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Art review: Diana Al-Hadid at the Hammer Museum

May 28, 2010 | 9:30 pm

Diana Al-Hadid's work invokes the texture of time. Her sculptures present themselves as archives of a sort, remnants of material history, akin to Jedediah Caesar's. And much like Kristen Morgin, Al-Hadid revels in the sensuality of ruin and decay. In her first solo museum show, at the Hammer, she teams nostalgia with creative energy, filling the lobby gallery with an installation equal parts romantic poetry and mechanical engineering.



"Water Thief" is a marvel and a mess — mostly the good kind of mess, born of generative activity, the kind that defines a construction site or artist's studio. Working in polymer gypsum, fiberglass, steel, polystyrene, plaster, wood and paint, Al-Hadid builds a dense, nearly monochrome complex of fossilized spires, gears, channels and wheels. Momentum spirals upward in a stiffened cyclone, and yearns downward in thick curtains of coated strings that drop from the undersides of several forms. Pipes and troughs convey once-viscous, tinted plaster aqueduct-style from the upper edge of the gallery walls down through the various components of the structure below.



The piece was inspired by a 13th-century Syrian water clock (Al-Hadid was born in Aleppo, and now lives in Brooklyn), and more generally by a spirit of invention and architectural aspiration rooted in the past. "Water Thief" lacks the concentrated potency of Al-Hadid's more discrete works, but its diffuse chaos has its own curious beauty. Mostly the color of bone and pale, pitted stone, the installation conjures a sense of ingenuity, a timeless force and momentum that animates body, spirit and mind.

— Leah Ollman

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