

# ARTFORUM

## Mona Hatoum

CENTRE POMPIDOU

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Lines are dangerous: They can draw boxes, curb thoughts, and create sides that barricade people within defined categories. Mona Hatoum has unapologetically crossed such divides throughout her career, exemplified in this retrospective by works including *So Much I Want to Say*, 1983, which projects a cycle of stills of the artist's face with a man's hands covering her mouth in each, thereby drawing a line between gender roles. To the right of this piece, *Present Tense*, 1996–2011 looks askance at the Oslo Accords. Red glass beads on 2,200 blocks of soap from Nablus in Palestine form an inland archipelago of territories that were supposed to be handed over to the Palestinian authorities as a result of the accord. The medium confirms the precarious nature of such agreements.



Mona Hatoum, *So Much I Want to Say*, 1983,  
video, black-and-white, sound, 5 minutes.

Distance, however, is not only in the gaps between places; it also separates people. In the video *Measures of Distance*, 1988, the setting is war-torn Beirut. Hatoum's voice-over reads an English translation of one of her mother's letters originally written in Arabic, and its handwritten text is shown on the screen atop stills of the mother's naked body. The two women can also be heard in an overlapping audio conversing in Arabic about manifestations of social and gender norms in daily life. What is lost in translation is made up for in the intimate visuals that blur all lines. Elsewhere, *Map (Clear)*, 2014, is a map of the world arranged in glass marbles that shift places as viewers walk by. This piece leaves us with one inalienable truth: Cartography is treacherous and brings out a putrid smell of oppression emanating from those man-made lines drawn in the sand.

— Lara Atallah