

States of Matter

On Display

by Claire Howorth



Al-Hadid in her Brooklyn studio, used polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel plaster and paint.
Portrait by Misha Taylor

THERE'S A SAYING that the past meets the present at a museum, and that's exactly how the artist Diana Al-Hadid stumbled upon one of her creative antecedents. Three years ago, when she was showing her work at Dallas's Nasher Sculpture Center, she walked past a trio of rare wax and plaster heads by Medardo Rosso, the Italian sculptor who died in 1928. Like Rosso, Al-Hadid works with plaster and wax and mixes materials. The figures captivated her—and quickly became the inspiration for a show of Al-Hadid's work opening at New York's Marianne Boesky Gallery this month.

"They were so beautiful," says the Syria-born, Ohio-raised Al-Hadid. "I didn't even process why I liked them, I was just so taken."

According to Boesky, the two sculptors share a tension "in unfinishedness, and beautiful decay." (Indeed, many of Al-Hadid's works look like ruins or unfinished buildings.) Rosso and Al-Hadid both reached

success at young ages. For her 32 years, Al-Hadid's talent and ambition are "shocking," says Boesky. "I was expecting a much older artist," the gallerist recalls of visiting Al-Hadid's Brooklyn studio several years ago. "Instead, I was met with this young, energetic and deeply serious person. And I was struck by her hands—true worker's hands." (Her left displays a sparkling Art Deco diamond ring from her husband, the architect Jonathan Lott.)

In the past two years alone, Al-Hadid's work has appeared in 10 shows internationally, five of them solo exhibitions. After the Boesky show, the Vienna Secession exhibition hall will display her work. Several royal families in the Middle East collect her pieces, which are also in the Saatchi and Judith Rothschild collections.



Like a Man on a Hill Over a City (2013), Approx 60 x 96 Inches

While she is known for ceiling-grazing, deeply intricate architectural structures, many of Al-Hadid's newer pieces—some of which will show at Boesky's gallery—blur the boundary between sculpture and painting. Lining the periphery of her Brooklyn studio are what Al-Hadid likes to call her "panels"—wet materials poured into and shaped on a flat backing, which she peels off once dry. The finished pieces look as if they have plaster and metal dripping down planes of air into the frames. "Something that looks like it should be liquid is solid," she says. All of Al-Hadid's work appears to be delicate, possibly disastrous to touch, but she knocks on some plaster drizzles to prove their sturdiness. Physical strength, according to Boesky, is another trait Al-Hadid and Rosso have in common (though Al-Hadid will never casually trade her sculptures with Rodin, as Rosso once did).

"My dream conversation with him would be something really geeky and about material," she says, imagining a meeting with Rosso. "We'd talk shop."