

Long road to ruin in a burning world: the work of Syrian American artist Diana Al-Hadid

February 14, 2022 at 11:02 am | Published in: Asia & Americas, Interviews, Middle East, Syria, US



Diana Al-Hadid [Diego Flores]

Naima Morelli  naimamorelli

February 14, 2022 at 11:02 am



We inhabit a burning world, where everything is constantly dying while also being alive, brightly so. From our emotions to our thoughts and feelings, from our bodies to the plant and animal kingdoms, everything is decaying from the moment it comes into being. This is the concept of the Burning World according to some Buddhist doctrines, and also the first impression I had when seeing the half-rotten body casts melting into crumbling architecture, the work of Syrian American artist Diana Al-Hadid.

Hadid's work combines something very old with something very new, seamlessly, revealing the underlying unity. Hence, when I look at a sculpture-installation such as "Nolli's Orders", an epic assembly of steel, polymer gypsum, fibreglass, wood, foam, plaster, aluminium foil and pigment, what comes to mind along with the burning world concept are lines from the song "Long Road to Ruin" by the rock band Foo Fighters:

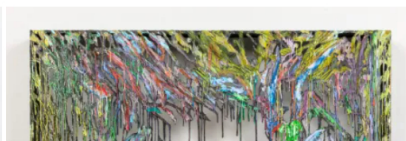
Long road to ruin there in your eyes

Under the cold streetlights

No tomorrow, no dead end in sight

Floating in tar: interview with Palestinian artist Hani Zurob

Life is indeed a long road to ruin, and it's hardly the first time that the sculptures of Diana Al-Hadid have evoked such images, especially when we know that the artist grew up in the US, but was born in Aleppo in 1981. The Aleppo to escape from, the Aleppo where past civilisations are stacked on top of each other, mocking the fictitious boundaries within which historians want to confine epochs, even while it is all destroyed by bombs and bullets: "If you look at history at close range the boundaries are so distinct, but when you pull back you realise that in Aleppo, there are all kinds of Hellenistic ruins everywhere and different civilisations have left a footprint," says Hadid. "It is interesting and it's a tricky thing to incorporate consciously into your work."



TRENDING THIS WEEK

- 01** **News**
Footage shows kidnapped Syrian boy, 6, being beaten
- 02** **Article**
UK government welcomes genocidal apartheid upholders
- 03** **Article**
The rise of Hindutva fascism belies India's claim to...
- 04** **News**
Israel to establish 'triangle of relations' with India, UAE
- 05** **News**
Turkey threatens to block international news outlets in media...

Stay Updated

Subscribe to receive our newsletters straight to your inbox.

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Subscribe

LATEST NEWS

February 15, 2022 Israeli aggression in Sheikh Jarrah needs agreed resistance programme

February 15, 2022 Israel imposes travel ban on Sheikh Raed Salah

February 15, 2022 Hamas' Haniyeh, Mustafa Barghouti meet in Qatar

February 14, 2022 Taliban call on Biden to reverse move to halve frozen...

February 14, 2022 Jordan condemns Israel's aggression in East Jerusalem

February 14, 2022 Israel lawmaker opens office in disputed East Jerusalem area

February 14, 2022 Algeria sentences former Energy Minister to 20 years in prison...

February 14, 2022 Former Tunisia PM, Marzouki, calls on opposition to find alternative...

LATEST VIDEOS





She once said that it's funny how much of an effort we make as a civilisation to restore history; how much effort we put into restoring ancient frescos from a particular district in Istanbul, for example, "Then in one moment, we wipe out an entire population in Syria. That kind of stuff really resonates. I feel like that fantasy to restore the past is so deeply ingrained in us and it's also irrational and it's impossible. There's only so far we can go, unless we figure out space travel. There's something that's always lost. You kind of have to, at some point, accept it."

And so, in their Pollock-like dripping, Hadid's upside-down sculptures, with canvases melting on their frames, can't help but demonstrate a reality that overflows from historic segments. Using a variety of non-organic materials, she recreates an unrestrainable process of decomposition and sprouting. Organic is a fitting word for her process, as she works on her sculptures mindlessly, unburdened by the complex conceptual apparatus that is so in vogue in contemporary art. That makes her like the mythological Parca, serving destiny, making, or rather producing, as she garners great personal success, integrated perfectly into the contemporary art world.

Hadid emigrated from Syria to the US at the age of five. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2005, since when she has held a number of collective and solo exhibitions in both museums and commercial galleries. She is described by many as one of the more significant artists of her generation, and there is no denying that she has established herself as someone who has the authority to draw from art history. From sculptor Bernini, to Pompeian frescos, up to the ancient figure of the Gradiva, the antique Roman bas-relief which became a trope of 1800 psychoanalytic literature, in her work she embeds a broad range of references subtly from both her Western and Middle Eastern backgrounds. In some of her architectural work we can even find a gothic element reinterpreted in some fantasy key, a Lord of the Rings-type sensation of unbelievable sadness when faced with the vastness of the eternal life of the elves, the ruins of something that has survived through the ages.

Painting in Arabic: the life and work of the late Lebanese artist Etel Adnan

In using layers of colour that run and dry as the pigment drips, she makes her original source almost unrecognisable, fragmenting the matter and then covering it under layers of plaster. She often uses first-hand materials, including images of things that she photographs herself, places she has visited, or even interiors of her studio. "In the end, the source is rather obscured and the original details are entirely lost," she says. "I have a simultaneous love for and disregard of the sources of my panels. I take from them what I need and I do my best to ruin them."



Among her reference points is Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858-1928). While their work was produced decades apart, it was exhibited side by side at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York under the title "Diana Al-Hadid: Regarding Medardo Rosso". In the show, the two sculptors appeared to engage in a dialogue questioning traditional practice and exploring two-dimensional concepts in a three-dimensional sphere, using wax and bronze, manipulating and pushing the material. Rosso's smiling or crying faces look like nothing, and at the same time, encompass all things that matter. His sculptures of more than a century ago, look like formless, shapeless, pieces

NEXT ASSASSIN'S CREED GAME TO BE SET IN IRAQ'S CAPITAL BAGHDAD

The next instalment of the Assassin's Creed (AC) video game franchise will be set in the Iraqi capital Baghdad...

Dubai's Burj Khalifa lit up with the Turkish flag

News
Israel occupation forces attack Sheikh Jarrah residents

Afghan refugees in UAE protest for 3rd day calling for...



Order now

Writing Palestine

Celebrating the tenth year of the Palestine Book Awards

THE MAKING OF HAMAS'S FOREIGN POLICY

DAUD ABUDELLAH

It is a must read for anyone engaged with the Palestine issue and interested in an honest introduction to this important Palestinian movement.

- Prof Ilan Pappé

Order Now >

things that matter. His sculptures of more than a century ago, look like formless, shapeless, pieces of materials. They could even be rocks on a beach, in which the casual passer-by could find forms and features, as people do when watching clouds.

"I have a tendency to build in a spontaneous way," says Hadid. "Messy and rough around the edges. I have the sense that it's partly in my personality to make work that looks ruined. It feels like it comes more out of my personality or out of my process than it comes out of a conceptual framework, or kind of a commentary about the psychology of ruins, which is fascinating."

Speaking about her process, the artist says that for her it's about finding the edges of something very carefully and slowly, mapping it out. "The materials have a different internal logic or some different story. I like the recklessness of chance. It's nice to start with some mess and then cultivate it into something more. Everyone seeks order in chaos. It is something that I tend to balance a lot in my work."

And so in the world of Diana Al-Hadid we enter a suspended present dimension — made visible — where we can't help our reality from burning and crumbling around us. We just have to accept that everything is melting before our eyes; that we are indeed on our road to ruin, finally and with no tomorrow, and no dead end in sight, as Foo Fighters put it so succinctly.

Art as a force for Libyan women's empowerment: interview with Shatha Sbata

Categories [Asia & Americas](#) [Interviews](#) [Middle East](#) [Syria](#) [US](#)

0 Comments | [Be the first](#)

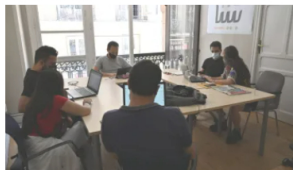


Unless otherwise stated in the article above, this work by [Middle East Monitor](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). If the image(s) bear our credit, this license also applies to them. [What does that mean?](#) For other permissions, please [contact us](#).

Spotted an error on this page? [Let us know](#)



Related



As a journalist in war-torn Syria you feel no fear, it dies within you
July 13, 2021



'Little Palestine': How History Will Remember Assad's Siege of Yarmouk
October 10, 2021



'I want to make beauty from this ugliness', says Gaza's first calligrapher artist
July 16, 2021



Writing Palestine
Celebrating the tenth year of the Palestine Book Awards
Order Now

[SHOW COMMENTS](#)

Latest Opinion Pieces [Read our blogs & in-depth articles](#)



Article
Putin wants to turn the clock back and must be reined in
February 14, Dr Amira Abo el-Fetouh



Article
Espionage is a dirty game that Israel plays with impunity
February 14, Yvonne Ridley



Article
Crisis within crisis: Refugees' energy crisis
February 14, Elif Selin Calik



Article
UK government welcomes genocidal apartheid upholders
February 12, Muhammad

[More Opinion →](#)



African Union

Africa must not abandon Palestine by granting Israel AU observer status

February 15, 2022



Article
PUMA sportswear is being urged to axe its football sponsorsh...
February 11, Yvonne Ridley



Hussein
Article
Palestinian Central Council lost the trust of Palestinians l...
February 11, Motasem A Dalloul



Article
Palestinian President is following footsteps of Arab Dictato...
February 11, Dr Ali Abo Rezeg



Article
With near consensus over Israeli apartheid, will UK Labour m...
February 11, Nasim Ahmed



Article
Rayan's story between politics, economics and the news ...
February 11, Feras Abu-Helal



Blog
UN's Guterres ensures Palestinian independence remains ...
February 11, Ramona Wadi

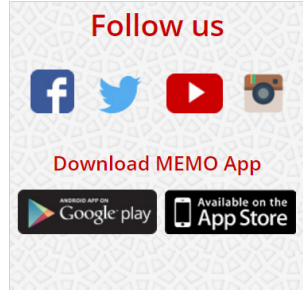


ENGAGING THE WORLD

THE MAKING OF HAMAS'S FOREIGN POLICY

DAUD ABDULLAH

Order Now >



Latest Updates

Columnist

Regular Contributors

Reports & Resources

Stay Informed

Middle East Monitor

Africa | Asia & Americas | Middle East | Europe | Book Reviews | Event Reviews | Film Reviews

Dr Daud Abdullah | Ramzy Baroud | Kamel Hawwash | Amelia Smith | Yvonne Ridley | Asa Winstanley | Guest Writers | Interviews

Anjuman Rahman | Nasim Ahmed | Omar Ahmed | Jehan Alfarra | Khalil Charles | Ibrahim Hewitt | Muhammad Hussein | Maha Salah | Ramona Wadi

Briefing Papers | Fact Sheets | Reports | Documents | Interviews

Facebook | Twitter | Youtube | Instagram

About Us | Palestine Book Awards | Editorial Guidelines | Legal Pages | Press Releases | Privacy Policy | All Stories Archive | Contact Us

Creating New Perspectives

Middle East Monitor is owned and operated by Ardi Associates Ltd
© Ardi Associates Ltd 2009-2022. All Rights Reserved | Legal Pages | Privacy Policy

MEMO
MIDDLE EAST MONITOR