In April 1996, Mona Hatoum, a British artist of Palestinian origin, installed a work entitled *Present Tense* at the Anadiel Gallery in East Jerusalem, an area annexed by Israel in 1967 (Figs 1.1–1.2). On the floor of the gallery, Hatoum laid 2400 pieces of soap in a rectangular shape. The soap was Nablus soap, a traditional Palestinian product made of olive oil. Hatoum pressed tiny red glass beads in curved lines into the soap (Fig. 1.2). At first sight, the lines seem to make up abstract forms, but in fact they depict part of the occupied Palestinian territories that, as determined by the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel should have handed back to the Palestinian authorities. Hatoum came across a map of these territories on the first day of her visit to Jerusalem. In *Present Tense*, she omitted the outlines of the map of Israel, only drawing the Palestinian territories: fragmented parcels of land, scattered across Israel, resembling an archipelago.

*Present Tense* was originally a site-specific sculpture as the work was made specifically for that exhibition in Jerusalem and was an immediate response to the site. By inscribing the map of the Oslo Accords on a local traditional product, Hatoum investigated the political, social and cultural dynamics at play within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Drawing only the Palestinian territories in Israel on the soap, Hatoum focused on the Palestinian situation within the conflict. The context of the city of Jerusalem affected the meaning of the artwork, enhancing the political dimension. Jerusalem was and remains the core issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it is claimed by both parties to be the capital of their states. Yet since the exhibition in Jerusalem, *Present Tense* has been displayed in several solo and group exhibitions, and was even acquired by
Figure 1.1 Mona Hatoum, Present Tense, 1996, soap and glass beads, 4.5 × 241 × 299 cm, installation at Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem. Courtesy White Cube and Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.

Figure 1.2 Mona Hatoum, Present Tense (detail), 1996, soap and glass beads, 4.5 × 241 × 299 cm, installation at Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem. Courtesy White Cube and Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.