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### Etel Adnan's Poetic Aesthetics at Serpentine Sackler Gallery

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | JUNE 03, 2016



"Etel Adnan: The Weight of the World" installation view at Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London (2 June – 11 September 2016) (© Tristan Fewings / Getty)

Lebanese-American poet, essayist, and artist Etel Adnan's first solo exhibition in a UK public institution is on at London's Serpentine Galleries until September 11. Entitled "The Weight of the World," the retrospective includes paintings, drawings, poetry, film, and tapestries from the 91-year-old visionary's entire career.

Commenting on the exhibition, the Serpentine's Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist said in a statement, "Adnan is one of the greatest artists of our time, and a great inspiration to many artists. For over 60 years – as a painter, poet, and the maker of exquisite tapestries – Etel's work has been underpinned by an intense engagement with the world and with modern history."

Adnan, who is best known for her bold and colorful small-scale abstract paintings, was born in Beirut in 1925 to a Greek mother and a Syrian father. After studying philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris and then at U.C. Berkeley and Harvard, she taught the subject at the Dominican University of California from 1958 to 1972, and also started painting, creating landscape-like works composed of squares of color.

The artist has described her paintings as a reflection of her “immense love for the world, the happiness to just be, for nature, and the forces that shape a landscape.” Taking the landscapes of the Mediterranean Sea and California as her points of departure, she creates energetic abstractions by placing her canvas flat on a table and using a palette knife to apply rapid, thick strokes of paint.

According to the Serpentine, since she moved away from purely abstract forms over the course of the 1960s, Adnan’s painting has continued to move between recognizable and imagined forms, revealing what is described as her “sensitivity to color and shape extracted from the environments in which she found herself.”

Since the 1960s, alongside her paintings, Adnan has also created beautiful tapestries, taking inspiration from the Persian rugs of her childhood. She also continues to make accordion-folded, illustrated sketch books known as “leporellos,” which she discovered in 1964, enabling her to combine drawing with writing and poetry.

“Every art is a window into a world that only art can access. You can’t define these worlds. They are epiphanies, visions,” Adnan has famously said. She also claims that “images are not still. They are moving things. They come, they go, they disappear, they approach, they recede, and they are not even visual – ultimately they are pure feeling.”

*“Etel Adnan: The Weight of the World” runs through September 11 at Serpentine Galleries.*