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The MSU Broad Art Museum Debuts New Works by Artist Diana Al-Hadid in Summer Exhibition

‘unbecoming’ questions constructions of femininity and the social expectations of womanhood

East Lansing, MI — Sculptor Diana Al-Hadid defies centuries-old conventions of femininity and womanhood in “[unbecoming](#),” on view June 7-Dec. 14 at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum). The survey exhibition features large-scale installations that consume the gallery and push visitors to adjust to their presence, standing in stark contrast to antiquated social norms that define a becoming woman as subtle and quiet.

“Women are often told not to take up space, whether that’s by physically getting out of the way, not sharing their opinions or being told to limit their emotions or reactions,” said Rachel Winter, Ph.D., assistant curator. “Taking up space puts a woman at risk of being deemed unbecoming. Diana Al-Hadid’s ‘unbecoming’ invites visitors to rethink how expectations for women and definitions of unbecoming have taken shape over time and to embrace the unbecoming as full of potential.”

“unbecoming” showcases nearly two decades of Al-Hadid’s career and marks the debut of four new works, a reinterpretation of Al-Hadid’s “The Seventh Month” (2015) and a new series of three works inspired by Scheherazade and Dunyazad in “One Thousand and One Nights.”

Al-Hadid’s work draws on diverse sources ranging from art history and Greek mythology to global literature. Often, narratives about women, even when seemingly told by them, are filtered through the male gaze and penned by authors who enforce narrow definitions of femininity. Al-Hadid’s visual language emerges from an astute sense of materiality that culminates in specific abstractions and reinterpretations that offer a counterpoint to these ideas. The works defy how we think about both materials and sculpture and, in turn, work to unravel the ways of thinking we may consider normal.

Several objects in the exhibition challenge ideas about familiar artworks and stories.

“Lionless” (2013), “Hindsight” (2020) and “Deluge in the Allegory” (2020) explore Hans Memling’s 15th-century painting “Allegory of Chastity,” which depicts a shy virgin guarded by lions. Al-Hadid’s works address ideas about purity’s alignment with the idea of a becoming woman.

Al-Hadid turns to Greek and Roman mythology to explore ideas about women’s emotions in “Blue Medusa” (2023), “Mad Medusa” (2023) and “Night Medusa” (2023). Medusa is traditionally defined by her rage and frightening appearance, which can turn people to stone. Al-Hadid portrays her as soft and liquid and challenges notions that deem women’s anger as socially unacceptable.

Visitors to “unbecoming” will also see Al-Hadid’s “Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz” (2006), on view for the first time in the U.S. in almost 20 years.

“The experience of seeing Diana Al-Hadid’s newest work goes hand in hand with seeing ‘Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz,’ which is one of the first large-scale sculptures she made after completing her graduate studies. While the work is significant in many ways, it can also be seen as marking the start of her professional career as a sculptor, and throughout the exhibition, we get to follow her journey across nearly two decades of work,” said Winter.

Based in New York, Al-Hadid works prolifically between painting, sculpture and, more recently, handmade paper. Born in Syria in 1981, Al-Hadid moved to the United States as a child and grew up in Ohio. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Kent State University and a Master of Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University.

“The MSU Broad Art Museum has increasingly been focused on the role of the Midwest in shaping larger narratives in the arts and contributions to culture more broadly. In partnership with Diana Al-Hadid through this exhibition, we continue this work while highlighting one of the most significant artists working today,” said Steven L. Bridges, interim director of the MSU Broad Art Museum. “We’re very proud to present the artist’s first solo exhibition in Michigan, which brings forward important and timely conversations around notions of femininity and womanhood while also celebrating her roots.”

“unbecoming” is organized by the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University and curated by Rachel Winter, Ph.D., assistant curator, with support from Laine Lord, former curatorial research assistant. Support for this exhibition is provided by the Eli and Edythe Broad Endowed Exhibitions Fund. Support for the accompanying publication “Diana Al-Hadid: unbecoming” is made possible by Kasmin Gallery, Lisa Applebaum and April Clobes. The museum also extends a special thanks to Kasmin and Dieu Donn  . Dieu Donn   is the leading non-profit cultural institution dedicated to serving emerging and established artists through the

collaborative creation of contemporary art using the process of hand papermaking.

“Diana Al-Hadid: unbecoming,” a forthcoming publication from Kasmin Books, explores the artist’s practice with a curatorial essay by Winter, a conversation between Winter and Al-Hadid and an essay from art writer and editor Cassie Packard that examines the broader scope of Al-Hadid’s practice. The book is edited by Winter and Molly Taylor, director of communications at Kasmin, and distributed by Distributed Art Publishers.

The MSU Broad Art Museum is open Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Admission is always free. Learn more at broadmuseum.msu.edu.

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The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum) connects people with art through experiences that inspire curiosity and inquiry. Presenting exhibitions and programs that engage diverse communities around issues of local relevance and global significance, the MSU Broad Art Museum advances the university values of quality, inclusion and connectivity. Opened on Nov. 10, 2012, the museum was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Zaha Hadid and named in honor of Eli and Edythe Broad, longtime supporters of the university who provided the lead gift for its creation.

Michigan State University (MSU) has been working to advance the common good in uncommon ways for more than 150 years. One of the top research universities in the world, MSU focuses its vast resources on creating solutions to some of the world’s most pressing challenges, while providing life-changing opportunities to a diverse and inclusive academic community through more than 200 programs of study in 17 degree-granting colleges.

Dieu Donn  is the leading non-profit cultural institution dedicated to serving emerging and established artists through the collaborative creation of contemporary art using the process of hand papermaking. Since 1976, Dieu Donn  has introduced artists to the untapped potential of hand papermaking as an art medium. Through extensive collaborations with Master Papermakers, Dieu Donn  works with artists from a wide variety of practices to explore the creative possibilities in hand papermaking — fostering experimentation and producing innovative works of art. Dieu Donn  strives to teach a new visual language, providing a transformative experience that often leads to artistic breakthroughs.

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Diana Al-Hadid, "Spun of the Limits of my Lonely Waltz," 2006. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York



Diana Al-Hadid, "Mad Medusa" (detail), 2023. Photography by Charlie Rubin. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York



Diana Al-Hadid, "Blue Medusa," 2023. Photography by Charlie Rubin. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York



Diana Al-Hadid, "Deluge in the Allegory," 2020. Photography by Timothy Doyon. Image courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York