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## THE ART NEWSPAPER

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### California landscapes resonate in London

Serpentine Sackler Gallery

by Aimee Dawson | 01 June 16



Etel Adnan. *Untitled (1995-2000)*. Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut

Etel Adnan's life is as colourful and compelling as her art. The artist, who was born in Beirut in 1925, is a poet, essayist and painter. Working in a range of media—from oil on canvas to watercolour and tapestry—her bright abstract style has been compared with that of Paul Klee and Nicolas de Staël. We spoke with Adnan on the occasion of her first solo exhibition in a UK public institution, which opens this month at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery.

**Your paintings are mostly abstracted landscapes and you have lived in many different places: Beirut, California and now Paris. How have these places influenced your paintings?**

California and Beirut are really my two homes, not only physically but mentally, and so I continue to live in relation to them even though I'm in Paris. I'm still inspired by these landscapes because I'm still haunted by these places—they are still in me. I spent most of my life in California, where I had a view of a mountain from my window and, willingly or not, it entered my psyche and also my writing and painting. You begin to live with it even when you can't see it.

**Your show at the Serpentine is called *The Weight of the World*, but much of your work is about weightless things, such as shadows and light. Where does this heaviness come from?**

The exhibition takes its name from a series of works that all feature circles. In this case, the expression "weight of the world" is less psychological and more physical—a big circle weighing down in each work. This new series was painted a year ago. I made the first one and Hans Ulrich Obrist [the artistic director of the Serpentine] happened to see it in my studio in Paris and said I should do more.

**Many Lebanese artists—Mona Hatoum and Walid Raad, for example—refer to the Lebanese Civil War in their work. How has the war affected your work?**

Tragedies indirectly foster creativity—[they] create tension. Look at Picasso's *Guernica*; it's like you have to create something at the same level of the tragedy that you are living in. In my own work, my response to such tragedies is more in my poetry and writing than in my painting. On the other hand, it's not only war that can inspire creativity—overwhelming beauty can also create overwhelming works. For example, Monet's *Water Lilies* triptych is epic. Nature is overwhelming if you really look at it. It's a burst of fantastic energy. It's a sort of positive apocalypse.

• *Etel Adnan: the Weight of the World, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London, 2 June-11 September*



Etel Adnan. Photo: Fabrice Gibert. © Etel Adnan/Courtesy Galerie Lelong