



MONA HATOUM AND SHANAY JHAVERI

A three-exhibition series entitled *Encounters: Giacometti* is underway at the Barbican Centre in London. Ahead of the recent opening of the second exhibition, ***Encounter: Giacometti X Mona Hatoum***, Sophie Kazan Makhoulf for Canvas discusses the creative collaboration with co-curator Shanay Jhaveri and artist Mona Hatoum.

Encounters: Giacometti is part of a year-long partnership between the Giacometti Foundation and the Barbican Centre, with the aim of maintaining the resonance of Alberto Giacometti's work with contemporary artists. It is co-curated by the Foundation's Emilie Bouvard and the Barbican's Head of Visual Arts, Shanay Jhaveri. In his previous role at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Jhaveri met artists Huma Bhabha, Mona Hatoum and Lynda Benglis, and it was these artists whose work he felt resonated particularly well with the Swiss artist's work and legacy.

As part of the exhibition planning, the three artists were each invited to visit the Foundation's collection in storage in Paris, which also includes archival materials and photographs. They were invited to select works that they felt connected with their artistic practices or were in dialogue with Giacometti's vision and ethos. Giacometti died in his native Switzerland in 1966 and so the concept of posthumous collaborations requires a great deal of intuition and delicacy on the part of all involved, not least the three artists taking part in this prestigious event.



Opposite page left: Mona Hatoum. 2019. Photography by Mizuho Miyazaki © The Japan Art Association/ The Sankei Shimbun; right: Shanay Jhaveri. Photography by Daniele Fummo. Image courtesy the Barbican Centre, London

This page: Alberto Giacometti. *Woman with Her Throat Cut*. 1932. Bronze, patinated in a gold tone object. 22 x 75 x 58 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, on permanent loan from the Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung, 1965

Sophie Kazan Makhoulf: What was the early genesis of the exhibition series?

Mona Hatoum: The Giacometti Foundation and myself were in touch a few years ago [when] they included the work of a few contemporary artists in a Giacometti exhibition at their centre. They exhibited *Roadworks*, a video documenting an action I performed in Brixton in 1985 in which I walked barefoot through the streets dragging behind me a large pair of boots that were, at the time, associated with the police and skinheads. The Giacometti work *Figurine between two houses* (1950) is included in this *Encounter* exhibition, because of its connection to the original *Roadworks* performance.

Shanay Jhaveri: With all three exhibitions in the *Encounter* series, we are aiming to build intergenerational dialogues around shared concerns and ideals amongst the living artists and Alberto Giacometti, moving beyond the simple formal references. Both Hatoum and Giacometti are preoccupied with

distilling the emotional and psychological effects of violence into sculptural forms. It is seeing this interplay that we hope will be exciting for visitors. Their work asks us to reassess our assumed relationships to our surroundings, compelling us to recognise and take cognisance of the disquieting nature of our current reality.

Hatoum comes from a generation of artists unafraid to tackle dissonant themes, conflicting and diverging emotions of physical fear, for example, repulsion, domination or desire. Though from different generations and working in distinct artistic contexts, Hatoum and Giacometti are both interested in the human condition, the body, its limited physical capacities, fragility and strengths. The conversation between their work is rooted in a shared timelessness which contemplate existential concerns and lived existence, including mental and physical traumas and suffering. Both artists are disruptive in their practice, requiring the viewer to question their expectations and realities.

Alberto Giacometti. *The Nose*.
1947. Bronze, painted metal and
cotton rope. 80.9 x 70.5 x 40.6 cm
© The Estate of Alberto Giacometti
(ADAGP, Paris)



IN CONVERSATION

Mona Hatoum. *Remains of the Day*. 2016–18. Photography by Kitmin Lee © White Cube © Mona Hatoum



SKM: Are there any specific Giacometti works that immediately speak to you?

MH: His cage works have always resonated with me. I admire the simplicity of his depiction of the cage with a simple outline. A work I really wanted to include in this exhibition is *Woman with her Throat Cut* (1932). I have had a postcard reproduction of this work on my studio wall for a couple of decades.

SJ: We felt that this particular work was a good starting point for the show. While [Giacometti and Hatoum] share a reductive approach, one is figurative and the other isn't... Both have engaged and wrestled with surrealist aesthetics in their work.

Working with the legacy of an artist such as Giacometti would be an exciting and unusual commitment for any artist. Hatoum has approached this challenge head-on, engaging and questioning the past and Giacometti's work with her distinctive curiosity and vigour.

MH: I created a handful of new works. The first, *Divide*, was inspired by the space itself, which is often a starting point for me. I wanted to create a barrier that would cut across the space. Initially it was supposed to go from floor to ceiling, but it evolved into a three-part screen that resembles a hospital screen on wheels. I replaced the usual cloth panels with a grid of barbed wire, which turned it into a mobile border. *The work in question resembles a space separator or screen, fashioned into an intimidating though impractical barricade, which appears more symbolic than effective. Another work that explores contradictory usage is Mirror.*

SJ: The grid structure is a recurring motif in Mona's oeuvre and is the basis of *Mirror*, a wall-mounted cage made of rebar. Unlike what its title suggests, there is a distinct lack of reflective surface in *Mirror*. Whereas the viewer may expect to see their own reflection, they are instead confronted with an ambiguous structure reflecting on the physical and psychological limitations that besiege us.

Alberto Giacometti. *Project for the Chase Manhattan Plaza: Walking Man, Standing Woman, Head on a Base*. 1959. Image courtesy of Fondation Giacometti



MH: I called [it] *Mirror*, despite the fact that it does not offer any reflection. Hopefully, it will make you reflect on the systems of control and repression that surround us.

SKM: What is the particular significance to you of cage-like structures?

MH: The cage has been a recurring motif in my work since the early 1990s, when I began making large installations with stacks of lockers resembling animal cages. They also look like the regimented urban architecture you come across in government projects in the suburbs of large cities. These are designed to control and ultimately confine, and end up resembling prison architecture. Sometimes, an entire domestic environment is

barricaded or caged-in, symbolising psychological or physical entrapment as in house arrest. There is an ongoing series of cage-like enclosures containing ambiguous, hand-blown glass forms that are reminiscent of bodily organs or creatures trapped inside. I have also made a series of bird cages containing one or two hairballs, which humanises the concept of entrapment. One of these is included in the current exhibition, inside a vitrine of small works, maquettes and drawings.

SKM: What other creative concepts have emerged through your engagement with Giacometti?

MH: An idea that I had in mind for a long while before being invited to participate in this exhibition has given me the

Mona Hatoum. *Cube*. 2006. Mild steel. 174 x 174 x 174 cm. Image courtesy of Rennie Collection, Vancouver © Mona Hatoum



incentive to revisit and experiment with it. In 2018, I came across some large, squarish nails that resembled Giacometti's emaciated figures. *Gathering* is essentially a bunch of these large nails embedded in a base of unglazed clay, which I produced during a recent residency in Sardinia and is included in this show.

SKM: How easy or challenging was it to integrate the forms or creativity of another artist into your work or see it through this frame?

MH: I had the crazy idea of literally integrating a Giacometti work into one of my own pieces. I think the Foundation made a very rare exception to allow for Giacometti's *The Nose* (1947)

to be housed inside my large *Cube* (2006) with its thick bars, looking like a medieval prison with no entrance or exit in sight. I am very grateful for them being open to this idea.

SJ: *Cube* is made using an ancient interlacing technique that was used for barring the windows of medieval buildings. The cage has been an enduring motif for Hatoum and she has acknowledged that Giacometti's own use of simple metal enclosures has been a point of reference. With no entrance or exits, this metal cube turns into a cage with the material it is made of bringing in connotations of incarceration and medieval torture. Mona has long been interested in challenging the relationship between individuals and system of control and the cage becomes a potent symbol for this exploration.

Mona Hatoum. *Mirror*. 2025. Steel reinforcement bars. 1.5 x 51.5 x 11 cm.
Photography by Theo Christeli © White Cube © Mona Hatoum



SKM: Mona, how far does Giacometti's use of bronze and plaster resonate with your own practice and what connections have you drawn?

MH: I haven't used plaster in my work since my student days, and have only made a few bronze sculptures, one of which is displayed in a vitrine in the exhibition. This is *Untitled (meat grinder)*, a bronze cast of the kitchen utensil used to mince flesh, a utensil I viewed with total dread as a child. I feel that the implied violence in this work has some affinity with Giacometti's *Woman with Her Throat Cut*.

SJ: Juxtaposing such works with Giacometti's sculptures spanning the 1930s to the 1950s transforms the gallery into an unsettling and strange domestic context.

MH: Yes, the gallery space is quite intimate, with dimensions closer to those of a domestic space. The first works we discussed for inclusion in the exhibition were the two large room-size installations, *Interior Landscape* and *Remains of the Day*. Both use domestic furniture, and they became the anchor of the exhibition. Other domestic objects, such as the cot, side table and carpets, seem to be natural companions, creating an interesting dialogue.

Mona Hatoum. *Interior Landscape*. 2008. Steel bed, pillow, human hair, table, cardboard tray, cut-up map, metal rack and wire hanger.
Dimensions variable. Photography by Fakhri N. al Alami © Mona Hatoum. Image courtesy of The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Darat al Funun



Creating a more human-sized space that allows audiences to look more closely at artworks is one of the benefits of the new, second-level gallery at the Barbican. Amber Li, the exhibition's Assistant Curator, explains that the smaller, informal setting also offers the visual arts team more opportunities to target a broader art audience. The Barbican does not have an art collection as such, so the centre's partnership with the Giacometti Foundation is allowing viewers to discover many different aspects of Alberto Giacometti's work since they are seeing it through the dialogue with a range of established contemporary artists, including Mona Hatoum. Seeing Giacometti's work alongside that of

Hatoum draws out particular themes, such as the surrealism and meaning of the cage, conversations about existence and power. The other two exhibitions offer different artistic conversations, highlighting alternative views and points of engagement with Giacometti's practice. Could exhibition series such as this be a recurring part of museum presentations in future? Maybe – revisiting the works of masters such as Giacometti brings them back into the present, where they are made relevant, questioned and discussed.

Encounter: Giacometti X Mona Hatoum runs until 11 January 2026