

Appropriating  
the base materials  
of the built  
environment  
allows ZAC  
HACMON to  
mediate between  
the personal  
and the political.

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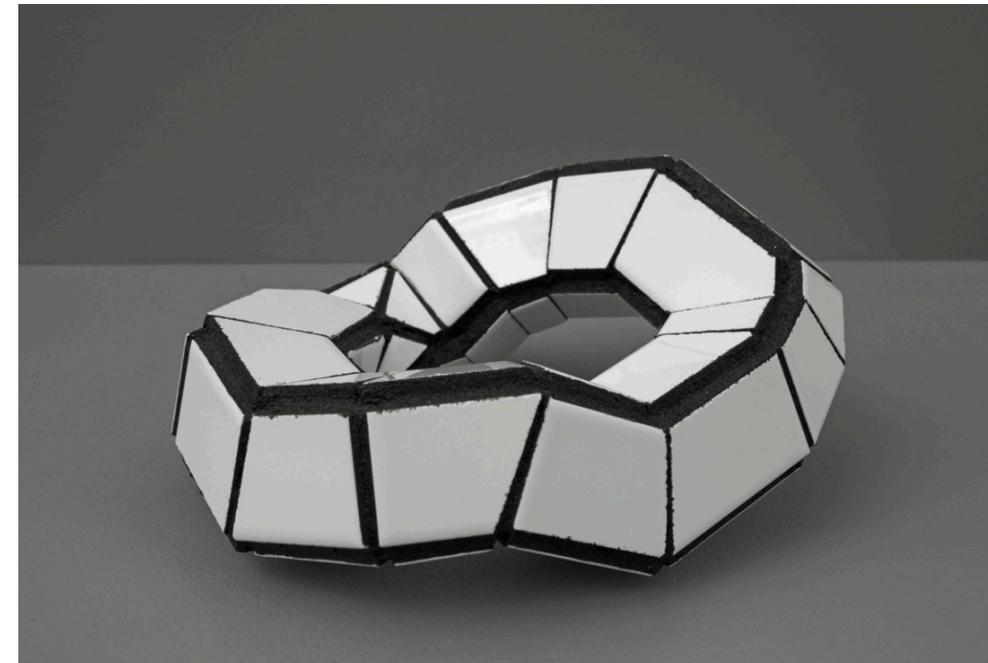
# *Inter Slate*





*Fruitful Anxiety*, from Hacmon's Afterlife series, on show at LMAKgallery Courtyard.

Etienne Rossard



Existing outside of 'comfort zones' is something Hacmon sees as a key role for international artists.

# ZAC

**BORN IN HOLON**, just south of Tel Aviv, Zac Hacmon has lived, studied and worked in New York for the last five years. He's on the rise, having recently exhibited at Tel Aviv's Museum of Fine Arts and at Brooklyn nonprofit Smack Mellon, as well as participating in residencies in Seoul and Prague. His latest show, *Afterlife*, at LMAKgallery in New York City's Lower East Side, caught our attention thanks to its astute appropriation of industrial elements resulting in surprisingly intimate ends.

Hacmon describes his sculptures as 'efficient'. They combine utilitarian, mass-produced materials with ambiguous forms and spaces in an attempt to reconstitute architecture's disorientating effects within the gallery context. In particular, he engages closely with the public areas of cities, seeking to understand the senses of both freedom and restriction offered by liminal spaces such as border crossings, corridors

and train stations. Often interactive, his projects have placed viewers in specific roles for political effect, but current works – his 'gateway devices' at LMAKgallery, for instance – have a more tentative and personal impact, achieving uncanny yet affective displacements of both location and mind.

We caught up with Hacmon to discuss his career to date, his changing priorities since moving to New York, and his next steps as he prepares for a solo show at mh Project NYC.

**According to the press release for *Afterlife*, you're a devotee of architectural design – where does this stem from?** ZAC HACMON: I was born in Israel, and much of Israel's identity was defined by architecture; the country needed to generate that identity from scratch, and Bauhaus proved an ideal tool for the purpose. And I grew up surrounded

by brutalist buildings, which were perceived as being Israeli, as being secure, as being different. My elementary school was a brutalist concrete structure, as was my university and my high school. Concrete was also used for the separation barrier between Israel and Palestine, so architecture can have the function of creating a division between identities, too. I think my biography has led me to explore architecture and its role in our sense of self.

**Your use of industrial materials seems to echo this link between the personal and the political ... I studied industrial design before fine art, giving me a pretty clear view of the impact that mass production has had on our lives. There are questions about what kinds of identity are generated when products are made in China and distributed globally, questions linked to those around Le Corbusier and modernist housing. If architecture is a machine to generate new identities, then I see my interest in the industrial, the functional and the modular as something similar. My sculptures are more than just passive objects; hopefully, they have the power to generate something.**

**In *Afterlife*, the industrial tile proves surprisingly multifaceted, even cladding sculptures such as *Re Peat*, which emerged from your own experience of grief. I've always been inspired by my surroundings, and after moving to New York five years ago for »**



Zac Hacmon poses with *Destined*, a work inspired by the grab bars ubiquitous to New York's public spaces.



*Gateway*, conceived shortly after Hacmon arrived in New York, represents the artist's response to the war in Gaza.

my master's, I found these tiles covering in-between spaces – subway stations, or places that are both private and public, such as restrooms. I'm trying to give that sense of intimacy, using mundane elements to create a device that gives access to something sublime – a portal perhaps. When you see the show, it almost feels like a temple, and these sculptures are like stupas. I was taking a Buddhist class at the time, which got me thinking what temples might look like if we built them in the city now. Marc Augé introduced the idea of 'non-places' – places such as malls or airports that have no history or identity, that look the same whether you're in Tokyo or New York, where you lose a sense of location, a condition he calls 'super-modernity' – so I attempted to harness that.

**Your use of steel grab bars in *Afterlife* feels rather less personal, is that fair?** You see them everywhere in New York as part

of architectural regulations, but it can get absurd, with six of them all in one place. It's funny, because people always reach out to touch them as they pass. It's like an instinct – we have been trained to use them, and they call out for use. The sculptures in *Afterlife* are rather delicate, even deliberately failed in places as an attempt to puncture society's idealization of architecture. Yet people still touch the bars – it's almost like an experiment, inviting people to respond to their own desires.

**At the same time, you exhibited the overtly political *Gateway* – a section of a security checkpoint modelled on one in Kalanidia – across town at Smack Mellon. It's a striking contrast.** I conceived of *Gateway* as a response to the war in Gaza just after I moved to New York, but because it was such a big project it took years to realize. I kept manipulating my language in the meantime, >>

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**‘I’m trying to give that sense of intimacy, using mundane elements to create a device that gives access to something sublime’**

and it became clear to me that I wanted to create some new sort of architecture – perhaps an ‘unclear architecture’. I do still see my work as political. At the end of the day, when people look at my biography, they’ll see I’m from Israel – and that’s already a political statement. But now when I ask myself what’s the purpose of my work, I feel that maybe I want to open a door for something else, not reflect back on the past.

**So you’ve moved away from literal re-creations of space, as in your Eritrean bar, *Aliyah Market*?** My earlier installations were more of a relocation of a place – a copy-and-paste scenario, where the results are placed in the white cube. At the time, it seemed urgent to do that – *Aliyah Market* was a direct response to where I used to live, a refugee neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. But now I’m in New York, observing American society, and my work is becoming something else. It still seeks authenticity – relevance to where I am in place and time – but now has more complexity. I carry my biography from where I was born, but I work here, so there is a hybridity. I am interested in what it means to be an international artist, active outside of comfort zones, away from a home city. It creates the kind of cultural bridge that is so needed today, with the rise of nationalism and the closure of borders.

**As you travel from Tel Aviv to London to New York, where do you find spaces that offer qualities of in-betweenness, of displacement?** Every time I go home, the first thing I do is go back to where I used to live and just walk for hours. I know how it used to be, and I notice the small changes – a cable that’s been added, cellular antennas on the roofs. There’s a language created by these changes, and I learn more from that than from what people tell me. So I just wander the streets or sometimes take a car and go as far as I can to the border, until I’m stopped, experiencing going from one place to another. It’s all part of my research – I guess it’s a kind of anthropology. But I find fewer and fewer in-between spaces. Public spaces are becoming more and more private, leaving less space to wander than ten years ago – fewer public parks, fewer public spaces, more authority, more barriers. But spaces in-between offer freedom – they exist in-between identities, in-between responsibilities – so that’s what I hope to generate in my work. It’s like a gift, allowing the viewer to sense something other, something else. ●

**A solo exhibition of Zac Hacmon’s work is on show at mh Projects NYC from 26 April till 2 June 2019**  
[zachacmon.com](http://zachacmon.com)  
[mhprojectnyc.com](http://mhprojectnyc.com)



*O-7*, part of the *Afterlife* series, references the ‘non-places’ of modern life, such as shopping malls and airports.