

# Etel Adnan at Central Library UNAM and Sonora 128 (Contemporary Art Daily)

*Dates:* October 10 – November 10, 2017 (Central Library UNAM); July 1 — August 20, 2017 (Sonora 128)

*Images courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler, Beirut/Hamburg*

*Press Release for Central Library UNAM:*

“Abstract art was the equivalent of poetic expression; I didn’t need to use words, but colors and lines. I did not need to belong to a language-oriented culture but to an open form of expression.”

– Etel Adnan

kurimanzutto is proud to present *Album à dessins*, an exhibition project by American-Lebanese artist Etel Adnan in collaboration with Sfeir-Semler Gallery, presented in the Biblioteca Central of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Following her project for Sonora 128, a selection of her drawings will be shown inside the building that hosts one of the murals that most inspired her during her visit to Mexico City in 1957, the mosaic composition created by Juan O’Gorman for the library’s façade.

Adnan began painting in the early 1960s. Widely known for her poetry, novels and plays, she moves fluidly between the disciplines of writing and art. Over the course of the 1960s, Adnan moved away from purely abstract forms and, in 1964, discovered ‘leporellos’, Japanese inspired paper concertinas, accordion-folded sketchbooks in which she could mix drawing with writing and poetry. The continuation of alternative modes of art production on paper are prevalent here: the sketchbook becomes the medium.

The *Album à dessins* (1990) are a series of drawings taken from these sketchbooks where she mixes occidental and arabic calligraphy, drawing and watercolor as a means to express her poetic universe through visual art. Adnan's use of language transcends its specific medium, as a poet she has utilized English, Arabic and French in her texts; as an artist she employs abstraction and vibrant forms to escape the boundaries of a specific tongue, thus communicating in the instant. The sketchbook applies the linear orientation of Japanese folding books and takes inspiration from a rich repository of literary sources.

### *Press Release for Sonora 128:*

The sixth edition of Sonora 128 is host to the LebaneseAmerican artist and poet Etel Adnan, whose work is exhibited for the first time in Mexico. Composed as a small drawing, its patchwork of bright pastel colors and detailed surface irregularities remind us of Adnan's own hand as she hints at themes familiar to Mexico. Entitled *The New Sun of the Aztecs*, Adnan's golden orb rising high over the city certainly does not intend to compete with the sun itself. Rather, the work nods towards Mexico's ancient founding myth of the Five Suns –a complex story of relationships and hierarchies. In it, a cycle of construction and violent destruction leads to the creation of a present world that can only be sustained by continuous blood sacrifices to appease the Gods. This new sun stands as a poignant metaphor for the celebration of life and beauty, one closely attended by death and deprivation. Organized around this glowing globe, both floating and abutting each other in a pattern of strong lines and forces, are a mosaic of symbols. Among them a green cactus, gray cross and red circle, point to a relationship of religion, nature and ancient culture, which rarely peaceful, continues to shape the country.

Etel Adnan must be seen through the dichotomy of her work as both painter and poet. In painting she expresses joy, while in prose and poetry, her somber side and political consciousness manifest themselves. For

Adnan, tragic and disturbing themes have no place in her visual work, which is fuelled by a universally understandable positivity. Here she focuses almost exclusively on landscapes, relying on clear, simple forms and harmonious color compositions. Her inspiration comes from a deeply felt connection with nature. The artist wants to evoke those same feelings in us, striving to render memories of pleasure and serenity. Her paintings are a visceral experience in the truest sense of the word.

Viewing Etel Adnan's drawings in person is often an intimate encounter, yet her desire to reach a large and diverse audience is woven throughout her life. Having spent several months in Mexico in 1957, Adnan was influenced by Juan O'Gorman's mosaic murals at UNAM's Central Library. She later cited them in her wish to make mosaic walls and tapestries, such as the ceramic compositions created for the Qatar University in 2013. Discovering the encompassing power of exhibiting in public spaces, Adnan became convinced that art should be present for all to see, firmly believing that "beauty is for everyone."

Magdalena Vukovic

about the artist

Etel Adnan was born in 1925 in Lebanon, and lives and works between Paris and Beirut; she is considered a leading voice of contemporary Arab-American culture. Adnan studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, at Berkeley and Harvard. From 1958–1972, she taught philosophy at Dominican University of California, San Rafael, where she then took up painting and dedicated herself to poetry.

As a reaction to the Lebanese Civil war, Adnan wrote her famous novel *Sitt Marie Rose* in 1977. Awarded the France-Pays Arabes Award, it has since been published in more than 10 languages. Her paintings also rose to prominence following their exhibition at Documenta 13 in 2012. In addition, recent solo exhibitions include the Institut du monde arabe, Paris (2016), The Serpentine Sackler, London (2016), Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2015),

Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria (2014) 'Etel Adnan in All Her Dimensions' at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar (2014) and the Whitney Biennial, New York (2014).

Adnan has received numerous awards for her contribution to culture, including, in 2014, France's highest cultural honor, the Ordre de Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

*Links:* [Etel Adnan at Central Library UNAM](#) and [Sonora 128](#)

*Link:* [Coverage of Sonora 128 on our Office Notebook](#)

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