Berut-born, London and Berlin-based artist Mona Hatoum's work has since the early 1980's been concerned with the trappings of control; that proved a decisive influence upon her Palestinian upbringing. Leaving Lebanon for London in 1975 as a consequence of civil war, Hatoum's work draws attention to the lives and landscapes of those permanently under siege and out of place. She is tormented as much by the delineated territorial maps of her homeland and its unsolved peace accords as she is the intrusion of external and internal forces upon her own body. And as a consequence the her current retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris reads like a chilling curiosity shop of objects and installations that are as tender as they appear traumatic.

Originally adopting video and performance as a subversive device through which she would take centre stage, during the nineties Hatoum moved towards more problematic installations and sculptural works that gave scale to her edgy ideas. She profited as much from her preoccupation with prefabricated materials as she did with those made from a more personal touch. And at the Pompidou, Hatoum's own hair, nail clippings and traces of urine, are the equal of neon lights, glass, wrought iron and metal.

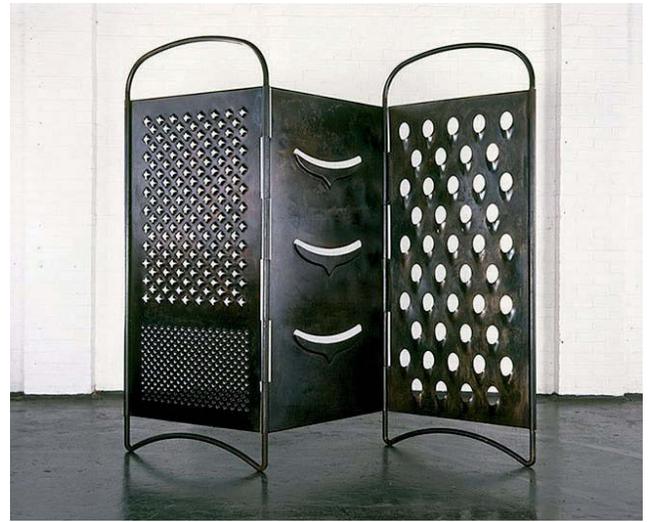
With more than one hundred works thematically displayed, the Pompidou's characteristic glass fronted facade provides an impressive, if not slightly incohesive open plan setting for the uneasy works of an artist who returns to the same symbols. And beyond the initial interference of Hatoum's repetitive video work that hangs as an unsophisticated billboard, lies the visual strength of major works such as *Present Tense* (1996/2011); revealing a territorial map (unrealized and unregulated since the 1993 peace agreement) drawn onto an uneven bed of olive soap, that by implication suggests the effect of such politics upon the lives of the people. And as motifs, maps and the tools of domesticity — a theme which is central to the artist's life and visual lexicography. *Light Sentence* (1992), is another seminal work for which Hatoum plays with a sliver of light likening it to the disagreeable condition of solitary confinement. The work encompasses a thread of wire and a reticent light bulb that rises and falls from within a mesh cage while a shadow hangs over the piece like a potential menace.

Less machine sculpture and more infected cell, *Socle du Monde* (Base of the World) (1992–1993), pays homage to Italian sculptor Piero Manzoni, and appears as a purulent magnetic cube covered entirely by dark iron-filings. Upon closer inspection it resembles the intricate honeycomb patterns of a bees nest.



(Above) *Impenetrable*. 2009. Barbed wire, fishing wire. 300 x 300 x 300 cm. Exhibition copy © Courtesy of the artist © Photo Courtesy Mataf: Arab Museum of Modern Art Photography by Markus Elblaus.

(Below) *No Way III*. 1996. Stainless steel. 11 x 25 x 29 cm. Artist's proof 2/2. © Courtesy of the artist © Photo Courtesy White Cube Photography by Edward Woodman.



(Above, from left) *Cellules* [Cells]. 2012-2013. Mild steel and blown glass in eight parts. 170 cm x variable depth and width. © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris © Photo Sébastien Normand; *Cellules*. 2012-2013. Mild steel and blown glass in 8 parts. 170 cm x variable depth and width. © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris © Photography by Florian Kleinfenn; *Grater Divide*. 2002. Mild steel. 204 x 3.5 cm x variable width. Artist's proof © Courtesy of the artist © Photo Courtesy of White Cube. Photography by Lain Dickens.

More delicate still are Hatoum's sculptural works. They are manufactured like clinical objects that have distressingly had all of their comforting characteristics removed — as though humanity had lost its heart as a consequence of a history of violence. When interviewed by the Tate in 2011 Hatoum recalls how her more intimate works resonate a level of unrest. "Often the work is about conflict or contradiction, and often that conflict or contradiction can be found within the object", Explaining how the work *Untitled* (wheelchair) (1998) is "on the one hand the person using the wheelchair would need someone to wheel them around, but the presence of the knives, makes you realize they resent that dependence. And as a consequence there is a whole internal conflict happening with that piece." Similarly for the work *Incommunicado* (1993), Hatoum has the bars at the base of the metal cot that are there for support removed entirely. And it is only when you venture closer that you realize the underlying metal frame has been replaced by these precarious wires. For which Hatoum suggests "your perception of the object changes. It is not anymore about protection, but it is more about a situation of abuse or danger."

Nominated for the Turner Prize in 1995, Hatoum turned her attention from works addressing social and political unease, to the deceptive neutrality of domestic objects that are out of context and appear as these misshapen tools of torture. *Quarters* (1996) is a work made-up of a series of metal bunk beds that rise from floor to

ceiling as five skeletal bed frames that for their industrial simplicity recall animal pens as much as they resemble the most basic space available for sleep. This is a work whose corrosive silence is punctured by the abrasive sounds that resonate from Hatoum's 1999 installation *Home* in which a table of forensic styled kitchen utensils appear to have been wired up to a live electric current and lights. All of this generates a series of temporary aftershocks for an audience standing behind a wire fence, as though voyeurs to the electrocution of domestic and daily bliss, or of life itself. *Home*, like *Light Sentence*, has an underlying edge that conditions much of Hatoum's work, with a contradictory juxtaposition of positive and negative influences.

Drawing on the gravity of her work, Hatoum pays attention to the endless possibilities of what is to come for her as a humanitarian and an artist. "I think the most exciting thing about being an artist is that I never know where the next exhibition is going to take me to in the world, and what you will end up making," she says. "And I find it very exciting — not knowing." This she says, like the works on display, is the sensation of comprehending reality through the apparatus of art. ■

MONA HATOUM RUNS UNTIL 28 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT THE CENTRE POMPIDOU IN PARIS. WWW.CENTREPOMPIDOU.FR