

Austria Bound



With the support of Vienna's Secession, artist Diana Al-Hadid enters fearless territory.

BY MARINA CASHDAN

PORTRAIT BY ANDREW MUSSON

"I wanted to be an artist since I was around 11 years old," says Diana Al-Hadid. "I didn't really know what that meant—but I was very serious about it." In the airy East Williamsburg studio where she works, the 33-year-old Al-Hadid crafts large-scale sculptures out of wood, steel, fiberglass, and plaster—media that make up "the core DNA of the work," she says. She has been working with these materials since graduate school, as well as "high and low" items including aluminum foil, cardboard, concrete, and gold leaf. Together, they form beautifully layered, tactile structures that feel one part archaeological dig, another part mythological fantasy.

The artist's panels achieve a similar dissonance, giving the appearance that color is suspended in midair. It's this ethereal quality that has made Al-Hadid one of today's most sought-after emerging artists, and among the youngest to be represented by New York art dealer Marianne Boesky. "When I was introduced to her work, [I was] instantly amazed at the sculptural complexity and visual impact," says Dr. Annette Südbek, who curated Al-Hadid's exhibition at Vienna's Secession (on view from Sept. 11 to Nov. 2).

Al-Hadid will make her mark on the home of the storied Vienna Secession, an artists'

union established in 1897 by an avant-garde group of Austrian painters, sculptors, and architects including Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, and Josef Hoffmann. Südbek explains that the chapel-like building, which features Klimt's "Beethoven Frieze" (1902), "has a long tradition of site-specific interventions."

Al-Hadid's show comprises mostly new works, anchored by two sculptures, one of which reaches all the way to the ceiling. "I imagine the light will become an important protagonist," says Südbek, who points to the textures and shapes in Al-Hadid's work that will be intensified by the natural light, which will change over the course of the day and the show's run. The main sculpture positioned in the center of the space will be surrounded by two of the artist's large-scale panels, and the show will be completed with her bronze sculpture "Blind Bust II" (2012). Taking inspiration from Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858–1928) and writer Wilhelm Jensen's fictional character Gradiva, Al-Hadid will realize her vision with the support of an ambitious curatorial team. "They're fearless," she says of working with them. "They're really about supporting an artist's vision and figuring out how to get it done."

Diana Al-Hadid at her studio in Brooklyn.