

REVIEW

Album à dessins by Etel Adnan
Biblioteca Central UNAM, organised by kurimanzutto, Mexico City (06/11 - 24/11, 2017)
***1/2

Previous / Next image (1 of 5)



Constructed in 1956, the Biblioteca Central at UNAM, Mexico City's primary university, is an architectural icon, a modernist construction which seems to grow from volcanic rock. Ten floors tall its façade is almost entirely clad in a 4,000 square foot mosaic by architect Juan O'Gorman, depicting Tláloc, god of rain and fertility and other symbols of Mexico's Mesoamerican past.

When, a year after its completion, Etel Adnan visited the Biblioteca, she left with a lasting impression, an impression which would draw her back more than a half-century later to front a small exhibition. Housed within four chest-high vitrines, a selection of sixteen drawings from Adnan's *Album à dessins* (1990) sketchbook series are on display.

Unified by a standardised circle motif each page is an experiment in poetic abstraction. In wax crayon, water colour and ink, Adnan plays, composing bright primary colours with rigid ruled forms; one page is left almost blank, whilst another becomes a dense collection of marks atop a watery background.

At times a horizon is recognisable, making pieces echo seascapes by Turner; other pieces explode into a multiplicity of mark making, more Twombly-esq; occasionally order asserts itself establishing patterns reminiscent of Klee. Broad experimentation is evident in both composition as well as the notational calligraphy which seems to vary between linguistic and mathematical approaches.

However, where the show succeeds, is how it exists amongst the life of the library: flanked by bookshelves, a stone's throw from students buried in their books, adjacent to a particularly ugly information desk, proximate to the photocopiers. It lacks the presumption of attention, it demands nothing, it is without an ego. As light filters through the biblioteca's sliced rock window panes, casting a golden air amongst the books, students either stop and look, or pressured by deadlines get straight to work. Either option is good.