

Etel Adnan : The Weight of the World

[September 2, 2016](#) ~ [Marika Bertelli](#)

Until 11th September at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, you can have the opportunity to visit an artist lesser known but equally engaging. I discovered that this is her first solo exhibition in a UK public institution.

Etel Adnan is a Lebanese artist who has lived and studied in Lebanon, California and Paris. Adnan has not studied painting, but rather philosophy at the Sorbonne and Harvard. Then she became a poet and has even taught philosophy at the University of California. At the end of 1950 she started creating abstract landscapes of modest size but with vivid colour.



Untitled, 1968, oil on canvas

This retrospective, at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery in Hyde Park, shows

works throughout her long and varied career. From paintings, drawings, poems, films to tapestries. Just in front of the gallery's entrance there are huge tapestries, fabrics with abstract patterns and rich colours. It is a reference to her childhood and her homeland, Lebanon. From the beginning, the tone of the exhibition hovers in a poetic atmosphere and you can feel immediately the love of colour from the artist.



Acrobaties Printanières (Springtime Acrobatics), 1967 , wool tapestry

The landscapes's paintings are the central subject of this exhibition. Her paintings are characterised by simple compositions, large brush strokes and range of vivid colours. The views of the landscapes were from a bedroom window. Let's see: the ochre plains and red skies of *Arizona*, the seas, the beaches, the clouds of *California Coast*, the peaks of *Mount Tamalpais*. The exhibition also features the Mediterranean landscapes.



Arizona, 1964-65, oil on canvas

Along the Serpentine Sackler walls, the artwork is marked by constant tension between figurative and non-figurative. In the early 60s Adnan painted landscapes with simple shapes but still recognisable, her recent works are smaller and completely abstract. In this case, the title becomes essential and referential, an example is *Le poids du monde 1-20*, 2016.



Le poids du monde 1-20, 2016, oil on canvas

Her philosophical and poetic background is highlighted by *Leporellos*. This is a series of accordion-folded books on Japanese paper in which she mixes drawing with writing and Arabic poetry such as *Kassaed Bain Chajar* and *Mahmoud Darwish*. In another notebook, you can see how Arabic writing has combined with landscape sketches in black and white (*Mountain*). The notebooks are very beautiful. I particularly liked *The Golden Retreat* where the artist highlights with large pink and blue brushstrokes an Arabic poem.



"The Golden Retreat" by Issa Makhoulouf in Arabic, date unknown, ink and watercolour on paper

Another series of works you can find in the two brick corridors. These are works in black resin drawn on large folding screens in alabaster such as *San Gimignano, 2014*, a panorama of the Tuscan city's churches and towers, or in accordion-folded books shown in transparent glass tables.



San Gimignano 5, 2014, black resin, alabaster, metal

This retrospective for me was a real joy to behold. Through a range of different works to each other, the common denominator is the artist's intention of celebrating the beauty of the world through her eyes. The artist is the one who has the power to filter and purify the reality from the bad things.

Etel Adnan : The Weight of the World

Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London

9 June – 11 September 2016