

Etel Adnan



Beirut, Lebanon, 1925 - Paris, France, 2021

Writer and artist Etel Adnan began painting in the early 1960s. Widely known for her poetry, novels and plays, she moved fluidly between the disciplines of writing and art and was a leading voice of contemporary Arab-American culture.

Her elemental colour field compositions exude an intense energy, recalling the late French landscapes of Nicolas de Staël or the paintings of Paul Klee. During her time in California, Adnan began to focus on the surrounding landscape, in particular Mount Tamalpais which was visible from the windows of her home. Like Cézanne's relationship with Mont Sainte-Victorie, the mountain became an immutable reference point which she drew incessantly, capturing its ever-changing moods and dynamic at different times of day, in all seasons.

Adnan's later work was painted from memory, featuring landscapes distilled into their definitive features: like after-images of an experience that remains particularly vivid. Horizon and sky are represented as square masses or triangular, pyramidal shapes in thick, undiluted colours. Floating circular shapes rendered in yellow, orange or green and bands of pure colour suggest sun, sea or sand. These works reflect Adnan's idea of vision as 'multidimensional and simultaneous', a meeting place for many images, coalesced into one sensorial experience.

Adnan has had solo exhibitions in institutions around the world, including Pera Art Museum, Istanbul (2021); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2020); MUDAM, Luxembourg (2019); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2018); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (2018); and Institut de Monde Arabe, Paris (2016). Her work has featured in numerous international art festivals, including the Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2015); Whitney Biennial, New York (2014); and Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2013).