

Encounters: Giacometti x Mona Hatoum

**3 September 2025 –
11 January 2026**

**Large print
exhibition guide**

Divide

Distilling the psychological and emotional aftereffects of violence into sculptural forms is at the heart of both Alberto Giacometti (1901–66) and Mona Hatoum's (b. 1952) respective art practices. Both have engaged and wrestled with surrealist aesthetics and are deeply attentive to their chosen materials, arriving at formal styles which tend to an economy of means.

While both are preoccupied with the human body in its vulnerability and resilience, their approaches diverge. In Hatoum's work the body is alluded to but never directly represented, while Giacometti committed himself to exploring figuration. Seeking to express a sense of alienation and existential crisis following the Second World War, Giacometti spoke of finding in sculpture "a kind of contained violence, which touches me the most". Hatoum describes her works, made in times of extended and multiple global conflicts, as an "open system", creating room for ambiguity and ambivalence while conveying the loss and discontinuities that come from conditions of exile and displacement.

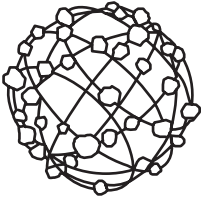
In her work, Hatoum investigates the impact of political instability on individuals and groups of people by disrupting expectations of what constitutes a 'home'. She often achieves this by modifying household objects, making them uncanny and at times threatening. Continuing this exploration of making the everyday unfamiliar, she approaches the Barbican's gallery as a total installation.

Hatoum presents works drawn from across her career alongside a number of new works created especially for this exhibition. Juxtaposing these works with Giacometti's sculptures, which span the 1930s to the 1950s, she transforms the gallery into an unsettling and strange domestic space.

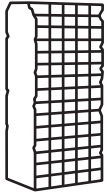
Entering the exhibition, visitors are confronted with the mutilated form of Giacometti's 'Woman with Her Throat Cut' (1932). Unambiguous in its intimation of violence towards the body, it sets a disquieting and discomfoting tone that amplifies as visitors move through the space, meeting cages, ruined furniture, and a cell-like room, leading to a concluding group of works that visualises the remnants of wide scale destruction of a world caught up in constant war and unrest.

As viewers, we are slowly implicated as the protagonists of 'Divide'. Feelings of danger, distress and uncertainty arise from the interplay between Hatoum and Giacometti's works. Their artworks compel us to reassess our relationship to our surroundings and recognise the disquieting nature of our current reality.

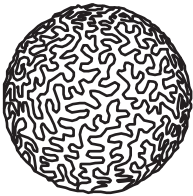
Foyer



Mona Hatoum
'Orbital', 2018
Concrete and steel reinforcement bars



Mona Hatoum
'Bourj', 2010
Mild steel tubing



Mona Hatoum
'Inside Out', 2019
Bronze

'Orbital' and 'Inside Out' both take the form of a globe, a recurring motif in Mona Hatoum's work. 'Orbital' is a skeleton globe punctuated by clumps of concrete rubble. Appearing as if constructed from demolished buildings, 'Orbital' suggests a world in a state of permanent destruction. By contrast 'Inside Out' is covered by a fleshy entrail-like pattern, contradicting the sculpture's dense bronze material.

'Bourj', the Arabic word for 'tower', is the title for a work developed for Hatoum's first solo exhibition in her native city at the Beirut Art Center in 2010. Made

from stacked steel tubes which have been cut and burnt, it resembles a model of a generic modernist building scarred by conflict and war.



Mona Hatoum

‘Over my dead body’, 1988

Ink on paper

‘Over my dead body’ was originally part of a series of billboards commissioned by Projects UK and exhibited on advertising hoardings in Newcastle and other major cities in the UK. Hatoum says: “I chose to use a bold popular expression which for me is equivalent to “No pasarán!”. I saw it as a humorous but also complex and contradictory image. I was playing with scale to reverse the power relationship by reducing the symbol of threatening masculinity to a small toy”.

Gallery



Mona Hatoum
'Incommunicado', 1993
Mild steel, wire and rubber

In replacing the springs of this child's cot with taut cheese wire, Hatoum transforms a symbol of care and support into a hostile object. The crib no longer offers protection to a vulnerable child, instead eliciting a visceral sense of danger.



Alberto Giacometti
'Woman with Her Throat Cut', 1932
Bronze
Kunstmuseum Basel, on permanent loan
from the Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung,
1965



Mona Hatoum
'A Bigger Splash', 2009
Murano glass

Originally intended by Alberto Giacometti to be displayed on the floor, 'Woman with Her Throat Cut'

is a hybrid between a woman's body and an insect. With its splayed limbs and slit throat, the sculpture presents themes of sexual violence commonly explored by the Surrealists, with whom Giacometti was associated in the first half of the 1930s. Its arched spine suggests both death and erotic ecstasy, or a snare which threatens to snap shut. The work is an important reference point for Hatoum, who keeps a postcard reproduction in her studio.

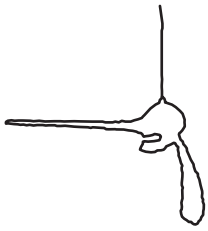
Displayed nearby, Hatoum's 'A Bigger Splash' takes its title from a well-known painting by David Hockney. Made in the glass workshops of Murano, near Venice, six delicate coronets of deep red glass resemble liquid droplets caught in motion. Unlike the cool water in Hockney's picture, their colour suggests splashes of blood. Hatoum's graceful coronets raise the spectre of violence, but the human body is absent. Quietly alluding to the unknown cause of the splash, the work offers a counterbalance to the spectacle of Giacometti's sculpture.



Alberto Giacometti
'The Cage', 1950-51
Bronze

Giacometti experimented with the motif of the cage repeatedly, first using it in the 1930s to place his figures in “fixed dimensional relationships” to their surrounding space. This 1950 work features a head and a tree-like figure, an arrangement copied from the floor of his studio. The cage functions like a theatrical window onto a parallel world. Giacometti commented in 1962, “in a sculpture you have to manage to grasp the head, the body, and the earth on which it stands, and at the same time you’ll have space, and the possibility of putting everything you want into it”.

The concept of the cage is also important for Hatoum, who admires the way Giacometti depicts the cage using only a simple outline. She has interpreted it as a visualisation of the physical and psychological limitations set by the socio-political system in which we exist.



Alberto Giacometti
'The Nose', 1947
Bronze

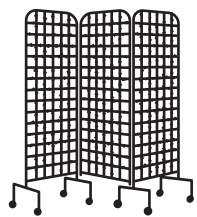


Mona Hatoum
'Cube', 2006
Mild steel

'The Nose' marks a transition in Giacometti's oeuvre from the symbolism of his 1930s Surrealist experiments to his 1940s humanist style. Customary to his way of working, he made numerous iterations of this work, the first being a 1947 painted plaster. In his 1946 essay 'The Dream, the Sphinx and the Death of T', Giacometti described witnessing two deaths: "The nose became more and more prominent, the cheeks grew hollow, the almost motionless mouth barely breathed". These traumatic experiences informed the making of this work, which resembles a figure screaming in agony or a lifeless corpse.

In a rare exception, Hatoum has been able to remove Giacometti's head with nose from its cage, suspending it in her own work. 'Cube' is made using an ancient wrought iron interlacing technique that was used for barring the windows of medieval buildings. In Giacometti's original composition, the

long nose protrudes beyond its metal enclosure, suggesting the possibility of escape. Hatoum's intervention traps the sculpture in a cage with no entrance or exit. In its material associations with incarceration and medieval torture, this rearrangement heightens the tragedy and pathos inherent to Giacometti's 'The Nose'.

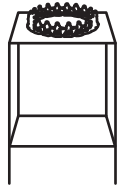


Mona Hatoum

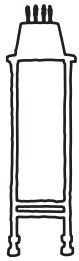
'Divide', 2025

Three panel screen, barbed wire

'Divide' replicates the dimensions of a hospital screen, replacing its curtain with a grid of barbed wire. The title references the original object's function but also triggers associations with issues of global politics, political borders, and restriction of movement. Hatoum substitutes a soft textile meant to provide privacy with a mesh associated with hostile architectures of containment and surveillance. The barb presents a physical threat to the viewer who, according to Hatoum, is always "somehow implicated or even visually or psychologically entrapped in some of the installations".



Mona Hatoum
'Round and round', 2007
Bronze



Alberto Giacometti
'Four Figurines on a Pedestal
(Figurines of London, B version)', 1950
Bronze

In these two works, Giacometti and Hatoum play with the scale of the human figure, eliciting concurrent sensations of closeness and distance. Giacometti arrived at this composition while making 'The Cage', which is also composed of small figures on a tall pedestal. He based this work on a memory of seeing four sex workers across a room, recalling that "the distance which separated us...seemed insurmountable in spite of my desire to cross it".

On a similar scale, Hatoum's 'Round and round' features a cast bronze ring of toy soldiers, positioned on a structure which resembles a domestic side table. The arrangement of the armed figures in a circular — and therefore endless — formation references relentless cycles of violence and war.



Mona Hatoum
'Remains of the Day', 2016–18
Wire mesh and wood

This installation presents a domestic environment that looks as though it has been hit by a sudden, devastating disaster. The charred, ghostly remains of wooden furniture, barely held together with wire mesh, look precarious and on the verge of disintegration.

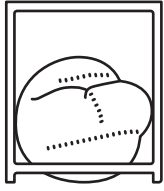
'Remains of the Day' evolved from a work first created by Hatoum for her exhibition as recipient of the 10th Hiroshima Art Prize. Made to recall the devastation of the atom bomb, Hatoum has suggested the work "can also be seen as a reference to the aftermath of war, violence or environmental catastrophes taking place around the world today".



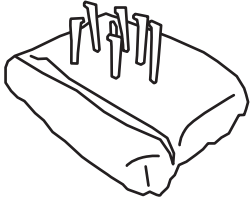
Alberto Giacometti
'The Cat', 1951
Painted plaster



Alberto Giacometti
'Head Skull', 1934
Plaster



Mona Hatoum
'Untitled (cage)', 2025
Glass, steel rebar



Mona Hatoum
'Gathering', 2025
Clay, steel nails

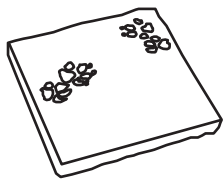


Mona Hatoum
'Untitled', 2025
Glass

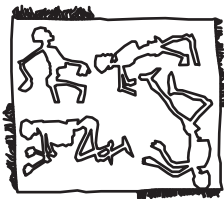
Hatoum routinely uses display cases in her work, including Victorian vitrines and medical cabinets. Here, she creates a cabinet inspired by a wardrobe in Giacometti's studio. In an archival photograph seen by Hatoum on a visit to the Fondation Giacometti, Paris, 'The Cat' appears balanced on top.

'The Cat' is one of only three animal sculptures ever made by Giacometti. Inspired by a cat taken in by his brother, Giacometti tried to capture the way it moved "like a ray of light", sculpting thin, fragile limbs. Also in plaster, 'Head Skull' is approximately life-size. Angular and faceted, it appears to flit between states of life and death.

Hatoum has paired these sculptures with three new works created for this exhibition, all of which allude to a hurt body: a cage entrapping a fleshy red glass blob reminiscent of bodily organs; a glass tile with a relief of a disembodied child's arm; and a clay work with nails, made during a residency in Sardinia, resembling both figures in a landscape and an instrument of torture.



Mona Hatoum
'Terracotta Tile', 2003
Terracotta



Mona Hatoum
'4 Rugs (made in Egypt)', 1998–2015
Hand woven wool rugs

Originally part of a larger work installed at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, Mexico, a single terracotta tile imprinted with a dog's paw prints is positioned on the floor. Also displayed on the floor, '4 Rugs (made in Egypt)' is a small version of a work comprising a dozen rugs that Hatoum created in Cairo with traditional local carpet makers for the 1998 Cairo Biennale. Hatoum dropped an articulated skeleton on the floor and traced the

positions in which it fell, creating a “danse macabre”. As with Giacometti’s ‘The Cat’, these works contain traces of animal and human life, evoking the domestic. However, they are unsettling: the dog is absent, and the rugs reference both the ground plans of Ancient Egyptian labourers’ dwellings and the 1997 massacre of tourists in Luxor, Egypt.

Vitrine

Mona Hatoum

‘Henna Drawing (high relief)’, 1999

Henna on card

Alberto Giacometti

‘Skeleton in a cage, project for Frontispiece for Les pieds dans le plat by René Crevel’, 1932–33

Graphite on paper

Fondation Giacometti (Exhibition facsimile)

Alberto Giacometti

‘Project for the Chase Manhattan Plaza: Walking Man, Standing Woman, Head on a Base’, 1959

Bronze

Fondation Giacometti

Mona Hatoum
'Medal of Dishonour', 2008
Bronze

Mona Hatoum
'Nablus Soap', 1996
Soap and pins

Alberto Giacometti
'Studies for Woman with Her Throat Cut', c. 1932
Graphite and ink on cardboard
Centre Pompidou (Exhibition reproduction.
Original size: 33.4 x 22 cm)

Alberto Giacometti
'Surrealist Composition – Woman', 1930
Ink and graphite on paper
Fondation Giacometti (Exhibition facsimile)

Mona Hatoum
'Untitled (soap)'
Soap, pubic hair and metal dish

Mona Hatoum
'Untitled (meat grinder)', 2005
Bronze

Alberto Giacometti

‘Cage’, 1930–31

Graphite on paper

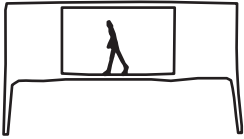
Centre Pompidou (Exhibition facsimile)

Mona Hatoum

‘Why Not Squeeze...’, 2009

Wood, wire, plastic and hair balls

In this vitrine, Hatoum highlights motifs central to the exhibition in a display of drawings, photographs, small sculptures and models for works including Giacometti’s maquettes for a never-realised commission for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York and his drawings relating to ‘Woman with Her Throat Cut’ and ‘The Cage’, 1931. Hatoum’s 1996 sketchbook contains a drawing of the later ‘Cage’ seen in this show. Her own cage, ‘Why Not Squeeze...’, is a reference to Marcel Duchamp’s 1921 work, ‘Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?’ Here she merges the personal (by using her own hair), and the political (with the cage representing entrapment). Themes pertaining to the domestic and to bodily violence recur throughout. Hatoum’s ‘Untitled (meat grinder)’ is a bronze cast of a kitchen utensil which minces flesh, and ‘Nablus Soap’ consists of a soap cube, handmade in Palestine, stuck through with pins.

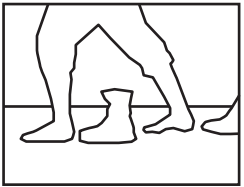


Alberto Giacometti

‘Figurine Between Two Houses’, 1950

Bronze, oil paint and glass

Private collection



Mona Hatoum

‘Roadworks’, 1985

Documentation of performance,

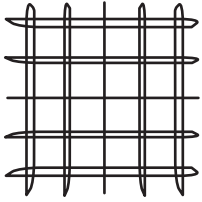
Brixton, London

Colour video with sound, 6 min 45 sec

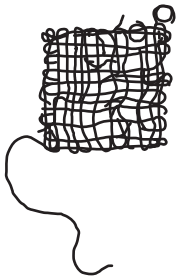
After the Second World War, Giacometti began experimenting with walking figures on bases as he observed people on the street “coming and going ... unconscious and mechanical ... each having an air of moving on its own, quite alone”. In this work, the solidity and scale of the two boxes in relation to the diminutive female figure imparts a sense of alienation and imprisonment.

Nearby, Hatoum’s ‘Roadworks’ documents a performance in which the artist walked barefoot through Brixton’s streets with a pair of large Dr. Martens boots tied to her ankles. In the 1980s, Brixton was the site of a series of race riots and was heavily policed. As Hatoum walks, her footsteps are shadowed by the boots which, in their association

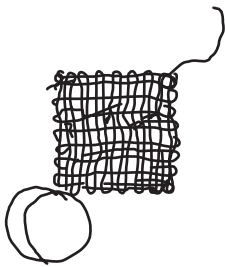
with far-right skinhead movements and the police, appear menacing and surreal.



Mona Hatoum
'Mirror', 2025
Steel reinforcement bars



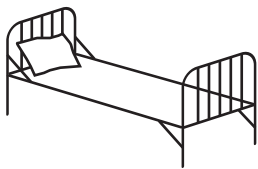
Mona Hatoum
'Untitled (grey hair grid with knots)',
2001
Human hair, hairspray and cardboard



Mona Hatoum
'Untitled (hair grid with knots)', 2001
Human hair, hairspray and tracing paper

The grid is a recurrent motif in Hatoum's work. Confronting the impersonality of this modernist compositional device, she often evokes the corporeal through choice of material or through underscoring the body's absence. In her delicate, abstract hair grids, Hatoum knots and weaves together individual strands of hair. This organic, bodily material is unruly, contradicting the control and neutrality associated with the grid.

In contrast, 'Mirror' is a wall-mounted cage made of rigid steel. Where the viewer may expect to see their own reflection, they are instead confronted with an ambiguous structure. Throughout modernist art history, the grid has often been regarded as anti-referential and free from function. Here, Hatoum disputes these assumptions, making us reflect on the physical and psychological limitations that besiege us.



Mona Hatoum

'Interior Landscape', 2008

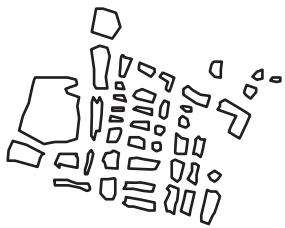
Steel bed, pillow, human hair, table, cardboard tray, cut-up map, metal rack and wire hanger

This installation was created during a residency at the Darat al Funun in Amman, Jordan, a city with a significant Palestinian population. Hatoum recalls that the installation came together through a series of coincidences and accidental discoveries that occurred during her month-long stay: "It was as if the work created itself".

The historical map of Palestine appears in this 'room' in a number of guises: embroidered in human hair on

the pillow; outlined by a distorted clothes hanger; and printed on a bag made from a cut-up historical map which uses the original Arabic names of towns and villages. On the bedside table, Hatoum has placed a take-away food tray. Its grease stains, carefully outlined in pen, resemble a fragmented map.

Hatoum upends our emotional and psychological expectations. Instead of providing comfort, warmth, and rest, this room is a sterile cell-like space which evokes entrapment and terror.



Mona Hatoum
'Beirut (major)', 2022
Tracing paper

This work depicts a street map of Beirut, hand-drawn in pencil on translucent tracing paper, with burnt-out rectangles across the surface. These absences and fissures mark the catastrophic damage caused by the massive explosion in the port of Beirut in 2020. Through its delicate lace-like patterning on translucent paper, 'Beirut (major)' underscores this event of violent destruction with a sense of loss and fragility.



Mona Hatoum

'Hot Spot (stand)', 2018

Stainless steel, neon tube and rubber

'Hot Spot (stand)' is a steel cage-like globe with continents outlined in searing red neon that both mesmerises and threatens danger. Hatoum has stated: "The idea behind this work for me was that 'hot spots', or spots of conflict these days are no longer limited to certain areas of disputed borders, but it feels like the whole world is caught up in conflict and unrest". This work has taken on additional urgency in times of accelerated global warming, which precipitates, and is precipitated by, political crises.

Credits

‘Encounters: Giacometti × Mona Hatoum’

Co-organised with Fondation Giacometti

In partnership with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art,
New Delhi

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