Diana Al-Hadid

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The Brooklyn Rail

DIANA AL-HADID with Elizabeth Buhe

Portrait of Diana Al-Hadid, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

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Diana Al-Hadid creates freestanding sculptures, wall-based relief paintings, and works on paper to examine the narrative frameworks that inform human culture. Born in Syria, Al-Hadid immigrated to the United States as a child and grew up in Ohio. On the occasion of her exhibition, *unbecoming*, at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, Al-Hadid joined Elizabeth Buhe on the *New Social Environment* (Episode #1240). Their conversation, edited for print, touches on a range of topics, including the relationship of the body to architecture, what it means to be unbecoming, and why images of women in motion are so important to the artist.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz*, 2006. Wood, polystyrene, plaster, fiberglass, and pigment, 72 × 64 × 64 inches. Courtesy Morten Viskum Collection.

Elizabeth Buhe (Rail): Your exhibition is a retrospective of twenty works over the last twenty years shown across two galleries. *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz* is both the oldest work in the show, from 2006, and one that is close to your heart. When we spoke previously, you said the show felt like it was a self-portrait, or you were thinking about this show through the lens of self-portraiture, especially as you saw it being installed. Can you talk about that feeling?

Diana Al-Hadid: Probably every show is a sort of a self-portrait in some ways, but this one feels more so because there are actual representations of my image and representations of my body. And it really starts with this piece. It's called *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz*, and I made it almost twenty years ago. It was pretty incredible to see it come back, because it hasn't been in the States in nineteen-some years since I first made it. Back then it was in a small summer group show in LA.

I don't often feel a lot of feelings around my work, but this was a rare moment where I felt kind of emotional seeing the work again, maybe because in some ways it's the oldest surviving sculpture, and it just feels very intimate to me. Let me explain the process of making it. I put paint on the soles of my feet and I danced the waltz in my studio. It was actually at a residency in upstate New York. And wherever my feet left footprints on the ground, those footprints became the blueprint for the spires of the cathedral.

Rail: So it began with a dance?

Al-Hadid: Yeah. It's a building made not for a body, but of my body. It was made to the proportions of my specific movement. It was made right side up, and then I kind of cartwheeled it, so it stands on its spires, and the feet are at my eye level. I danced both the male and the female positions. The female is the nave and the male is the buttress. I've come to see this work as holding a lot of root themes that kept coming up in my work. Self-portraiture might not seem obvious to anyone who knows my work, but my work is very handmade. It's made with really small marks that accumulate. And this piece in particular holds the core tenets of my practice, which are, you know, movement and motion and fluidity.

And for me, that concept, it's like a way of being, it's almost a moral imperative. There's so much literature on movement as a kind of political agency, because movement is about bodily autonomy. It's about freedom. It's essentially a form of resistance, against hierarchy, against rigidity, against things that are static. And you can expand a lot from there.

Later I became interested in embodied cognition when I learned about George Lakoff and metaphor and how we understand the world through very basic metaphorical concepts that can be traced through our movement. It can be understood by how our body lives and exists in space. And we can find it in our language too, right? This piece is essentially the opposite of the phrase, "stand your ground," which is about strength and stability. It's obviously a cathedral, but it's upside down and it's not based on the cross plan. It's based on a squarish plan. I learned that some gothic cathedrals, including this one specific cathedral in Spain, were based on a squarish mosque. I was raised a Muslim, so that was really interesting to me.

Rail: I'd love to come back to that idea of motion, but can you talk through the process of making this work? I'm curious how you get from the footprints on the floor to a three-dimensional version. Are these actual casts of your feet?

Al-Hadid: Yes, they are. In a lot of cultures and religions it's kind of impolite to make a show of the soles of your feet. They're often considered dirty. You're supposed to remove your shoes when you go into a mosque. Like any spiritual space, it is supposed to be very clean. So the idea that the piece begins with soles of my feet, that's actually very transgressive.

Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz was an intuitive work. I made it with very crude and simple materials, a lot of which are the same materials I use today. They're basically common construction materials that you could find at a big box store: wood, polystyrene, plaster, fiberglass. When I set the spires down on the footprints, it established the organizing principle of the piece. It's made from foam and wood. I carved all the details by hand. The only things that were cast were the feet. And then I actually burned it, which was kind of risky, but it was controlled. I was kind of careful. It was fun to do, but it was chaotic. That's how I made it.

In a way, you can really see the materials. I mean, they're processed and transformed, but it was one of the first works where the surface was much less precious than in earlier works. This one unlocked that sort of surface treatment. Before I was sanding and polishing a lot, if you can believe, and I'm still pretty fussy with all of these details.

I'm not a terribly religious person, but a lot of superstitions still exist in me, like that the ground is a sacred space for me as a sculptor. To be in battle or in conflict with the ground has always been one of my basic or fundamental aims. "Battleground" is a funny term, but it's appropriate insofar as I'm trying to get the sculpture to not just rest politely or comfortably on the ground.

So that was one of the things that I really wanted to try to do: uproot this structure. Cathedrals are these super vast things that are supposed to reach the heavens. They're supposed to reach god. They're towers, and they're supposed to make you feel small. They're supposed to make you feel this disproportionate sense of scale and vertigo. When I did my kind of customary European backpacking tour after college, I visited every cathedral in every city I visited, and I had that experience of feeling extremely overwhelmed. I think this was a way for me to create intimacy, and to allow it to be off-kilter. It's funny to see this work in the MSU Broad Art Museum, because Zaha Hadid's architectural design is very asymmetrical, and has these extreme, oblique angles, so it is really well suited for this space.

Rail: I'm wondering if that dyad you mentioned of gravity and weightlessness—which I think is present in so much of your work—somehow maps onto the motion and stasis, binary or not? One of the things that I felt for a long time about your work is that you set out binaries, but somehow they manage to both always be true. It's not an either/or proposition, it's a both/and proposition. I'd like to think a little bit more about that question of motion, because that's something you've already talked about—"Stand your ground"—but I think motion is something that often feels gendered as well. Now I'm thinking about your untitled 2013 work that references the story of Gradiva.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Untitled*, 2013. Conté, charcoal, pastel, and acrylic on mylar, 24 × 18 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Al-Hadid: I'm glad you brought up the word binaries, because if I've learned anything in life, it is that everything exists on a spectrum. Everything. Everything really is a gradient, and I have a need to find nuance and not trust binaries. Movement and fluidity are essential parts of that philosophy. It's about flexibility of mind. It's very psychological. Depictions of women in motion, having agency, and in flight or mid-step—those are very appealing to me.

This drawing portrays the character, Gradiva, which is also the title of a novella by Wilhelm Jensen. Jensen, at the start of the twentieth century, became a source of inspiration for the Surrealists. I studied art history in undergrad, and was obsessed with the Surrealists, and the Dadaists especially. And you know, Salvador Dalí called Gala his Gradiva.

Gradiva is a character that is named after a Roman bas-relief sculpture. The novel tells the story of an archeologist who is this sort of stuffy academic, and he becomes fixated on this relief sculpture of a woman mid stride. She's the "gradiva", which translates into "the woman who walks." In other translations, it's "the woman who walks through walls," which on its own is such a sculptural idea, that something can start as flat and become dimensional. That is essentially the setup for the cathedral in *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz*; there was a blueprint on the ground that was extruded to become dimensional form.

Anyway, the archeologist romanticizes this artwork and becomes sort of obsessed with it. He starts to hallucinate that he sees this character, Gradiva. He's in Rome, and starts to imagine her as this apparition that he sees in the streets of Rome. He starts chasing her, and he chases her all the way to Pompeii, where he starts to hallucinate that Vesuvius is about to erupt, so time becomes really warped. Now he's talking to this ghost, and eventually realizes that he's been talking to his childhood crush, this woman Zoe. It's a strange little story. Sigmund Freud made it very popular because he drew out this metaphor and basically took the story as an allegory of the psychoanalytic process. The archeologist was unearthing layers to kind of reach his subconscious desires, and he finally discovered what was compelling him: this sexual attraction to his childhood crush.

Jacques Derrida wrote about Gradiva in *Archive Fever*, which is a hard and complicated text. He's basically criticizing Freud for narrowing everything to one specific origin, a specific scene that, like the act of archiving a memory, essentially produces loss. There's a drive to reduce everything to a memory, to create an archive. But to move something from private to public brings up this issue of power, and of who gets to write history. You could ask: is this really about the past, or is it about building a future? It's really interesting if you're obsessed with this idea of archiving. It's basically looking at how we create history, how we decide on history—on our collective memories—as a society.

Later I found another interpretation that I loved by Daniel Orrells called "Derrida's Impression of *Gradiva: Archive Fever* and Antiquity" where Orrells wrote how art historians are essentially compelled by this impossible fantasy of trying to both witness the event and the archive simultaneously, and to basically see her footprint in the ash. At the end, there's this moment where the archeologist sees Gradiva leave her footprint, her foot making this impression of the print in the ash, and this moment of trying to both capture the memory and archive it at the same time. He's drawing out that these traces are actually traces of an absence, not of a presence.

Gradiva features heavily in my work. She shows up in sculptures and in panels and in drawings. She's this character that is a figment of a male imagination, and she's always on the move. That's her defining characteristic, that she has one foot on the ground and one foot off the ground.

Rail: I know you've also drawn inspiration from Hans Memling.

Al-Hadid: Yes. Specifically from the character in the Hans Memling painting, *Allegory of Chastity* (1479–80). There's a woman basically wearing a mountain as a skirt. I love allegories, so it was a really interesting and sort of subconscious pairing that I would show both of these figures together. The first time I showed them together was at the Vienna Secession. I made two diaphanous wall works, one of Gradiva in motion and one of the *Allegory of Chastity*. She's sitting very politely on top of this mountain. My feminist reading is that she is holding in a volcanic eruption. That she isn't really a victim. She is actually in command of her environment. That both of these stories or myths correspond to volcanos is interesting to me.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Blue Medusa*, 2023. Mixed media, 84 × 97 × 2 ⅞ inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York. Photo: Charlie Rubin.

Rail: It's so interesting that you brought up Derrida and the archive, because there are so many female protagonists who center your work. There's this way that we could think about your work as a kind of archive for women, or a logic of the archive as a creative act, a kind of counter act.

This idea of a woman who is always in motion makes me think of the ways that we have different, gendered conceptions around the way people move. In the history of art, we have images of people in motion. I am thinking of Étienne-Jules Marey, who was the inventor of the chronophotograph, which was right after Eadweard Muybridge did his horse images. Marey wanted to still the human body moving, so he put white dots and white lines on the side of a man who he then asked to walk from one side of the room to the other. This was in the 1880s, and the whole idea was to graph the movement of the object, or in this case, the person. But of course, it's a man who's doing that kind of structured, scientific walking. And it was not just a man, it was a soldier. I was thinking about this earlier when you mentioned *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz* as a kind of battleground. There's something interesting about this militaristic language, or the way in which movement gets coded as militaristic in a masculine realm, and is something else in a female realm.

Al-Hadid: It's seductive in a female realm, right? It's something that men chase after.

Rail: Which is what happens in the story of Gradiva.

Al-Hadid: So interesting—I never thought of it from a militaristic perspective. For men, it tends to show up as aggression and violence, and for women, it's survival. It's movement, and fluidity and escape and disturbance—not being pinned to one place or one definition or one existence, one way being right. I think that that's what I really like, to tie this back into the title of the exhibition, *unbecoming*, that kind of shift, that stasis is more important than being right. The transition between states is what gives us power and agency.

Rail: I like that the word "unbecoming" isn't just one thing. It's both an adjective—like something is unbecoming, it's not attractive—and a verb, as in "to unbecome." And of course, Simone de Beauvoir talks about how one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. The concepts around how womanhood is construed can be oppressive, but they can also be freeing, and can be both at the same time.

So it's about stepping into that plethora of perceptions around womanhood that aren't static. And that makes perfect sense with the way that your work wants to always be in a liminal zone between binaries. I mean, Simone de Beauvoir was writing as an existentialist, and that's exactly the place where the binary of self and other became so important in the definition of selfhood. It seems like an extremely appropriate title, both for the feminist dimension of the work and for the way that the work constantly moves between concepts on a spectrum.

Al-Hadid: I love that. When you're unbecoming, it's like it's rude or disrespectful—to be unbecoming. I mean, I can say for myself, growing up, I was called a big mouth more than once. I was expected to be well behaved and polite and defer to men, and, you know, this is not specific to my upbringing as an Arab Muslim in Ohio.

What's interesting about being a third-culture kid is that you have a front row seat to feminism in two different cultures. It was very easy to spot the restrictions that exist in Arab culture as a woman, and in American culture they're so present but have a different flavor. I don't know why I bring that up, but I'm just thinking about this criticism of being unbecoming or inappropriate, not polite, not sitting respectfully and holding yourself in, but instead being angry and being loud and rude and kind of breaking those codes.

Rail: That makes me think about the stories we learn as children, how they are a form of indoctrinating behavior when we're young. One of the things that your work does so brilliantly is to find moments in narrative where those conventions get turned upside down. You can probe the convention through the figures that you bring into your work.

Al-Hadid: I wanted things to be upside down. I think *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz* was the first time that something was fully upside down in my work. But I did have several moments where I would literally turn a thing upside down, turn an image upside down, or turn a geographic map upside down. I love to see things from what's conventionally understood to be the wrong point of view. I'm interested in how it upsets our proprioceptive sense, as well as our psychological sense.

Diana Al-Hadid, *There was and there was not. . . a clever woman in disguise*, 2025. Linen pulp paint and cotton blowout on abaca base sheet, 40 × 60 inches. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, donated by the artist and Dieu Donné, New York, 2025.

Rail: I want to ask you about *There was and there was not. . . a clever woman in disguise* (2025). I'm curious if this conversation we're having plays into the diptychs that are in this show? I'm thinking of the way that the diptychs bring to mind the idea of the storybook, or two different perspectives. I know they are new, and I'm curious to hear you talk more about the diptych structure. Maybe you can speak to *There was and there was not. . . a clever woman in disguise*?

Al-Hadid: *Clever woman* is one of the works that MSU generously commissioned. I made these with Dieu Donné, a paper making studio in Brooklyn. I was their lab grant resident a couple years ago, which meant they invited me to come about once a month, to experiment with this process—and boy, did I take to it!

It's just weird, because I've never really worked that way. I've never drawn on paper. Even the Gradiva drawing that we talked about was made on Mylar, which is a transparent medium. So the ground is see-through, and I think I've always wanted to make marks on a ground like that because I feel like the marks kind of float on the surface. I couldn't draw on traditional paper because it felt like the material was taking something from me. It's hard to explain, but when I made a drawing out of paper it felt so sculptural, so natural to my studio process.

These marks are not sitting on top of the surface. They are embedded. The work is made through a really wet process and it's super thin, practically on the verge of not existing. The layers of this thin paper are everything I wanted. I really loved working at Dieu Donné, so the curator at MSU, Rachel Winter, devised a plan where I could make another body of work. I look at so many small paintings, miniatures, not just the Northern Europeans, but also Islamic miniatures and Islamic paintings that are extremely tiny and detailed. There's something about looking at the smallness of these marks and getting so close to the artist's hand, getting so close to that intimate moment—I live for that. Despite how large scale and gestural and spatial my work can be, it really starts in this teeny-tiny way.

Rail: Can you describe what's happening in *There was and there was not. . . a foolish king* (2025)?

Al-Hadid: I was thinking about stories told by women, specifically *The Thousand and One Nights*. I didn't want to play into any kind of orientalizing of Arab culture, obviously. I wanted to personalize it. So the narrator is a woman named Scheherazade. The premise of the stories is that Sultan Shahryār was kind of taking his revenge on womankind because his wife was caught cheating. In a rage he decided to kill a new bride every night. Eventually, Scheherazade steps up. She has a plan, which is to tell stories that end with a cliffhanger, every night, that way the sultan will keep her alive to hear the rest of the story. She essentially rescues herself and then womankind with the power of her storytelling, with her creativity. It's such an incredible notion. So momentous.

I was thinking about those stories, and I realized that I wanted to really make a scene about her, the storyteller—not the stories that she was telling. So I set up a camera and took a picture of myself as Scheherazade telling the stories, and then also as Dunyazad, her sister, who was also in the room. It shows a detail that can get overlooked: that it was Scheherazade, the sultan, and her sister in the room.

I'm fascinated by the inclusion of her sister. Why was she there? What purpose did she serve? Maybe she's a stand in for the audience, so that we're not implicated as the sultan hearing the stories. We're with her, the sister. In this image I am both the listener and the storyteller. And then there's a character in the middle. It's kind of hard to see, because it's heavily abstracted, but that's my brother Sam, who was lounging on my mom's couch when I went home for Thanksgiving. It's a family scene, after all.

Rail: The background is so interesting.

Al-Hadid: Initially, I had a whole series where I had the figures set in the sultan's bedroom, this kind of opulent palace interior, and the series didn't feel right. I don't know how many works I made, but I could tell something was off. They just weren't working. Let me tell you, it is really uncomfortable to be working with people for a limited time, like at Dieu Donné, and have that feeling! But they very generously let me come back and keep working on the project. That's when I put them in this ethereal landscape, so they were kind of within the stories, and it turned out a lot better.

I do these washes, just like pools of paper pulp, colorful paper pulp that reticulate and make these incredible textures and create all this depth. The pooling happens on a horizontal plane, and then the marks are made on a vertical plane where everything is dripping. In my work, from the drawing to the sculpture—everything is built.

Rail: I'm realizing, not for the first time, how these themes are woven through each of your individual pieces. There's the feminism-motion narrative. You just mentioned this idea of pooling. Once you have a vocabulary of the concepts that are operative in your work, it's easier to identify them in any single piece. I wanted to go back to *Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz* and talk about how your footprints gave rise to an upside-down cathedral. Another direction we could take the question of motion is performativity. Not you as a performer, but the direction that motion has taken within art history and performance studies.

I think this is a two-part question. I'm thinking of Andy Warhol's "Dance Diagram" series from 1962, black and white paintings that were on the floor showing the steps you would take as someone who wanted to learn how to do the Fox Trot or another dance. Your work isn't didactic like that, but there is an element of viewer engagement. I mean, you have an untitled sculptural work that is floor based, and in the MSU show there is the large-scale *Smoke Screen* (2015) that you can walk through. I hadn't known that Gradiva could be translated as "the woman who walks through walls," but I like that connection in this exhibition particularly.

My question here is twofold: Is there something to thinking through the legacy of performance art or the participatory dimension of art? And then also, more straightforwardly, can you talk about how your work has been installed at MSU in Zaha Hadid's unusually shaped galleries where you don't have a conventional flat white surface on which to hang things?

Diana Al-Hadid, *Untitled,* 2014–21. Bronze, ¾ × 32 × 30 inches. Courtesy the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York.

Al-Hadid: I'm really glad that this bronze floor sculpture is included. It's weird, because it's the only sculpture that is untitled. All of my works on Mylar are untitled, but this is the only sculpture. I started making it in 2014, but I didn't finish it and just kept returning to it. I cast it first in wax and froze it so the wax was really cold. Then I dropped it so the wax cracked, and I poured hot wax onto it. I'm always playing with hot and cold materials. It becomes a mirror that doesn't reflect, that's corrupt, that breaks the relationship with the self. You can't really look at yourself, but you're inclined to. It's interesting—by not producing a reflection it makes you very aware of your body.

I think sculpture is fundamentally performative, because you're sharing the floor with this object. You have to navigate the space. You have to move around it. For me, I look behind, I look up, I look down, I look within. Most of my work—maybe not this particular piece, but so much of my work—you can see through. I don't use transparent materials. The materials I use are typically opaque, but there is always a way of seeing through them. All of my large-scale installations, you can see into them. They don't close off space to you. In fact, I hope they create more space than they take up.

Even though I make so many works that hang on walls in the tradition of painting, all of those were born from my sculptural practice, and from the materials that I use in my sculptures. I don't think with images. I don't start things with a picture of something in my mind. I'm more compelled by materials, by space, and by playing with my hands and experimenting with how things move and flow. I kind of have to find the thing.

I might start with a historic reference or an image that I take of something; there could be a combination of references that I put together. In large part that's because I don't know what to do with a blank page. I need to be creating in response to something. I cannot just conjure up something from absolute nothing. I really think through my hands, and I find the story as I'm making. I often don't know where it's going to go, or what I'm going to privilege in the work. Sometimes I'm responding to a material opportunity, something that's opened up as I'm working. It's hard to explain. Sometimes I think, "Oh, this material has allowed for this other narrative to come in." And different themes get woven together. I don't have a clear agenda from the start where I'm like, "I want this piece to be about this thing." With the story of Scheherazade, I knew that was the starting point, but I didn't know I would have so many failures until I figured out what the final image was going to be. I had so many versions of it! As I'm making, I'm finding the colors I want. It all happens in the moment; planning is really hard for me. I'd rather start with everything available, and then just make very intuitive moves. Even in my large-scale work, which looks like it could have been carefully mapped out, I start with something flat, extrude up, and see where it goes.

Family Style

Look Up

The natural world shines through in Diana Al-Hadid's new, labyrinthine works, in which intricate layers congeal into views of the trees and sky.

Installation view of Diana Al-Hadid's solo presentation at Kasmin for Frieze Los Angeles, booth D6.

Meka Boyle
February 23, 2025

"I carry Syria in my heart all the time," says Diana Al-Hadid, whose recent solo booth at Kasmin for Frieze Los Angeles recalled landscapes, including a few of her homeland. For her bronze sculpture of a spindly, bare jasmine plant, *Warda II*, 2024-2025, the artist dipped the national flower of Syria's root ball in wax to make a mold. A layer of bronze seeps out from its base in what Al-Hadid reveals is a rough outline of the country.

Set at dusk, *Zenobia's Moon*, 2024-2025, appears as if it is decomposing or regenerating. A lattice of materials from the artist's controlled dripping technique obscure the sky, which crystallizes in the top left hand corner. It was born from a reference to English painter Herbert Gustave Schmalz's 1888 depiction of Zenobia, the rebellious queen of the Roman colony of Palmyra, now present-day Syria. "In the painting, she gazes at what I believe is the moon on the horizon," says Al-Hadid.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Zenobia's Moon*, 2024-2025. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York.

Works like these reflect the time Al-Hadid spent in the mountains upstate New York after the pandemic. Pastel, threadbare depictions of skies and trees channel scenes from her property and what she describes "dramatic, impossible perspectives interpreted from 16th- and 17th-century Dutch paintings," like those of Pieter Bruegel. While Al-Hadid was working on one such wall panel, *Dear Wife, Save Me*, 2024-2025, she looked at Bruegel's Magpie on the Gallows, 1568. "Upon his death he asked his wife to burn a lot of his work but said she could keep this one for herself," she says of her affinity toward the painting. "I was curious as to why he wanted to give her this particular work. I love weird gestures of love," she adds.

History and speculation, imagination and logic are two sides of the same coin for the artist—dualities that allow for nuanced interrogation of how we understand meaning. As a child, the artist's older brother would tell her bedtime stories about worlds made of bubbles. "I still think about that world," she admits. The artist, whose family immigrated from Aleppo, Syria to Cleveland, Ohio when she was 5 years old, recalls watching the city release over a million helium balloons into the sky a few months after her arrival. "I had been in the country no more than a couple of months but I distinctly remember this," she says. "It was this grand, happy gesture—something outrageous and oversized, a quintessential American experience."

Diana Al-Hadid, *Dear Wife, Save Me*, 2024-2025. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York.

At home Al-Hadid learned Islamic folklore, and in school Greek mythology. The story of the minotaur in the labyrinth in particular resonated with her: it tells the story of a hero who uses a ball of yarn to escape the labyrinth and kill the Minotaur. “I love debate, and so I was really drawn to the metaphor, in which logic is a method of problem-solving by exhausting all avenues of thought,” she says. Today, such mazes unravel in her works, revealing her complex web of references.

Throughout her practice, in which historical and personal context is transmuted into ethereal, thickly layered labyrinths, Al-Hadid probes constructions of femininity and gendered agency via mythological stories of women in captivity, as well as how feminine power is depicted in mythology in general. “I like to catalog all the various ways in which women are cloistered, held in towers, mountains, walls even,” she explains. “Often these imprisonments are by powerful men to prevent a prophecy that will challenge their authority from coming to light.” That today these tropes feel extra prescient goes without saying: “How quickly the public will turn on a woman for speaking up against abuse, especially if they don’t match up to our notion of the perfect Disney victim,” Al-Hadid observes. “How often women are pressured to prioritize or adapt to the needs of men.”

Diana Al-Hadid in her studio. Photography by Charlie Rubin. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York.

This year she has two upcoming projects at the MSU Broad Art Museum and Princeton University Art Museum. The former, opening in June, will feature works from the past two decades that connect her process of reworking materials to reworking frameworks around womanhood. The latter is inspired by the university's expansive global collections including objects from her birthplace of Syria, to Turkey, to the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. Is there a project she has yet to realize? "So many ideas," she says. "So little time."

Frieze

Work in Progress: Diana Al-Hadid

The Syrian-American artist looks to the skies in new paintings showing at Frieze Los Angeles

Livia Russell
February 17, 2025

My studio is ‘an extension of my mind’, says Diana Al-Hadid. It’s where she has developed her alchemical, additive approach to painting that fuses polymer gypsum, fibreglass, pigments and metal leaf. As she prepares for her solo show with Kasmin at **Frieze Los Angeles**, Al-Hadid discusses the new colours emerging in her latest work, taking inspiration from the Biblical paintings of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and how to cast the root ball of a jasmine plant.

Livia Russell Can you talk about your new work for Frieze Los Angeles?

Diana Al-Hadid I’ve been doing a lot of sky studies in preparation for my commission for the sculpture terrace of Princeton University’s new museum, which opens in late 2025. Since 2020, I’ve been spending more time upstate, and nature and landscape have become a significant presence in my work. For Frieze Los Angeles, my body of work combines images I’ve taken of my property upstate, skies over Princeton and historical paintings that capture striking skies or ‘sky events’.

Diana Al-Hadid in her studio. Courtesy: the artist and Kasmin, New York. Photo: Charlie Rubin

Diana Al-Hadid, *Long Sky*, 2024. Polymer gypsum, fibreglass, steel, plaster, metal leaf and pigment, 2.1 × 1.6 m. Courtesy: the artist and Kasmin, New York. © Diana Al-Hadid

LR How does this work fit within your œuvre?

DA-H These works are made using a process I developed years ago in which I make a kind of 'backwards' cast of a painting. This results in the work appearing fragile or deteriorated. However, the embedded image is an additive process made of lots of layers of colour and material. I think it is best described as a blend of fresco and tapestry.

LR Are there new sources of inspiration in your current work?

DA-H One of the historical paintings I've referenced is *The Miracle of the House of Loreto* [1743] by Tiepolo, which is in the Getty Center's collection. It depicts the Virgin Mary's house being miraculously transported through the sky by angels from Nazareth to Loreto, Italy. My husband, who's an architect, was transfixed by this story when we were in Italy together. When I was thinking about a work for Frieze, I wanted to make something that felt both familiar to LA and personal, especially as we've been considering future collaborations.

Another work in this series draws from a depiction of Zenobia, the rebellious queen of Palmyra (present-day Syria), painted by the British artist Herbert Gustave Schmalz in the early 20th century. In the painting, she gazes at what I believe is the moon on the horizon. Syria comes up again in the booth in my work *Warda*. It's the second edition of a bronze sculpture of a jasmine plant – the national flower of Syria – created by dipping the plant's sponge-like root ball in wax, which burns out in a direct bronze pour. I also cast and weld its wild, circular stems. This edition features a roughly hewn outline of my native country as its base.

Diana Al-Hadid's studio. Courtesy: the artist and Kasmin, New York. Photo: Charlie Rubin

Diana Al-Hadid's studio. Courtesy: the artist and Kasmin, New York. Photo: Charlie Rubin

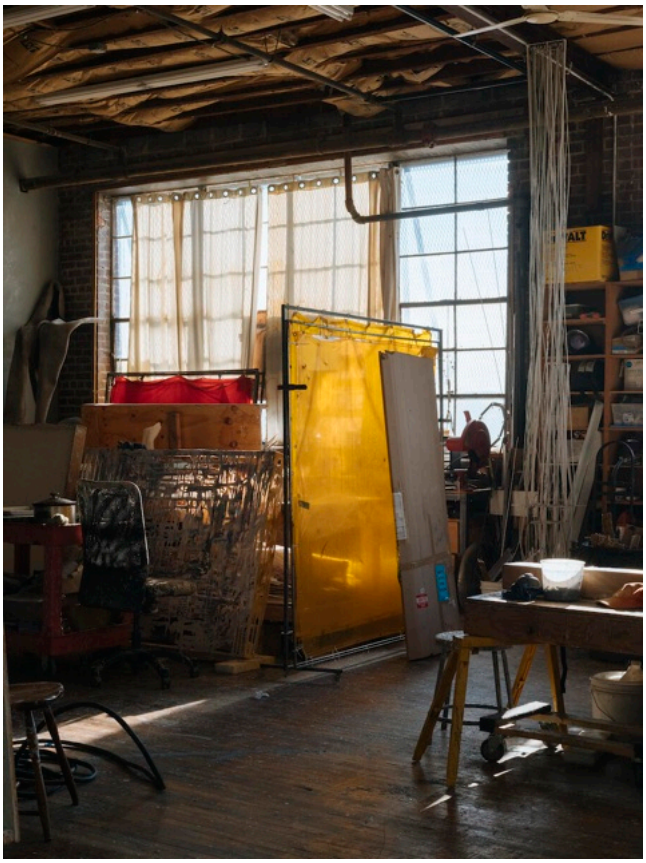
LR How do you see your practice developing?

DA-H I'm still practising my practice, so I don't know exactly how it will develop. But I try to keep pursuing things that light up my brain – whether that's a story, a myth or a material process. With my panels, I'm constantly refining my process. Since 2020, spending more time in nature has had a major effect on my perception of colour. My eyes have been saturated with greens, blues and purples – I see that reflected in my work.

LR What does time in the studio mean to you?

DA-H Time in the studio is precious. It's the most consistent place I know, more than any home, and the place I feel most connected to myself. I've noticed that the closer I am in proximity to the space, the faster new ideas drop on my head. When I'm away for too long, I feel it in my body.

During 2020, when we moved upstate, it was the longest I had ever been away from my studio, and it took a real toll on my mental health. That experience led us to start building a new studio there. Now, I have a quiet space in nature as well as the studio I've had in Brooklyn for over 17 years. My studio is truly an extension of my mind – I need access to it wherever I'm spending a good amount of time. Otherwise, I quite literally feel like I'm losing my mind.



Diana Al-Hadid's studio. Courtesy: the artist and Kasmin, New York. Photo: Charlie Rubin

FRIEZE

The Miner's Magic of Diana Al-Hadid

At Kasmin, New York, the artist's new body of sculptures and drawings feel frozen between solid and liquid

REBECCA ROSE CUOMO

JANUARY 5, 2024

Main image: Diana Al-Hadid, *The Seven Sleepers and the Dog*, 2023, polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, metal leaf and pigment, 127 × 127 × 7.3cm. Courtesy: © Diana Al-Hadid and Kasmin Gallery.

Diana Al-Hadid opens portals into other worlds. In 'Women, Bronze and Dangerous Things', the artist's first solo show at Kasmin in New York, Al-Hadid presents a sophisticated new body of more than 20 works developed over the last five years. Upon entering the gallery, visitors are transported into a parallel universe where the familiar laws of physics do not apply.

Objects transitioning between solid and liquid are frozen in flux, seemingly caught in the act of melting or congealing. Volumes materialize through intricate interplays between mass and void.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Blue Medusa*, 2023, mixed media. 213 × 246 × 7 cm. Courtesy: © Diana Al-Hadid and Kasmin Gallery

Three large-scale sculptures occupy the central gallery space. These are encircled by an array of wall reliefs, drawings on mylar and works on paper produced during the artist's recent residency at Dieu Donné, New York. In the monumental sculpture *Mother Splits the Moon* (2023), an avalanche of filiform stalactites cascades above and around a plinth of superimposed planes. The installation is an alchemy of industrial materials – concrete, steel, gypsum, fiberglass, urethane, chicken wire, plaster and paint – turned geological phenomena. Through this sedimentation of gravity-defying drips and pours, Al-Hadid constructs a floating mountain, an insurmountable peak that can only be viewed from below by peering up into its visible insides. Invoking the miner's magic, the artist here reminds us that precious stones are to be found within the Earth's crust.

Diana Al-Hadid, *The Bronze Chamber of Danae*, 2023, mixed media, 292 × 239 × 7 cm. Courtesy: © Diana Al-Hadid and Kasmin Gallery

The Bride in the Large Glass (2023) stands before the mountain. In this bronze sculpture, the bust of a woman appears on top of an ambiguous mesh-like structure that dissolves into puddles at the floor. The title brings to mind Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), also known as *The Large Glass*, but visually the work is more reminiscent of Hans Memling's painting *Allegory of Chastity* (1479–80), in which a Burgundian maiden is depicted encompassed by cliffs of amethyst rock. Al-Hadid's references to art history are subtle, acquiring new depth of meaning through her innovative reinterpretation of signifier and symbology. This bride appears glassless and without a face, an abstracted etching of a woman ossified in metal. We don't really see her; our minds fill her in. Wrapped around her absent body is an expanse of woven fabric, diaphanous and oxidized, perhaps an ode to Memling's gemstone mountain. Spiky at the top and hollowed-out in the centre, does the form serve as a protective nest or a means of entrapment? In either scenario, this trace of a woman is entangled.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Untitled (Mountain Series)*, 2023, conté, charcoal, pastel, acrylic on mylar, 56 × 46 cm

Standing alongside is *Seed* (2023), a bronze sculpture in which a similar female bust-etching emerges from a concrete pedestal. Here, the artist's touch is cemented: fingers that once combed across liquid matter have left their indelible marks on a now-calcified ground – imprints of gestures like the ones we might make digging soil to plant seeds. Rising from the concrete, an enigmatic vortex, like a wisp of smoke or a vine, engulfs the barely there woman. Perhaps we are witnesses to the figure's transformation, solve et coagula – a chemical phase change of condensation or sublimation – denoting arrival or departure from this realm. Planting is also a form of burial, albeit one that aspires to resurrection, to new growth. Evoking this liminal state, Seed holds the promise of a generative future.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Diana Al-Hadid: *Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things*

ELIZABETH BUHE
DECEMBER 14, 2023

Diana Al-Hadid, *The Bronze Chamber of Danae*, 2023. Mixed media, 115 x 94 x 2 5/8 inches. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy the Artist and Kasmin Gallery.

The twenty-five works on view in Diana Al-Hadid's debut solo show at Kasmin present an artist at the height of her powers, practiced in aligning the behavior of her materials—primarily gypsum, bronze, steel, and linen pulp paint—with the conceptual contours of her message. Except paper pulp, which she introduced this year during a residency at Dieu Donné in Brooklyn, Al-Hadid has been working with these materials for over a decade. Since the fluid lines of her built-up floor sculptures and wall reliefs sit on the cusp between figuration and abstraction, the meanings they summon are multivalent. Yet a prominent strand of Al-Hadid's message is the observation that when we reach deep down into cultural history—

primarily classical mythology, Islamic and Christian stories, as well as their depictions in visual art—we expose the deep sedimentation of our contemporary biases, especially as they relate to women and mothers. That the work engages this kind of structural thinking, transcending the particularities of any one situation, is made clear by Al-Hadid's title, "Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things." It imperfectly cites the 1987 book *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* by the cognitive linguist George Lakoff, who argues that metaphors guide our ordinary conceptual system. "Absolutely everything in life is a metaphor," Al-Hadid noted during a gallery walkthrough. Her work aims a sharply critical eye at the shortcomings of binary and hierarchical thinking by presenting a cast of women protagonists who erupt upwards even as they melt, and who pierce us with their gaze even as they flicker in and out of visibility.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Blue Medusa*, 2023. Mixed media, 84 x 97 x 2 7/8 inches. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy the Artist and Kasmin Gallery.

The mostly greyscale gypsum and fiberglass ground of the towering wall relief *The Bronze Chamber of Danae* (2023) is covered in shimmering vertical runoff of gold varnish. The effect is a strong downward force which leads the eye to a gaping hole at bottom center, contained only by the broken lower margin of the work, as if something has left the picture. This is where Danae should sit, imprisoned in a round columned room (following a painted rendition by Jan Gossaert on which Al-Hadid based the relief). According to myth, Danae was shut in a bronze chamber to prevent bearing the son

prophesied to kill her father, King Acrisius of Argos. Zeus impregnated her nevertheless, bypassing the gilded cage in the form of golden rain. This material transformation prefigures another, when the son conceived here—Perseus—later murders Medusa, the monster whose gaze changes human bodies to stone, a fate conferred as punishment for being raped by Poseidon. Al-Hadid's Medusa appears, in turn, on an adjacent gallery wall in the form of another large-scale wall relief. Like Danae, the evidence of Medusa's body is largely absent, as a swarm of writhing blue and beige hair frames a lozenge-shaped vacancy. In absenting the representation of these mythical figures from her work, Al-Hadid seems to suggest not an alternative narrative in which assaulted women escape their fate, but the cumulative effect that tweaking their stories might have on the present.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Double Standard*, 2022. Bronze, 115 x 68 x 66 inches. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy the Artist and Kasmin Gallery.

The binaries that Al-Hadid's works surface—such as right/wrong, male/female, liquid/solid, up/down, weak/strong—extend to her use of materials. At Kasmin, we see Al-Hadid working for the first time with paper, an ephemeral material made with water. This new material appears alongside her longstanding practice of casting in bronze, a permanent material made malleable by fire. The apparent opposition here helps us see that, in Al-Hadid's hands, binaries never hold. The magisterial bronze *In Mortal Repose* (2011), on view on the gallery's rooftop garden, gives us a headless body in contemporary dress, almost entirely melted save for her upper torso. Even the patriarchal visual language of the monumental concrete plinth on which she rests cannot resurrect her. In contrast, less durable works painted with paper

pulp, like the emblematic *Mad Medusa* (2023) on abaca paper, stamp out some of the most forceful images in the show. Or look to the windswept filaments in bronze that encircle the central figure of *Seed* (2023). These were made by the direct burnout of spray foam, inverting our expectations of material permanence. Thus Al-Hadid's material play aligns with her subversion of the gendered narrative expectations that accompany the mythic stories she draws upon. Yet even despite deploying these conceptual throughlines across the board, Al-Hadid's works never seem formulaic, since we see her clearly reveling in the responsiveness of materials acting in the studio, as evidenced by the unpredictability of dripping media or the stability of asymmetrical sculptures, like the ceiling-high *Mother Splits the Moon* (2023), that seem on the verge of collapse.

A component in the lower corner of the latter sculpture points to a more recent direction in Al-Hadid's work, familiar to those who saw her 2018 room-like installation, enclosed by hedges, in Madison Square Park. This component is the honeycomb lattice of a beehive, cast in bronze (which also makes the sculpture site-specific, since it refers to Kasmin's rooftop pollinator habitat and honey-producing hives). Al-Hadid began gardening at her upstate studio during the pandemic, one upshot of which has been introducing shocks of color into the new work. She also recognized a metaphor for immigration in the root-bound plant, and this orientation toward living matter, realized both through such explicit citations as the beehive and through integration with nature in outdoor installations, suggests a future-directed outlook toward growth, rather than excavation of the past. Perhaps this should come as no surprise, since continual shape-shifting between domains of thought, understanding one conceptual realm in terms of another, is among Al-Hadid's great strengths. Even as the work offers an alternative vision of the history of objects, one in which the structural biases that govern human thought were configured differently, Al-Hadid's ambition is not simply giving voices to women or flipping the script. It is nothing less than the reshaping of knowledge. Another way of saying this might be that nothing is inevitable, and this formulation is future-oriented indeed.

artnet news

How Medieval Art, Music, and Memory Interplay in Diana Al-Hadid's Sculptural New Works Centered on Her Heritage

This November, the artist will have her first solo exhibition after moving to Kasmin Gallery.

KATY DIAMOND HAMER
SEPTEMBER 18 2023

Diana Al-Hadid, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin.

Syrian-born artist Diana Al-Hadid is known for her sculptures and two-dimensional artworks that transform the industrial materials of bronze, steel, fiberglass, and wood into evocative visions drawn from cosmology, cartography, folklore, and antiquity. The artist, who has lived and worked in Brooklyn for the past 16 years, has been a witness to the borough's transformation over those years, and in many ways, her works are about time, its passage, and how that manifests in mark-making.

Diana Al-Hadid, *The Long Defeat* (2017–23). Courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin Gallery. © Diana Al-Hadid. All Rights Reserved.

Today, Al-Hadid divides her time between the city and Upstate New York, where she purchased a home in 2019. Currently, she is also in the process of building a studio for that property. Al-Hadid is prolific. Currently, she is taking part in an ongoing residency with Brooklyn's Dieu Donné, a non-profit cultural institution devoted to furthering hand papermaking processes in contemporary art. This November, the artist will present her anticipated debut exhibition "Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things" at Kasmin Gallery in New York, showcasing a body of work over five years in the making. The exhibition, which will run from November 2 to December 22, 2023, promises to offer a selection of new work including a series of painterly wall-hanging pieces and totem-like sculptures that rise up in the same way they are planted down. Coinciding with the Kasmin exhibition, Al-Hadid will also be featured at the NGV Triennial, which opens on December 3.

Your work has been aesthetically consistent over the years, capturing your hand and mark-making over time. Can you talk about your interests and practice?

I often think about the glacial pace that my work has—or the long arch of materials that I've been working with since grad school. There are basic constructions that coincide with our contemporary world in raw form. In some ways, I think there are some formal or maybe subconscious compulsions that have remained consistent [in my practice]. I work a lot with line

and plane, pours, or drips, and things that happen over time. There are metaphorical concepts that I'm interested in, that we live with as a society.

What do you mean when you say you're interested in metaphorical concepts that we live with as a society?

There are ways that we move, shape, and mold the world. We use wood, metal, steel, and contemporary materials, yet the processes are ancient in many ways. All my work looks back at art histories, narrative histories, and common tropes—ascensions, overground and underground. We sometimes understand metaphorical concepts as a cultural construct and sometimes as a body or cognitive construct. They are all cognitive. The show's title is "Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things," which is inspired by a book first published in 1987, similarly titled *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* by George Lakoff (b. 1941), an American philosopher and cognitive linguist. The book title comes from an Aboriginal dialect in Australia and is a reference to a word that describes women, fire, water, certain animals, and dangerous things. It offers an incredible shift in thinking regarding how we see the world and the language we use is intrinsically related and reinforced over and over. One of the metaphorical concepts that Lakoff explores is the notion that the unknown is up and the known is down. In the English language we might say, "What's up?" or "It's up in the air." Language plays a role in how we experience our living bodies and how our society makes associations.

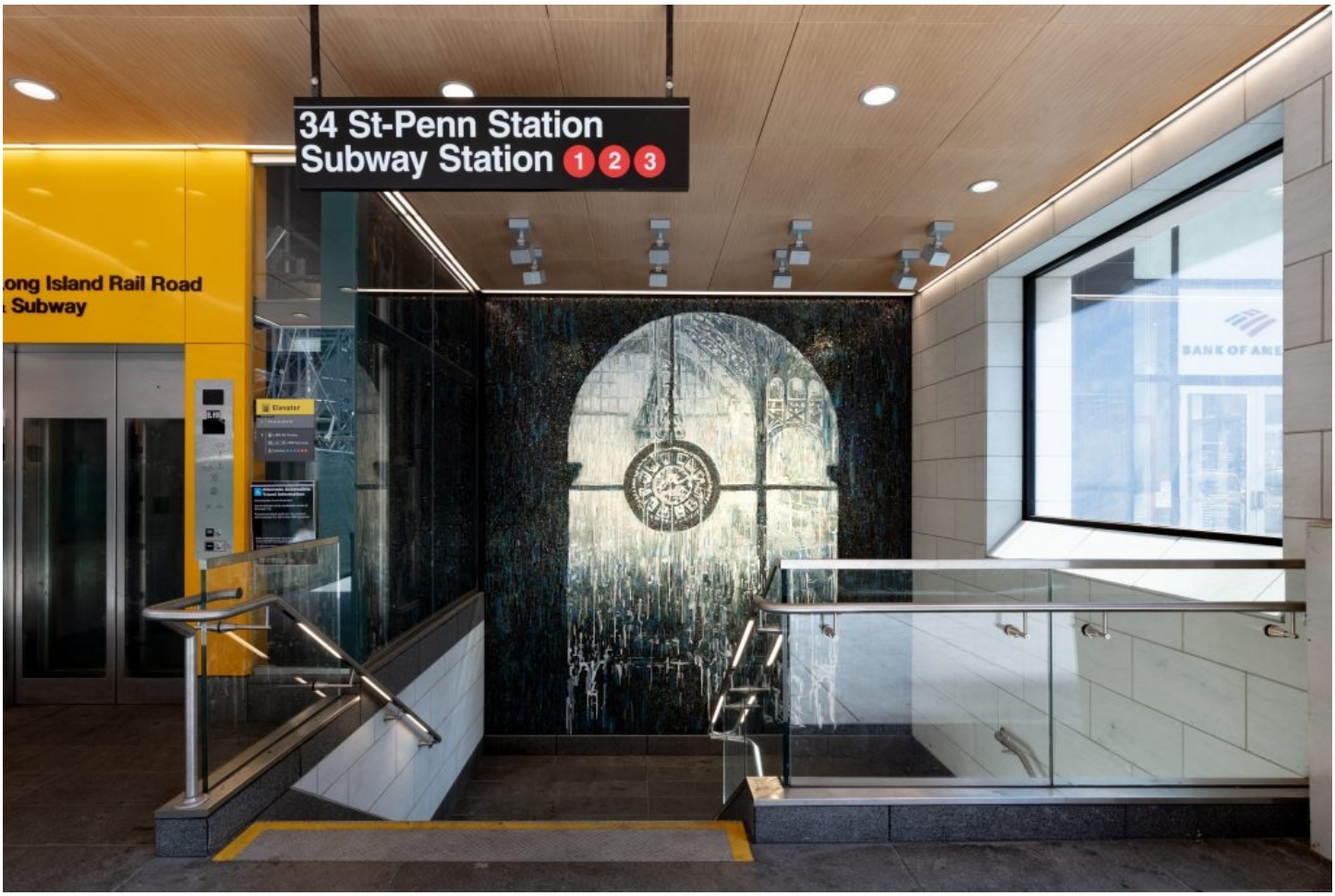
Something I've been thinking a lot about recently is the different visual experiences that people have linguistically based on their native language and other written languages that they may or may not know. For example, even saying, "What's up?" when translated into another language, may not carry the intended meaning. These lapses in understanding can also happen when talking about spirituality.

You are hitting all of my notes. This show has some elements of religion in it, and the reason that this book resonated so deeply in my bones is because of these irregularities between cultures and minds. We always want to try and make contact, to come close to something, to understand it. I was born in Syria, my mother tongue is Arabic, and I grew up in Ohio, a very Christian, white...but loving and wonderful place. I often look at works from the Middle Ages, both Islamic and Christian. I look towards the 1550s for many of my references and keep ending up there. At this moment, post-2020, I have a kid, I'm not an emerging artist anymore, and these are facts about me. Moving upstate [at this stage of my life] I've learned about plants, and I've learned about roots, and I've learned about trees. I listen to Arabic music constantly. Life is such a negotiation as an immigrant; finding out how much of yourself to make public, and how much of your history to hold on to. I returned to Syria at 13 years old and I often think about what you mentioned, that approximation, that missed connection in a conversation, and how language can lend itself to poetic and cultural insights that otherwise won't be understood. I've constantly been made aware of that since I didn't grow up there, even though it is my blood. It is something I always work in reference to.

Diana Al-Hadid, *The Outside In* (2023) at the Planting Fields, New York. Photography by Diego Flores. Courtesy of Kasmin Gallery and Diana Al-Hadid. © Diana Al-Hadid. All Rights Reserved.

Thinking about roots metaphorically and literally, all seems to make sense with your work—things that are earthbound. Do you also think about the absence of space? How do materials inform your process?

Yes, exactly that, spaces that are immaterial. I did a stint at the Smithsonian and spent time looking at Islamic and German miniatures. They are almost like fortune-telling devices—people could read their future in them. Now I'm at Dieu Donné in an ongoing residency and working with paper pulps is a huge part of the show. I'm working with bronze and I'm working with paper. I've never worked with paper before, I tend to make large-scale drawings on mylar.



A longtime New Yorker, Diana Al-Hadid recently completed a permanent installation for MTA Arts & Design, *The Time Telling* (2023). Photography by Diego Flores. Courtesy of Kasmin Gallery and Diana Al-Hadid. © Diana Al-Hadid. All Rights Reserved.

Does this mean that before making a sculpture you don't sketch it out first?

The sculptures start in a very casual way. There is a work that is intended for the show that is a very small piece that will be bronze. It's jasmine roots. Jasmine is the flower of Syria and it's very nostalgic. All of my aunts have jasmine and I had jasmine plants that died. I took what remained in the pot, the roots, and dipped them in wax and hung it. I've had so many plants that are root-bound and learned about how these roots would push to the edge [of a pot] and become encased. It struck me as a metaphor for the immigrant experience, these tightly wound roots where you have to learn how to grow in a new territory, new soil. It felt so core for me.

That is beautiful. The roots can be confined or allowed to spread if planted in the ground. What else can we expect from the show?

The show pulls from so many sources, but I think there are some common historical threads, including Medusa, as inspired by Greek mythology. To return to the idea that the *unknown* is up and the *known* is down, the gallery is a cavernous, nearly underground space. A stacked and towering sculpture will be installed in the main gallery, reaching upward and another will be on the roof, an ascension of sorts, an unexplained narrative.

Galerie

Tour Diana Al-Hadid's Expansive Brooklyn Studio

With an upcoming solo show at Kasmin Gallery, she continues to push her work in new directions.

HILARIE M. SHEETS

AUGUST 11, 2023

New works lean against a wall in the Brooklyn studio of Diana Al-Hadid. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

Diana Al-Hadid traces the discovery of her artistic voice back to a sculpture of an upside-down Gothic cathedral she made shortly after receiving her MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2005. Scaling the structure to her height and the movement of her body, Al-Hadid started by painting the soles of her feet and dancing the waltz—both the lead and follow parts. On this blueprint of footsteps, she constructed the church architecture with spires and buttresses using wood, plaster, fiberglass, pigment, and polystyrene. Then she torched the building and flipped it onto its peaks. Titled *Spun of the Limits of My Lonely Waltz*, the inverted form hovers on wobbly stilts, bruised and melted like a mirage.

Diana Al-Hadid. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

Materials and unfinished projects in Al-Hadid's Brooklyn studio. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

"I felt like the floodgates had opened for me materially, creatively, conceptually," says Al-Hadid at her expansive studio in Brooklyn, where she has been making new work for her first solo show with New York's Kasmin gallery, debuting in November, and for the NGV Triennial 2023 in Melbourne, Australia, which opens the following month. "This piece spoke to my conflict with gravity, my building from the ground up, and it held a lot of principles that I feel have lasted in all the different media I use."

Born in Aleppo, Syria, and raised in the suburbs of Cleveland, where her family immigrated when she was five, Al-Hadid is known for her intricate, often materially complex, and distinctively drippy allegorical sculptures, in which fragments of figure, landscape, and architecture collide. These organic-looking constructions—including painting-like wall reliefs—appear at once representational and abstract, ancient and contemporary, eroding and regenerating.

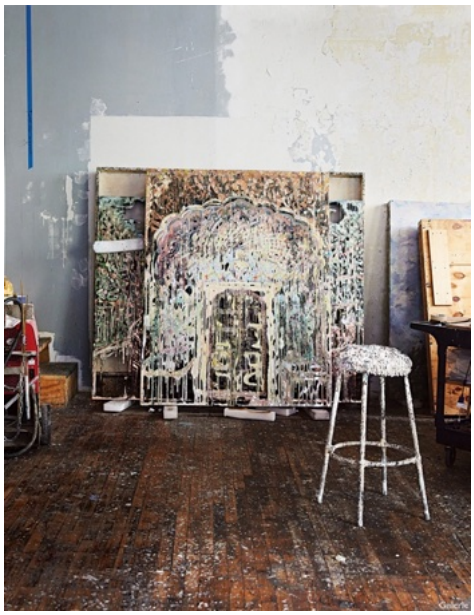
Materials in Al-Hadid's Brooklyn studio. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

Diana Al-Hadid at work on one of her labor-intensive, multilayered relief paintings. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

"A lot of my work happened as a result of living in rural Ohio and access I had to the Home Depot and garbage dumps with big foam blocks from construction," says Al-Hadid. "But it points back. I'm always looking through art history." She uses

commonplace building materials such as plaster, wood, metal, and urethanes in experimental ways, concocting a tinted polymer gypsum—what she calls her “secret sauce”—to paint with in thin layers of fresco for her wall reliefs and to pour over armatures in hardened cascades.

“It’s all line and plane, just drip or pool,” says Al-Hadid. “That’s the organizing principle of how I build form.”



New works lean against a wall in the Brooklyn studio of Diana Al-Hadid. This fall, the artist is having a solo show at Kasmin in New York, her first since joining the gallery, and she will participate in the NGV Triennial at Melbourne’s National Gallery of Victoria in Australia. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

Work in progress in Al-Hadid’s studio. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

The artist’s ideas and aesthetic have been influenced as well by formative trips back to Aleppo, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with an ever-present sense of geologic and archaeological time embedded in the landscape. “I was ripped from that place at a very young age,” she says. “I do have a complicated relationship to the notion of nostalgia. Is it intellectual curiosity? Is it inspiration? Is it sourcing? Is it sampling?”

In her new works for the Kasmin exhibition, Al-Hadid is revisiting female archetypes of purity and desire that she explored in her 2018 show *“Delirious Matter”* at New York’s Madison Square Park. There, she used the early Netherlandish painting *Allegory of Chastity* by Hans Memling as a departure point for her sculpture *Citadel*, a pious feminine figure entrapped at the waist by a towering mountain-cum-cascading-hoopskirt welded in steel and poised over a fountain.

Materials and unfinished projects in Al-Hadid's Brooklyn studio. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

Materials and unfinished projects in Al-Hadid's Brooklyn studio. PHOTO: WINNIE AU.

"My interpretation of her being in the mountain was she was making the best of her situation, like she was holding in a storm," says Al-Hadid, who has created a new version of the piece, cast in bronze, that resembles a mountaintop from one side and, from the opposite view, a sweeping cloak over the backside of a figure—now beheaded. "She's erupted."

Another new installation, titled *Double Standard*, to be sited in Kasmin's roof garden, recycles Al-Hadid's mold of a woman in repose on a pedestal, a timeworn trope. But now the headless figure is conjoined at the neck with its twin hovering directly above, upside down, like a mirror image. "I wanted to see if I can close the chapter," she says, of fitting one section like a lid atop the other, which gives the sculpture the silhouette of an hourglass. "It's made into a timepiece." Also cast in bronze, the work is streaked with rivulets of pale patina that the artist applied by hand, describing it as painting with fire and chemicals.

Al-Hadid likes the fluid quality this gives to bronze, which she has also embellished with splashes of her gypsum material in other projects. "I'm interested in breaking the perception of bronze sculpture in public art, that heroic quality," she says. "Monuments are of interest to me, but in a weirdly intimate way. My hand is in every part of it. I'm expecting that when you see the bronzes, they'll feel more tender than monumental."

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Louise Despont’s collages at Mumbai's Galerie ISA traverse imaginary architectural realms

A riveting journey across organised forms on antique paper, Louise Despont’s series of collages - Portals - visualises non-visible energies as architectural forms.

ALISHA LAD

JULY 17, 2023

On titling the art pieces for her Portal series, Louise Despont notes, “I actually feel they are all connected and I've titled them in the order in which I've made them because they appeared like chapters in a book unfolding themselves to me.” Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie ISA, Mumbai

[EXCERPT]

As one walks into Galerie ISA's stunning display titled Different Realms featuring works by Louise Despont (b. 1983 New York) and Diana Al-Hadid (b. 1981 Syria), a sense of transcendence washes over them. Be it the unrestrained chaos of Al-Hadid's work, or the organised yet ethereal structure of Despont's collages, these works of art straddle intangible notions and discernible form - a discourse that lies at the heart of art - with seamless ease. At once entrancing, familiar and illuminating, Louise Despont's haunting series of collages titled Portals provides a mesmerising glimpse into the organisation of her mind.

[...]

For Despont, archways and doorways are laden with meaning, rich with metaphysical references to cultural fabrics, mythology and ancient lore. Common to Al-Hadid, Despont delves into the associative possibilities of architecture, deeply inspired by divination. "From tarot cards to tea leaves to I-ching there are systems of divination that allow us to access layers of information not always available to us," she muses, patiently unravelling particular energies and various materials. The energy of the paper guides her for each new creation. The found objects that find expression in her collages and drawings are sensitively anointed with homage to their mysterious and evocative nature.

Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie ISA, Mumbai

[...]

Different Realms featuring the works of Louise Despont and Diana Al-Hadid will be on display at Galerie ISA, Mumbai from 13th July to 2ndSeptember, 2023.

HYPERALLERGIC

Diana Al-Hadid's Nostalgic Tribute to Penn Station

Al-Hadid's new mosaic features the famed clock that hung at the entrance of the original station until the building was demolished in the 1960s.

TAYLOR MICHAEL
JANUARY 30, 2023

MTA New York City Transit President Richard Davey, MTA Chief Accessibility Officer Quemuel Arroyo, and MTA Arts & Design Director Sandra Bloodworth announce the completion of an entrance to Penn Station on the northwest corner of West 33 St & 7 Av, with a new elevator and glass mosaic "The Time Telling," by Diana Al-Hadid on Thursday, Jan 26, 2023. (Marc A. Hermann / MTA)

Some New York City commuters and tourists traveling through Manhattan's 34th Street–Pennsylvania Station will now discover Diana Al-Hadid's new mosaic "The Time Telling." The work was unveiled Thursday, January 26 by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) Arts & Design initiative as a part of the new ADA-accessible street-level entrance to the 1, 2, and 3 subways on 33rd Street and Seventh Avenue.

"It's a nice addition to a bleak station," Kadia B., a Bronx resident, told Hyperallergic as she ascended the newly opened stairway. Inspired by the pioneering photojournalist Alfred Eisenstaedt's black-and-white image "A Farewell to Servicemen," (1943), Al-Hadid's artwork features the famed clock that hung at the entrance of the original Penn Station until the building was demolished in the 1960s. The Syrian-born, Brooklyn–based artist transforms the iconic shot into an abstraction while keeping the original's somber yet grandiose tone.

Diana Al-Hadid's "The Time Telling" at the 34th Street–Penn Station accessible entrance (photo Taylor Michael/Hyperallergic).

At nearly 15 feet, the glass mosaic greets subway riders as they approach the stairs. Taking up the entire back wall of the stairway, the clock that once adorned the original train station can be made out clearly; arches, beams, a window pane, and a light fixture mimic the Beaux-Arts architectural style of the station, which was completed in 1910. But the soldiers from

Eisenstaedt's photograph, who were captured as they departed for service in World War II, are rendered as vague silhouettes.

To Nial Burke, a Brooklyn resident who was approaching the newly built elevator on a recent Friday afternoon, the mosaic looks like a cathedral or skyline. "I do like it; it's grand," Burke said.

"The Arches of Old Penn Station" by Diana Al-Hadid (photo Taylor Michael/Hyperallergic).

But the mosaic and new entrance can be easily overlooked, as they are surrounded by ongoing construction and scaffolding that cover Penn Station and Madison Square Garden. Many commuters looked frustrated as they walked by the entrance, seemingly searching for the escalators to the Long Island Railroad, or New Jersey Transit, which is also across the street.

Victoria Kayes was one NJ Transit rider excited to find the entrance completed, telling Hyperallergic that she had been watching for several days as workers installed the artwork and was waiting for a chance to see the mosaic. Kayes echoed other riders' observations that the piece is a boon for dreary commuters' spirits, adding that she will enjoy strolling by the subway to appreciate Al-Hadid's artwork before heading back to Jersey.

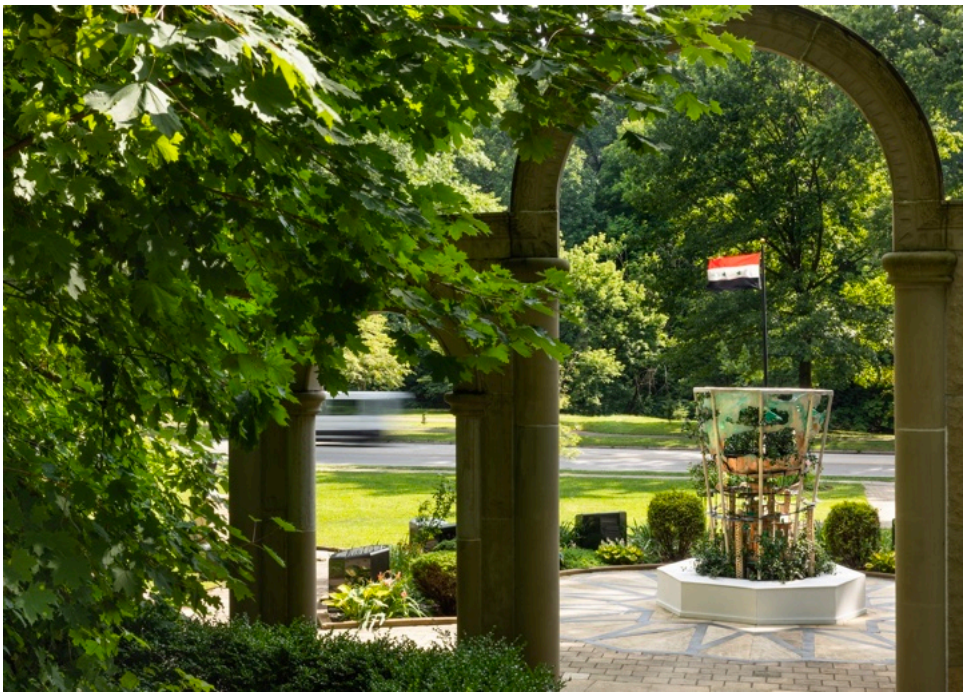
Al-Hadid's nostalgic tribute comes as New York State officials recently approved a major renovation for Midtown Manhattan, including Penn Station, in July 2022. The Penn Station overhaul, which is estimated to cost $7 billion, was first conceived by former Governor Andrew Cuomo and then picked up by Governor Kathy Hochul, who hopes to transform the current "hellhole" into a more aesthetically pleasing commuting center. The ambitious plan has drawn criticism over proposed tax breaks for real estate developers and concerns that the state will fall short of the projected revenue needed to fund the expensive construction. Some wonder if individual taxpayers will bear that burden and worry that redevelopment efforts will displace some tenants.

"The Time Telling" joins two other mosaics by Al-Hadid created for 34th Street–Penn Station, "The Arches of Old Penn Station" and "The Arc of Gradiva," which were installed in 2019 on the mezzanine level.

ARTASIAPACIFIC

FRONT International: "Oh, Gods of Dust and Rainbows"

PAUL LASTER
SEPTEMBER 21, 2022



Installation view of Diana Al-Hadid's *The Time Being*, 2022, steel, polymer gypsum, fiber glass, Plexiglas, copper leaf, and jasmine, dimensions variable, at The Syrian Cultural Garden, 2022. Photo by Field Studio. Copyright Diana Al-Hadid.

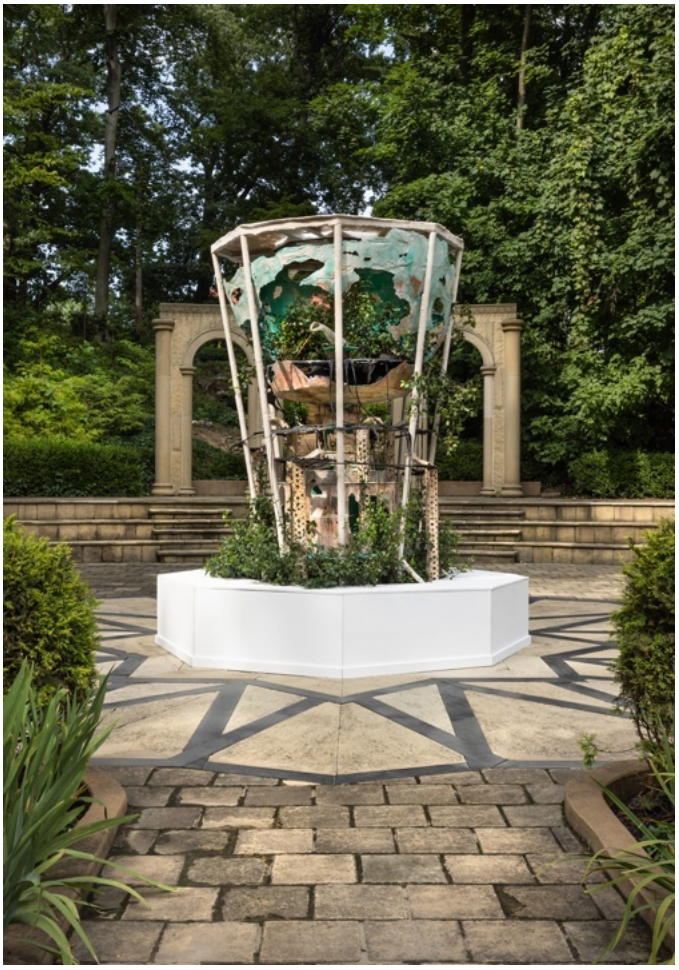
[EXTRACT]

Exceedingly ambitious, FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art made for a meaningful way to explore cultural sites in Ohio City and its surrounding area with an engaging program that explored art as an agent of transformation, a mode of healing, and a therapeutic process.

The name of the triennial's second iteration, "Oh, Gods of Dust and Rainbows," was taken from the first line of the poem "Two Somewhat Different Epigrams" (1957) by Langston Hughes, an African-American poet, social activist, and playwright who spent his teenage years in Cleveland and retained an artistic relationship with the region throughout his career. The sprawling show featured 100 local, national, and international artists working in a variety of media at nearly 30 venues in Cleveland, Akron, and Oberlin.

"The exhibition looks at how daily practice can allow individual artists to cultivate liberation through the everyday rituals of creations . . . it looks at how aesthetic pleasure—sharing joy through movement, music, craft and color—

can bring different people together," Prem Krishnamurthy, the artistic director of FRONT 2022, shared with *ArtAsiaPacific*.



Installation view of Diana Al-Hadid's *The Time Being*, 2022, steel, polymer gypsum, fiber glass, Plexiglas, copper leaf, and jasmine, dimensions variable, at The Syrian Cultural Garden, 2022. Photo by Field Studio. Copyright Diana Al-Hadid.

In another park across town, Diana Al-Hadid transformed a fountain at the center of the Syrian Cultural Garden into a symbolic ancient water-clock, based on Islamic polymath Ismail Al-Jazari's design for a scribe clock. The water-clock is surrounded with jasmine, the national flower of Syria.

sculpture

Diana Al-Hadid

MATTHEW KANGAS
JANUARY 25, 2022

Diana Al-Hadid, installation view of "Archive of Longings," 2021. Photo: Jonathan Vanderweit, Courtesy the Henry Art Gallery

"Archive of Longings," Diana Al-Hadid's current survey (on view through February 6, 2022), acts on two levels: as individual, autonomous sculptures both abstract and figurative and as a collective "archive" forming a series of passages and encounters fraught with peril, dismemberment, and death. Realized through extraordinary material accretion, Al-Hadid's works assemble countless fragments that struggle to coalesce into a complete whole. Unstable and shifting, they describe the movements and lives of displaced people—whether during the horrific civil war in the artist's homeland of Syria or in Europe at this moment—capturing the refugee's longing for home, while embodying more general ideas of borders, barriers, and destinations unattained.

The exhibition focuses on 13 works made between 2010 and 2021, generously spaced by curator Shamim M. Momin so that the huge, skylit gallery designed by the late Charles Gwathmey easily contains objects that need to be observed from all sides. How else to realize that the truncated bronze limbs, awkward and askew, semi-buried in *Subduction* (2019) and *Magmatic* (2018–19) uproot classical ideals with gestures drawn from catastrophe? Al-Hadid has replaced the cliché of the grasping hand with the more troubling reflexes of the human leg. This is one of her greatest strengths as a sculptor: she has assimilated all of Western art history, grafted it onto the brutal realities of seemingly never-ending carnage in the Middle East, and emerged with something viscerally powerful and heartrending.

Bleak resilience and survival in the face of human cruelty are dominant themes. Three *Blind Busts* (all 2012) are not immediately visible behind *Smoke Screen* (2015), one of several suspended metal and painted plaster filigree curtains. The *Blind Busts* play with and mar bronze with stainless steel struts, all dripping in oil paint, which serves as a stand-in for blood. The figures' dignity is further degraded by spoofing the nobility of pedestal sculptures and the classical world's elevation of the individual to the status of potential god. Not here: additional plinths placed atop each pedestal support an eroding head, head and shoulders, and head and neck, as if each bust were a stage of torture and execution. There is something both appealing and disturbing in these works, reminiscent of how we might disapprove of Francis Bacon's sensationalism but cannot look away.

The same could be said for the suspended curtain walls, which have a ceremonial character of flickering concealment and revelation. The crowds glimpsed in the shredded cascade of *Smoke Screen* could be charging into the unknown. The wall-mounted *Volcanic Split* (2018), which seems to abandon references to current events unless one sees it as an omen of climate change, displays a signature Al-Hadidian contradiction—the struggle to express the horrible without undue recourse to the beautiful. Its split rectangular forms recall Barnett Newman or Sam Gilliam more than Anselm Kiefer or Cy Twombly, too attractive to be scary. *Gradiva* (2017–18), which is not as convincing as the other works, exposes the hazards of a theater-set approach (front matters more than back) and dramatic spectacle; it seems alien to Al-Hadid's otherwise fully three-dimensional conception of sculpture.

Moving Target (2014) straddles paradoxes. Stepped like a staggering ziggurat, it impossibly magnifies steps to freedom and escape from the terror of violence. Gold drips give a heavenly quality that reinforces the dialectic between salvation and danger common to all these sculptures. Al-Hadid's pathway from work to work illuminates her brilliant trajectory over the past decade. The curtain screens, ghostly and insubstantial with pervasive drips, express the transitory and transient nature of her subjects. Given her themes, they are the only possible solutions for now.

HYPERALLERGIC

The Arches of Old Penn Station Return in Diana Al-Hadid's Subway Mosaics

The permanent installations line the mezzanines at the 34th Street Penn Station stop with fluid line work and ghostly presence.

ZACHARY SMALL
MAY 1, 2019

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Arches of Old Penn Station" (2018) (All images © Diana Al-Hadid, NYCT 34th Street-Penn Station, commissioned by Metropolitan Transportation Authority Arts & Design, photo by Peter Kaiser)

Everybody misses the grandiose interiors of the old Penn Station — even if you (like me) weren't alive to see it in person. But the ghostly shadows of that long-demolished pride of New York City are preserved in the mosaics of artist Diana Al-Hadid.

Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design for the mezzanine spaces at the 34th Street Penn Station subway stop, the permanent installation consists of two long murals. "The Arches of Old Penn Station" is an impressionist work of fluid line and turquoise tiling that recalls the latter-day bravura of the 1910 building, which was designed by the architecture firm McKim, Mead, and White. "The Arc of Gradiva" is based upon the literary work of the German author Wilhelm Jensen.

As New York prepares to demolish the current Penn Station — one of the world's most-despised transit hubs — the artist's murals will remind straphangers of a bygone America that once engineered its infrastructure for ease, aesthetics, and scale. It's a far cry from our current subterranean rat's maze constructed in the 1960s. The $1.6 billion

budget for a new station was finalized in 2017, but construction plans have stalled as financing commitments for the larger $30 billion-plus Gateway Project have floundered. Developers have long-predicted that construction would start in 2020, and that might happen if the $2 trillion infrastructure deal spearheaded by President Donald Trump, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) can pass the Republican-held Senate.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Arches of Old Penn Station" (2018)

There is an anticipation of change in Al-Hadid's murals, particularly for the one depicting the old Penn Station. The image of the bygone transit hub emerges form a hazy cloud of grey tiles like a memory fading back into view. It is a palimpsest upon the wall, a reminder of former glory and a bequest for a better future. The artist has created etch-like markings on the mosaic with thinly sliced white tiles, that reinvent the famous image of the station's concourse as a blueprint with perspectival depth and a hint of abstraction.

More cryptic is the artist's "Gradiva" mosaic, which takes its titular subject from an early-20th-century novel of the same name by the German author Wilhelm Jensen. The book is itself a reference to a Roman bas-relief of the same name, which was popular with intellectuals at the turn of the century. Sigmund Freud even kept a copy of the sculpture in his study, and later analyzed Jensen's novel in his 1907 essay, "Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva." The novel is a surreal story about an archaeologist fantasizing about the mythological female figure, later meeting the woman in what could be either reality or a dream. Freud took the story as an anxious expression of the subconscious pointing toward the main character's Oedipal complex.

All these details make for a surprisingly dense historical background for a public artwork plunked into the subway system, but it's not exactly a surprise for those who know Al-Hadid's oeuvre. Over the last few years, Gradiva has become a reoccurring reference in the artist's work, which often plays with concepts of perspective, time, and space. The Roman figure was last seen as a fiberglass and steel sculpture at Al-Hadid's 2018 exhibition inside Madison Square Park. Here and there, Gradiva is a symbol of undefined longing, a woman trapped between the annals of time, the real and the imagined. In her subway mosaic, Al-Hadid portrays the woman as a sweeping silhouette, a

ghostly penumbra that leaves a bluish cloud of smoke behind here in what appears to be a petrified forest of white trees.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Arc of Gradiva" (2018)

Reviewed as a diptych, each mural clarifies the other's intention. The arches of old Penn Station reference our will to recreate history; by contrast, Gradiva is an expression of our collective longing for the past, which remains as elusive and ill-defined as ever. What shape will the new Penn Station take when it comes, if it comes? And will we love it as much as the old station, which the majority of us have never personally experienced? The results are unclear, but Al-Hadid's new mosaics keep the dream alive.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Arc of Gradiva" (2018)

BOMB

Unstable Solids: Diana Al-Hadid's Delirious Matter by Rebecca Rose Cuomo

Dialectics of mass and void.

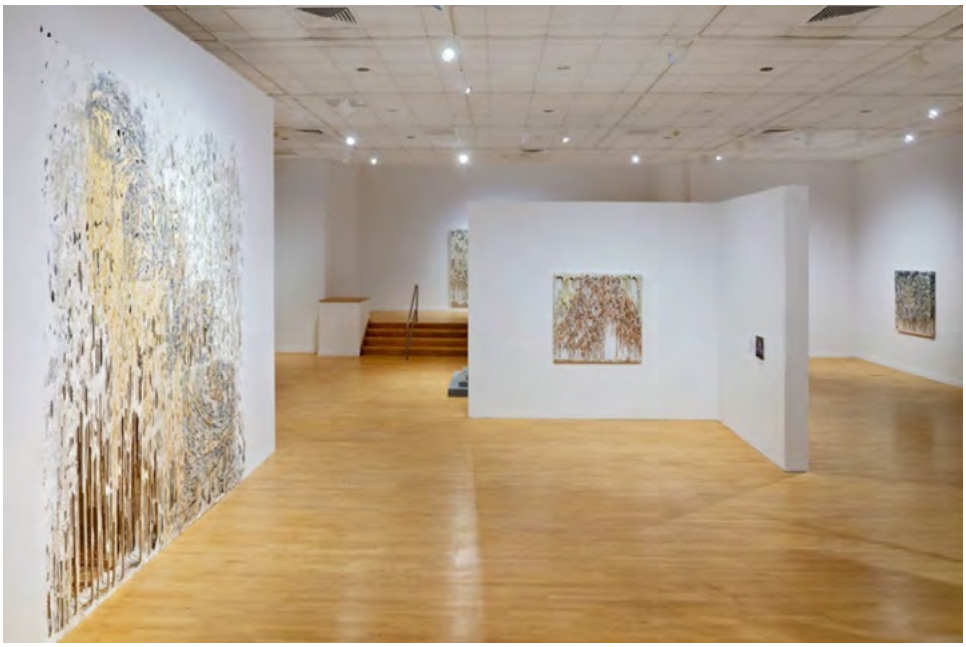
REBECCA ROSE CUOMO
OCTOBER 10, 2018

Nolli's Orders, 2012. Steel, polymer gypsum, fiberglass, wood, plaster, aluminum foil, and pigment. 156 x 264 x 228 inches. All images courtesy of the artist, Bronx Museum, and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. Photo credit: Stefan Hagen.

It is the apparent in-betweenness, the sense of transition, that is most striking about Diana Al-Hadid's exhibition Delirious Matter at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Al-Hadid's sculptures seem to melt or harden, caught in a chemical phase change from one state to the next. Whether things are passing from solid to liquid or vice versa is unclear. Her work is a reminder that the material world is unfixed and unstable—that matter, time, and space are alterable entities, subject to topological distortions, dilations, and transformations. Things are not what they are, but what they are becoming.

In Mortal Repose (2011) is a bronze sculpture of a headless woman whose lower body drips and dissolves down the stepped concrete plinth that supports her languid figure. Notably, the woman's feet are intact. They rest dainty and bare at the pedestal floor. Dressed in contemporary clothing, she is grounded in an eternal present, elegantly modern and self-aware in limpidity. The lost-wax casting process is fossilized in eloquent pours of liquefied metal cascading over cement. Sculpture merges with base, present flows into past. Bronze has a special way of preserving the past. It was during the Bronze Age, third in the development of material culture, that humans began working with metal. Writing was introduced then, as were the wheel and the plow. Much of what is known about these

ancient civilizations is through depictions that survive in bronze. The technique employed by Al-Hadid is similar to the one used by sculptors working four thousand years ago.



Left to right: *The Sleepwalker,* 2014. Polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, gold leaf, and pigment. Approx. 144 x 132 x 8 inches. *Make Haste Slowly,* 2018. Polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, gold leaf, and pigment. 48 x 48 x 3 inches. *Late Last Night,* 2015. Polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, aluminum leaf, and pigment. 48 x 48 x 3 inches.

Mob Mentality (2014), on the wall opposite *In Mortal Repose*, is a sculptural painting of sorts: a paradoxically diaphanous yet muscular object made of polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, gold leaf, and pigment. It is one of five such panels constructed through controlled drips and pours in which the solution is layered and worked to achieve the desired effect. This is where the direction of events could be confused. Despite the additive nature of the process, the surface seems subjected to corrosion, perhaps even burning—the product of violent subtraction, as if stripped down to its quiddity. The project appears to unsubstantiate the structure. Diffuse vertical striations trace the contours of an incorporeal volume, an internal depth illuminated by translucencies—the interplay of light and shadow through a lattice of congealed matter. It is in fact an accumulation, a growth, an object on the border. The porosity of *Mob Mentality* makes it hard to see.

This technique reaches a crescendo with Al-Hadid's installations. *The Sleepwalker* (2014) is a panel inset in the architectonics of the room, becoming part of the wall itself and creating a corridor to a smaller gallery behind. Dense with cross-cultural and trans-historical references, the subject is Gradiva, "she who walks," the young woman from an ancient Roman bas-relief who became a muse for novelist Wilhelm Jensen, Sigmund Freud, and the Surrealists. Seen from the front, Gradiva is sectioned into four parts positioned in a downward slope, emphasizing movement. Her image is luminous and ethereal behind a veil of gold leaf, the vision of a lucid dream. Shadows cast by stalactitic spills animate the other side of Gradiva's wall. This spatial passage offers an opportunity to reflect upon how natural and artificial landscapes influence and inform embodied experiences.

Al-Hadid sources from history, literature, the natural and social sciences, and memory to investigate intersections that materialize through exchange and appropriation. Exploring entanglements between the environment, built forms, the human body, and imagination, she reveals how they are fluid and changeable, instilled with distinct ways of knowing. *Nolli's Orders* (2012)—perhaps the most impactful work in the show due to its scale and visual

intricacy—is a monumental sculpture inspired by Giambattista Nolli's eighteenth-century map of Rome. Nolli's ichnographic plan revolutionized mapmaking standards, describing the city with unparalleled accuracy and detail. He reoriented the topography to magnetic north, showing his use of a compass to guide his gestures. He graphically distinguished between public and private space, engaged dialectics of mass and void, interior and exterior to produce a more experiential representation of urban space. Al-Hadid heightened the experiment, lifting it from two to three dimensions so that the work exists in a continuum of undulating, multifaceted planes. Figures extracted from Northern Renaissance and Mannerist paintings are planted on levitating ledges of frozen liquid. Like a baroque fountain at the heart of a piazza, the sculpture activates the gallery by encouraging visitors to move around it while challenging the certainty of what they perceive. Forms that initially appear whole reveal themselves to be ghostly shells and fragments from different angles. Superimposed and suspended, *Nolli's Orders* seems displaced from time and space, elusive and out of reach. Al-Hadid's practice discloses a reality of secretions, layered and complex—slow and destined to become heavy.

Nolli's Orders, 2012. Steel, polymer gypsum, fiberglass, wood, plaster, aluminum foil, and pigment. 156 x 264 x 228 inches.

HYPERALLERGIC

Diana Al-Hadid Studies Boundaries While Refusing to Obey Them

In her solo exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Al-Hadid continues to let the most elemental, universal facts of bodies morph into unique forms.

ANDREW SCHLAGER
SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

Diana Al-Hadid, "In Mortal Repose" (2011) Bronze and cast concrete, 190.5 x 194 x 178.8 cm (all images courtesy of the Bronx Museum)

The sculptor Diana Al-Hadid, her hands working under a brown cover, a potato sack used like a pillow case, is making a face. Her arms bob, the tarp pulses, she looks away, and the face under the cover forms. She cannot *see* what she is making. She doesn't care. Like a pianist she plays this burlap mass, as if *hearing* her art on her fingers. In this filmed studio visit, Al-Hadid explains that she doesn't look at the head she's sculpting because it's the "only thing on your body you can't really see." The claim, so simple, so belatedly obvious, satisfies until the ensuing

thoughts swarm: if the only head we can't see is our own, if this is the logic of self-perception, then is Al-Hadid sculpting her face as she cannot see it? Or is it another's face, as that other might sculpt it? Or is she suggesting that we warp even the faces of others because we cannot see our own?

In her absorbing show at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Diana Al-Hadid: Delirious Matter, Al-Hadid continues to let the most elemental, universal facts of having a body deform the bodies we have. The human figures that are found in the show are kind of anti-Pygmalions — not sculpture on the threshold of animation, but sculpture on the precipice of decomposing. Ruins are scattered throughout the show, and Al-Hadid delicately exhumes old sources without papering over their fractures. Her talent is to be clear without being clean, to study boundaries with care, without obeying them.

"Nolli's Orders" (2012), the show's largest piece and anchor, makes a soft allusion to Bernini's "Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi," displayed in the Piazza Navona in Rome, though the reference has dried up. Al-Hadid's waterless fountain drips over its edges, the actual material of which it is composed (plaster, polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel)] in icicle-like fragments, as if this fountain froze before getting turned off. Its theater is its dereliction. No burly river gods keep watch along the fountain. Instead, Al-Hadid has placed headless, isolated figures posed around the heap.

Diana Al-Hadid, "Nolli's Orders" (2012) steel, polymer gypsum, fiberglass, wood, steel, plaster, aluminum foil, pigment, 396.2 x 670.6 x 579.1 cm

The sculpture directly cites Giambattista Nolli's 1748 map of Rome, revolutionary for its use of shading to distinguish public from private space, and it epitomizes Al-Hadid's interest in the cartographic. Featured on a nearby wall, a segment of Nolli's map seems both blueprint and lost cause. As if executing his orders, Al-Hadid builds distressed, model-size Roman arches near the base, but as the sculpture rises, the arches melt. Al-Hadid models not just a fragment of a city, but a city's eventual decay — the future in which it ceases to matter, has been left to the elements.

The only reflective surface that mimics water is aluminum foil, conspicuously un-ancient and mass produced, cold in refrigerators. This material becomes the skin of the work and its preservation, as if, in a campy finish, the piece was pitched between relic and leftover.

Al-Hadid was born in Aleppo. Her family moved to Ohio when she was five. She knows how to layer and mix these histories of the classical and the contemporary; after all, artifacts from that part of the world are frequently moved from their original sites to new, temporary homes, sometimes stolen, sometimes saved. But here, pieces are jarringly decontextualized of their historical circumstances, as if stand-ins for an experience of immigration, of a new home.

Al-Hadid revisits her old house in the sculpture "Head In The Clouds" (2014). In it, a face adorned with a halo hovers above a coarse, tattered, almost non-anatomical body. It is a body without a situation. Fabric piles beneath the figure, who appears to be covered with a cloak or wings. This saint (or is it an angel?) rises high off its plinth. In an ecclesiastical allusion, this saint holds a model of Al-Hadid's childhood home in Ohio; in typical religious iconography, saints might hold models of dedicated churches as offerings to Christ. But this is no interventionist American angel, or patron saint of the American Dream welcoming immigrants with the prospect of home ownership. This ragged figure cuts across geopolitical myth. In this era of mass migration and displacement, what might it mean to sculpt, to reference the statuary, to meditate on movement with the stationary? Maybe Al-Hadid means to distrust our ability to ever fully arrive at the place we hope to go. Your house may still, may always, feel like a temporary model. You might feel like a place-holder, until the real you arrives.

Diana Al-Hadid, "Head in the Clouds" (2014) polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, foam, wood, plaster, clay, gold leaf, pigment, 330.2 x 142.2 x 127 cm

Headlessness recurs throughout the show: In "In Mortal Repose" (2011), a bronze, headless, legless body melts off of a cement plinth. Her bare arms and chest, in modern dress, lean at the top, while a pair of feet have fallen below. This piece anticipates three sculptures currently displayed in Madison Square Park, where Al-Hadid has a commissioned

exhibition running concurrently and under the same name as her indoor show at the Bronx Museum. On the park's lawns, three torsos, headless and legless, all titled "Synonym" (2017–2018), melt off of and into their bases, as if the sun had grown too hot.

Diana Al-Hadid, "Synonym" (2016) polymer modified gypsum, fiberglass, powder coated aluminum, pigment, 210.8 x 152.4 x 152.4 cm

Though dissolved, these figures have their genders preserved. A lost face might disturb a certain desire for individuality, but headlessness morbidly augments these sculptures' femininity. If we follow Al-Hadid's earlier logic in her treatment of heads, there's the trace of self-perception in these anonymous "Synonyms." Like a knot of wishbones, a body of ribs, they haunt the bronze sculptures of American Civil War figures, all men, with whom they share the park. These men's heads endure, but they are by no means easily recognizable. For their faces to have meaning, they depend on the names carved into the plinths and bases on which they rest.

The show also features a number of Al-Hadid's wall panels, with surfaces that appear as damaged or as frayed as her sculpture. One, "Late Last Night" (2015) suggests a cluster of anonymous yellow buildings. The gaps and holes here double as windows and arches in the buildings. Because you can see into the holes, the buildings take on a three dimensionality of architecture. Flatness is swallowed by the openings in the cityscape. If these look like paintings, they are leaking sculpture.

Al-Hadid's practice in these panels is entirely additive. She uses a "controlled dripping" to layer paint mixed with polymer gypsum, around which gaps and absences branch and pool. No material was removed. These holes form not from puncture, but from careful addition. What is missing is brought along with what is added. Each drip carries with it its contagious absence, wherever it trickles. There are pockets of emptiness, of nowhere or elsewhere, included in these places.

Diana Al-Hadid, "Head in the Clouds" (2014) polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, foam, wood, plaster, clay, gold leaf, pigment, 330.2 x 142.2 x 127 cm

It's as if this delicate play between the present and the missing reframes Al-Hadid's early emigration. Disintegration and assimilation edge each other. The threadbare abstraction of these panels frustrates any attempt to read these works too biographically, but Al-Hadid's wall pieces, even at their most rootless, remain intricate. She suggests that there's an intimacy in not belonging, of not settling in one world. If Nolli's cartographic innovation distinguished public from private space, we might say in Al-Hadid's mapmaking, where you *are* present contours where you might not belong. Our vision falls off as we see through her panels and her sculptures: where her material goes missing, so do our eyes. We are blind to where we are under the pressure of where we've come from. If Al-Hadid sculpts faces without seeing them, announcing how we fail to see our own heads, she puts places under erasure to show how we fail to inhabit them permanently.

The New York Times

Coming to Madison Square Park: Drippy Abstractions and Headless Figures

HILARIE M. SHEETS
FEBRUARY 8, 2018

For Diana Al-Hadid's installation this May, three life-size headless figures on plinths will be placed in Madison Square Park along with two 14-foot-tall lacy wall fragments.Credit Tony Prikyll/Marianne Boesky Gallery

Tracing how women have been depicted in art history as objects of purity or desire, Diana Al-Hadid will exhibit new architecturally scaled sculptures riffing off timeworn female types at Madison Square Park in New York this May. Titled "Delirious Matter," the show will be the first major outdoor public art project for Ms. Al-Hadid, a Syrian-born, Brooklyn-based artist, and will open in tandem with the presentation of her monumental 2012 sculpture "Nolli's Orders" at the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Known for her organic-looking plaster sculptures that can appear to be simultaneously eroding and growing, Ms. Al-Hadid is making two 14-foot-tall lacy wall fragments framed by hedgerows that create an outdoor room visitors can enter. One wall section is based on Hans Memling's painting "Allegory of Chastity" (circa 1475), in which a woman with arms folded politely seems bound at the waist by a mountain that also looks like her skirt. The facing segment is modeled on "Gradiva," a Roman bas-relief of a woman in midstride with swirling drapery that was elevated to a figure of fixation through the writings of Wilhelm Jensen and Sigmund Freud.

Works for “Delirious Matter” in progress in Ms. Al-Hadid’s studio. Al-Hadid Studio.

Using a signature process that she describes as “a blend of fresco and tapestry,” Ms. Al-Hadid painted her interpretations of these figures, which dissolve into drippy abstracted landscapes, using wet polymer gypsum tinted with pigment on her studio wall. Once dry, the material is peeled off and reinforced to make the free-standing walls.

“If you look back at old masters, you can extract a lot about the role of women, either encased in a giant pile of fabric or lounging horizontally — dead or fainting or sleeping,” said Ms. Al-Hadid. Three of her life-size headless figures on plinths, sited on smaller lawns around the park, will play off just such a woman in repose.

“Diana is a keen observer of historic works of art,” said Brooke Kamin Rapaport, deputy director and senior curator of Mad. Sq. Art at the Madison Square Park Conservancy. “These figurative fragments pivot between ruin and regeneration.”

Time Out

Diana Al-Hadid melds sci-fi and spiritualism at Madison Square Park

PAUL LASTER
MAY 22, 2018

Diana Al-Hadid, *Synonym*, 2017–2018 All photographs: Morgan Stuart

One of the most audaciously experimental sculptors working today, Diana Al-Hadid melds figurative and architectural elements into objects that seem to dissolve into thin air. Made of materials like gypsum and fiberglass, her apparitions also appear as if they draw upon the ancient past. "History is everything in my work," says the artist, who was born in Aleppo, Syria, before emigrating to Ohio. Her latest exhibition, "Delirious Matter," represents her first public art project and comprises four sculptures installed around Madison Square Park. On a recent outing there, Diana Al-Hadid discussed her installation and what it took to transform the public space into a phantom zone.

Why did you title your show "Delirious Matter"?

Delirious is a reference to the way I play with illusion, instead of being true to my materials. Matter represents the show's narrative framework, which in this case was inspired by an early-20th-century novel called *Gradiva*, by the German writer Wilhelm Jensen. I titled one piece after it. The story is about an archaeologist who becomes obsessed with a woman depicted in a Roman bas-relief. The book later became the subject of a psychoanalytic study by Sigmund Freud.

Does that have something to do with why the sculptures depict female figures?

To a certain extent. Gradiva is a woman on whom Jensen's protagonist makes all of these projections. You could say the same for art itself, which has often focused on the female figure. It's also a subject I'm comfortable with. I feel like I have a title to it.

Diana Al-Hadid, *Citadel*, 2017–2018

Could you talk about the piece for the park's fountain?

It's called Citadel and comes from Hans Memling's painting, Allegory of Chastity, from 1475. Memling depicts a virgin encased by the peak of a mountain. I think of Citadel as sort of the opposite to Gradiva—a stable figure, whereas Gradiva seems fleeting.

Some have described your work as resembling ruins. Do you think of it that way?

I've heard my sculptures portrayed that way, yes, but their appearance is more the result of my process than some point I'm trying to illustrate. I'm pretty rough with my materials, but my approach is additive, rather than subtractive in the way ruins are.

What about something else that has been said of your work—that it's apocalyptic in tone?

I don't think so, though I guess I understand people seeing it that way. Personally, I don't think we're living through some kind of end times or anything. I mean, I have a sense of humor. But, on the other hand, I do work the way I do.

It seems as if there's another dimension to your work that is equal parts sci-fi and spiritual. Is that more of what you're trying to convey?

I love sci-fi, and I'm fascinated by religion. I grew up a Muslim, and a lot of art history encompasses religion. I'm also totally fascinated by things that can't be explained. I'm drawn to the unknown, to the mysterious and esoteric. I'm more interested in what we don't know than what we do know.

How do you think visitors will react?

Not everyone is going to like the work, of course, and that's okay. It's okay for them, and it's okay for me. But they'll discover that it's considered art, and even if they don't agree, they'll know that it's something that can go in a park.

Diana Al-Hadid, *The Grotto*, 2017–2018

Diana Al-Hadid, *Gradiva,* 2017–2018

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

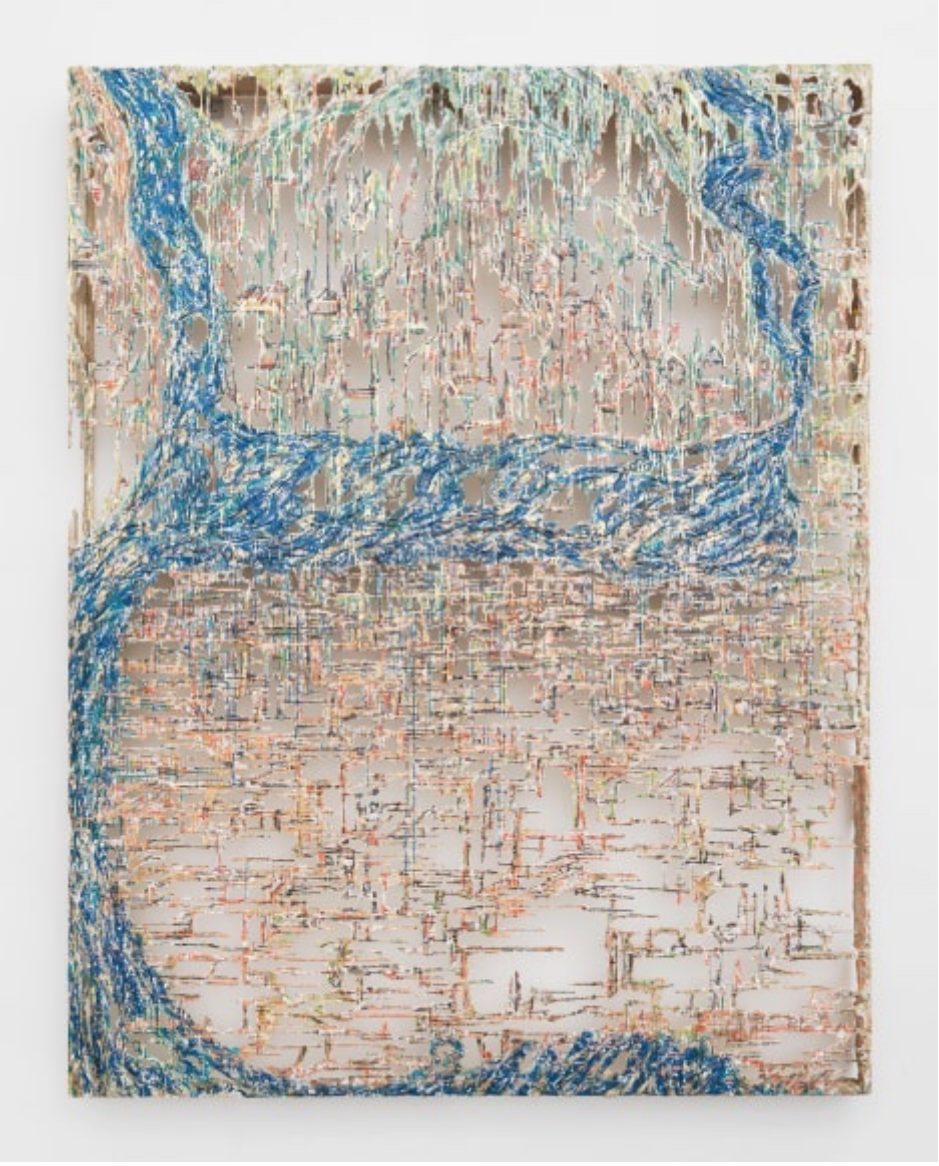
DIANA AL-HADID: Falcon's Fortress

STEVEN PESTANA
OCTOBER 21, 2017

Diana Al-Hadid, *Split Stream*, 2017. Polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, pigment, tape, gold and copper leaf, 58 x 64 x 3 inches. Courtesy the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Diana Al-Hadid. Photo: Object Studies.

In the Islamic Golden Age, Turkish engineer Ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari wrote a proto-Borgesian text called *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical* Devices (1206). This 13th-century collec- tion of fantastical engineering projects detailed, in straightforward language, instructions for creating fountains, automatic hand tools, timekeeping de- vices, and self-playing musical instruments. When contemporary sculptor Diana Al-Hadid came across these brilliant, poetic, and functional contraptions, she was galvanized to work towards new ways of working with space, physics, and materials in her own practice.

Diana Al-Hadid was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1981, and moved to Canton, Ohio, with her parents when she was five. While studying sculpture, she developed a style steeped in classical references, with particular influence from the Old Masters. Incorporating themes of antiquity and architecture into intricate, figurative tableaux, her work is distinctive for its simultaneous complexity and seeming weightlessness. She works with a repertoire of sculptural techniques—structurally reinforced white plaster "drips," exposed armatures of tarnished rebar, fancifully modeled representational objects, such as buildings and figures—that give the appearance of timeworn decomposition. When there is any color in her works, it tends toward neutral, lighter hues, as if aged. In 2010, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles hosted her installation *Water Thief*, a full-scale, non-functioning water clock. It was her first foray into exploring Al-Jazari's timepieces. With her new exhibition, *Falcon's Fortress* at Marianne Boesky Gallery, Al-Hadid has again taken on Al-Jazari's mantle. Inspired by the innovative spirit of Arabic wisdom from the 8th to 13th centuries CE, Al-Hadid's latest offering provides rich insight into her evolving creative process as she reconnects with her geographical and cultural origins.



Diana Al-Hadid, *Woven City*, 2017. Polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, tape, pigment, gold and copper leaf, 108 x 84 1/4 x 5 3/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Diana Al-Hadid. Photo: Object Studies.

In *The Candle Clock of the Swordsman* (2017), a seven-foot tall copper and brass armature is coated with a torrent of hardened candle drips. Beneath the armature is an elaborate matrix of chutes carrying ball bearings, which borrows its design from one of the candle clocks described in Al-Jazari's book. An early method of measuring time, candle clocks marked the passage of hours through the use of a burning candle connected to a counterweight via a pulley, which rose as the flame consumed the candle. The movement resulted in the periodic release of ball bearings that collected along a channel to indicate the hours. Al-Hadid was faithful to Al-Jazari's design, even including a decorative gilded falcon at its center-point. With outspread wings, it emits the ball bearings from an opening in its beak. However, in its idiosyncratic details, such as the exaggerated excess of melted wax, the sculpture is also a space of play for Al-Hadid's material explorations. The "wax" is, in actuality, a plaster blend of Al-Hadid's own concoction. Hazily iridescent clouding, remnants of the welding process, lend a rustic and distressed patina to the frame's metallic surface. The overall effect is as though the piece was unearthed from an architectural dig, with wax accumulated at its base, as if it remained functioning for centuries. While the sculpture no longer keeps time, its machinery rendered inoperable by Al-Hadid's aesthetic flourishes, it did briefly work. As a tribute to the early astronomers and cosmic time-trackers of the Islamic Golden Age, Al-Hadid ceremoniously dedicated its only run to this year's solar eclipse. The falcon motif recurs throughout the exhibition, appearing in two additional sculptures—*The Candle Clock of the Scribe* (2017) and *The Candle Clock in the Citadel* (2017)—as well as in *The Falcon in the Mirage* (2017), a polymer-gypsum wall panel. In this sculpture, a resting falcon is perched within an oval vignette, superimposed over an aerial view of inverted palm trees. Like the other wall panels in *Falcon's Fortress*, it bursts with vivid, shimmering copper surfaces.

Most of the panels *in Falcon's Fortress* took inspiration from the 16th-century Ottoman illustrated manuscript, *Menazilname*. Its author, Matrakçi Nasuh, was a Bosnian mathematician, geographer, calligrapher, polyglot, man of arms, and miniaturist. *Menazilname* documented Nasuh's time as an infantryman on a military campaign, during which he painted the locations of his army's encampments and major cities along the expedition's route. While leafing through a modern reproduction of this text, Al-Hadid recognized a familiar visage: the Citadel of Aleppo, painted in Nasuh's meticulous hand. Damaged but still standing today, the Citadel is nearly identical to how Nasuh saw it hundreds of years ago, even after Syria's devastating civil war. In *Falconer's Fortress*, it reappears in two untitled drawings on Mylar, but its form can be made out more clearly in a third work, a large polymer-gypsum wall panel. The Citadel is depicted on the left, nestled into a bustling urban landscape. The work is titled *Home Base* (2017); in this expression, Al-Hadid acknowledges a debt of gratitude to her heritage. It is not only an homage to Nasuh, but also to Aleppo, its fortitude and longevity.

HYPERALLERGIC

The Past and Present of a Syrian-American Artist

Diana Al-Hadid is a cherished former student who is moving beyond talent into something much deeper and riskier, what Emerson called "the science of the real."

GREGORY VOLK
OCTOBER 14, 2017

Diana Al-Hadid, "South East North West" (2017), polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, gold leaf, copper leaf, painter's tape, pigment, diptych: 130 x 168 x 5 inches 330.2 x 426.8 x 14 cm Each panel: 130 x 84 x 5 1/2 inches 330.2 x 213.4 x 14 cm (all photos courtesy the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery and © Diana Al-Hadid. All photos by Object Studies)

Full disclosure: Diana Al-Hadid is a cherished former student of mine, exemplary and adventurous. As a second-year MFA candidate in sculpture when I began teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2004, she sought me out, requesting to audit my Critical Issues seminar (she couldn't officially enroll because she had too many credits). I agreed, with one caveat: She had to do the same copious amount of work as the other students — all the eclectic readings and intensive class discussions, all the comprehensive engagement. This she did, with aplomb.

We also had many studio critiques, basically every two weeks for much of one year. I witnessed at close quarters the origins and development of what is sure turning out to be a deeply compelling and strikingly idiosyncratic artistic vision, and I don't use that word "vision" lightly.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1981, Al-Hadid immigrated as a five-year-old child to Ohio, where she grew up in an Arabic-speaking Muslim family. She has thus long negotiated her way between two vastly different worlds — the West and Islam; heartland America and Syria; box store, fast food, high school football, family car Ohio, and Syria, both ancient and modern, the seat of multiple civilizations with millennia's worth of historical remnants and architectural traces.

This negotiation is also essential for her art. I recall one studio visit when an in-process sculpture (I think it was largely made of plaster built around some scaffolding) was threatening to overwhelm her entire studio. With its slopes and indentations it suggested rolling hills — akin to parts of the Ohio landscape — but it equally suggested architecture, a brittle archaeological fragment writ large, and the weathered surfaces of ancient structures. Back then it was apparent that Al-Hadid wasn't intent on making "successful" (an art school word that always makes me cringe) sculptures catering to the endless crits and discussions in grad school, or to the whims and fashions of the art world. Her focus was instead on creating crazily ambitious sculptures that arise from her deepest self and ultimately engage in dialogue with the world — her world — based on her very particular experience.

While at VCU — and this has certainly continued into her professional career —Al Hadid's favored materials were not high end and splendid but Home Depot(ish) and quotidian, among them plaster, cardboard, aluminum foil, and paint. Even back then it was apparent that she had an extraordinary, almost alchemical ability to coax these bare-bones materials into startling and at times spectacular and enthralling sculptural forms. She also imbued them with acute thought, involving eclectic research.

This ability has only increased through the years. "No ideas but in things," the great poet William Carlos Williams counsels in his poem "A Sort Of A Song," thus fusing thought with the material world (or, as he put it in his poem, using "metaphor to reconcile the people and the stones"). This seems very close to what Al-Hadid has long been up to with her thought-filled, heavily material art, and it underpins the various works in her impressive new exhibition, *Falcon's Fortress* at Marianne Boesky Gallery.

There is nothing overtly political about this exhibition, which features three decidedly eccentric (to say the least) sculptures; a set of mesmerizing wall panels made by the controlled dripping of polymer gypsum and other sundry materials, which leaves small gaps and wider openings across the surface; and willfully scruffy yet gorgeous mixed media drawings (Conté, charcoal, pastel, and acrylic) on Mylar, but it's gratifying to witness the way the show subtly turns the tables on the frothing-at-the-mouth, profoundly ignorant, ban-the-Muslims crowd.

Al-Hadid's inspiration for her new body of work involves two Muslim visionaries, towering figures in the Islamic world but little known in the West. One is Al-Jazari (1136-1206), the Arab polymath and mechanical engineer whose brilliant *Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, chronicling (and giving instructions for) his many inventions ranging from water-pumping systems to functional candle clocks, predated Leonardo da Vinci by almost 300 years. The other is Bosnian Matrakçı Nasuh (1480-c. 1564), likewise a genius polymath — mathematician, cartographer, expert swordsman, and painter of gorgeous, intricately detailed miniature panoramas of the cities, villages, fortifications, and landscapes of the far-flung Ottoman empire, notably the cities encountered by the Ottoman army during Suleiman the Magnificent's Safavid War of 1532-1555, involving a long march between Istanbul and what is now Baghdad, and back.

Al-Hadid's multi-tiered "The Candle Clock of the Swordsman" (2017) features a candle-like form at the top, with molten candle wax (it's actually gypsum) spilling down the sides; a gold falcon (tinged with green) perched, wings

spread, in the middle; various small balls made of cast plastic and metal leaf and a white base with incisions, so that parts of it seem to be flowing or dripping.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Candle Clock of the Swordsman" (2017), modified polymer gypsum, fiberglass, brass, copper, steel, concrete, polyurethane foam, wood, plaster, lead, bronze, metal leaf, pigment 94 x 88 x 88 inches

It isn't at all a faithful reproduction of one of Al-Jazari's clocks (which kept accurate time via the decreasing weight of burning candles and the release of the small balls). It's a riff on one of those clocks: essentially, Al-Hadid absorbed Al-Jazari's design into her distinctive sculptural aesthetic — which is at once exquisite and unruly, graceful and rugged — and the work is a total marvel.

This is the only one of the three sculptures in the show that Al-Hadid intended to actually function, sort of. Prior to the exhibition there was a real candle at the top, which, when lit, and after it burned down for a couple of hours, actually released one of the small balls, then another.

Al-Hadid had timed the working of her clock to coincide with the August 17 total solar eclipse, thus alluding to the Islamic world's centuries-old engagement with astronomy (this information is in the press release and available to the public). Later, candle and wax were replaced by fabricated versions.

The falcon, which is made of cast polymer gypsum and fiberglass, with additional metal, foam, and metal leaf, is riveting. It's a version of a bird but it also functions as a powerful and mysterious totemic force. Falcons appear in the other sculptures too, and also in the wall panels, sometimes overtly, sometimes via subtle hints. It's as if this totemic

bird is traversing the different works in the exhibition, but also flashing across a vast expanse of history and time, uniting present and deep past.

A falcon appears near the bottom of "The Candle Clock in the Citadel" (2017), this time with a gold ball issuing from its chest. Way above, there is a candle and cascading gypsum "wax." Scraps of architecture and a protective outer sheath (also hinting at architecture) are derived from Nasuh's miniature of Aleppo's famous citadel — an architectural and historical treasure and long the city's central landmark—which has been gravely damaged during Syria's civil war.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Candle Clock in the Citadel" (2017), modified polymer gypsum, fiberglass, brass, copper, steel, concrete, polyurethane foam, plaster, lead, bronze, metal leaf, pigment 117 x 90 x 73 inches

Pouring in a centrifugal whirl toward the floor, Al-Hadid's absorbing, extraordinarily complex sculpture, while static, feels chock-full of wild motion, poised on a cusp between intricate cohesion and impending decay. Like many of Al-Hadid's works it is also curiously mobile in time. It's fresh and eventful, but also seems crusty and precarious, almost like an unearthed archaeological relic. It may well be the case that this sculpture, launched by an exquisite miniature made several centuries ago, responds to Aleppo right now, this renowned city punished by warfare and wantonly wrecked by the brutal Assad regime.

For a New York audience, the big news from this exhibition is the opportunity to see a generous selection of Al-Hadid's remarkable wall panels, which are extremely novel variations on paintings. Instead of applying brushstrokes to canvas or wood panels, she orchestrates drips, spindly strands, and other mostly thin shapes made of various

materials (along with polymer gypsum, she has used fiberglass, steel, gold leaf, copper leaf, and pigment). These drips are the brushstrokes, so to speak, for three-dimensional “paintings” sans supports, which you look at but also through, because of their many open spaces The panels seem to almost float on the walls.

Each is based on an image (a reproduction) of one of Nasuh’s miniatures, but not obviously so. Al-Hadid magnified and reoriented the images, often inverting and rotating them, before weaving them, so to speak, into sculpted, hybrid “paintings” that are partially abstract but that also suggest architecture, architectural fragments, landscapes, and maps. Al-Hadid’s process of controlled dripping, during which she rotates the panels, allows for a gravity-defying array of activity: drips that flow up, for example, or sideways; forms that sweep across at an angle, almost like a visible wind.

In “Home Base” (2017) an irregular blue band from top to bottom conjures a river sluicing through the landscape. It’s surrounded by hints of columns and walls, houses and distant hills. Step back to take it all in and this teeming work seems full of ragged splendor. Step up close and you get enthralled by details: luminescent parts abutting subdued, earth-toned ones; little glinting bits of silver and gold; vivid, yet tiny, dabs of russet and ocher.

Diana Al-Hadid, “Home Base” (2017), polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, aluminum leaf, gold leaf, pigment 86 x 120 x 5 ½ inches

As with the other wall panels, this one suggests a tapestry, threadbare in parts, as well as a partially eroded fresco or mural. In the large diptych, “South East North West” (2017), blue bands again conjure rivers, while myriad accompanying shapes suggest clustered buildings and fecund vegetation. Even though huge, at 130 by 168 by 5 inches, and presumably weighty, this work, with its many openings, seems diaphanous, almost ethereal.

There is a large oval opening on the left of “The Falcon in the Mirage” (2017) and while it suggests outright damage — a hole in a painting or tapestry, say, or a blank space in an eroded fresco or mural — it equally suggests a portal providing access to some other dimension, a conduit to the remote past. It takes a while (or at least took me a while)

to realize that the white, gray, and gold, seemingly abstract form at the bottom of the oval is another falcon, with attenuated vertical gypsum strips jutting from its back and head, endowing it with a sort of magical energy.

Diana Al-Hadid, "The Falcon in the Mirage" (2017), polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, plaster, copper leaf, pigment 84 x 108 x 5 ½ inches

There is something very dear and touching about this bird, at once powerful and vulnerable, as it surveys a "landscape" that seems both wrecked and wondrous. Here you see how expansive Al-Hadid's eclectic techniques really are, as they embrace world-shaping forces of cohesion and entropy, regeneration and decay. Also, while Al-Hadid's wall panels arise from a complex engagement with Nasuh's miniatures, and by extension with the so-called "golden age" of the Ottoman Empire, it's likely that her strong feelings for her childhood homeland — especially at this time of utmost distress — are crucial to her new work.

Completing the exhibition are three of Al-Hadid's drawings on Mylar. Each is a complex, all-over mesh of lines, shapes, and muted, yet still vivid, colors. Although largely abstract, these drawings contain abundant hints and traces of architecture, landscape, and figures, and while quiescent — even meditative — on one level, the more you open yourself to them the more you register how crackling and agitated they really are.

For me, the joy in being a professor is witnessing (and somehow being a part of) an obviously talented young artist's progress, moving beyond talent into something much deeper and riskier, the kind of questing authenticity that Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay "The Poet" (1844), wonderfully termed, "the science of the real." (This essay was in fact the introductory and foundational text of the seminar that Al-Hadid audited.) That's what I experienced with Diana Al-Hadid years ago, and it is what I have experienced again, in droves, with her scintillating and deeply meaningful exhibition.

Los Angeles Times

Review: Diana Al-Hadid sculptural paintings: Such beautiful decay

SHARON MIZOTA
MAY 3, 2015

"Sinking and Scaffolding" by Diana Al-Hadid, 2015.(Diana Al-Hadid / Ohwow Gallery)

The drip becomes form in Diana Al-Hadid's latest work at Ohwow Gallery in Los Angeles. Known mostly for sculpture, the Brooklyn artist has more recently created wall works in which the paint appears to be floating on air. In nine pieces, including one spectacular, site-specific piece, Al-Hadid filters Renaissance imagery through the lens of drippy abstraction and decay. Her work is beautiful and technically marvelous.

Al-Hadid creates her works by "painting" in polymer gypsum, fiberglass and plaster, forming a loose image in trails and drips over a wall-like support. She then pries the image off the backing, resulting in a stiff, lace-like scrim. It's like a fossil of a painting.

Her imagery, often highlighted with gold leaf, is abstract and gestural but refers to Renaissance-era subjects: aristocratic or religious portraits, a rendering of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, Italy. With Al-Hadid's signature technique, these images appear to decay before our eyes, as if they are literally being eaten away. The drip itself is a form of decay, tracking time that has passed since the touch of the painter's brush.

There's something theatrical and almost operatic about this work, and Al-Hadid brings us further into the drama with a stunning archway built into the wall between two galleries. Here, we literally walk through the painting as it rains down over our heads.

VOGUE

Artist Diana Al-Hadid on Fate, Form, and Freud—and Her New Exhibition at the Secession in Vienna

The Syrian-American artist Diana Al-Hadid on fate, form, Freud, and her new exhibition at the Secession in Vienna.

THESSALY LA FORCE
SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

All photos by Mark Peckmezian

"Maybe you can help me out," Diana Al-Hadid says to me with a soft smile on her face. She's standing in the single air-conditioned room of her East Williamsburg studio in front of a desktop computer. It's late summer, and final decisions must be made for her upcoming exhibition at the Secession in Vienna, Austria. Namely, she needs to decide on a title. "There is a danger to titles," she notes with a tilt of her head. "There is something nice about them, but it can be another mark on the piece." She also needs to decide which of her early sketches should be included in the catalogue. Over the past few weeks, a large installation she created for the exhibition—consisting of a large

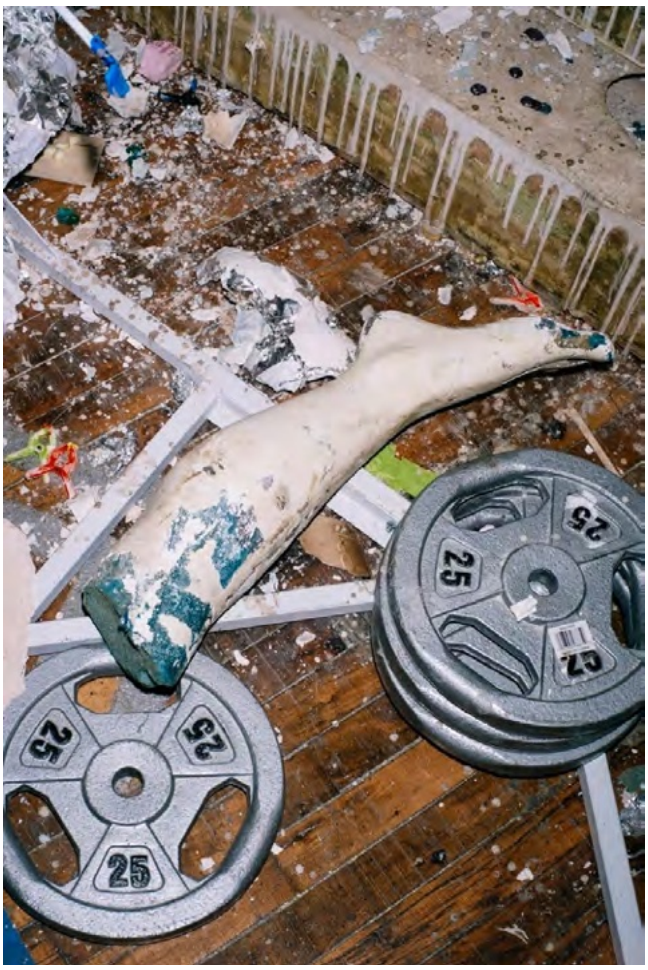
interlocking arrangement of sculptures and additional panels—has been shipped off to Europe, and in the heat of the summer, you can feel the negative space that its departure has created throughout the studio. The opening date, September 11, feels awfully close, but Al-Hadid is very calm about all the loose ends and unanswered questions.

That might be her point. Al-Hadid, who is 33 years old, has been working on the installation for the last two years, between creating other works of art at a prolific pace. With the Vienna installation in particular, she wanted to take her time, to let the idea come to her without knowing exactly where she was going or what she was doing. "I really didn't set up to understand it," she explains. "I didn't have anything to understand. I wanted to start from scratch—it was really raw. I was interested in what you gravitate towards without being too conscious of it." As she explains its various components (using materials such as gold leaf, steel, wood, plaster, and fiberglass), it's impressive to hear how much she trusts her peripheral vision as an artist—how she lets certain narratives or references speak to her, slowly, and allow their importance to bubble up through her subconscious.

"We started with this figure," Al-Hadid says, pointing to the bust in the center of the piece. "She was this woman I had laying around—she was almost decomposing in the studio." Al-Hadid is referring to the cast of a mold for a sculpture called *Antonym* that she showed two years ago at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York. She kept the cast, and over time, as it began to acquire a Duchamp-like patina from plaster fillings and studio dust, the form began to haunt her imagination. "I had this residual person in my studio, which is kind of gross, but her surfaces looked a lot like my drawings," she says. "It was decomposing and rotting, but it was also kind of beautiful because I had worked on it so much." Al-Hadid set the figure floating on a pedestal and became fixated with creating several layers and playing with opacity, eventually filling in the space around her with what she called "razor-thin puddles"—even leaving a discombobulated leg trailing off behind the bust.

The female form is referenced more subtly in a separate panel of the installation—and it reveals a bit more of the gears turning inside Al-Hadid's mind. The form in question belongs to Gradiva, a fictional figure, here deconstructed, sliced into four parts, like a "stutter," according to Al-Hadid. The character of Gradiva (the "woman who walks") originally appeared in a 1903 novella by the German writer Wilhelm Jensen, but was popularized by Sigmund Freud four years later, in a 1907 essay about dreams and delusions. The story goes something like this: A

young archaeologist discovers a Roman bas-relief of a beautiful woman walking. He falls completely under her spell. Writes Jensen: "He could not explain what quality in it had aroused his attention; he knew only that he had been attracted by something, and this effect of the first view had remained unchanged since then." It "attracts him so exceptionally," Freud writes in his subsequent summary of the novella, "that he is delighted to be able to get an excellent plaster-cast of it which he can hang up in his study in a German university-city, and study with interest." Soon, the archaeologist begins to see Gradiva everywhere—he thinks he recognizes her feminine gait in a woman walking down the street. He has a vivid dream that he encounters her in the ancient city of Pompeii. Later, we learn that the archaeologist's obsession with Gradiva is rooted in a repressed memory of a childhood love. "Freud thought of this as a metaphor for the psychoanalytic process," adds Al-Hadid.



When asked if Al-Hadid's fascination with Gradiva might explain on some subconscious level her attraction to using the cast from *Antonym*, the artist beams. Jensen's novella illustrates how obsession can manifest itself subconsciously by an attraction to a particular form, repeated over and over in different settings and states—just in the way the archaeologist believes he sees Gradiva wherever he goes, both in the flesh and in rubble, in present day and also in the past. "She is a little bit of a double," Al-Hadid says. "She's the same as Gradiva—that's good, good. She's the castoff—I didn't excavate that from my mind." She laughs. "I didn't think, 'She's the first one, she's the one that made the mold. She's the original.' Funny!"

Al-Hadid loves to reference art from centuries past, and she shares another one of her starting points for the installation: a well-known oil-on-wood painting called *Allegory of Chastity*, by Hans Memling, which depicts a

woman piously standing in the center of an imposing mountain. Al-Hadid used the image to create one of the panels. “It’s the weirdest painting ever, maybe not the weirdest ever, but she is emerging from a mountain,” Al-Hadid says, shaking her head in wonder. “She is cut and pasted, grafted onto this mountain, like it’s her body part—I mean, to have a mountain as gaping hole. . . ”

Asked why she’s drawn toward artwork from centuries past,she pauses, searching for an answer that never comes. Later, when I ask her what led her to become an artist in the first place, her assistant enters the room and, overhearing us, insists that Al-Hadid show me her juvenilia. Al-Hadid opens another file on the computer, unveiling early sketches and drawings she made when she was in high school, well after she immigrated to the United States from Syria, where she was born. One is a remarkably precise rendering of a little girl with a ponytail, her head resting on her chin, glasses slipping down the bridge of her nose. Al-Hadid lets out a hearty laugh and recalls the inspiration: She was copying an advertisement. “My big creative moment was getting rid of the Crayola marker she’s holding in her left hand,” she says. I remark on how painstakingly detailed it appears. “I was trying to be a Northern Renaissance painter,” she says, after a pause. “I was trying to be van Eyck. I never thought about that. Maybe that’s the attraction.”

Everything in Al-Hadid’s approach feels unencumbered by pretense or an overbearing sense of purpose. What comes to her as an artist simply becomes part of the work; her need to explain the idea is less necessary than expressing it. Later, when I write to ask her if she’s decided upon a title, she responds that she has. She has decided to call it “The Fates.”

Los Angeles Times

Art review: Diana Al-Hadid at the Hammer Museum

LEAH OLLMAN
MAY 28, 2010

Diana Al-Hadid's work invokes the texture of time. Her sculptures present themselves as archives of a sort, remnants of material history, akin to Jedediah Caesar's. And much like Kristen Morgin, Al-Hadid revels in the sensuality of ruin and decay. In her first solo museum show, at the Hammer, she teams nostalgia with creative energy, filling the lobby gallery with an installation equal parts romantic poetry and mechanical engineering.

"Water Thief" is a marvel and a mess — mostly the good kind of mess, born of generative activity, the kind that defines a construction site or artist's studio. Working in polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, polystyrene, plaster, wood and paint, Al-Hadid builds a dense, nearly monochrome complex of fossilized spires, gears, channels and wheels. Momentum spirals upward in a stiffened cyclone, and yearns downward in thick curtains of coated strings that drop from the undersides of several forms. Pipes and troughs convey once-viscous, tinted plaster aqueduct-style from the upper edge of the gallery walls down through the various components of the structure below.

The piece was inspired by a 13th-century Syrian water clock (Al-Hadid was born in Aleppo, and now lives in Brooklyn), and more generally by a spirit of invention and architectural aspiration rooted in the past. "Water Thief" lacks the concentrated potency of Al-Hadid's more discrete works, but its diffuse chaos has its own curious beauty. Mostly the color of bone and pale, pitted stone, the installation conjures a sense of ingenuity, a timeless force and momentum that animates body, spirit and mind.