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NEWS RELEASE

Guggenheim Presents *Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure*

Exhibition Highlights Six Decades of Work by Beirut-Born Artist and Writer, Including Paintings, Tapestries, Films, and Works on Paper

Exhibition: *Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure*
Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York
Location: Rotunda Levels 1 and 2
Dates: October 8, 2021–January 10, 2022

(NEW YORK, NY— August 26, 2021)—From October 8, 2021, through January 10, 2022, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents *Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure*. This focused survey, installed along the first two ramps of the museum's rotunda, marks the first solo exhibition of the artist's work at a New York City institution.

Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure is organized by [Katherine Brinson](#), Daskalopoulos Curator, Contemporary Art, and [Lauren Hinkson](#), Associate Curator, Collections.

Over the course of a lifetime that spans almost a century, Etel Adnan's creative and intellectual vision has been expressed in many forms. In addition to being a visual artist, she is a renowned poet, a prominent journalist, and the author of *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977), one of the defining novels of the modern Arab world. Adnan's biography is notable for its rich convergence of cultural influences. She was born in Beirut in 1925 to a Greek mother and Syrian father; grew up speaking French, Arabic, and Greek; and as an adult has lived for extended periods in Lebanon, the United States, and France. She began to paint in the late 1950s, while working as a professor of philosophy in Northern California. It was a period when, in protest of France's colonial rule in Algeria, she renounced writing in French and declared that she would begin "painting in Arabic."

While Adnan's writings have been unflinching in their critique of war and social injustice, her visual art is an intensely personal distillation of her faith in the human spirit and the beauty of the natural world. She has stated, "It seems to me I write what I see, paint what I am." Adnan creates her paintings decisively

and intuitively. Seated at her desk with her small canvases laid flat, she applies pigments directly from the tube, using a palette knife to render compositions of radiant immediacy. Simple geometries recur throughout her work: a red square anchoring abstract forms, a bright circle for the sun, horizontal bands that suggest the sky over the ocean. Her abiding subject of Mount Tamalpais—the view seen from her home during decades spent living in Sausalito, California—is evoked in innumerable guises, shifting with the light and weather, and continually dancing between figuration and abstraction. Despite their modest scale and formal economy, her paintings and drawings are potent visualizations of the sensations of memory and momentary perception that shape our inner lives. Adnan's partner, the artist Simone Fattal, has described her works as playing “the role the old icons used to play for people who believed. They exude energy and give energy. They shield you like talismans. They help you live your everyday life.”

Installed on the first two levels of Frank Lloyd Wright's spiraling rotunda, this exhibition surveys Adnan's practice since the midcentury, encompassing paintings, tapestries, and drawings. It also presents the Super 8 film *Motion* (1980–89/2012) and a selection of the artist's *leporellos*: accordion-fold paper books that straddle her linguistic and pictorial registers. On the upper levels is a presentation of the work of Vasily Kandinsky, an artist Adnan has studied throughout her life. She perceives in Kandinsky a spirit akin to her own, describing his abstract painting as “folklore reexperienced on a cosmic plane. It's about unity sought everywhere, at the cellular level, in history, in astronomy.”

Following *Etel Adnan: Lights New Measure*, solo exhibitions of the work of Jennie C. Jones and Cecilia Vicuña will each be installed alongside *Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle*, a presentation of works by [Kandinsky](#) drawn from the museum's permanent collection.

Funders

Support for *Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure* is provided by The Macallan Scotch Whisky; Galerie Lelong & Co.; White Cube; Étant donnés Contemporary Art, a program developed by FACE Foundation and Villa Albertine; the French-American Cultural Foundation; the Kalet A. Doolin Foundation; Ellen and Alan Meckler; the Barjeel Art Foundation; GALLERIA CONTINUA; William and Agnes Peelle Jr.; Nicoletta Fiorucci Russo, London; Mr. and Mrs. John L. Townsend III; Karen E. Wagner and David L. Caplan; and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Additional funding is provided by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's International Director's Council.

About the Artist

Etel Adnan lives and works in Paris. Born in Beirut in 1925, the artist attended the Sorbonne, Paris (1949); University of California, Berkeley (1955); and Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1957). From 1958 through 1972, Adnan taught Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. She is the author of over twenty books of poetry and fiction, including *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977), for which she was awarded the Amitié Franco-Arab Prize, Association de Solidarité Franco-Arabe, France (1977). Adnan has had solo exhibitions at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha (2013); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2013); Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria (2014); Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2015); Serpentine Gallery, London (2016);

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (2018); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (2018); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2018); Mudam (Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean), Luxemburg (2019); Aspen Art Museum, (2019); and Pera Museum, Istanbul (2021), among other venues. The artist's work has also been shown in Documenta 13 (2012), the Whitney Biennial (2014), the Istanbul Biennial (2015), the Sharjah Biennial (2015), and the Rabat Biennale (2019).

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was established in 1937 and is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary art through exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications. The international constellation of museums includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. An architectural icon and "temple of spirit" where radical art and architecture meet, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is now among a group of eight Frank Lloyd Wright structures in the United States recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. To learn more about the museum and the Guggenheim's activities around the world, visit guggenheim.org.

Visitor Information

Admission: Adults \$25, students/seniors (65+) \$18, members and children under 12 free. Open Thursdays through Mondays from 11 am to 6 pm. Pay What You Wish hours are Saturdays from 4 to 6 pm, with free admission on Saturday on the House, offered once each month. Timed tickets are required and available at guggenheim.org/tickets. Explore the Guggenheim with our free Digital Guide, a part of the Bloomberg Connects app. Find it in the [Apple App Store](#) or in the [Google Play Store](#).

The Guggenheim is implementing health and safety measures in consideration of visitors and employees. In compliance with the New York City mandate, COVID-19 vaccination is required for admission to the Guggenheim for anyone who is eligible. Face masks are mandatory inside the museum for anyone over the age of two. Policies should be reviewed in advance of a visit; they are posted on [COVID-19 Safety Measures: What to Expect When Visiting](#).

For publicity images, visit guggenheim.org/pressimages

Password: presspass

guggenheim.org/social

August 26, 2021

#1610

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Director, Media and Public Relations

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Exhibition Checklist

Loan objects with status: approved, approved-ratified

Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

1960s

Oil on canvas

14 inches × 18 1/16 inches (35.5 × 45.9 cm)

Collection of Gary and Tracy Mezzatesta

X.2021.47



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1961/62

Oil on canvas

19 1/8 inches × 13 inches (48.5 × 33 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.415



Etel Adnan

Untitled

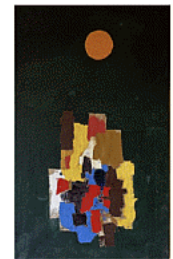
1962/63

Oil on canvas

41 3/4 × 25 3/16 inches (106 × 64 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.575



Etel Adnan

Untitled

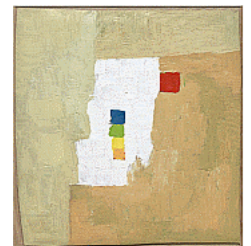
1965/1966

Oil on canvas

21 1/4 × 22 5/8 inches (54 × 57.5 cm)

Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation and Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan Fund (both by exchange), 2015.

X.2021.154



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

1965

Oil on canvas

26 3/16 × 26 3/16 inches (66.5 × 66.5 cm)

Irene Panagopoulos Collection, Athens

X.2021.170



Etel Adnan

Mont Tamalpais

1965

Oil on canvas

22 13/16 × 21 1/4 inches (58 × 54 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.576



Etel Adnan

Untitled

ca. 1970

Pastel on paper

9 7/16 × 11 13/16 inches (24 × 30 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

X.2021.586



Etel Adnan

Funeral March for the First Cosmonaut

1968

Accordion book, with ink and watercolor on paper

10 5/8 × 3 5/8 × 3/4 inches (27 × 9.2 × 1.9 cm)

10 5/8 × 106 1/4 × 1/8 inches (27 × 269.9 × 0.3 cm)

Purchase, with funds from Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo, Beth Rudin

DeWoody, Donna Rosen, Nadia Zilkha, and Ann and Steven Ames

X.2021.43



Etel Adnan

Late Afternoon Poem

1968

Accordion book with ink and watercolor on paper

open: 7 x 105 1/2" (17.8 x 268 cm); closed: 7 x 4 5/8 x 1/2" (17.8 x 11.7

x 1.3 cm)

Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee on Drawings and Prints

Fund, 2015.

X.2021.44



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Mont Tamalpaïs

1970 / 2017

Tapestry

2/3

63 x 78 3/4 inches (160 x 200 cm)

Collection of Daryl and Robert Offer

X.2021.66



Etel Adnan

Untitled

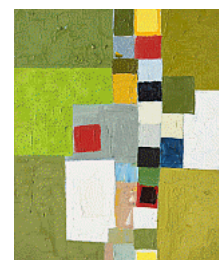
1972-75

Oil on canvas

composition: 25 9/16 x 21 1/4 inches (65 x 54 cm)

Irene Panagopoulos Collection, Athens

X.2021.169



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1980s

Oil on canvas

frame: 19 x 25 inches (48.3 x 63.5 cm)

Private Collection, New York

X.2021.11



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1980s

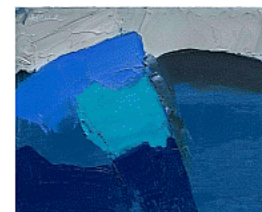
Oil on canvas

image: 7 1/8 x 9 7/8 inches (18.1 x 25.1 cm)

frame: 9 1/8 inches (23.2 cm)

Collection of Gary and Tracy Mezzatesta

X.2021.26



Etel Adnan

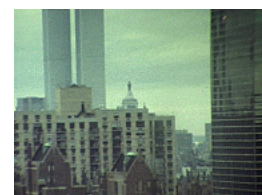
Motion

1980-89/2012

Super 8 color film with sound transferred to DVD, 92 min.

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

X.2021.172



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

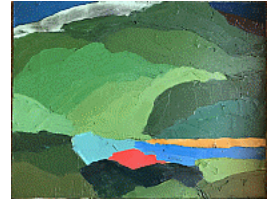
1980s

Oil on canvas

9 1/16 × 11 inches (23 × 28 cm)

Collection of Mirene Ghossein

X.2021.591



Etel Adnan

Untitled

ca. 1987

Oil on canvas

approx. 10 x 12 inches

Private Collection, New York

X.2021.34



Etel Adnan

Untitled

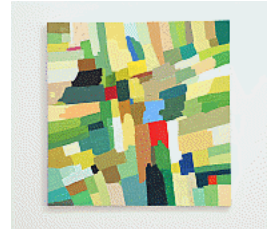
1983

Oil on canvas

29 × 29 inches (73.7 × 73.7 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.23



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1984

Oil on canvas

12 1/2 × 16 inches (31.8 × 40.6 cm)

Collection of William R. Peelle Jr.

X.2021.39



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1985

Oil on canvas

30 × 29 inches (76.2 × 73.7 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.24



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Landscape

1988

Watercolor on paper

14 inches × 19 7/8 inches (35.5 × 50.5 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

X.2021.171



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1990s

Oil on canvas

9 × 8 inches (22.9 × 20.3 cm)

Private Collection, New York

X.2021.18



Etel Adnan

Untitled

1990s

Oil on canvas

8 × 10 inches (20.3 × 25.4 cm)

Collection of Lonti Ebers, New York

X.2021.42



Etel Adnan

Untitled

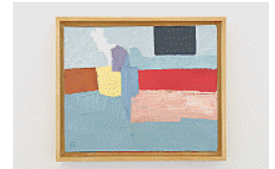
ca. 1995-2000

Oil on canvas

7 7/8 × 9 13/16 inches (20 × 25 cm)

Collection of Yto Barrada

X.2021.416



Etel Adnan

Untitled

ca. 1995-2000

Oil on canvas

7 7/8 × 9 13/16 inches (20 × 25 cm)

Collection of Peter M. Currie

X.2021.571



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

ca. 2012

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carolyn Ramo, New York

X.2021.574



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2010

Oil on canvas

9 7/16 × 11 13/16 inches (24 × 30 cm)

Collection of Dana Farouki and Mazen Makarem

X.2021.418



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2010

Oil on canvas

7 7/8 × 9 13/16 inches (20 × 25 cm)

Collection of Karen E. Wagner and David L. Caplan, New York

X.2021.419



Etel Adnan

Untitled

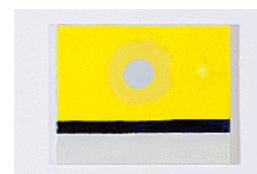
2010

Oil on canvas

9 7/16 × 11 13/16 inches (24 × 30 cm)

Private Collection, New York

X.2021.420



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2012

Oil on canvas

9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm)

frame: 10 × 13 × 2 inches (25.4 × 33 × 5.1 cm)

Collection of Carla Chammas and Jodi Roaman

X.2021.13



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

2012

Oil on canvas

9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.14



Etel Adnan

Untitled

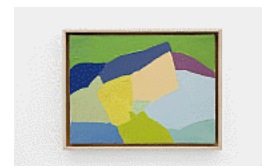
2012

Oil on canvas

9 × 12 inches (22.9 × 30.5 cm)

Collection of Stamatina Gregory and Michael Hall

X.2021.15



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2013

Oil on canvas

12 1/2 × 16 inches (31.8 × 40.6 cm)

frame: 13 1/2 × 17 inches (34.3 × 43.2 cm)

Lauren M. Driscoll Collection

X.2021.40



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2013

Oil on canvas

12 1/2 × 16 inches (31.8 × 40.6 cm)

Collection of Avo Samuelian and Hector Manuel Gonzalez

X.2021.41



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2014

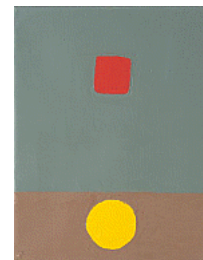
Oil on canvas

13 3/4 × 10 5/8 inches (35 × 27 cm)

frame: 15 7/8 × 12 3/4 × 1 5/8 inches (40.3 × 32.4 × 4.1 cm)

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

X.2021.74



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Untitled

2015

Oil on canvas

16 1/8 × 13 inches (41 × 33 cm)

frame: 18 5/8 × 15 1/2 × 1 3/4 inches (47.3 × 39.4 × 4.4 cm)

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

X.2021.76



Etel Adnan

Untitled

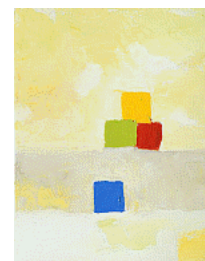
2015

Oil on canvas

16 × 13 inches (40.6 × 33 cm)

Collection of Joel Wachs

X.2021.79



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2015

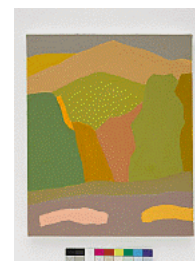
Oil on canvas

18 1/8 × 14 15/16 inches (46 × 38 cm)

frame: 19 3/4 × 16 5/8 × 1 3/4 inches (50.2 × 42.3 × 4.4 cm)

Courtesy of the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.134



Etel Adnan

Le poids du monde 11

2016

Oil on canvas

11 13/16 × 9 7/16 inches (30 × 24 cm)

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

X.2021.64



Etel Adnan

Le poids du monde 10

2016

Oil on canvas

11 13/16 × 9 7/16 inches (30 × 24 cm)

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

X.2021.65



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Key Signs

2017

Accordion book with watercolor on paper

4 3/4 × 7 3/16 × 1 9/16 inches (12 × 18.2 × 4 cm) (closed)

7 1/16 × 114 15/16 inches (18 × 292 cm) (open)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.164



Etel Adnan

Key Signs

2017

Accordion book with watercolor on paper

4 3/4 × 7 3/16 × 1 9/16 inches (12 × 18.2 × 4 cm) (closed)

7 1/16 × 114 15/16 × 1/16 inches (18 × 292 × 0.2 cm) (open)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.165



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

16 1/8 × 13 1/16 inches (40.9 × 33.2 cm)

frame: 17 11/16 × 14 9/16 × 1 5/8 inches (45 × 37 × 4.2 cm)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.138



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

16 1/8 × 13 1/16 inches (40.9 × 33.2 cm)

frame: 17 11/16 × 14 9/16 × 1 5/8 inches (45 × 37 × 4.2 cm)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.139



Etel Adnan

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

16 1/8 × 13 1/16 inches (40.9 × 33.1 cm)

frame: 17 11/16 × 14 1/2 × 1 5/8 inches (45 × 36.9 × 4.2 cm)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.140



Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, January 10, 2022)

Etel Adnan

Morning Mist

Brume Matinale

2019

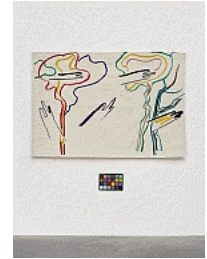
Tapestry

2/3

49 3/16 × 72 13/16 inches (125 × 185 cm)

Courtesy the Artist and White Cube

X.2021.132



Etel Adnan

Vignoble

2019

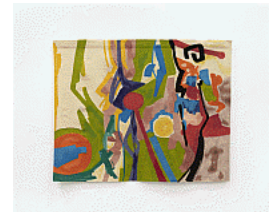
Tapestry

Artist Proof

58 1/4 × 72 7/16 inches (148 × 184 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

X.2021.159



Etel Adnan

Mont Tamalpaïs

2020

Oil on canvas

13 × 16 1/8 inches (33 × 41 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

X.2021.119



Etel Adnan

Satellites 27

2020

Oil on canvas

13 inches × 9 7/16 inches (33 × 24 cm)

Private Collection

X.2021.424



48 artworks

Over the course of a lifetime that spans almost a century, Etel Adnan’s creative and intellectual vision has taken many forms. In addition to being a visual artist, she is a renowned poet, a prominent journalist, and the author of one of the defining novels of the modern Arab world. Adnan’s biography is notable for its rich convergence of cultural influences. She was born in Beirut in 1925 to a Greek mother and Syrian father; grew up speaking French, Arabic, and Greek; and as an adult has lived for extended periods in Lebanon, the United States, and France. She began to paint in the late 1950s, while working as a professor of philosophy in Northern California. It was a period when, in protest of France’s colonial rule in Algeria, she renounced writing in French and declared that she would begin “painting in Arabic.”

While Adnan’s writings have been unflinching in their critique of war and social injustice, her visual art is an intensely personal distillation of her faith in the human spirit and the beauty of the natural world. She has stated, “It seems to me I write what I see, paint what I am.” Adnan creates her paintings decisively and intuitively. Seated at her desk with her small canvases laid flat, she applies pigments directly from the tube, using a palette knife to render compositions of radiant immediacy. Simple geometries recur throughout her work: a red square anchoring abstract forms, a bright circle for the sun, horizontal bands that suggest the sky over the ocean. Her abiding subject of Mount Tamalpais—the view seen from her home during decades spent living in Sausalito, California—is evoked in innumerable guises, shifting with the

light and weather, and continually dancing between figuration and abstraction. Despite their modest scale and formal economy, her paintings and drawings are potent visualizations of the sensations of memory and momentary perception that shape our inner lives. Adnan’s partner, the artist Simone Fattal, has described her works as playing “the role the old icons used to play for people who believed. They exude energy and give energy. They shield you like talismans. They help you live your everyday life.”

This focused survey of Adnan’s paintings, tapestries, and drawings is installed on the first two levels of Frank Lloyd Wright’s spiraling rotunda. On the upper levels is a presentation of the work of Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), an artist Adnan has studied throughout her life. She perceives in Kandinsky a spirit akin to her own, describing his abstract painting as “folklore reexperienced on a cosmic plane. It’s about unity sought everywhere, at the cellular level, in history, in astronomy.”

Etel Adnan: Light’s New Measure is organized by Katherine Brinson, Daskalopoulos Curator, Contemporary Art, and Lauren Hinkson, Associate Curator, Collections.

To learn more about the exhibition, download the Guggenheim Digital Guide, available for free on the Bloomberg Connects app. Look for this icon 

 310  710 Español  810 普通话

#EtelAdnan

THE OTOLITH GROUP

est. 2002 by Kodwo Eshun (b. 1966, London) and Anjalika Sagar
(b. 1968, London)

I See Infinite Distance Between Any Point and Another

2012

Color video, with sound, 33 min., 32 sec.

Courtesy The Otolith Group and LUX, London

This film by the London-based artist collective The Otolith Group is part of a trilogy of films that focuses on the ocean, the politics of water, and the links between language and environmental forces. *I See Infinite Distance Between Any Point and Another* centers on Etel Adnan's creative life as a poet, drawing out the intensity of her language in an intimate portrait of the artist. Shots of Adnan in her Paris apartment capture her reading "Sea," a poem from her 2012 volume, *Sea and Fog*. Modulating between soothing and powerful, the artist's voice animates her words. The film ranges from the closely shot domestic interior to views of spectacular natural imagery, including ice floes on the river. The setting of present-day Paris is brought into dialogue with archival imagery sourced from the decades of Adnan's youth. These shifts in scale and temporal register, suggestive of the artist's long life and sweeping historical experience, give the film an epic scope despite its ostensibly modest subject: a woman reading a poem in her home.

ETEL ADNAN

Motion

1980–89/2012

Color video, transferred from Super 8 film,
with sound, 92 min.

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

Etel Adnan's film *Motion* is a meditative visual history derived from Super 8 footage she shot regularly on her travels during the 1980s and later reassembled into an impressionistic montage. Dwelling on the exchange of light and surface in both the built environment and the natural world, the grainy footage often hovers on the border between abstraction and representation—a dynamic also evident in her paintings and artist's books. Much of the film was shot from the window of an apartment Adnan would stay in during visits to New York City, capturing the constant flux of the city's East River and its iconic skyline etched against blazing sunsets.

Among the artist's pluralistic and formally varied body of work, *Motion* is distinctive as her first exhibited film. Its predominantly urban setting distinguishes the work from the sustained engagement with natural landscapes central to Adnan's art. Yet the dedication to close looking and the desire to bring abstract imagery in touch with traces of social reality ground *Motion* within the core concerns of Adnan's practice.

JOANA HADJITHOMAS AND KHALIL JOREIGE

b. 1969, Beirut (both)

ISMYRNA

2016

Color video, with sound, 50 min.

Courtesy the artists

ISMYRNA is a documentary-style film by the Lebanese artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. The film depicts bonds, both personal and historical, between Hadjithomas and Etel Adnan—two artists of different generations, whose family histories run through the ancient city of Smyrna (present-day Izmir, Turkey). While neither artist has resided there, both consider the eastern Mediterranean city to be a formative site. When the two met in Beirut in the 1990s, they realized they held in common an attachment to Smyrna and a shared heritage of exile and displacement. Adnan's Greek mother was born in Smyrna and married an Ottoman officer stationed there; both were forced to resettle in Beirut following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Hadjithomas's family, who also settled in Beirut, had been driven out of Smyrna during the Turkish occupation, amid the conflagration known as the Great Fire of Smyrna in 1922. Long a Greek enclave on the Anatolian Peninsula, the city was ceded to Greece after World War I, only to be retaken by Turkish nationalist forces. A symbol of the cultural exchange that defines the eastern Mediterranean, Smyrna is also now synonymous with the challenges of sustaining that diversity. Far from an abstract historical event, the burning of Smyrna appears highly personal to Adnan and Hadjithomas as they recount the event and their family lore in Adnan's studio. A geopolitical cataclysm of the 1920s remains in living memory, marking the lives of the artists and shaping their perspective on contemporary events, including the fraught conflicts they have experienced in Beirut.

ETEL ADNAN ON VASILY KANDINSKY

Throughout her career, Etel Adnan (b. 1925) has been fascinated by the work of Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), recognizing him as a fellow polymath who worked in many fields of practice. In 1963 Adnan saw Kandinsky's paintings on view at the Guggenheim Museum and was struck by the way they drew on "the bright colors and particular rhythms of Central Asia." In a review published that year in the Pan-African magazine *Jeune Afrique*, she stated:

On the same canvas, I recognized the lacework of Russian grandmothers and biochemical cultures, fused into highly personal images that move about in a fluid made of color. . . . It is often said that Kandinsky's final period lacks poetry, that it's rigid because it comprises defined forms, circles and triangles. It is disdainfully labeled "geometric." But that's tantamount to saying that the sky has no grandeur, that circles are not awe-inspiring symbols. We forget that Kandinsky didn't speak so much about abstract painting as about "absolute painting"; we forget that, for him, it was as natural to express mystical explorations in painting as it is for us to find them in written texts.

Etel Adnan: Light's New Measure Rotunda Level 2 —————→

←————— *Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle* Rotunda Level 3

A SPACE TO REFLECT

While finalizing his plans for the Guggenheim Museum in 1955, architect Frank Lloyd Wright wrote to the museum’s director: “Isn’t a picture (like sculpture and like a building) a circumstance in nature; sharing light and dark—warm and cold—changing with every subtle change: seen now in one light; now in another?” Wright was describing the advantages of the Guggenheim’s oculus: a soaring dome of 169 glass panels, nearly 60 feet wide, that allows natural light to enliven the experience of looking at art. Wright’s letter also expresses his philosophy of bringing nature and architecture into harmonious existence by organically blending interior and exterior—a condition he achieved through his use of daylight, plants, and water within his buildings. Inspired by the notion of the museum as a public space for communing with art, architecture, and nature, this installation of benches and plantings at the apex of Wright’s iconic rotunda invites a moment of rest and reflection.

Within this environment are opportunities to further explore the multidisciplinary practice of artist, novelist, and poet Etel Adnan (b. 1925, Beirut), expanding on the exhibition *Etel Adnan: Light’s New Measure* installed on the lower levels of the rotunda. Adnan’s earliest ambition was to be an architect and she has always been fascinated by the impact of the built environment on human experience, describing it as a “mysterious art form” that literally shapes our lives. “It is a vertical movement,” she has said, “something that comes out of the earth like a tree which grows; cathedrals are forests.” Adnan has long been engaged in the work of Wright in particular, praising his sensitive use of materials and his lucid writings. Noting the influence of Mesopotamian forms on Wright’s work in a 1963 article, she imagined the Guggenheim as a contemporary image of the Tower of Babel. In the films and published materials featured on this level, Adnan’s polymathic practice is amplified within Wright’s unique architectural vision of a space that promotes the contemplation of the creative spirit.

Landscape design concept by Snøhetta in conjunction with Guggenheim Exhibition Design.

Additional works by Adnan are on view in *Etel Adnan: Light’s New Measure*, which is presented on Rotunda Levels 1 and 2.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 1984

Oil on canvas

Private collection

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2012

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carla Chammas and Jodi Roaman

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2012

Oil on canvas

Private collection

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

2012

Oil on canvas

Collection of Stamatina Gregory and Michael Hall

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1990s

Oil on canvas

Private collection, New York

E' TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1983

Oil on canvas

Private collection

While Adnan's compositions oscillate between abstraction and figuration, sometimes within a single work, she has always maintained a deeply held belief in the power of nonobjective painting to communicate the texture of interior life. In particular, she has championed the notion of colors as entities that create meaning and have their own emotional agency, referring to them as "metaphysical beings." For Adnan color and abstract form, like poetry and music, offer ways to evoke experiences beyond language or logic. "I would insist on the word abstract," she has asserted, "or what people call non-figurative painting, which is like music. I like to reach a depth of meaning that has nothing to do with words even if I use words. We want to tap a source from where the words come. There is a non-figurative or non-worldly world that is ours."

E' TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1985

Oil on canvas

Private collection

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1970s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Neda Young

E' TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1970s

Oil on canvas

Private collection

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1980s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Gary and Tracy Mezzatesta

🔍 313

🌐 713 Español

🌐 813 普通话

👁️ 542

While notably modest in scale, Adnan's paintings often evoke the immersive sublimity of nature. In this work she depicts a surging seascape. The ocean, ever-present in vistas from her homes in Beirut and Sausalito, has been an object of unceasing fascination for the artist, and a vessel for self-realization. She described this relationship in her 1993 book, *Of Cities and Women (Letters to Fawwaz)*, in which she characterizes the sea as the essence of femininity: "To come close to the sea, to look into her until nothing else is visible, and finally, for a fraction of a second, to finish in the gaze of this shifting mass that has neither beginning nor end . . . to look at the sea is to become what one is."

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1980s

Oil on canvas

Private collection, New York

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1984

Oil on canvas

Collection of William R. Peelle Jr.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2013

Oil on canvas

Lauren M. Driscoll Collection

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2013

Oil on canvas

Collection of Avo Samuelian and
Hector Manuel Gonzalez

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1990s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Lonti Ebers, New York

ETEL ADNAN

Funeral March for the First Cosmonaut

1968

Accordion book with ink and watercolor on paper

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
purchase, with funds from Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo,
Beth Rudin DeWoody, Donna Rosen, Nadia Zilkha,
and Ann and Steven Ames

In the 1960s Adnan began experimenting with accordion-fold books to create distinctive hybrid works of poetry and painting that she calls *leporellos*, applying the traditional Italian term for this binding style. She often inscribes poems by friends or other writers she admires, adding illustrations in ink, watercolor, or gouache that mingle with her distinctive handwriting. This leporello features one of Adnan's own poems, the eleven-part epic *Funeral March for the First Cosmonaut*. Having been inspired by Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's historic 1961 orbital spaceflight, Adnan composed this ode to "the great child in the great machine" in 1968, the year of his death in a plane crash. "We had escaped the power of Earth," writes Adnan. "Ever since, we've been floating in the universe, attracted by its boundlessness." This search for freedom amid displacement is a defining dynamic in the artist's work.

This poem continues on the reverse of the leporello. Read the poem in full on the Guggenheim's Digital Guide, a part of the Bloomberg Connects app.

ETEL ADNAN

Late Afternoon Poem

1968

Accordion book with ink and watercolor on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee
on Drawings and Prints Fund, 2015

🔍 312 🌐 712 Español 🌐 812 普通话

On a sheet of paper that stretches nearly nine feet yet folds into a small, portable booklet, Adnan applied watercolor washes rich in pastel yellows, oranges, and purples to create imagery evocative of both bodily forms and the California landscape. Handwritten lines of her poetry interrupt this dreamy vision: “Why is a newsman caught in a / crossfire / while reporting something / he does not care / to know?—Why is spring planted as / a flower / in a helmet or under a car / on the highway?—Why is a solar ray burning / my eye when / the sky still lies / in ice?”

These words suggest the unrest Adnan witnessed in the late 1960s when she was teaching philosophy in the San Francisco Bay Area, which was a nexus of the antiwar movement. “Poets wrote against the war, or rather, fought against the war through poetry,” Adnan later reflected about this period, during which she directed her efforts as an artist, poet, and journalist toward countering the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1965/66

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of
The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation and
Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan Fund (both by exchange), 2015

Adnan was already an established writer and poet when she began painting at the suggestion of a colleague in 1959, while living in California. From the outset of this new creative mode, she produced her canvases in a single sitting, working without preliminary studies. Her earliest compositions were fully abstract, constructed from vital, loosely rendered squares of color—a shape derived from experiments with pastels rubbed flat against paper—which she stacked relationally or suspended in monochrome grounds. Characteristically these paintings were structured around a pivotal square of red pigment that functioned as a locus of creative energy for the artist. Adnan has stated that “the first works are like the first notes of a musical composition in that they hold the seeds of everything that comes thereafter.” The red square that vibrates at the heart of this work, *Untitled* (1965/66), is a recurring motif that can be traced throughout the exhibition.

E' TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1960s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Gary and Tracy Mezzatesta

ETEL ADNAN

Le poids du monde 11

2016

Oil on canvas

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

Adnan's paintings frequently feature brightly colored orbs that suggest celestial bodies, evoking the cosmic scale of a vast, unknowable universe. The dream of escaping from the binds of Earth's gravity—and the associated nightmare of abandoning humanity's home—have been recurring themes in the artist's work since the space race of the 1960s. Captivated by the romantic heroism of the astronaut explorers, Adnan regarded them as kindred nomadic spirits. In her writings, however, she has also cautioned against giving up on terrestrial challenges. "Went to the moon. . . . Planet earth is old news," she writes in her 2011 book-length essay, *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay*. "It's the house we are discarding. We definitely don't love her."

E' TEL ADNAN

Le poids du monde 10

2016

Oil on canvas

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

ETEL ADNAN

Mont Tamalpais

1970/2017

Tapestry

Collection of Daryl and Robert Offer

In the late 1960s Adnan began translating the visual forms of her paintings and leporellos into woven wall hangings and carpets. She was inspired to create textiles after studying with the experimental weaver and natural-dye proponent Ida Grae in California, as well as by her emotional attachment to the Persian rugs that were a constant presence during her childhood in Lebanon. Adnan's weavings are based on designs created specifically for the medium, leveraging the texture of the fabric and the colors of individual wool strands. Their large scale stands in contrast to a body of work otherwise comprised of folded books and small canvases. The tapestries on view in this exhibition depict natural elements—forests, bodies of water, mountains—in different seasons.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2014

Oil on canvas

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

In this painting Adnan combines her cherished forms of the red square and the glowing sun, but the sun is embedded in the earth and the square ascendant in the sky, as if a celestial body. Typically of Adnan's late work, the abbreviated compositional elements foreground points of generative energy. Though self-trained as a painter and invested in close observation of nature, Adnan developed her practice in dialogue with the history of modernist painting. She has described her regard for the Swiss painter Paul Klee (1879–1940), whose modestly scaled but deeply felt paintings express a shared lyrical sensibility. Equally, affinities with Lebanese modernist painters such as Saloua Raouda Choucair (1916–2017) and Paul Guiragossian (1926–1993) might be traced in Adnan's artistic practice, which draws together multiple cultural traditions.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2015

Oil on canvas

Collection of Ellen and Alan Meckler

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2015

Oil on canvas

Collection of Joel Wachs

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 1970

Pastel on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E' TEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 1970

Pastel on paper

Private collection

E'TEL ADNAN

Nu 1

1990

Graphite on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Nu 2

1990

Graphite on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

La couleur naturelle des coccinelles 8

2019

Watercolor and ink on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

After studying literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, Adnan moved to the U.S. in 1955 to attend graduate school, first at Harvard and later at U.C. Berkeley. She subsequently settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she taught philosophy at Dominican College of San Rafael from 1958 to 1972. After five years spent in Beirut, she returned to live in a home in Marin County that offered a view of the forested peak of Mount Tamalpais. This landmark has been an enduring source of creative inspiration for the artist, and a presence intrinsic to her sense of self. In a life that had been marked by restless movement and self-imposed exile, Mount Tamalpais came to embody for Adnan the notion of home.

Today Adnan lives in France with her partner, the sculptor and publisher Simone Fattal, in an apartment in Paris's sixth arrondissement that also serves as the studio for her daily painting and writing practice. Throughout her life she has mourned the loss of formative places and communities: her mother's city of Smyrna (present-day Izmir, Turkey) was occupied and burned to the ground; Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq have been afflicted by extended conflicts. And now, in her advanced age, she is unable to travel to Sausalito. Adnan has commented that the "actual space of painting—its very dimensions—is the space of memory." Although no longer able to draw it from life, Adnan continues to conjure Mount Tamalpais as it lives within her imagination, as seen in this selection of paintings dating from the past decade.

ETEL ADNAN

Montagne 8

2019

Pastel on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

ETEL ADNAN

Summer Tree

1990s

Watercolor and charcoal on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

ETEL ADNAN

Mont Tamalpais

2020

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Tamalpais, Sausalito

1988

Watercolor and ink on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

Adnan has compared Mount Tamalpais to a musical theme and its variations. In one sense, a mountain is an inherently fixed form, but in Adnan's visual language it also has endless permutations, shifting with the seasons, the light, and the weather as well as with the psychological perspective of the artist. This elastic state is reflected in the various stylistic approaches with which Adnan addresses the mountain, from bold planes of impasto paint to calligraphic line drawings. In this luminous watercolor, the experience of light and landscape is delicately reflected in the choice of medium. "Painters have a knowledge that goes beyond words," says Adnan. "They are where musicians are. When someone blows the saxophone the sky is made of copper. When you make a watercolor you know how it feels to be the sea lying early in the day in the proximity of light."

ETEL ADNAN

Paysage, Sausalito

1988

Ink on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

ETEL ADNAN

Tamalpais

1983

Ink on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1980s

Ink and watercolor on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

ETEL ADNAN

Forest

2019

Tapestry

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Morning Mist

2019

Tapestry

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

2015

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Vignoble

2019

Tapestry

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Key Signs

2017

Accordion book with watercolor on paper

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

Adnan was attracted to the leporello format in part because its elongated, foldable sheets offered an alternative to the static confines of a rectangular page or canvas. “It was like writing a river,” she said recently of the experience of creating these works. She first acquired blank accordion-fold books in the mid-1960s in a California shop specializing in Japanese crafts, and she continues to work with handmade Japanese paper. Adnan’s leporellos are inherently syncretic, melding ink art traditions rooted in East Asia, the calligraphic sensibility of Arabic poetry, and her own distinctive approach to creating abstract visual glyphs—one that is evident in her “key signs” series created in the mid-2010s. The shapes Adnan renders here in watercolor resemble letterforms or characters, and joined together in a leporello they might appear to comprise an alphabet. Yet unlike the script Adnan uses in her prolific writings in English, French, and Arabic, these marks ultimately defy legibility, expressing diffuse meaning through abstraction.

ETEL ADNAN

Key Signs

2017

Accordion book with watercolor on paper

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1972–75

Oil on canvas

Irene Panagopoulos Collection, Athens

From 1972 to 1975 Adnan returned to live in Beirut, at a time when the city was a vibrant center of creative and intellectual life in the region. During this generative period Adnan worked as a newspaper journalist while continuing to develop a painterly language of dynamic, intensely chromatic abstract forms. When the onset of civil war in Lebanon forced Adnan to leave the country, she remained deeply engaged with the plight of her home city. In 1977 she wrote her experimental novel, *Sitt Marie Rose*. A searing account of the murder by militants of one of Adnan's acquaintances in Beirut, the Syrian social worker Marie Rose Boulos, it has become a classic of war literature and an indispensable document for understanding the wider cultural complexities that precipitated the conflict.

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1965

Oil on canvas

Irene Panagopoulos Collection, Athens

E'TEL ADNAN

Landscape

1988

Watercolor on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1961/62

Oil on canvas

Private collection

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 1995–2000

Oil on canvas

Collection of Yto Barrada

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2010

Oil on canvas

Collection of Dana Farouki and Mazen Makarem

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2010

Oil on canvas

Collection of Karen E. Wagner and David L. Caplan,
New York

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

2010

Oil on canvas

Private collection, New York

E' TEL ADNAN

Satellites 27

2020

Oil on canvas

Private collection

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1988

Ink on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 1995–2000

Oil on canvas

Collection of Peter M. Currie

E'TEL ADNAN

Untitled

1962/63

Oil on canvas

Private collection

E' TEL ADNAN

Mount Tamalpais

1965

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Throughout her career Adnan has been inspired by the landscape around her, particularly in her former home of Sausalito, where the towering Mount Tamalpais is an inescapable presence. “The mountain became my best friend,” she recently remarked. “It was more than just a beautiful mountain: it entered me, existentially, and filled my life.” For Adnan the experience of a landscape is far more than visual. In her 1986 book, *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*, she describes the intimate spiritual and philosophical relationship between art and the natural world. Her paintings, drawings, and watercolors of Mount Tamalpais embody the profundity of her decades-long engagement with the subject. These works also reflect a deep affinity for the work of Paul Cézanne, whose epic, formally inventive series depicting Montagne Sainte-Victoire in southern France is a touchstone for Adnan, who has stated that for Cézanne, “Sainte-Victoire was no longer a mountain. It was an absolute. It was a painting.”

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

ca. 2012

Oil on canvas

Collection of Carolyn Ramo, New York

The intertwining of the sun and the sea has been a primary subject of Adnan's poetry and visual art. It is an image that reverberates for the artist as a trace of a childhood spent in the coastal city of Beirut. Notably, Adnan refuses the term "Middle East" for its origins in European colonialism, preferring to refer to the Arab world of Western Asia as the *Mashriq*, or "place of sunrise." The ocean horizons conjured with austere formal gestures in these paintings express a majesty that belies their diminutive size. The works call to mind the horizon line as a marker of human mortality, as the sun rises and sets in an eternal cycle of beginning and endings.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1980s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Mirene Ghossein

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

1980s

Oil on canvas

Collection of Mirene Ghossein

ETEL ADNAN

Tamalpais

1990s

Watercolor and graphite on paper

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2018

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube

ETEL ADNAN

Untitled

2015

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and White Cube