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The John Tusa Interviews

Transcript of the John Tusa Interview with the Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum

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Let's start with some of the known facts, the obvious ones. Mona Hatoum is a Palestinian artist who works in sculpture, conceptual and situational art. She was born in Lebanon, educated in Britain academically, and now works in Berlin. In 1995 she was short-listed for the Turner Prize, and she has exhibited at Galleries such as Tate Britain, the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art, White Cube and many, many others around the world. What do you see? Well for a start domestic objects from baby cots to vegetable graters uncomfortably transmuted into objects of uncertainty and threat. Then there are wire cages casting threatening shadows as a light-bulb slowly rises and falls, or there's the intimate endoscopic journey through Hatoum's own body, or there's a welcome doormat which is anything but welcoming made as it is out of steel pins. But these very specific yet very uncertain images must then be connected to the more important questions surrounding Mona Hatoum and her work.

Is her rootlessness - Beirut, London, Berlin - is that a necessary condition for her determination to be aware of global issues? Given her personal background, how far have purely political issues played themselves out in her work? How important is the question of the body, the physical exploration of her own body, how important is that in today's world, and does she regard the act of jolting or even shocking audiences as an important part of her work? Well I'm here in Mona Hatoum's latest home, that is her studio in Berlin, but let's go right back to the beginning.

You wanted to be an artist, your father wanted you to have a practical skill, was he really opposed to you becoming an artist?

Yes very much so. When I was a teenager and we were discussing my future and I mentioned that I wanted to become an artist he categorically refused to send me to art school, because he said he wanted me to do something that will get me a real job, and that was the end of the conversation.

But when you said to yourself that you always knew you wanted to be an artist what exactly did you have in mind?

Well since I was a child I always want, was interested in drawing and I was making things all the time and I always wanted to become an artist. I suppose at the time I was thinking about becoming a painter, because women in that society would not be expected to be doing heavy work like sculpture or working with heavy machinery, so I was thinking that I'd like to be an artist as a painter. It's really only when I was finishing my studies that I discussed this issue with my father, and it's very strange because ever since I was a child I used to make lots of drawings and like the school I was in did

A - Z of interviewees

A - I

Louis Andriessen
Eve Arnold
Frank Auerbach
Bernardo Bertolucci
Harrison Birtwistle
Edward Bond
Sir Anthony Caro
Elliott Carter
Michael Craig-Martin
Tony Cragg
Merce Cunningham
Norman Davies
Edmund De Waal
Atom Egoyan
Milos Forman
William Forsythe
Michael Frayn
Frank Gehry
Gilbert and George
Heiner Goebbels
Anthony Gormley
Nicholas Grimshaw
Sir Peter Hall
Richard Hamilton
David Hare
Tony Harrison
Mona Hatoum
David Hockney
Howard Hodgkin

J - Q

Anish Kapoor
Ivan Klima
Robert Lepage
Gyorgy Ligeti
Simon McBurney
Don McCullin
Paul Muldoon
P.M. Pei
Renzo Piano

R - Z

Paula Rego
Bridget Riley
Michal Rovner
Richard Serra
Muriel Spark
Tom Stoppard
David Sylvester
George Szirtes
William Trevor

not have any art subjects at all.

This was in Beirut?

In Beirut yeah. So the only times we were able to draw, and it was completely optional, we had to do it at home, we couldn't do it at the school, was making illustrations to poems that we copied out in a notebook, so we were allowed to make illustrations on the opposite page where the poem was written, or making illustrations in the science class, Science Natural, you know like making a drawing of an amoeba or all these kind of plants and things like that, and I remember that I used to spend a lot of time actually perfecting these drawings, and I felt extremely encouraged when on one occasion for instance the teacher showed one of my drawings to the whole class and said this is a masterpiece. So I mean that's the, all the encouragement I got as a child towards you know becoming an artist. And in fact what happened is my father actually saved all these notebooks and I actually found them in his filing cabinet after his death, so he must have recognised some kind of talent in these early drawings to keep hold of them all these years, yet when I mentioned that I wanted to go to art school he objected to it completely, which was quite surprising for me.

What did you see in those notebooks when you looked at them again? Do you recognise yourself as the artist today even in what you were doing in those notebooks?

For instance there's one work from kindergarten where there's a kind of weaving with paper, and I'm sure this was like, it must have inspired me to get into this weaving which is very present in my work until now. These kind of crafts of like I do weavings with hair now quite a lot, or you know a lot of works based on weaving even with electric wire or something.

What were your terms of reference though? Did you think that art looked like Western art, or did you think it looked like Arabic calligraphy? I'm just trying to think what your terms of reference could have been.

No Arabic calligraphy never entered into my mind as a, as an art form, because that's a very traditional art form. I mean I grew up in a very westernised cosmopolitan city. Beirut is kind of very French in many ways. I mean I went to French schools and most of the subjects we studied were in French. The idea of doing Arabic calligraphy was not something that came into my mind, I was drawing, actually making drawings from nature and figurative drawing and that sort of thing.

But they were from within the Western representational tradition? That was what you saw. You must have had books at home didn't you that you looked at and saw the great masterpieces?

Well the funny thing, I mean the great masterpieces, the very early memory I have of seeing the great masterpieces within the back of the French dictionary, Larousse French to French dictionary, there was a section on famous people in the cultural world and there were these tiny little black and white mostly reproductions of paintings, stamp size like, which I used to look at with a magnifying glass and marvel at the beauty of these paintings...

Can you remember what they were?

Well, I mean one painting I remember very clearly is the Liberty leading the peoples.

But still that even that...

That was something...

That gave you something that you thought ah this is painting, this is real?

I remember I used to spend hours, you know, looking at all these paintings, but no art books at home or anything like that and no real art, any galleries or museums that I was aware of at the time.

Luc Tuymans
Bill Viola
Deborah Warner
Rachel Whiteread

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But you did finally get to a graphic art school in Beirut didn't you?

Well as a compromise to be able to go to university and study some kind of career related to art, but obviously it wasn't art. It was a way of doing something that would get me a job as soon as I left university, and it was only a two year course so it meant that I could get out of my father's grip or whatever within two years, so I did two years of graphic design.

And then two years in an advertising agency, how did you find that?

I think I was depressed all the time because I wasn't doing what I wanted to do and the worse thing about it is that, you know, I was working in an office going, you know having to turn up every morning at nine or ten or whatever, working - how many hours a day do you work in an office? eight hours? - and there's nothing that kills me more than routine and having to turn up somewhere and of course...

Did that make you even more determined to be an artist?

It did, I mean I was like also always on the wrong side of the fence if you like in that job, because I was always pointing out that the adverts were not honest, that they were, that they were claiming certain things about the products which were not there and it was, it was this funny kind of a little subversive. I wasn't part of that conspiracy against the consumer if you like and I, it gave me internal conflict to, to work in this kind of situation.

Did it teach you anything graphically though, was there any lesson visually that it taught you or professionally?

Well of course I mean I learnt not only about graphics and you know printing presses and you know how things work with the printing and the photography and all that so but also with film and because I used to be at shoots when they did commercials you know as well, and I learnt a lot from that you know the language of film was, that was very important, but also I also learnt to you know work and support myself, which was very important because when I came to England I had to do that.

Let's move forward to the art school in, in London. What strikes me is that you seem to have had a very clear idea already of where and how you wanted to work. You were already very interested in the body weren't you, in the use of bodily fluids, bodily elements, so it's as if you had a very clear idea of how you wanted to work by the time you got to London and got to art school. Is that right?

Not really because in the early part of my education, before I went to the Slade, when I went to the Byam Shaw, I was not really working with bodily fluids. This was something that came afterwards and it was more a kind of reaction to this kind of feeling that people were so disembodied around me, people were just like walking intellects and not really giving any attention to the body and the fact that this is part of one's existence, and that for instance the work that I wanted to make I wanted it to appeal to your senses first maybe or to somehow affect you in a bodily way and then the sort of connotations and concepts that are behind that work can come out of that original physical experience. This is what I was aiming at in the work. I wanted it to be experienced through the body. In other words I want work to be both experienced sensually and intellectually rather than just one dimensionally if you like.

Did you want the British in particular to be just less inhibited about the body, its nature, its skin, its functions?

I'm not sure I can do very much about the British and their inhibitions. I really doing a little thing here.

Now another theme talking more generally about I think some of your early works is you seem to have had a fascination for using electricity, creating metal constructions and putting electricity through them so the electricity actually crackled, so

there was a sound, a physical nature and a sense of danger. Now was that sense of danger important to you to convey that sense of danger?

Yeah I mean electricity and a lot of other kind of invisible forces were things that I really enjoyed working with as a student, but electricity was one that of course has danger attached to it, and one of the earliest works was this kind of installation with metal objects, household objects, or even you know a metal ruler or whatever which I hung from the ceiling in a continuous line, and right at the bottom there was a light-bulb and the electricity was running through all these objects and lighting the light-bulb so obviously there was something very dangerous about it so those objects were electrified, and it's funny because very recently, in the last five years, I started using the same idea. This time creating like a home environment with an assemblage of sometimes furniture, metal furniture in, in a space and all the objects are connected together with electric wire and the electricity is running through those objects to light, light-bulbs are hidden underneath or you know inside colanders or underneath beds or whatever.

It's meant to make us uncomfortable isn't it?

It is meant to disrupt this idea of the home and what it means.

The home can't be reassuring and comfortable and pleasant. All these objects are now dangerous because you have wired them up.

Exactly it becomes a sort of threat as opposed to comfort and then makes you think about all the possible unpleasant things to do with home whether it's like the housewife or the woman feeling entrapped by domesticity, or whether it's to do with a condemned environment where the inhabitants have to flee, or an environment that is to do with incarceration as in being under house arrest, or the notion of the home denied. I mean there could be so many different readings, but basically what I like to do with these works is to like introduce a kind of disruptive element, physical or psychological element, that makes you question the whole environment.

You had a nice home yourself, that's a very banal observation.

Which one?

The one in Beirut with loving family, parents.

Yes of course I did definitely. I was very lucky that I did not grow up in a Palestinian camp. My parents were sort of fairly privileged because my father managed to be employed by the British Embassy in Lebanon and therefore we had a relatively comfortable home environment.

So in a way was it the contrast between your experience and your knowledge of what other people in Beirut and around the world were going through, that made you take on this question of the comfort of the home and home surroundings and make us look at it as something potentially threatening?

I don't know if I would go down that avenue. I would say it's more to do with trying to expose a kind of undercurrent of malevolence or of contradictions in situations of maybe things that could look like something actually are hiding something else underneath, and maybe it's the question of having lost that stable environment, longing for it at the same time dreading the idea of home becoming almost also like a prison.

You dreaded the possibility that your home might become a prison and this is what you're reflecting in your work?

I mean I, I think I'm working on a very, very much more general kind of level where I'm trying to make people question what they're looking at, walk away with more questions than answers, complicate things so that it becomes a kind of one, challenging one's assumptions about the world, you know...

Well the work like A Light At The End, i.e. light at the end of the tunnel, and after all the idea of a light at the end of the

tunnel is basically reassuring isn't it? We are going to come out of the tunnel, and in your work we walk down a corridor towards the end of the room and there are these light elements and except when you get close to them they are not light elements they are heating elements, which if we touched them we would burn ourselves. Is this a classical Hatoum image? There's the light, it's not a light, it could actually kill you.

Well that's a very good example because that's one instance where I was exploring this idea of announcing the piece with a title that gives you an impression of something positive yet when you get close to the work you realise it's exactly the opposite, so your, your expectation about the work gets completely disrupted, so the light at the end of the tunnel is not a light at all but it's something made with electric heating elements that if you touched it could burn you through to the bone.

It's a very cruel image.

It's a cruel image and also the structure itself looks like a prison gate. It's like where the bars have become electric heating elements, so there's the implication of torture, pain, incarceration, all those things, but at the same time it's a very minimal structure and it's very beautiful and it's very attractive and it induces in you this feeling of wanting to be playful or take risks and, and put your hands in between the bars.

Didn't to me, I think once you, once you know what it is it has destroyed deliberately of course that sense that this is an attractive reassuring image. Once you see what it is as far as I'm concerned there's no going back to being able to play with that image.

For me that was a, a very great balance for me between kind of making a work that is visually very kind of concise and contained and minimal within, in its elements, using very few elements, at the same time reverberating with so many meanings...

Carrying a lot of meaning, yes.

Yeah, associations with, with imprisonment, torture, pain, whatever, but without ever focusing on any specific place or any specific region or culture, and where you have this kind of the oppressed and the oppressor never defined so that when you look at this, when you're in front of that work you could be identifying yourself as the jailed or the jailor, you could be either. It's, it's not moralising, it's not defining the source of conflict or the place or the culture. It's just presenting you with a situation which makes you almost experience that pain first hand.

You see everything you've said, which is generally political and you've insisted, and I quite understand why, that you operate at a high level of generalism, I wonder what you felt when Edward Said said that he thought that you had expressed more vividly than anybody else the Palestinian condition. Now from what you've just said that's exactly what you're not doing, so when Said said that did you mind?

Well people interpret these works depending on their own experience, so his experience of exile and displacement is that of the Palestinians so he read specifically the Palestinian issue in my work, but it's not so specifically to do with the Palestinian issue. It could be related to a number of people who are exiled, who are displaced, who suffer a kind of cultural or political oppression of, of any kind. Now sometimes people who are writers often sort of look for very literal meaning and, therefore, the content in the work is more important than the, than the form. I actually like work when people, critics are writing about my work to actually value the form as well and to talk about the possible readings, or the possible meanings that come through that form, but that can be a kind of multiple, that can be not necessarily fixed or, because I think the language of art is very, very slippery. It never, you can never say this work is about this.

And it should be slippery?

The language of art is slippery and cannot speak in very direct terms, and in artwork you can't say this equals that and that's it. The meanings are never fixed. It's always, it's, it's like you can approach a same work of art from different angles and read different things in it...

That's how it should be...

Yeah that's how it should be. I mean that's the richness of an artwork when it has several meanings and can actually bring out in the person different stories in their head. I mean it almost becomes like a mirror of one's sort of history and unconscious.

I want to talk about something very, very practical for a moment and I want to talk about some of your other work a bit later, but I'd love to know how on a daily basis you work. Are you a regular worker? Are you always working on, on projects? Just how does the creative part, the conceptualisation, how does that work for you?

I'm one of those people who is so undisciplined you would not believe. I hate routine. I hate to be working in an environment that even vaguely, you know, reminds me of a nine to five job. As you see I don't have assistants because I cannot stand being responsible for a number of people that I have to go and assign works to every day. I find this completely unbearable and I can't do it. I'm always working towards a deadline and a space and a specific exhibition in a specific space.

But how can you be undisciplined in that case?

What I'm saying is I don't have a method of working. For instance I'm going to be doing a month in Cairo, actually it's not a residency but I'm, I'm making it into a residency, I've been invited to do a show in, in a place there and I said I want to go and visit the space and a few months later I'd be there spending a month actually making the work. So I have a few ideas and, but I'm leaving it open to when I see the space because that will, that will inspire me. I mean what I'm saying is that this is a way of working that I really like because it makes me feel very kind of, I have to work on my feet and I have to be very intuitive and very instinctive.

But that makes me even more curious about what you are in between these important bursts, concentrated focused bursts of activity, and you say that you are very, very loose. I think I want more of a picture of how you work when you're in this, in this studio, or how do you take in ideas. Do you, do you not press yourself to, to work, are you not worried if you're not getting ideas?

Well of course there are situations that don't inspire me but, and I am worried because, and I don't like it when it's a struggle to get something to work for a space, because very often when I see a space, especially if it's had a specific history and it still, you know, has some vestiges of its previous use or whatever, these things inspire me immediately and, and often it's, it's very much accidental that I go to see a space and they tell me that next door there's a, a, a bottle factory for instance and I decide that space and the bottles will work together to make this work. So it's very, very much a number of sort of happy accidents that happen sometimes. I go to a place and they, and I find out that they have possibilities of producing things in crystal or in alabaster or in metal or all of the above and I decide to use all these materials and expertise of these people and, and work with them on certain ideas. I mean it's the actual presence of those crafts that actually excite me and make me, inspire me to make works.

Does this mean that you're much less comfortable as an artist working in a gallery environment?

Yes I am actually. I much prefer these situations which are not fantastic for my career, for instance like going to an obscure little gallery in Cairo is not going to sort of advance my career in any way, but that's the area, that is the kind of situation that inspires me and maybe will make me carry on making new ideas and new works that are inspired from that situation.

So you don't care about being famous?

Well I mean what happens often I feel like I need to have at least one, one situation each year where I will go to a place like I did a month in Mexico City and created a whole number of works which I'm still showing in some of my touring exhibitions, and then the following year I did a similar thing in Wahaka in a museum there, and these situations are the most exciting for me and that's where I get like my inspiration and my excitement about you know experimenting with new materials and, and with working with, in traditional crafts and skilled craftsmen in those places.

But you haven't told me whether it matters to you to be famous?

Well, you see having said that I also feel that I have to show my work in museums and I have to be in those big touring shows like I've just finished a large, the largest ever survey touring show which started last year in March in Hamburger Kunsthalle in Hamburg and then went to Bonn and then went to Stockholm and at the end of May it ended in Sydney...

I think you've answered my question...

So that's a huge, that's a large tour. Now these exhibitions are very important of course because I get a fantastic amount of public seeing the work, and of course we do a fantastic catalogue and it's in big centres, you know accessible to the largest amount of people, and they are very important but when I'm putting up the same work again and again I actually really get bored with it, and that's, that's, that's why you know I find those residencies in obscure little places much more exciting.

Yes. You are not naive about your career and why should you be...

So it, it, it goes like one way or another, like for the last year and a half I've been working very hard on this touring show, now it's over, thank God now the next few exhibitions are going to be all new work and it's exactly the opposite. I'm running around like crazy now trying to put all the proposals together, work out all the things and start producing them.

Let's talk about one of your most famous pieces and that is Corps Etranger, Foreign Body, when micro cameras explored your own body through most of its, or all of its openings, its orifices, and what made you want to do that? I mean the first contradiction of course which we've been talking about is that it's called Foreign Body but the body is your own. So what is the contradiction between the title and the image?

It's the body of a foreigner.

So you don't know it, you don't, I mean we don't even know our insides?...

Well we don't really, we don't have access to the, our insides except when you know we go to hospital and discover we have a terrible disease, so we're, our, the internal workings of our body are completely foreign to us most of the time. This is a, a sort of long, you know the inspiration behind it is, is, it goes very far back to a series of performances I was making when I was a student actually and it was a series of performances I was doing where I was pretending that I had a camera, a magic camera that could see through the clothes of the people in the audience. I would actually, there I was making performances and when the audience was expecting me to be the performer you know baring myself if you like, I turned the camera on to the audience themselves and I was sort of scanning their body and...

Which some of them hated.

Which some of them hated and experienced as a complete kind of violent intrusion into their boundaries and stuff like that.

So was that why you did it? Did you want to challenge, of

course you wanted to challenge them in this way.

Of course, I mean one thing this kind of the video, the video becoming like an eye that observes you was something that I very much picked up, one of the very early things I picked up when I went to London is the fact that we're always on camera, we're always observed and we're always, you know is something which I didn't experience before. I became very aware of the existence of you know CCTV cameras, you know surveillance became very present in my work in this, 1984 and all that stuff, so that was part of it, and to make people aware of the fact that we are being observed all the time, but I was sort of taking it a bit further and making it in to a kind of funny situation where I was using models behind the screen, and I was mixing the image, images that were fed through with a live camera in the audience with images of the naked bodies of the two assistants who were you know directing the camera at themselves, or I would put in X-ray images so I was pretending the camera had an X-ray vision in it, or sometimes I was doing very playful things like putting on you know a man's arm, like a tattoo saying 'mum' or something, you know or, or, or playing with the gender, you know swapping the gender where the camera sort of stopped at somebody's shirt, a man's shirt and then when it disappears on, on the screen you see a woman's naked torso behind it. So I was really playing around and you know doing, it was sort of...

So how did that lead to the idea that you would expose your own unseen inside in the same way?

Yes, well I, I was seeing this medical intervention called endoscopy and coloscopy as the ultimate invasive kind of device, or the ultimate in the invasion of one's boundaries.

But you welcomed it, you did it voluntarily, so...

Yes I was doing it for, to make it as an artwork, so I, you know I had to go through it myself in order to make the work of course. So yeah I mean the funny thing is I wanted to do this work since I was a student as a result of all these performances I was making, but I couldn't get any doctor to agree to do the intervention on me...

Was it dangerous, well it must have been?

Well I think in the early days it was, it's only dangerous I suppose if the doctor is unskilled and, and the camera goes through the intestine or something...

Well that's, that's quite a risk isn't it?

But so, so basically when I actually finally did it, which was like fourteen years later, working with the Centre Pompidou in Paris, they commissioned me to do a video installation for a show I was doing, you know a solo exhibition, then they had to find a doctor and we had to have insurance in case something goes wrong and all that sort of thing, but it's a daily procedure that doctors. I, I had two meetings with the doctors to make sure that everything is going to be safe and to run through all the procedure and all the preparation that you have to do beforehand, so I mean I wasn't into you know masochistic stuff or taking any risks of course so I made sure that everything was actually going to be very safe.

Did you learn anything about yourself as a result of being such a central part of one of your own works of art?

You know when I'm making a work like that I'm really thinking in very abstract terms. I'm not thinking about myself specifically. I mean what I learnt is that everybody inside is exactly the same, because I looked at a lot of images of, you know, endoscopy, and the doctors agreed with me that everybody is so similar inside, you know, and unless you know of course you have you know something wrong with your, you know medically something wrong. But it was very much about really going into the body and turning it inside out and making it into, you know like making it vulnerable at the same time making it threatening, because...

Why is it threatening?

Well because I mean it's the body form and it sort of opened out on the floor, in some cases, I don't know if you've actually seen the work...

I saw it, I saw it.

But you know in some cases where, where the, where the camera is sort of going down the intestine for instance you're looking at a hole in the floor and it feels like you're on the edge of an abyss that can swallow you up, but also I mean all the associations with woman's body as dangerous as you know a dangerous power kind of thing, the vagina dentata, the unconscious kind of fear of women can be activated in those situations, or just the fact that you're inside this cylinder with the strong sounds of the body, heartbeat and all that, makes you kind of feel like you've re-entered the womb, or you know it could have a cathartic kind of feeling...

So is it also trying to de-mythologize our fear and our ignorance of body?

To activate those fears and...

To get rid of them?...

To question them.

Yes to...

To question all these things yes, to question them yeah.

I suppose one of the most frequent things that you have, have talked about has been the question of belonging or not belonging. When you left London you said even after twenty-seven years I don't know where I really belong. Do you belong anywhere yet, has that feeling of not belonging changed?

Well I have to struggle to think of times where I felt like I did belong somewhere and maybe I would have to go to very, very early childhood, maybe before I even started going to school or something where the home environment, you know being with my parents and my sisters and wherever was, there was a sense of belonging in, inside the home, because as I was saying growing up in Lebanon, being Palestinian, going to school, having students my, my student friends sort of making fun of my accent as whenever you know a few words came out pronounced differently to the Lebanese accent, all these things were always making me and my sisters and my family of course feel like foreigners living in the Lebanon...

But has it been useful, has it been useful to you as an artist?

Well I, I always say that I'm not really complaining about the fact of being you know a foreigner or being displaced or whatever, and I don't really like to get sentimental about it because as a foreigner I feel extremely privileged because I always have at least two perspectives on every situation, which gives me a feeling that I can transcend the local situation and I can always have a wider perspective on things and it makes me feel very privileged in that sense.

So you've never needed to belong to the London art scene or anything like that. You've never risked being part of a sort of cosy national art coterie?

Well I'm not really great at belonging in many, in many incidences like I've never belonged to groups. For a short time I joined feminist groups, consciousness raising groups which were extremely useful but very quickly I started being very critical and you know feeling like I'm an outsider looking in and did not want to belong to them any more and yeah I'm not very great at sort of belonging to or identifying with a group of people. I mean you know sometimes people ask me about my experience of being a YBA, well I don't feel I've ever been a YBA because like when I think about it when Damien Hirst was organising the Freeze exhibition I was in Vancouver doing a residency and making a video called Measures of Distance, which is like ten million miles away from the sort of work that the YBAs were doing at the time. So, but you know I actually

like this feeling of having, keeping a distance, and that's partly why I like being here...

In Berlin ?

In Berlin , because like I don't speak the language and therefore you know there's no way I'm going to feel kind of integrated in this environment.

So not belonging has not created a sense of insecurity. It sounds as if being independent is the condition for what you do. Would you be as good an artist if you belonged more?

In many ways I, I feel like this kind of living in a perpetual state of alienation is, has become a necessity, and it's like I sometimes think that I structure my life in such a way that I'm recreating that original state that I was in when I first left Lebanon, because it was both a very exciting time and at the same time very hard but also very challenging. So in many ways it's almost like there's a compulsion to repeat that moment and, and therefore whenever I start feeling too comfortable in one place I take up a job teaching in Venice for two and a half months, which I just finished, and alienating myself both from London and Berlin which was quite difficult but somehow. You know I, I sometimes feel I do these things constantly to sort of destabilise the situation.

This is, this is quite a tough regime that you put on yourself. It's as if you're testing yourself the whole time that you mustn't become comfortable.

I don't know if it's about not becoming comfortable. It's, it's feeling restless. If I spend more than a couple of weeks in a place I just start feeling restless and you know having to go somewhere else and, I don't know I think when I'm on the move I think better. I am one of those people who thinks much better when I'm on the move. I mean as soon as I get on a plane or a train or wherever my brain sort of opens up and I start and a kind of inspiration just drops in on me. Maybe because I, I'm sort of can't move around, you know I'm in one place and I sort of I could be reading a novel and I start getting inspired about ideas for my work and very often it's about the place I'm going to, before I reach there I sometimes have some ideas that I could apply to that situation. Maybe I'm a bit, somehow a bit lazy. When I have a lot of space and a lot of time I don't do enough with it and then at the last minute I'm on a plane going somewhere I have to come up with ideas so I come up with the ideas. I don't know. Apparently children are like that. They learn better and they sort of absorb information much better when they're on the move, when they're moving and you know like on a swing or whatever, rather than sitting at a desk. This is something that they discovered recently so maybe I'm...

That something childlike that you've retained?

Yeah, so maybe it's I'm essentially still a child. I don't know. I mean when I think about my kindergarten years they were the most exciting years and, and when I look through those notebooks and things that my father kept, all the grades from school, it seemed like every three months, every term in the kindergarten I got a special prize for whatever I was doing, drawing mostly.

Don't tell me that life has been a big disappointment since?

Ah and then after that it was so boring, waiting to go to art school.

And now it's one exhibition after another.

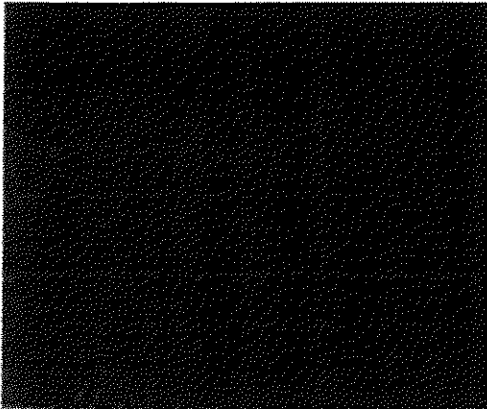
Yes.

But you still get the prizes.

Well I have...

And you still get the acknowledgement...

I have to say I've been lucky in the last couple of years. I got




two great big prizes.

So perhaps from that point of view alone it is similar to your experience of the kindergarten, approval and success.

Wow, maybe.

Mona Hatoum , thank you very much.

[BACK TO THE TOP](#) 

- Home
- Doctor Who
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- EastEnders
- BBC iPlayer
- Health & Parenting
- Music
- Sport
- CBBC
- History
- News
- TV
- CBeebies
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