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Boucheron Honours Emirati Artist Maitha Abdalla at the MENART Fair 2026

The Emirati artist will receive the Maison's first Coup de Cœur Boucheron at MENART Fair 2026 in Paris, where she will unveil her new bronze sculpture, Hug My Land

What makes a place feel like home? Is it the familiarity of its surroundings, the memories we associate with it or the people who make us feel that we belong? For Emirati artist Maitha Abdalla, the answer is far less tangible. "Sometimes you can feel completely at home somewhere unfamiliar, and sometimes you can feel like a stranger in a place you have known your entire life," she reflects. It is this contradiction that lies at the heart of *Hug My Land*, her latest sculpture, unveiled at MENART Fair 2026 in Paris, where she becomes the inaugural recipient of the Coup de Cœur Boucheron.

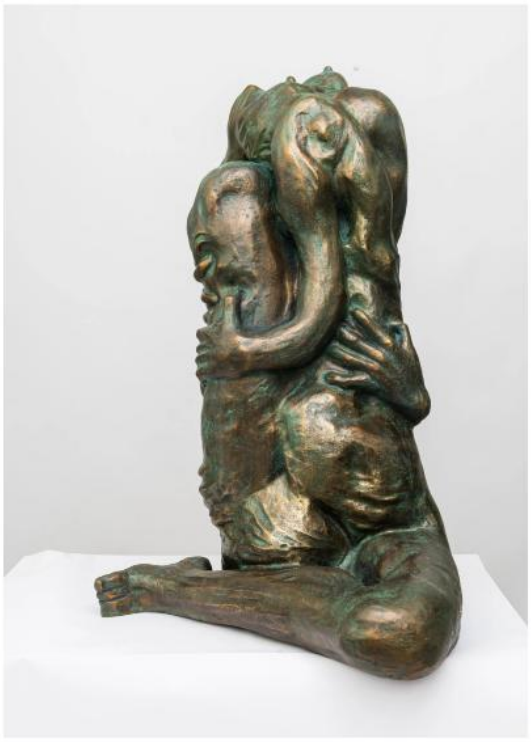


Introduced by the French high jewellery maison in partnership with MENART FAIR, the award celebrates female artists from the Middle East and North Africa whose work challenges conventions and offers new perspectives. For Abdalla, whose practice has long examined the intersection of memory, mythology, and the human psyche, the recognition carries a deeply personal significance. "There's something very beautiful in getting recognised for something that started as a very intimate and personal thought," she says. "What moves me most is the moment of external connection, when the idea surpasses the self and something so personal becomes meaningful to someone you have never met."

Born in Sharjah in 1989, Abdalla has developed a multidisciplinary practice spanning painting, sculpture, film and performance. Her work frequently inhabits the space between reality and imagination, drawing on folklore, rituals and inherited narratives to explore the complexities of human experience. Having exhibited at the Venice Biennale, Sharjah Biennial 15, and the Lyon Biennale, her artistic language remains deeply connected to her upbringing. "The UAE is where I first learned to dream, and perhaps that is the most important thing a place can give an artist," she shares.



Hug My Land, Maitha Abdalla



Hug My Land, Maitha Abdalla

In *Hug My Land*, those ideas take on a particularly intimate form. Cast in bronze and standing approximately one metre tall, the sculpture depicts a woman folded into herself, her arms wrapped tightly around her body. Created in response to MENART FAIR's 2026 theme, *Where is Home?*, the work began as a meditation on our emotional attachment to places before evolving into something more introspective.

"What if home isn't always somewhere we go back to? What if it is also something we are trying to find within ourselves?" Abdalla asks. "The gesture is at once tender but also almost desperate. Perhaps she is holding herself because she has finally found comfort within, or perhaps because she has nowhere else to turn."

The female body has long served as a recurring motif in Abdalla's practice, becoming a vessel through which emotions, memories and contradictions take physical form. Here, it represents both vulnerability and protection. "An embrace can be an act of love, but it can also come from fear. We can hold ourselves out of tenderness, or because we are trying not to fall apart," she explains. "In *Hug My Land*, the woman becomes both the one seeking shelter and the shelter itself."



The sculpture takes on a broader resonance against the backdrop of MENART FAIR's exploration of displacement, identity and belonging. Founded in 2021 by Laure d'Hauteville, the Paris-based fair has become an important platform for contemporary art from the Middle East and North Africa. Boucheron's partnership with the fair, established in 2024, reflects the Maison's commitment to championing female creativity and artistic freedom.

For Abdalla, presenting her work internationally is less about translating an Emirati perspective than creating an opportunity for connection. "I come from somewhere, the viewer comes from somewhere else, and for a moment we meet in the strange little world that the artwork has created," she says.

Ultimately, *Hug My Land* offers no definitive answer to the question of belonging. Instead, Abdalla invites viewers to recognise something of themselves in the figure's embrace. "Perhaps someone will see loneliness, someone else will see tenderness. Someone might see a woman protecting herself, while another might see someone who is longing to be protected," she reflects.

And perhaps that is the sculpture's most poignant suggestion: that home is not always a place we return to, but something we carry within ourselves. As Abdalla puts it, "I don't know if home is something we find or something we spend our lives creating. Perhaps it is both."