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In a New Show, Diana Al-Hadid Breathes Life Into 'Dangerous Things'

BY GRACE EDQUIST

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Diana Al-Hadid's sculptures are a masterclass in duality. They seem both ancient and modern, fierce and delicate, simultaneously growing and disintegrating—reminding us there is no such thing as a fixed state. It's art of the *both-and*. "In all senses, I'm interested in the literal and metaphorical, the specifics and the general," the New York-based artist says.

In "Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things," her debut solo show with Kasmin Gallery, on view in Chelsea now through December 22, Al-Hadid presents almost two dozen sculptures, Mylar drawings, and works on paper pulp that embrace these dichotomies. In her hands, industrial materials such as polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, and bronze coalesce into entirely new worlds that confront notions of identity, function, and home. It's work to take time with, up close and in person.

Like Al-Hadid's earlier work, this collection, made over the last five years, references mythology, architecture, art history, and religious motifs of Islam and Christianity. In *The Bride in the Large Glass* (from 2023, the title a nod to Duchamp), a figure in a cloak-like garment holds forth in Kasmin's main gallery space. Regal and haunting, her head is some kind of Celtic cross. Her cloak, made of delicately overlaid strands of bronze, seems an impossibility: It's gothic but light and airy, like moth-eaten gauze that somehow stands up on its own. "I was trying to make bronze not feel so heavy and fixed, and I wanted to build it by hand," Al-Hadid says. The garment pools in the back, like lava, with hints of gold glistening in the light.

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The Bride in the Large Glass is pictured at front left. *Mother Splits the Moon* in back middle. Photo: Courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

Warda (2023), another bronze piece, sits on a plinth in the gallery's small side room. Cast in homage to the root ball of a jasmine plant, it is the "perfect metaphor for the immigrant," Al-Hadid says. She was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1981 and moved to suburban Ohio with her family when she was five years old. She had to plant new roots once again when she moved to New York, where she has lived and worked for the last 16 years. The root ball is turned upside down, with its bronze fingers stretching up and out: a deeply human call for connection.

Suspended from the ceiling—a first for Al-Hadid—is the type of large-scale sculpture she is perhaps best known for, and which has garnered her acclaim as one of the most interesting sculptors working today. Made of towering spindles of blue, gold, and ivory, *Mother Splits the Moon* (2023) plays with space both vertical and horizontal, interior and exterior. Using gypsum, fiberglass, and her other signature materials, Al-Hadid outlines a woman reclining, taking up the entire height of the room. One corner is anchored by two vertical slabs of honeycomb in an L shape. The violence of the present day heavy on my mind, it looks like the innards of a bombed-out building.

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Diana Al-Hadid, *Blue Medusa*, 2023. Mixed media. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin Gallery.
Photo: Christopher Stach

Al-Hadid makes smaller works as well, though they are no less dynamic. Scattered along the gallery walls are her Mylar drawings and paper pulp works, the latter made while Al-Hadid was a resident at the nonprofit Dieu Donn  in Brooklyn. The Mylar drawings (which had a “liquidity” about them, she says) contain metallic ink, echoing so much of the golden glow in the show’s other pieces. The wall-mounted works often reference mountains and caves—which trace back to mythological tropes as well as geological formations the artist saw on trips to the Middle East throughout her childhood. Medusa and her volcanic rage are embedded throughout as well. It feels good to scream along with her, even if only in your head.

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Diana Al-Hadid, *Untitled (Mountain Series)*, 2023. Conté, charcoal, pastel, acrylic on mylar. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin Gallery. Photo: Christopher Stach

Do not miss Kasmin's rooftop sculpture garden along the High Line, where two pieces nestle among the native grasses. The body of a bronze headless woman slowly melts and drips down the side of the concrete pedestal of *In Mortal Repose* (2011), while *Double Standard* (2022) conjoins symmetrical headless bodies at the neck, one rightside up, one upside down.

Al-Hadid's inventions seem to burst forth from another world, one of her own meticulous creation. She follows her compulsions and lets her materials interact with space and form, allowing something entirely new to emerge. It's art that misbehaves. May we all be so bold.

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Diana Al-Hadid, *Double Standard*, 2022. Bronze. © Diana Al-Hadid. Courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin Gallery.
Photo: Charlie Rubin

“Diana Al-Hadid: Women, Bronze, and Dangerous Things” is open at Kasmin Gallery, 509 West 27th Street in New York City, through December 22, 2023.

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