

Etel Adnan: The Weight of the World at Serpentine Sackler Gallery

[Anna Souter](#) 1 June 2016



Etel Adnan is a 91-year-old artist whose work is being shown at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery in Hyde Park. It is her first solo exhibition at a UK public institution and the show charts a long and exceptionally varied career. From abstract paintings and video art to concertina books filled with careful calligraphy and colourful tapestries, Adnan's oeuvre demonstrates a wide range of skills and interests.

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Adnan's international horizons brought her to study at the Sorbonne and Harvard before gaining a post teaching philosophy at the University of California. Despite having no artistic training, she began painting in the late 1950s. Her modest-sized canvases

from this time feature bright, non-representational compositions and work well in the light space of the Serpentine Sackler.

Many of Adnan's paintings appear to oscillate between being purely abstract and representing landscapes, with mountains and hazy suns emerging from the painted shapes. This tension between the figurative and the non-figurative is something Adnan explores throughout her career, down to her most recent small canvases whose collective title give their name to the show.

Other recent works include a set of tapestries woven with abstract patterns. These are a nod back to Adnan's roots and the cultural associations of carpets and textiles in her homeland of Lebanon. It's interesting to see the progression from the artist's earlier painted abstractions to these flexible explorations of non-traditional fine art materials, mechanical production and gendered creative processes.

The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to get to know the work of a lesser-known but intriguing artist. The Serpentine Sackler Gallery is free to enter, and certainly worth a detour if you find yourself in Hyde Park. Etel Adnan's vibrant use of colour and unusual materials are guaranteed to brighten up a dull day.

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Etel Adnan: *The Weight of the World* is at Serpentine Sackler Gallery from 2nd June until 11th September 2016, for further information visit [here](#).



