

Mona Hatoum: After Pompidou and Tate now in Kiasma

According to the Center Pompidou and the Tate Modern, Mona Hatoum's monographic exhibition is to be seen at the Kiasma in Helsinki, 7 October 2016 - 26 February 2017. Interview by Christine van Assche, one of the curators.

Sep 2016



photos

After seeing Mona Hatoum's major monographic exhibition at the Center Pompidou in Paris in 2015, Mona Hatoum was shown at the Tate Modern in London from May 4 to August 21, 2016. From 7th October 2016 to 26th February 2017, she can be seen at the Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland.

The show entitled *Mona Hatoum* has been curated by Christine Van Assche, Center Pompidou's curator, Clarrie Wallis, curator of modern and contemporary British art by Tate, and Katy Wan, assistant curator at Tate Modern. The exhibition is organized by the Center Pompidou, the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris, in collaboration with the Tate Modern, London and the National Gallery of Finland / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki. A catalog of Tate Publishing will be published for the presentation in London, and a lecture and event program will be offered.

In a world driven by contradictions, geopolitical tensions and diverse aesthetic perceptions, Mona Hatoum offers us an artistic creation of unsurpassed universality,

an oeuvre that has become a "model" for many artists of our time. Born in Palestine, the British artist is one of the key figures of the international art scene. Her work is characterized by the relevance of her discourse through the perfect interplay of forms and materials used, the multidisciplinary aspect of her work and her unique, committed reinterpretation of contemporary art movements (performance, kinetic art and minimalism).

After the Center Pompidou centered the first museum exhibition of Mona Hatoum 20 years ago, it now dedicates its first large monographic show, in which over 100 works are represented and which spans the multidisciplinary aspect of their work from 1977 to 2015. Without any chronological sequence, similar to a "map" of their career, the exhibition offers the audience a journey through their artistic production, based on formal and sensitive affinities between the works. In this way the performances of the 1980s - documented in photos, drawings or videos - can be seen in the context of the installations, sculptures, drawings, photographs and objects from the late 1980s to the present.

Mona Hatoum, born in Lebanon in 1952 as a child of Palestinian parents, left the country in 1975 for a brief stay in London, just as the war broke out in her homeland. She stayed in the British capital and began to study art. Their work is divided into two main periods. During the 1980s she explored the areas of performance and video. Her work was narrative at that time and focused on social and political issues. Since the 1990s, more "permanent" works have been part of their artistic production - installations, sculptures and drawings. Mona Hatoum, now a part of the avant-garde, was concerned with kinetic art and phenomenological theories as well as other installations that can be defined as post-minimalist, for which she used materials found in the industrial world (grid and barbed wire) or in her own environment (hair). Some of these installations and sculptures, most of which have a political dimension, are filled by feminism. Somehow surreal objects are created, works produced on paper or photographs taken with unusual everyday materials, which have a relationship with other works of the exhibition. The curator of the show at the Center Pompidou spoke with the artist: Works produced on paper or photographs taken with unusual everyday materials, which have a relationship with other works of the

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Christine van Assche: They spent 23 years in Lebanon, where they were born, and now they have been living between Great Britain and Berlin for 40 years. How do you position yourself between these different cultures, between the Middle East and the West, or rather, where do they situate their work?

Mona Hatoum: I do not think that one should see my work in such terms. I find it a pity when people approach my work with the idea of linking it to my origin. This restricts their interpretation and hinders the formal subtleties and comprehensive experience that my work can offer. I use geometry, abstractions and the formal language of art in my work. The great installations that I have created since the early 1990s refer to architecture, the structures of power and control that I have observed in the West. My roots lie in the Middle East. I completed my entire school education in Beirut, a cosmopolitan city where I went to a French school, finished my education at an Italian school and then went to an American university. So long before I left Lebanon, I was already exposed to a wide range of complex influences. This is typical of the postcolonial situation in Arab and North African regions, where the combination of multiple cultural influences nourishes the psyche with its complexity and richness. I've spent two-thirds of my life in England, and it's not so long since I began to share my time between London and Berlin. That is why I have a hybrid cultural experience, a plural existence, and I think this is clearly reflected in the variety of forms and approaches in my work. I was already exposed to a wide range of complex influences. This is typical of the postcolonial situation in Arab and North African regions, where the combination of multiple cultural influences nourishes the psyche with its complexity and richness. I've spent two-thirds of my life in England, and it's not so long since I began to share my time between London and Berlin. That is why I have a hybrid cultural experience, a plural existence, and I think this is clearly reflected in the

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CVA: What do you mean by referring to the "structures of Western power"?

MH: The constant monitoring of a company is one of the first things that affected me when I arrived in England. In the late 1970s, my commitment to feminist groups led me to investigate relationships of power that existed first and foremost through the gulf between the sexes, and I devoted myself to those based on racial relations. I also noticed that the bureaucratic institution I attended at that time (University College, London) was a microcosm of colonial power. This observation prompted me to analyze the relationship between the West and the Third World. At that time, I read Foucault and Bataille, and among other mechanisms of state control, I was extremely interested in panopticon and surveillance concepts.

CVA: Her entire work draws the viewer into a complex relationship that is completely

different in the performances, sculptures and installations. How do you develop this inclusion?

MH: I want to draw people's attention to a visual and physical approach so that their associations or interpretations suddenly spring from a physical contact with the work. In my performances, I had a direct relationship with the audience, but when I started to create installations, I wanted to achieve that the bodies of the viewers take the place of my own. In very large installations, which can be quite impressive in terms of their area, the viewer gradually becomes a part of the space and the formal elements of the work and ultimately feels something like instability or danger. In the sculptures, especially when they take the forms of household objects, the viewers can project their own bodies onto the work, As they use them themselves. The fact that these works have been turned into useless and menacing objects is causing us to question the security of the world in which we live.

CVA: How are the performances presented in the exhibition?

MH: A selection of a total of ten performances is documented in photographs, sketchbooks and descriptive texts. The exhibition also shows four video footage of performances, which represent the major part of the work that I produced during the 1980s together with the video work. Everything is distributed throughout the exhibition to provide a different perspective and experience, together with more formal, experimental installations and sculptures.

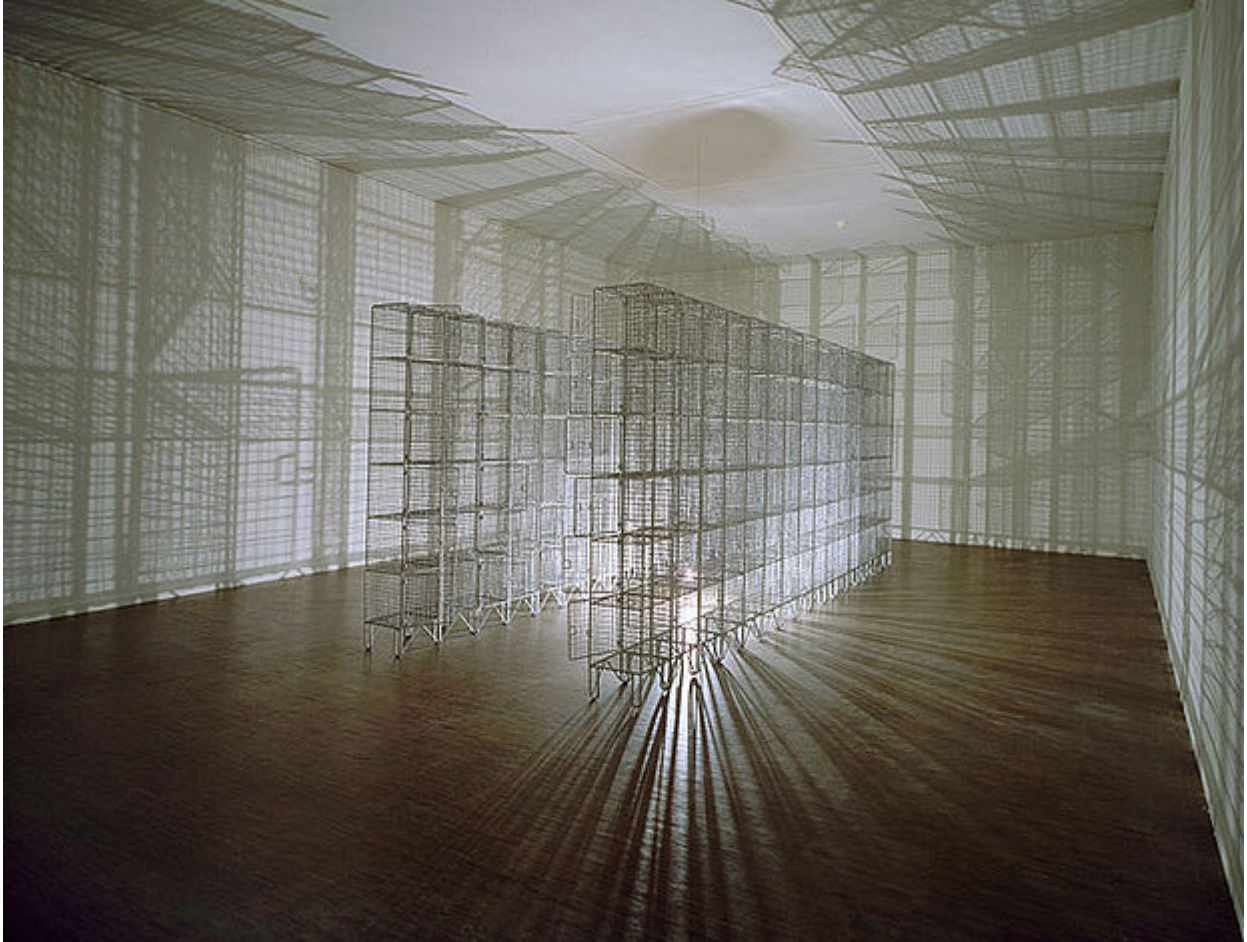
CVA: They have produced several videos that have nothing to do with performances. Do they correspond to a particular phase of their creation or specific explorations?

MH: In the 1980s, apart from my performances, which often included an element of a live video, I produced various videos that were an extension of what I was doing at that time, based on time sequence and narration. The first of those videos, *So much I want*

to say , consisted of a performance with a Slow Scan satellite transmission, produced 1983 in Vancouver and Vienna. I also used sequences filmed in Super 8 during the Performance *Under Siege* (1982) to add chaos to the second part of *Changing Parts* (1984). In addition, I have completely reconfigured certain elements of a section from a complex performance entitled *Mind the Gap* (1986) To create the video *Measures of Distance* in 1988 . Since then, I have been producing installations and videos dealing with the problem of surveillance, such as *Corps étranger (Foreign body)* [a 1994 work for Center Pompidou, which was recorded in his collection in the same year, ed .], Along with a series of installations, for which I projected with a monitoring camera sounds and recordings from the street in real time into the exhibition rooms.

CVA: The exhibition presents a series of impressive installations that are minimalistic in terms of material and their relationship to the space and the viewer. What do these installations represent in their entire work? How do you classify them into the minimalist movement?

MH: In the large installations I used the geometry of the cube, ranking and repetition as formal minimalistic systems. But when the cube becomes a cage and the grid becomes a barrier, they cease to be abstract: they relate to captivity, control, and ultimately to the architecture of the prison. Some of these installations, such as *Light Sentence* (1992), are performative and use light, shadow and movement to destabilize the space. Others such as *Map (clear)* (2015) refer to an unstable material - in this case, glass marbles - to turn the ground beneath our feet into a deceptive surface. Therefore, the work is minimalistic only on a formal and aesthetic level. It is not self-referential,



CVA: They also produce objects that seem to build even more on surrealism and have a clear sense of humor. Is that your intention?

MH: Humor has always played an important role in my work. I often linked him with a touch of surrealism, to counter or to dampen certain serious themes in my first works. This is the case in *Roadworks* , a 1985 performance where I walked barefoot through the streets of Brixton and pulled heavy police cars behind me, or in the picture titled *Over my deadbody*, in which the symbol of the masculine on a Toys in the form of a small soldier is reduced. Evidently it is also in such sculptures as *Jardin Public* (1993), *Untitled (wheelchair)* (1998-99) and *T42 (gold)* (1999). It can also be found in a series of sculptures, In which I enlarged surrealistic proportions of harmless kitchens and turned them into menacing screens or beds. Surrealism interests me because I see it as a visualization of the contradictions and complexity that dwell in us,

and as a way to make art proceeding from an intimate reality instead of our logical thinking. The concept of the uncanny or intimate, which is disturbing or even menacing, because it is associated with a certain trauma, often occurs in one way or another in my work. And as a way to make art outgoing from an intimate reality instead of our logical thinking. The concept of the uncanny or intimate, which is disturbing or even menacing, because it is associated with a certain trauma, often occurs in one way or another in my work. And as a way to make art outgoing from an intimate reality instead of our logical thinking. The concept of the uncanny or intimate, which is disturbing or even menacing, because it is associated with a certain trauma, often occurs in one way or another in my work.

CVA: What contemporary artists do they feel particularly close to?

MH: The artists who inspired me during the different stages of my career are Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, Meret Oppenheim, Agnès Martin, Eva Hesse and Félix Gonzáles-Torres, although there are many others.

Christine van Assche Chief Curator, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Center Georges Pompidou, Paris