

Born in Beirut in 1925, Etel Adnan is a painter and writer, widely recognized as one of the foremost authors, poets and playwrights of her generation in the region. Leaving Lebanon in 1949, she studied literature and philosophy first at the Sorbonne and then at Harvard University in the late 50s. Adnan later settled on the Californian coast, a landscape that has inspired many of her paintings and writings, where she began teaching until the early 70s. The daughter of a Greek mother and a Syrian father, Adnan says in an interview with Hans Ulrich Olbrist “there’s a duality in my life as in my thinking, and it works because I accept it rather than favouring one side or the other. It’s a dialectical movement.”

The show will include both earlier and recent paintings, makimonos, and tapestries, in addition to videos by and in tribute to the artist. Painting on small intimate canvases, her minimalist work radiates an honest simplicity reflective of the purity and straightforwardness of her expression. Her provocative palettes verge on abstraction, while her abstract colour studies suggest a kind of interior landscape, a testimony of her adage “Colour is the sign of the existence of life”. (1986, Journey to Mount Tamalpais).

Her artistic career started in abstract painting in the late 50s, focusing on strong lines and red squares, a recurrent point of reference in her earlier paintings. Landscapes later entered her work, marking a certain transition in Adnan’s work and the start of a long relationship with Mount Tamalpais. Adnan asserts that the mountain is not a static form,, it changes with time, with seasons, climates and the observer’s perspective reinforcing her vision of the world and the universe as the all-encompassing connection between living-beings.

Adnan has written many books of poetry and fiction, including *Paris When It's Naked*, *Of Cities and Women*, and *Sitt Marie Rose*, which has been translated into over ten languages and is considered a classic of Middle Eastern literature. She combines illustrations with modern language in many of her works, including *The Arab Apocalypse*. Upon discovering the Japanese leporello format, an accordion-folded-out booklet, Adnan found an outlet to combine drawings with writings and poems and allowed her “to get out of the page as a square or a rectangle; it was like writing a river”.

Adnan blends and fuses the many disciplines, finding poetic expression in her paintings, and creating a forceful sense of imagery in her poetry. Writing across languages and continents, she has long been a singular voice in the cultural discourses of the Middle East, and painting has always been a key component to her artistic work. Leading a life of no constraining national, social, or creative boundaries, her expression has a resounding sense of freedom. She writes: "Abstract art was the equivalent of poetic expression; I didn't need to use words, but colors and lines. I didn't

need to belong to a language-oriented culture but to an open form of expression.” (1996, *To Write in a Foreign Language*).

Her work has been shown in various venues around the world, including solo exhibitions at Sfeir-Semler Gallery in Hamburg (2012) and Beirut (2009). She was a featured artist in the most recent Documenta XIII in Kassel, Germany (2012). Her work is in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Mathaf, Doha, Qatar.

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