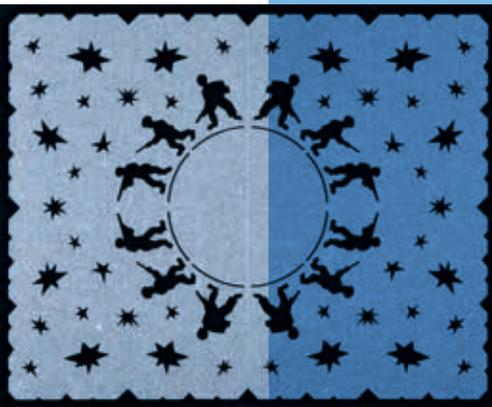
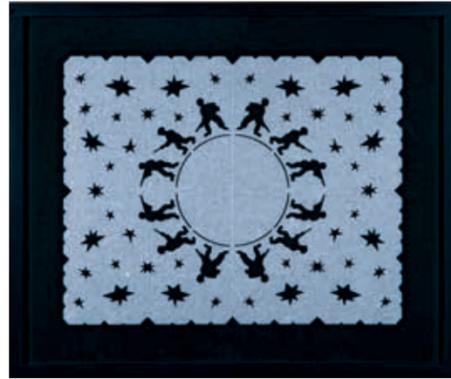
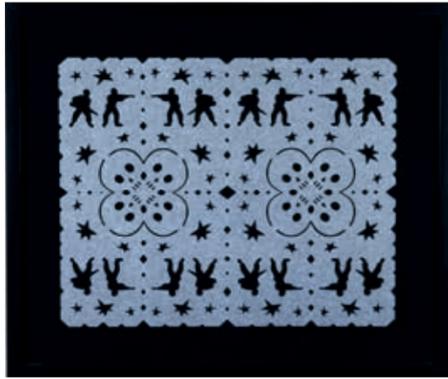




MONA



HATOU



■ *Untitled (cut-out 8)* 2009 (top left), *Untitled (cut-out 9)* 2009 (top right) and *Hair Grids with Knots* 2006 (bottom)

**MONA HATOUM** was selected for the prestigious Bellagio Creative Arts Fellowship in the program's first year, 2009. She was one of three artists chosen through nominations from an international panel of curators and arts professionals. During her residency, Mona worked on projects ranging from weavings of human hair to paper cut-outs, and her major project was an installation, *Natura Morta*, exhibited in Turin during 2009.

**BEYOND THE VIOLENCE VORTEX INTO THE BEAUTY VORTEX:  
FROM POMEGRANATE TO HAND GRENADE TO MURANO GLASS GRENADE**

During her 2009 Creative Arts Fellowship at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center, Mona Hatoum created works which required time and attention: delicate weavings with human hair, a set of small paper cut-outs, and a series of two hundred hand grenades blown in mirrored glass with a craftsman in Murano (Venice) and shown shortly after at the Fondazione Merz (Turin) in a display entitled *Natura Morta* (2009). There, scattered on the Mario Merz spiral table, *Doppia Spirale* (1990), the iridescent Murano glass grenades seem to reflect, as Hatoum explains, the vortex of violence.

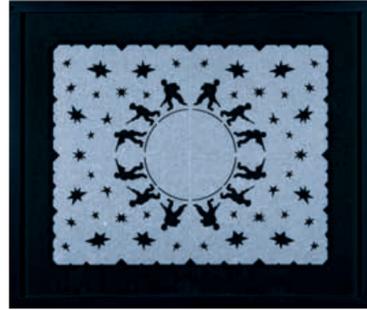
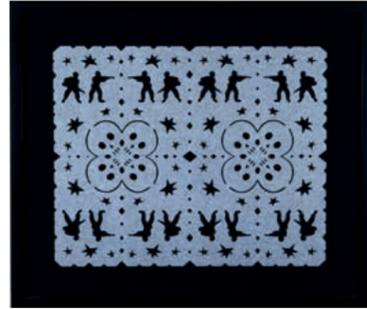
Designed to disperse shrapnel upon exploding, the first Byzantine hand grenades had a body made of stone, ceramic, and later of glass. The small explosive shell took its name from the French *grenade* for "pomegranate," because it looked and behaved like the many-seeded fruit that explodes once it is overripe, disseminating its seeds over a wide perimeter. The pomegranate is native to the region of Persia and the western Himalayan range. Knowing no borders it has been cultivated for several millennia in Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Northern India, Russia, and also in South China, Southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean region. In Hatoum's still life *Natura Morta*, the grenade appears as both vital fruit and deadly fire.

Bearing the name of a luscious fruit upon a lethal weapon, different models of fragmenting bombs, fabricated from hard plastic or steel, were used by the artist to produce her multi-colored glass grenades. In this transformation, Hatoum seems to reduce the hand grenade's potentially destructive power to smithereens were it to be thrown. Too often the brute force of war has brought overwhelming events of pain and suffering upon entire communities, who seeking justice through retaliation in the aftermath of trauma have descended into a whirlpool of chaos. Reenactment of victimization is mostly at the root of violence in society. Unspeakable trauma itself scatters and wanders with its self-perpetuating, out-of-control spiraling of evil energy that keeps amplifying. In the vicious cycle of trauma, victims unconsciously seek repetition of trauma, consequently often becoming the next aggressor. To interrupt the aggressive "trauma vortex," be it the Rwandan genocide or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many have advocated an understanding of the etiology, source, and unconscious processes of vicarious trauma, in particular with children.

With their reflective surface, Hatoum's Murano glass grenades visualize the mirroring victim/perpetrator loop, so that the viewer can recognize the senselessness of rampant violence and become aware of other options, turning the collective "trauma vortex" into a shared "healing vortex," to use the words of Gina Ross or Viveca Hazboun. Trauma concerns the loss of connection to the self, to the others, to life, to nature, to beauty. Together we have the obligation to heal and restore these broken connections, enabling the dissolution of the transgenerational cycle of violence into curative practices of compassion. The precarious splendor of Hatoum's glass grenades, almost like brittle Christmas balls, request and imply our own fragilization for a productive dispersal at the border so it allows a passage to one another. In this way, Hatoum's art contributes to a certain working out and breaking up of trauma that takes place in the aesthetic and ethic fields. Here the Bataille modernist notion that "beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of violating it" is reversed in a twenty-first century feminine and constructive manner.



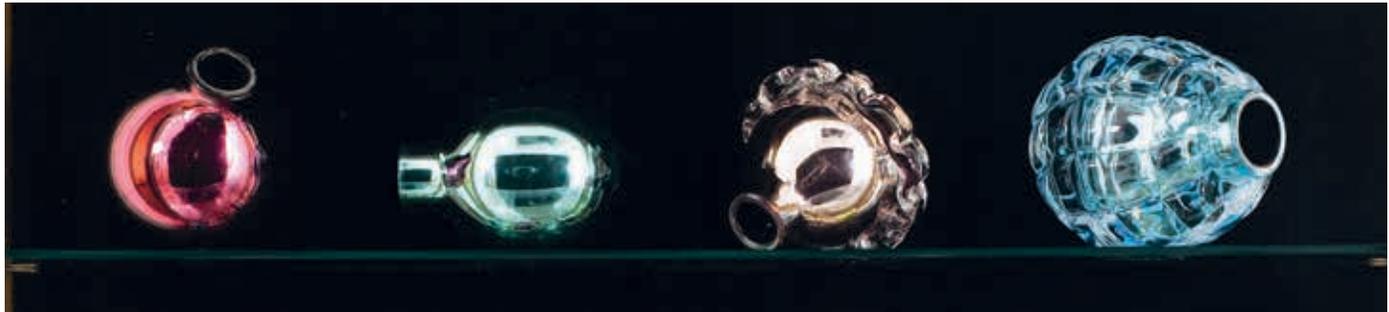
Catherine de Zegher, *Director of the 18th Biennale of Sydney*



Untitled (cut-out 8) 2009 (top left), Untitled (cut-out 9) 2009 (top right) and Hair Grids with Knots 2006 (bottom)



Mona Hatoum, *Natura morta* 2009, Murano glass, dimensions variable | Mario Merz, *Doppia Spirale* 1990, glass and metal (above and cover)



■ *Natura morta (wall cabinet) detail, 2009*

The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Creative Arts Fellows program hosts visual artists at the Bellagio Center in Italy for three-month residencies. Creative Arts Fellows, like other participants in the Bellagio scholar, practitioner and creative arts one-month residency programs, have the time and space to work independently during the day. They also enjoy and benefit from a lively community of scholars, writers, policymakers and other artists who gather in the evening for dinner and occasional presentations, promoting interdisciplinary interaction strengthening each resident's work. <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center>