

An Analysis of the Discovery Narrative: The Case of Etel Adnan

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In
Curatorial Practice

by

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As institutions have increasingly diversified their collections in recent years, there has been a growing interest in the artistic practices of underrepresented artists. This interest has beneficially challenged existing cultural hierarchies and exclusive tendencies of traditional museums and art institutions, putting the spotlight on voices previously unheard. However, it has also produced concerns about the discovery narrative formed around the artistic practices of those artists. This institutional narrative of overlooked, forgotten, or rediscovered artists creates a widespread myth around their practices—in certain cases erasing a richer account of their histories.

This thesis will investigate the general problem of embracing discovery narratives in recent curatorial practice by focusing on one case study: namely, recent interest in Western institutions in the writer and artist Etel Adnan. More specifically the thesis investigates three curators who presented Adnan in Western contexts over the last decade: Adnan's inclusion in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *documenta (13)* (Kassel, Germany, 2012); Hans Ulrich Obrist's monographic exhibition of Adnan's work, titled *The Weight of the World* (Serpentine Gallery, London, 2016); and Eungie Joo's *New Work: Etel Adnan* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2018). Assessing each exhibition's distinct approach to Adnan's practice, this thesis analyzes how each show embodied a discovery narrative that limited a broader understanding of her work. Finally, the thesis suggests an alternative curatorial methodology to remedy this reductive narrative.

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I—Introduction: What is a Discovery Narrative?

A blurry black and white photograph depicts the artist and writer Etel Adnan reading in front of a microphone. [Fig. 1] Facing the camera, a script in her hands, she stands on what appears to be, from dark curtains visible behind her, a stage. A reproduction of an artwork hangs behind her. The perspective of the camera finds four audience members in the image—all men. Two of them sit on the stage, looking away, as a younger boy, facing right, looks down; the fourth is only one who seems focused on Adnan as she reads. Spot-lit, comfortable in a shirt and loose plaid pants, there is a smile on her face.

It is hard to say where this image was taken.¹ It could be in Paris, Beirut, or Sausalito—cities in which she has lived—or elsewhere. It is also unclear what kind of a place this was. But visual cues point us towards an underground poetry bar in an unknown city, rather than an acclaimed institution such as a museum. We do not know the date, but she appears to be young—maybe in her mid-30s. (Adnan was born in 1925, so this guess would place the photograph somewhere around 1960.)

While I was writing this thesis, Adnan turned 95—I know because it was announced on social media. In a recent interview, when asked how she felt about “garnering accolades for her art much later in life,” Adnan responded:

To be honest, I did not expect recognition. I was happy to keep going. Some people I respected liked my work. I was selling two or three paintings a year at very low prices, but it kept my image going. That is important. In the beginning, every article started with [mentioning] my age. I thought it was funny, but I got a little annoyed. I won't make an issue out of that; most female artists who are well known became known later in life.²

This quote says something about Adnan's image on the stage. She was surrounded with people, interested or not interested, and this was enough for her: she was happy. She was not

¹ Image courtesy of the artist and Sfeir Semler Gallery, Beirut & Hamburg. The gallery cannot confirm the location and the date of the picture.

² Gareth Harris, “Etel Adnan: This is the summit of my career,” *The Art Newspaper*, June 13, 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/interview/etel-adnan-this-is-the-summit-of-my-career>.

yet recognized by the cultural mainstream of the West. Recognition brought benefits, but also problems; it will be the task of this essay to articulate some of them.

Adnan's recognition, which arrived late in life, was part of a larger phenomenon. In the last decade or so, the art world has engaged in a process of institutional self-critique and self-conscious expansion as part of a broad tendency to initiate a more inclusive and equal art world. In line with this, Western institutions started engaging in initiatives to diversify their programs and holdings, to make up for historical underrepresentation in their collections. There were different reasons for this underrepresentation: gender, geographical situation, class, race, ethnic minority status—and often a mixture of more than one. These initiatives have aimed to give proper credit to previously understudied artists and to acknowledge their contributions to art history, and to challenge cultural hierarchies and the exclusive tendencies of Western museums and art institutions. One effect of this has been the production of ambitious solo and retrospective exhibitions by underrepresented artists in the last several years, including—just to name a few—Saloua Raouda Choucair at TATE Modern in 2013; Maria Lassnig at MoMA PS1 in 2014; Jacob Lawrence at MoMA in 2015; Carmen Herrera at Whitney Museum of American Art in 2016; Huguette Caland at the Institute for Arab and Islamic Art in New York in 2018; and Sam Gilliam at Dia:Beacon in 2019.³

These initiatives have been promoted by institutions and the press through a common language around this phenomenon. This language evolves around the word “discovery,” often followed by other shared phrasing, such as “finally getting their turn,” “forgotten,” “overlooked,” and “ignored.”⁴

³ There have been other initiatives as well: Tate's Hyundai Research Center: Transnational, Guggenheim's UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, and MoMA's C-MAP project are all research-based projects to foster cross-cultural interaction. The institutions have been collecting more works by women artists, as in the example of Baltimore Museum. There have been more group exhibitions and publications bringing together solely women artists: *Global Feminisms* exhibition (Brooklyn Museum, 2007), *Modern Women: Women Artists* catalogue (MoMA, 2010), and *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction* exhibition (MoMA, 2017), to name a few.

⁴ See, for example, Dana Goodyear, “The Playful Provocations (And Erotic Kaftans) of the Lebanese Artist Huguette Caland,” *New Yorker*, June 7, 2017; Hilarie M. Sheets, “Female Artists Are Finally Getting their Turn,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2016; Simon Hattenstone, “Carmen Herrera: Men controlled everything, not just art,” *The Guardian*, December 31, 2016; Charlotte Gordon, “Female artists have been overlooked and ignored. This book wants to correct

Discovery is, of course, an historically loaded word. It brings to mind Columbus's discovery of America—a contested discovery that ignored the presence of the indigenous Native American peoples and their distinctive civilizations.

But what does discovery *really* mean? According to the Cambridge dictionary, discovery means: “the act of finding something that had not been known before.”⁵ This definition is followed with the example: “It was quite a discovery when I came upon this beautiful mountain stream.”⁶ A close reading of this example will reveal that the beautiful mountain stream was there before the discovery occurred, and will continue to be there afterward. Its existence does not depend on the arrival of the “I” who came later to experience it. But who is this new arrival? From whose perspective is the stream unknown? Is there a way to describe the encounter while still acknowledging the stream's precedence?

Looking at this perhaps accidental allegory from an institutional perspective, we can for a moment imagine artistic practices of underrepresented artists as mountain streams, and the position of the “I” as the position of the acclaimed Western institutions. Now we can rephrase the question: How can we do justice to the existing exhibition histories of these artists while organizing exhibitions for them at Western institutions? How do we make sure the narrative of their new discovery does not blank out their prior histories by portraying them as exhibiting for the first time *in their careers*? Can Adnan's image on the stage in an underground bar find a place for itself in this narrative?

The narrative of how Adnan's career shifted in the last decade provides a valuable case study for this discussion. Below, I will give examples from her career to expand on these questions, in order to examine the discovery narrative and to understand its inner systems, functions, outcomes, and alternatives. To do so, it is important to analyze curatorial decisions regarding how Adnan's work has been exhibited at Western institutions. I will focus on three curators who presented Adnan

that,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 2019; Edward M. Gómez, “Discovering the Women of Art Brut,” *Hyperallergic*, February 23, 2019.

⁵“Meaning of discovery in English,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed February 24, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/discovery>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

conspicuously in Western contexts in the last decade. These include: Adnan's inclusion in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's documenta (13) (Kassel, Germany, 2012); Hans Ulrich Obrist's monographic exhibition of Adnan's work, titled *The Weight of the World* (Serpentine Gallery, London, 2016); and Eungie Joo's *New Work: Etel Adnan* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2018).⁷ Assessing each exhibition's approach to Adnan's holistic practice, this thesis will analyze how the shows embodied a discovery narrative that limited a broader understanding of her work. Finally, the thesis will suggest an alternative curatorial methodology to remedy this reductive narrative.

⁷ Here it is important to note that these three curators were contacted for interviews, but there was either no response or no availability.

II—The Case of Etel Adnan: Three Curators

Adnan's discovery has been attributed to curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's encounter with her work at her solo show at Beirut's Galerie Sfeir-Semler in 2010.⁸ Titled *Etel Adnan: Paintings and Drawings*, this exhibition presented fifty paintings by the artist and two works in leporellos, or folded books. [Fig. 2] Later, Christov-Bakargiev presented Adnan both in the edition of documenta she curated in 2012, and in the 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015.

Adnan's presentation in documenta (13) was similar to her exhibition at Galerie Sfeir-Semler, insofar as it focused mostly on the artist's paintings. Presented in one of the rooms of documenta Halle, thirty-eight untitled paintings by Adnan hung on four walls. [Fig. 3] Produced between 1959 and 2010, these paintings were abstract compositions. Canvases from different periods allowed the audience to observe changes in her technique. Her initial works showed "abstracted landscapes in lush colors," according to the exhibition catalogue, whereas her latest series, executed in Beirut in 2010–2011, were more "formally reduced."⁹ The later work revealed squares and circles, and "suggested seascapes through depictions of the horizon and sun."¹⁰ In the middle of the room was a tapestry by Adnan titled *Jažž* (1999), woven at Tapisseries Legoueix in France, which was presented on a pedestal as the centerpiece of the exhibition. [Fig. 4] (It is important to note that Adnan prefers these tapestries to be hung on the wall; this was a curatorial decision due to space limitation.)¹¹

Adnan was also included in what Christov-Bakargiev described as "The Brain" of the exhibition. Located in the rotunda of the Fridericianum, separated from the other rooms by a glass wall, this associative space brought together a number of artworks, objects, and

⁸ "Despite her devotion to her visual art practice, Adnan didn't receive widespread acclaim until Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev saw her work at Beirut's Galerie Sfeir-Semler in 2010." See: Alina Cohen, "Painter Etel Adnan's Career Didn't Take off until Her Eighties—Now She's an Inspiration to Young Artists," *Artsy*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-painter-etel-adnans-career-eighties-inspiration-young-artists>.

⁹ *documenta (13), The Guidebook, Catalog 3/3* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Conversations with Etel Adnan," in *Etel Adnan In All Her Dimensions* (Doha: Arab Museum of Modern Art Qatar Museums Authority, 2014), 61.

documents linked to larger installations elsewhere in the expansive exhibition. Adnan's palette knife, which she used to paint between 1970 to 2011, stood next to a selection of artifacts from the National Museum in Beirut that had melted together in shell fire during the civil war between 1975 and 1990. [Fig. 5] This gesture positioned Adnan's practice in relation to Lebanon's troubled socio-political context of ongoing war, terror, and trauma. Adnan was also invited to documenta (13)'s residency program *Chorality: On Retreat* as a writer. In the catalogue of the exhibition—and the import of this decision will be made clear below—her previous exhibition history and bibliography were not listed.

These curatorial decisions affected how Adnan's works were perceived. Some critics referred to her as the “Lebanese-American poet and writer,” others as the “marvelous Lebanese poet and painter,” descriptions that de-emphasize Adnan's equal belonging to Paris, and—to some extent—her long residence in California.¹²

In one of her interviews, Christov-Bakargiev described her interest in Adnan in terms of complicated dynamics of the artist's exclusion—one that involved not only geography but also gender and socioeconomic status:

The problem as I see it is not just about the exclusion of women but also about exclusions to do with geography and class. I've taken pleasure in showing artists such as Fahrelnissa in the Istanbul Biennale (in 2015), and Etel Adnan in documenta (13) (in 2012) and seeing how their work bloomed and flourished.¹³

This statement suggested that Adnan's work became richer in content only after her representation at this proclaimed institution. Equally it positioned Christov-Bakargiev—the curator—as the individual or the catalyst for conferring value on these previously underrepresented artists. Further, it contributed to her status as member of a curatorial elite who has the authority and resources to make such decisions.

¹² See: Roberta Smith, “Art Show as Unruly Organism,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/15/arts/design/documenta-13-in-kassel-germany.html>; Daniel Birnbaum, “Documenta 13,” *Artforum*, October 2012, <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201208/documenta-13-34514>.

¹³ I use this quote here, as there was no detailed discussion of Adnan's work by Christov-Bakargiev in the documenta catalogue. See: Editors, “Women in the Arts: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev,” *Frieze*, March 27, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/women-arts-carolyn-christov-bakargiev>.

Another curator who has included Adnan in his projects was Hans Ulrich Obrist. Obrist's encounter with Adnan's practice predated Christov-Bakargiev's; he first came across one of her leporellos in the group exhibition *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* at British Museum in 2006.¹⁴ He started reading Adnan's books of poetry, fiction, and journalism, only later learning about Adnan's practice as a visual artist. After Obrist met Adnan in person in Paris in 2007, they began to record their conversations; currently, Adnan is the artist most interviewed by the prolific dialogist. Later, Obrist invited her to participate in Serpentine Gallery's public programs, such as Edgware Road Project and various of his signature twenty-four-hour-long interview marathons between 2010 and 2015. In these events, Adnan participated as a writer, reading from books such as *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage* (1990), *Seasons* (2005), and *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* (2005). [Fig. 6] This suggested another tendency regarding how Adnan was presented in the Western context, i.e. separately—as an artist in exhibitions, and as a writer in events and public programming, as in the case of documenta (13).

In 2014, Obrist curated a show titled *Etel Adnan: In All Her Dimensions* which took place at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha. As its title suggests, this exhibition aimed to showcase the multi-dimensional characteristics of Adnan's practice—an approach distinct from the previous tendency to focus on Adnan's paintings or to segregate her artistic and writing practices.¹⁵ When Obrist curated her solo show *The Weight of the World* at Serpentine Gallery in 2016, he carried this holistic approach back to London.

Promoted as the first solo exhibition of Adnan at a public institution in the United Kingdom, *The Weight of the World* showed work from different moments in her career, including paintings, drawings, poetry, film, and tapestry. [Fig. 7] Additionally, the show presented seventy of Adnan's snapshots of the sea, sun and sky, as well as her studies for

¹⁴ Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Etel Adnan," in *Maharam Stories*, ed. Michael Maharam and Bailey Salisbury (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2015).

¹⁵ I choose not to give details about this exhibition as I focus on Adnan's presentation at Western institutions in my thesis. However, it is important to note that this exhibition presented Adnan's paintings, leporellos, publications, drawings, tapestries, ceramics, and films in different rooms. See: Obrist, "All Her Dimensions."

large ceramic wall paintings for public space. [Fig. 8] The latter brought an important new perspective on Adnan's practice, one that revealed her interest in public art, which she believes has the power to "humanize the environment" due to its democratic nature.¹⁶

This presentation of Adnan's diverse practice aimed to place her within a "particular lineage of artists such as Sonia Delaunay," whose practice shows a similar engagement with the surrounding environment through a variety of color and form.¹⁷ Linking Adnan to Delaunay, another woman artist who carved out a unique place for herself within the canon, Obrist suggested a formalist approach to Adnan's artistic practice. This narrative proposed an alliance between Adnan and Delaunay, which expanded an understanding around Adnan's practice beyond her relation to the Lebanese context (as was the case in documenta (13)).¹⁸

Regarding these curatorial decisions, Obrist explained in an interview:

She is of course a Lebanese artist, but she is also a French artist, an American artist. She's a global artist. She's lived her life between geographies. There's nothing wrong with describing her as a Lebanese artist because she's an amazing treasure, the most important Lebanese person alive, without any doubt. But her work has an impact today all over the world. If you look at this triangle between Sausalito, Paris and Beirut, places she's lived and her other journeys... her way clearly went beyond national identities. She has, as [French Marxist philosopher] Etienne Balibar says, become a borderline, being and living between geographies rather than belonging to one geography. I think the idea of imprisoning her within a national identity seems impossible... Her whole work goes beyond boundaries, not only of geographies but disciplines.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Decent or beautiful public work is democratic, because even a poor person can walk in a beautiful environment and have his spirit uplifted. We painters do an elitist type of work; nevertheless it has its place because it's intellectual and spiritual. But we badly need public works." See: Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Etel Adnan: The Weight of the World* (Berlin: Koenig Books, 2016), 12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ I use the word "alliance" here as curator Helen Molesworth suggested in a 2010-dated article. She highlighted the importance of different genealogies and alliances that are formed despite "geographical distance and temporal incommensurability" while presenting works of women artists. Having different works of art from different periods of time and different geographies, one could form alternative narratives around the artistic practices of women artists. In this way, one could visualize vertical narratives of patriarchy, by presenting gaps and absences. See: Helen Molesworth, "How to Install Art as a Feminist," in *Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

¹⁹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Of Etel Adnan and superstring theory," *Sahafi.jo*, April 11, 2014, <http://vista.sahafi.jo/art.php?id=46d60200261cb92464cd91cf9f3c66a690da556f>.

The catalogue of the exhibition also included: an essay by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, who placed Adnan's practice in relation to Lebanon's political context; a tribute by poet Robert Grenier about Adnan's relation to landscape; and a text by filmmaker Simone Fattal—Adnan's partner—each describing the evolution of Adnan's art. Unlike the catalogue for the Mathaf show, which opened with a four-page long biography and bibliography of the artist (see Appendix), the London catalogue provided a less generous accounting: a brief biography, information about selected writings and publications, and international collections that have acquired the artist's work. It omitted her life story or a systematic accounting of her artistic career. Also, this exhibition was small—it included fewer works than Mathaf.

Alongside Christov-Bakargiev and Obrist, Adnan's "discovery" has been attributed equally to her involvement in curator Eungie Joo's 12th Sharjah Biennial (2015).²⁰ In this biennial, Joo was interested in organizing solo exhibitions for older figures who have been regarded as recently discovered, such as Chung Chang-sup, Saloua Raouda Choucair, and Fahrelnissa Zeid. In the preface of the exhibition, Joo described one of her interests in these practices of women artists as "a wealth of abstraction," offering examples from practices of Etel Adnan, Lala Rukh, Jac Leirner, and Julie Mehretu.²¹

When Joo moved into the newly created position of Curator of Contemporary Art at SFMOMA, Adnan was the first artist that she presented as part of the museum's *New Work* exhibition series, which has run since 1987. This was SFMOMA's second solo show of an Arab woman artist; the first was a solo exhibition of artwork by Madiha Umar in 1950.²²

²⁰ "There's an extensive selection of paintings by a much feted 're-discovery': the 90-year-old Lebanese poet and painter Etel Adnan, whose semi-abstract landscapes have become something of an institutional staple of late." See: Coline Milliard, "Eungie Joo's Cautious Sharjah Biennial Fails to Engage with Reality," *Artnet*, March 27, 2015, <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/sharjah-biennale-review-280672>.

²¹ HG Masters, "Sharjah Biennial 12," *Art Asia Pacific*, May/June 2015, http://hgmasters.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/93_BOB_20150330.pdf.

²² Deena Chalabi, former associate curator of Public Dialogue at SFMOMA, points out this precedent in her tour of the Adnan show. See: "Staff Picks: Deena Chalabi on Etel Adnan," Facebook, October 12, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/sfmoma/videos/1180119558796116/>.

Similar to Joo’s edition of Sharjah, *New Work: Etel Adnan* prioritized her abstract paintings. Sixteen paintings demonstrated the significance of visual abstraction in Adnan’s practice, reflecting the shades of Californian landscapes. [Fig. 9] Like documenta, the exhibition also displayed one of Adnan’s earliest tapestry designs, executed by Hal Painter in the late 1960s, with one of her recent tapestry works. Both titled *Explosion Florale* (1968, 2018), these works hung on the walls of the exhibition space. [Fig. 10] Three of Adnan’s leporello works—from 1988, 2003, and 2009, respectively—were presented in a plexiglass vitrine. [Fig. 11]

Adnan’s writing was again presented in an evening of public programs consisting of readings and musical performances. Poets David Buuck, Nick Hoff, and Denise Newman read from Adnan’s writing and their own. This was followed with a performance by composer Zeena Parkins and percussionist William Winant, whose improvisations responded to Adnan’s paintings. The museum did not publish a catalogue to accompany the exhibition.

The exhibition’s press release described this show as a “homecoming” for Adnan.²³ By this measure the show acknowledged the artist’s legacy not only in Lebanon but also in the Bay Area. Adnan had developed this strong and ongoing community in the 1960s, through close conversation and friendship with poets, experimental musicians, and playwrights (like many artists in the Bay Area, Adnan frequented SFMOMA without having her work shown there). However, as Adnan’s full biography was not present, this homecoming did not account for Adnan’s past and recent presentations in the Bay Area’s art context.²⁴

²³ “Press Release,” SFMOMA, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/new-work-etel-adnan/>.

²⁴ Among these recent exhibitions was *Words and Places: Etel Adnan* which took place at the Wattis Institute in 2013. This exhibition was curated by the graduating class of the Graduate Program in Curatorial Studies at California College of the Arts—Cecilia Adwell, Jenna Hans, Jesi Khadivi, Antonia Marsh, Rodrigo Ortiz Monasterio, Heidi Rabben, and Rebecca Roy—under the guidance of faculty advisors Ana Paula Cohen, J. Myers-Szupinska, and Joanna Szupinska-Myers. This exhibition also included works by Otolith Group, Chris Marker, and Rabih Mroué.

III—Effects of the Discovery Narrative

How the narrative of discovery described above affect Adnan’s career and practice? In the last decade, as mentioned above, there has been growing interest from Western institutions to exhibit her work. This interest can be tracked through her appearance in *Artforum* articles.²⁵ Adnan first appeared in *Artforum* in 1964 with a shore review by Knute Stiles; her second appearance was in 2010 with an article by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, after Adnan’s show at Galerie Sfeir-Semler in Beirut.²⁶ Thereafter, Adnan appeared forty-nine times in *Artforum* between 2011 and 2020, with reviews about her participation in acclaimed art events, such as Sharjah Biennial 10 (2011), documenta (13) (2012), the Whitney Biennial (2013), a solo show at Qatar Museum (2014), Sharjah Biennial 12 (2015), the 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015), and the Shanghai Biennial (2016), among many others. These examples show that Adnan’s discovery by these three curators gave her more visibility in Western institutions and magazines and provided her opportunities to share her practice with new audiences.²⁷

On the other hand, it is important to look at how this discovery narrative was implemented through curatorial decisions, and what kind of a narrative they built. For example, when her long biography prior to her presentations at these institutions was not present, it did not open up enough space for her exhibition history and existing bibliography—strengthening the discovery narrative. Moreover, in these presentations of Adnan at Western institutions, there were general curatorial tendencies. One was to emphasize her painting practice over other aspects of her work, as was the case of documenta (13) and *New Work: Etel Adnan* at SFMOMA. Another tendency was to separate her from her artistic practice from her writing,

²⁵ Here I choose *Artforum* specifically so that I can analyze how Adnan’s work was perceived by the Western cultural mainstream.

²⁶ *Artforum* was founded in San Francisco in 1962. It moved to Los Angeles in 1965, before settling in New York City in 1967. Knute Stiles, who wrote the first review of Adnan for *Artforum*, was an important figure in the Bay Area: a union organizer, painter, collagist, art critic, poet and entrepreneur. See: Knute Stiles, “Etel Adnan: Karmanaduca Gallery,” *Artforum*, April 1964, <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/196404/etel-adnan-72855>. See also Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Picks: Yto Barrada, Etel Adnan, Saloua Raouda Choucair, Tania Bruguera,” *Artforum*, November 28, 2010, <https://www.artforum.com/picks/yto-barrada-etel-adnan-saloua-raouda-choucair-tania-bruguera-26915>.

²⁷ For future research, it might be interesting and beneficial to investigate the role of journalists on the discovery narrative. Wilson-Goldie was contacted for an interview but did not respond.

through realizing the latter primarily in public programs, as in the case of Serpentine Gallery's marathons, documenta (13)'s public program in which Adnan participated as a writer-in-residence, and SFMOMA's public program featuring writers responding to Adnan's prolific literary work. A third was that the curators tried various approaches to locating Adnan in relation to different nations and geographies. In the case of documenta (13), Adnan's presentation was more in relation to Lebanon's sociopolitical context, due to the presentation of her palette knife next to the melted objects from Lebanon's civil war.

All of these decisions played a role in shaping how Adnan's practice was perceived in the Western context in the last decade. Presenting primarily one medium, such as painting, or separating her writing practice from her drawing, constructed a limited narrative around her oeuvre. Situating Adnan's practice in relation to a single geography strengthened this unilateral narrative (which might be contrasted with Obrist's account). This "siting" of her work had limitations in terms of projecting Adnan's complex practice.

It is therefore essential now to give an overview of Adnan's multifaceted life and career, and her shifts between different geographies and mediums, to show exactly what was occluded from the discovery narratives I have now described.²⁸ Adnan was born in Beirut in 1925 to a Syrian father and Greek mother.²⁹ After studying at the Sorbonne, she moved to the United States in 1955, where she attended U.C. Berkeley and Harvard University. From 1958 to 1972, she taught philosophy at Dominican College (currently known as Dominican University of California) of San Rafael in California. It was in this period, in 1959, that she started painting. Her early works were abstract compositions directly applied from the paint tube. [Fig. 12] During her first years in California, she also started to produce tapestries with

²⁸ See the appendix for a longer account of Adnan's biography and bibliography as listed in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Etel Adnan In All Her Dimensions*. Doha: Arab Museum of Modern Art Qatar Museums Authority, 2014.

²⁹ Kaelen Wilson-Goldie's monograph on Adnan provides an extensive and in-depth understanding about the artist's personal life and artistic career. See: Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Etel Adnan* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).

abstract compositions. [Fig. 13] She was an active participant in the creative community of the Bay Area, engaging in various collaborations with artists, poets, and musicians.³⁰

In the 1960s, Adnan started to move away from abstract forms. In 1964, she encountered leporellos—Japanese accordion-folded books bringing image and text together—at an art-supply store in San Francisco and started experimenting with this form. [Fig. 14] This was an important moment which opened for Adnan a new possibility to experiment with a form that did not fit neatly into the traditional categorizations of Western art history.³¹ A leporello was neither a painting nor a poem—rather it was both. Leporellos allowed an ideal space for Adnan’s multidimensional approach to medium. Later, Adnan reflected on this encounter: “I like manuscripts in languages I don’t know because they are drawings. I was happy the day I discovered that the act of writing is an act of drawing.”³²

When Adnan moved to Sausalito in the 1970s, she became attracted to the landscape of Mount Tamalpais, which she defines as “the most important encounter of her life.”³³ This attraction resulted in a number of paintings, and her seminal book *Journey to Mount Tamalpais* (1986), which explores the relation between nature and art. [Fig. 15] In 1972, Adnan returned to Beirut and became a journalist for the newspapers *Al-Safa* and *L’Orient-Le Jour*. During this time, she met her longtime partner Simone Fattal, who later founded the Post-Apollo Press in Sausalito and published Adnan’s books. When the Lebanese Civil War started in 1977 and Adnan’s novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978) was banned in Lebanon, the couple decided to move back to California. In the 1980s, during a visit to New York, Adnan started making Super-8 films, capturing what she saw from her window: bridges, skylines, and ships. [Fig. 16] In 1990 when the Lebanese Civil War ended, she returned to Beirut for the first time in twelve years. Currently, she lives and works in Paris. [Fig. 17]

³⁰ Adnan was an active participant in Ann O’Hanlon’s Perception Workshops in Mill Valley in the 1960s. Also, my interview with Adnan’s long-term collaborator Lynn Marie Kirby highlighted the importance of collaboration in Adnan’s practice.

³¹ “When I saw that format I thought it was a good way to get out of the page as a square or a rectangle; it was like writing a river.” Obrist, “All Her Dimensions,” 45.

³² “Etel Adnan,” Radio Papesse, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://radiopapesse.org/en/archive/interviews/etel-adnan-it-is-very-difficult-not-to-be-who-you-are>.

³³ Etel Adnan, *Journey to Mount Tamalpais* (Sausalito: The Post Apollo Press, 1986).

It is also crucial to note that Adnan was widely known and highly regarded as a poet and writer over these decades. She has written substantively on political themes such as the Algerian War, the Vietnam War, and the troubles of Arabic-speaking nations. Her writing has taken many different forms, ranging from reportage and plays to fiction and letters. As a writer, she has won awards, such as the France-Pays Arabes Award for her novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977) and the Arab American Book Award for *Master of the Eclipse* (2010). She penned *Sitt Marie Rose* after the start of the Lebanese Civil War, and it has been translated from its original French into a dozen languages. *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), a book-length poem bringing together Adnan's poems and drawings, revealed the turmoil of war in the Arab world. [Fig. 18] Later, she wrote *Of Cities and Women (Letters to Fawwaz)* (1993), a series of letters about feminism, politics, and loss, addressed to exiled Arab intellectual Fawwaz Traboulsi. *The Actress*, her first play, was performed in Paris in 1999. In recent poetry collections, such as *Sea and Fog* (2012) and *Seasons* (2008), Adnan discussed phenomena related to nature and space. Her poetry has been put to music by composers such as Henry Threadgill and Annea Lockwood.

Throughout her life, Adnan made and showed art actively. Starting in 1964, her work was shown at galleries in San Francisco, Oregon, Paris, Beirut, Rabat, Washington D.C., and London, among other cities. A solo show showcasing her leporellos, *Etel Adnan: Artist's Books*, took place at Darat al Funun in Amman, Jordan, in 1998. [Fig. 19] Her artwork was featured on the covers of magazines and newspapers, such as Palestine Research Center's journal *Shu'un Filastiniya* in 1977. [Fig. 20] Moreover, her leporello works were acquired by many collections and institutions, such as the British Museum and the Institut du monde arabe in the 1990s. [Fig. 21] Venetia Porter, curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East Art at the British Museum, commented on this earlier moment of institutional interest:

When we started to acquire [objects] at the end of the 1980s, we were the only institution in this country—and anywhere outside the Middle East really—that was acquiring this kind of material. Of course, in the Middle East, everybody knew about these practices. But people in the West didn't really know about it until the 1990s. The first art fair focusing on [contemporary art from the Arab world] was founded in Dubai in 2007. It's not even twenty years ago, but it's quite difficult now to imagine that people just didn't

know about these practices at the time. And these international fairs and biennials, like the Istanbul Biennial, initiated these conversations.³⁴

Another important presentation of Adnan's work in the 1990s was by Palestinian American art historian and curator Salwa Mikdadi, who curated the exhibition *Forces of Change* in 1994 at The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C. [Fig. 22] This show was organized by the International Council for Women in the Arts (ICWA); Adnan was one of the co-founders of that organization. Mikdadi presented a hundred-and-sixty works of art across various mediums by seventy female artists from fifteen countries in the Arab world. [Fig. 23] This was the first large-scale exhibition of contemporary art from the Arab world to take place in the United States, and it attempted to “change the one-dimensional and exoticizing tone towards Arab artists.”³⁵ The show was the result of extensive research conducted by Mikdadi. Between 1987 and 1993, she traveled across Algeria, Kuwait, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, visiting and interviewing more than a hundred artists, and meeting with various arts organizers and museums, building for herself a full picture of each country's art scene. In this exhibition, Adnan was represented by her leporello *One Linden Tree, Then Another* (1975). [Fig. 24] In the catalogue of the exhibition, all the artists had long biographies listing all the exhibitions they participated in before *Forces of Change*, acknowledging their previous exhibition histories.³⁶

One outcome of the discovery narrative is that it does not acknowledge these previous presentations of Adnan—not only those in non-Western institutions, but also those in Western contexts. Moreover, these examples show that prior to Adnan's presentation in the last decade, there was a substantial interest from Western institutions to show or acquire her leporellos rather than her paintings, as in the case of her presentation at British Museum, Institut du Monde Arabe, and The National Museum of Women in the Arts. Moreover, the discovery narrative had limitations in terms of opening a space for the “unbounded” and

³⁴ Venetia Porter, interview by author, London, January 14, 2020.

³⁵ Wassan Al-Khudhairi, “Forceful Change,” *The Exhibitionist*, October 2014, 8.

³⁶ Artists who have been regarded as discovered in the last decade by Western institutions were exhibited in this show, such as Saloua Raouda Choucair and Fahrelnissa Zeid, among many others. For the full list of the artists and their biographies, see: *Forces of Change: Artists of The Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994), 120-143.

“unhomely” nature of Adnan’s practice.³⁷ In the next section, I will look closer into these curatorial decisions, to analyze the reasons behind them and to suggest an alternative way of curating Adnan’s practice in her future presentations at Western institutions.

³⁷ I borrow these terms from Irit Rogoff and Okwui Enwezor, who see these characteristics of artistic practices as a result of the “widescale global modernity of peoples, goods, and ideas permanently on the move.” The result is “culture that operates metonymically, always simultaneously at separate but parallel registers.” See: Okwui Enwezor, “Bio-Politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of ‘Truth’ in Contemporary Art,” in Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (eds.), *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies, Berlin: Sternberg, 2008): 62–102.

IV—Conclusion: What is an Alternative?

What does the discovery narrative do? On the one hand it gives more visibility and acknowledgement; on the other hand, it narrows down complicated histories—or omits them altogether. The examples I have described in section II show that artists being presented by Western institutions for the first time, are portrayed as exhibiting for the first time *in their careers*. This understanding assumes that they were not acknowledged before or previously lacked opportunities to exhibit their works. This institutional narrative of “overlooked, forgotten, and/or rediscovered” artists therefore creates a myth around their practice.³⁸ Their histories outside Western institutions or by non-Western curators do not get counted. Eventually, discovery assumes the prerequisite of an acknowledgment from the cultural mainstream, one “naturally” positioned in the West. It creates a hierarchy between West and non-West, between institutional spaces in the cultural mainstream—museums and acclaimed institutions—and spaces and cultures relegated to outsider status: alternative exhibition spaces, galleries, Non-Western museums, and small or mid-sized institutions.³⁹

To put it simply, the various curators involved have different goals, norms and curatorial agendas. Mikdadi, for example, is, among other things, an art historian; she aimed to build an accurate historical accounting of the included artists’ careers, and through that accounting, to build legitimacy for the artists she presented. Inclusion was part of her agenda, but her method was also personal: As an Arab woman, she saw gaps in the historical record, and aimed to fill them. By contrast, Christov-Bakargiev, Joo, and Obrist—high profile international figures with institutional capital to spare—could confer legitimacy simply by including Adnan into their productions. Equally, though, this curatorial capital is undersigned by their ability to discover new artists and uncover forgotten histories. In this disparity between Mikdadi and the others, the elephant in the room is the art world as

³⁸ For an in-length essay on how this myth is operated in art writing language, see: Ashton Cooper, “The Problem of the Overlooked Female Artist: An Argument for Enlivening a Stale Model of Discussion,” *Hyperallergic*, January 10, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/173963/the-problem-of-the-overlooked-female-artist-an-argument-for-enlivening-a-stale-model-of-discussion/>.

³⁹ “This division between the historical center and its periphery is formed not only by what separates the powerful from the powerless but is also legitimized by cultural and racial differences.” Rasheed Araeen, “A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics.” *Third Text*, 14 (2000): 3–20.

such—and not least of all, the art market. When Obrist points his finger at an artist, it gets registered by institutions, galleries and auction houses. Mikdadi does not confer the same value or excitement, partly because she is herself a member of an underrepresented community.

Furthermore, the discovery narrative might not allow space for discussion about the institutional structures that led to the exclusion of underrepresented artists from art history in the first place.⁴⁰ Although rediscovering overlooked artists might be helpful for widening our knowledge of their achievements in art history, it might not be enough. It is equally urgent to acknowledge the earlier discouraging and exclusionary methodologies of the very institutional structures which later produced the discovery narrative. In this way, one can measure the specific effects of difference—which are manifested not only in outright exclusion but on troubled forms of inclusion and the functioning of the curatorial elite. These effects are inevitably present in curatorial decisions around underrepresented artists at Western institutions, as they affect the writing of history around their practices.

Looking closely at curatorial decisions for exhibiting Adnan's works indicated some general tendencies. It showed us that often Adnan's previous exhibition history was not acknowledged, and it showed how often one aspect of her practice was separated and prioritized above others in these newly established narratives. A solution to this problem could be organizing a different sort of retrospective for Adnan. And why has not this been the case so far? Rebecca Lewin, Exhibitions Curator at Serpentine Galleries explained:

We avoid that word because we're too small for a retrospective. I think a retrospective needs to be the equivalent of a catalogue raisonné. And to do that, you need to be able to show more work than we can fit in our buildings. So, we're happy with "survey" as a term. Because then you have an edited selection of things. To do a successful

⁴⁰ "Such attempts, whether undertaken from a feminist point of view, like the ambitious article on women artists which appeared in the 1858 Westminster Review, or more recent scholarly studies on such artists as Angelica Kauffmann and Artemisia Gentileschi, are certainly worth the effort, both in adding to our knowledge of women's achievement and of art history generally. But they do nothing to question the assumptions lying behind the question 'Why have there been no great women artists?' On the contrary, by attempting to answer it, they tacitly reinforce its negative implications." See: Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews*, January, 1971, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists>.

retrospective, there's a lot involved, and it demands a length of time and research, which might reach to five or ten years. And because we work, on the whole, with much younger artists that maybe don't have a lifetime's work to do a retrospective, we tend to work about two years in advance. But the main thing is the scale of it—the scope of what we can do in our spaces.⁴¹

It seems like one reason for not having a retrospective is about resources—of time, physical space, and budget. Another reason could be the limited access to the archives of these artists, and limited documentation. Notably most of Adnan's earlier exhibition history took place before the digital era. In our conversation, curator Salwa Mikdadi explained:

I think a great deal has to do with the internet. The digital age came later. It did not cover these early exhibitions—all the work that I have done. Maybe it's my fault: I haven't updated my website. It seems that all these artists were known to the Arab world, but not yet discovered by the West. When Western curators drew attention to these artists, then they got discovered by Arab curators and publics as well—not now, but when this whole interest started in the beginning. Although they were wrong—because if they wanted to depend on the recognition by the West, many of these artists exhibited in Venice, in Philadelphia, and all over the place as far back as in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s... This is why we are trying to document all this with my research now at NYU Abu Dhabi.⁴²

This limited access to archives may have played a role in curatorial decisions. Furthermore, the reason for focusing on one aspect of these artists' practices could be explained by the relation of the art market to the issue.⁴³ Newly discovered artistic practices attract the interest of the market. This market tends to position them within the linear narrative of art history, while also presenting their practice as a commodity. As a result, what gets presented in some

⁴¹ Rebecca Lewin, interview by author, London, January 10, 2020.

⁴² Salwa Mikdadi, telephone conversation with author, February 3, 2020.

⁴³ This concern was raised by Andrea Fraser in her 2006 essay, where she writes: "It appears that the critique of cultural elitism and the marginalization of minority and post-colonial cultures and audiences was not inconsistent with corporate interests in pursuing the largest possible markets for their messages. They are also consistent with the interests of artists and art professionals in gaining greater recognition, prestige, and respect for their work, as well as preserving a professional, if not political and artistic, autonomy. I would not draw the conclusion that there has been anything misguided about the progressive discourses that have challenged the cultural hierarchies and exclusionary practices of traditional museums. However, this narrative may indicate a problem with pursuing cultural critique as separable from economic critique and a social critique of professional status and power." See Andrea Fraser, "A Museum Is Not a Business. It is Run in a Businesslike Fashion," in *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* ed. Nina Möntmann (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 86–98.

of these exhibitions tend to be one aspect of their career, their relation to a specific geography, or one (saleable) medium, such as painting—all of which makes it easier for these practices to be promoted. For example, the practice of an artist from Middle East could be regarded in relation to women’s rights—a scenario in which activism is marketable.⁴⁴ Similarly, even when the artist of interest tends to shift contexts, making work in response to and with close conversation to different places and communities, the market still tends to promote their practice in relation to one geography—the Middle East in Adnan’s case—due to a tendency to exoticize. As a result, the presentation of these artistic practices at Western institutions might not do justice to the complexity of artistic practices that value duality, multidimensionality, and a non-linear perspective of existence. As Adnan points out:

I like the seas and I like the mountains. I am assimilated into Western culture—my mother was Greek—and Christianity, even if it started in the East, became one of the pillars of the West, but I am also very attached to the Muslim world. I understand it from the inside. All in all, it is true: there is duality in my life as in my thinking, and it works because I accept it rather than favoring one side or the other. It’s a dialectical movement. I accept that the same thing pleases me and displeases me, that something can be true and not true in the same time, that I am one thing and its opposite, and this ad infinitum.⁴⁵

Could a retrospective be imagined that opens a space for such dialectical movement? Let’s imagine a retrospective for Adnan in which the artwork generates the form of the exhibition. In this exhibition, we could acknowledge the multidimensionality of her practice in relation to different geographies and mediums. This presentation could highlight her practice responding to sociopolitical contexts of various countries she lived in—Lebanon, United States, and France. Rather than segregating her work, it could present a more holistic approach towards Adnan’s oeuvre, giving equal space to paintings, drawings, writings, leporellos, films, tapestries, and ceramic

⁴⁴The market has been particularly aggressive in the Middle East, and whenever you have women from the region, people imagine their work in relation to women’s rights,” See art historian Media Farzin quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Rumours & Recognition,” *Frieze*, October 13, 2013, <https://frieze.com/article/rumours-recognition>

⁴⁵ Obrist, *All Her Dimensions*, 42.

works. And it would make Adnan's previous exhibition and writing history present: listed in the catalogue or collected from the archives and presented in the exhibition space. In this imagined exhibition, we could value Adnan's image on the stage at an underground bar as much as her awards from acclaimed institutions. Adnan's age would no longer be the main focus of social media posts; there will be no celebration of discovery but instead a storytelling of what *really* happened. What if the solution to exclusion is not inclusion alone, but inclusion with a responsibility to history? Such a retrospective would demand resources: time, energy, and space, as well as generosity, love, and care.⁴⁶ But one can imagine the benefits of such an approach for challenging the discovery narrative—and embracing the complicated histories of beautiful mountain streams.

⁴⁶ Adnan refers to this generosity in one of her interviews: "And the real curator has this generosity. This is what makes a public intellectual out of him. An intellectual is not only someone who writes; it is someone who is a catalyzer of thinking, of art, who creates History, a part of History: the intellectual History. This requires generosity." See: Obrist, *All Her Dimensions*, 79.

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Figure 1: Etel Adnan on the stage. Date and location unknown. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Etel Adnan In All Her Dimensions* (Doha: Arab Museum of Modern Art Qatar Museums Authority, 2014).



Figure 2: *Etel Adnan: Paintings and Drawings* (installation view). Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Beirut, 2010.



Figure 3: documenta (13) (installation view). Kassel, 2012. ©documenta archive/Photographer: Ryszard Kasiewicz.



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Figure 4: documenta (13) (installation view). Kassel, 2012. ©documenta archive/Photographer: Ryszard Kasiewicz.



Figure 5: documenta (13) (installation view). Kassel, 2012. ©documenta archive/Photographer: Ryszard Kasiewicz.



Figure 6: Etel Adnan reading her poems at Serpentine Gallery’s Edgware Road Project. London, 2010.



Figure 7: *The Weight of the World* (installation view). Serpentine Gallery, London, 2016. ©readsreads.info.



Figure 8: *The Weight of the World* (installation view). Serpentine Gallery, London, 2016. © Tristan Fewings / Getty.



Figure 9: *New Work: Etel Adnan* (installation view). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2018. ©SFMOMA.



Figure 10: *New Work: Etel Adnan* (installation view). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2018. ©SFMOMA.



Figure 11: *New Work: Etel Adnan* (installation view). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2018. ©SFMOMA.



Figure 12: Etel Adnan, *Untitled*, 1965-70, oil on canvas. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Etel Adnan* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).



Figure 13: Etel Adnan, *California*, 1977, tapestry. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Etel Adnan* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).



Figure 14: Etel Adnan, *Five Senses for One Death*, 1969, ink and watercolor on paper. ©Callicoon Fine Arts.



Figure 15: Etel Adnan, *Untitled*, 1970-73, watercolor on paper. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Etel Adnan* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).




Figure 16: Motion, 1980-1989 / 2012, Super-8, digitized, color, sound, 92 mins. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Etel Adnan In All Her Dimensions* (Doha: Arab Museum of Modern Art Qatar Museums Authority, 2014).



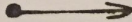
Figure 17: Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal in their apartment. Paris, 2016. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Etel Adnan* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).

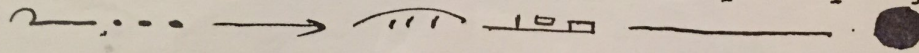
XOX

the universe is everywhere and its child-like patience protects us STOP
the universe's patience is a balm STOP a child's patience is a flower
a yellow sun took the place of the Arab's eye mouth and teeth
on the big ships of the Arabian Gulf they will sail like atoms
I think of the absolute freedom of the atoms in the sun's combustion

I wear the solar crown  as a crown of sorrow. I'm walking!

0 people with no calendar 0 Arab people 0 people unstable 0 phosphorescent people!

the sun is a fisherman's lake with burnt feet they swim!
a yellow sun stricken with menopause  0 patience!
Sun! the day has come for you to be inoffensive ■ shapeless spinning top



THE SOLAR BOAT IN THE MIDDLE OF ITS COURSE GETS SIDETRACKED IN ORCHARDS
IN A PORCELAIN SKY STOP FULLSTOP STOP STOP

Figure 18: Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, 1989.



Figure 19: *Etel Adnan: Artist's Books* (installation view). Darat al Funun, Amman, 1998.

لشؤون فلسطينية

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Figure 20: Etel Adnan, Palestine Research Center Illustration, 1977.



Figure 21: Etel Adnan, *Nabar Mubarak (Blessed day)*, 1990, ink and watercolor on paper. © British Museum Collection.



Figure 22: *Forces of Change* (installation view). Nexus (Atlanta Contemporary Art Center), Atlanta, 1995, showing work by Chaibia Tallal. Pictured from left to right is Salwa Mikdadi, Etel Adnan and Laura Nader.



Figure 23: *Forces of Change* (installation view). The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. 1994, showing work by Huguette Caland. Kathleen Buckalew. Installation Slide from *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, 1994. Betty Boyd Dettre Library and Research Center, National Museum of Women in the Arts.



Figure 24: Etel Adnan, *Nabar Mubarak (Blessed day)*, 1990, ink and watercolor on paper. *Forces of Change: Artists of The Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994).

Appendix

The accounting below was assembled for the catalogue for Etel Adnan's exhibition at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2014. See Obrist, ed. Etel Adnan In All Her Dimensions. Doha: Arab Museum of Modern Art Qatar Museums Authority, 2014: 22–25. I include it here to demonstrate both the multifaceted nature of Adnan's career, and her substantial exhibition history before 2010.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1961 O'Hanlon Gallery, Mill Valley, California
- 1963 Dominican College Gallery, San Rafael, California
- 1964 Karamanduca Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1965 Karamanduca Gallery, San Francisco California
- 1965 Mount Angel College Gallery, Mount Angel, Oregon
- 1968 Unitarian Center, San Rafael, California
- 1969 Dominican College Gallery, San Rafael, California
- 1971 Sight & Insight, The Cannery, San Francisco, California
- 1973 Dar el Fan, Beirut, Lebanon
- 1977 Galerie La Roue, Paris, France
- 1978 Galerie L'Atelier, Rabat, Morocco
- 1979 Asilah Festival, Morocco
- 1982 Al Sultan Gallery, Kuwait
- 1983 Perception Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, California
- 1983 Alif Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1984 Perception Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1985 Perception Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1986 Marin County Civic Center, San Rafael, California
- 1987 Samy Kinge Gallery, Paris, France
- 1988 Administration Bldg, Fort Mason, San Francisco, California
- 1989 Salazar Library, University of California, Sonoma, California

1990 Kufa Gallery, London, U.K.
1992 Gallery 50x70, Beirut, Lebanon
1998 Salazar Gallery, University of California, Sonoma, California
1998 Darat al Funun, Amman, Jordan
1999 Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
2004 Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
2006 Arte Mare, Bastia, Corsica, France
2007 Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
2007 Eileen Curtis Museum, Sausalito, California
2009 Bonnafont Gallery, San Francisco, California
2010 Europie Gallery, Paris, France
2010 Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
2012 Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Germany
2013 CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, California
2013 Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
2013 Galleria Continua, Paris, France, and San Gimignano, Italy
2013 Maison de la poésie, Paris, France
2014 Mathaf, Doha, Qatar
2014 cipM - centre international de poésie, Marseille, France

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1990 Evenements urbains, Grenoble, France
1990 Villa Croce, Genoa, Italy
1991 UNESCO, Paris, France
1991 Mediatheque, Mureaux, France

1991 *20 ans, 20 artistes*, L'Atelier, Rabat, Morocco

1991 Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France

1993 Galerie Natkin-Berta, Paris, France

1993 André Demedtshuis, Wielsbeke, Belgium

1994 Harelbeke Demedtshuis, Wielsbeke, Belgium

1994 Galerie de Paperbusse, Ostende, Belgium

1994 *4 Women Artists*, Alif Gallery, Washington, D.C.

1994 *Forces of Change*, National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.

1995 Le Arie del Tempo - Studio Alaya, Genoa, Italy

1995 Inter-American Gallery, Dade Wolfson Campus, Miami, Florida

1995 Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois

1995 Nexus Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

1995 Hallie Brown Ford Gallery, Salem, Oregon

1995 Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek, California

1996 Andre Demedtshuis, Wielsbeke, Belgium

1996 *Book Art VIII*, National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

1997 Fine Arts Gallery, University of Arkansas, Lafayette, Arkansas

1997 Bradford Gallery, San Anselmo, California

1997 *London Artists' Book Fair*, Barbican Center, London, U.K.

1998 *London Artists' Book Fair*, Barbican Center, London, U.K.

1998 Bradford-Smock Gallery, San Francisco, California

2000 *Art Paris*, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Paris France

2001 *Cart du Livre Arabe*, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, France

2001 Galerie Claude Lemand, Paris, France

2003 Jordan National Gallery, Amman, Jordan

2003 Musée Municipal de Thionville, France
2004 Palacio Reale, Naples, Italy
2006 British Museum, London, U.K.
2007 *5 Artists*, Oriental Museum, Moscow, Russia
2007 *5 Artists*, L'Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia
2009 *Taswir*, Martin Gropius Bau Museum, Berlin, Germany
2012 Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany
2013 *HIWAR*, Darat al Funun, Amman, Jordan
2014 Whitney Biennial, New York

AWARDS

1977 Amitié Franco-Arab Prize, awarded by the Association de Solidarité Franco-Arabe, for *Sitt Marie Rose*
2010 Winner of the 2010 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Book Award for *Master of the Eclipse*
2010 Winner of the Arab American National Museum's 2010 Arab American Book Award for *Master of the Eclipse*
2013 Winner of the 2013 LAMBDA Literary Award for Poetry for *Sea and Fog*
2013 Winner of the 2013 California Book Award for Poetry for *Sea and Fog*
2014 Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, France
Lifetime Achievement award by the Radius of Arab American Writers Inc. (RAWI)
Women Playwrights International honors Adnan with its annual Etel Adnan Award for Women Playwrights
Adnan has been the president of RAWI: Radius of Arab-American Writers, Inc.
Adnan was honored with an homage ceremony in Beirut, Lebanon
Small Press Traffic Homage to Etel Adnan

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BOOKS

1966 *Moonshots*. Beirut: Beyrouth. Out of print.

1971 *Five Senses for One Death*. New York: The Smith. Out of print.

1982 *From A To Z*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1982 *Sitt Marie Rose*. Trans. (from the French) Georgina Kleege. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press. Now in its 8th edition.

1985 *The Indian Never Had A Horse & Other Poems*. Illustrated by Russell Chatham. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1986 *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*. Illustrated by Etel Adnan. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1989 *The Arab Apocalypse*. Trans. (from the French) Etel Adnan. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1990 *The Spring Flowers Own & The Manifestations of the Voyage*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1993 *Of Cities & Women: Letters To Fanwaz*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1993 *Paris, When It's Naked*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

1997 *There In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

2003 *In/somnia*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

2005 *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

2008 *Seasons*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

2009 *Master of the Eclipse*. Northampton: Interlink Books. Winner of the Oakland Pen Award, 2010

2011 *Etel Adnan: On Love and the Cost We Are Not Willing to Pay Today: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 006*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

2012 *Sea and Fog*. Callicoon: Nightboat Books.

2012 *Homage to Etel Adnan*. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

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June 1966. "The Enemy's Testament." *Quixote: The Peace Issue* (The Monthly Literary Magazine of the University of Wisconsin), vol. 1, no. 7.

Autumn 1982. Excerpt from "The Beirut-Hell Express." *Compages*, no. 6.

Winter 1982-1983. "Maze." *Pablo Neruda Is a Banana Tree*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2.

Autumn 1983. Excerpt from "The Beirut-Hell Express." *Compages*, no. 7.

Autumn 1984. Excerpt from *Sitt Marie Rose. Sinister Wisdom*, no. 27.

October 1984. "To Write in a Foreign Language." *Unheard Words*. Later published in an anthology with the same title, *Unheard Words*, Mineke Schipper (ed.), London: Allison & Basby.

Winter 1984. "Amal Hayati." *Connexion: Women & Militarism*, no. 11.

1987. Excerpt from *The Arab Apocalypse. Red Bass: For Palestine*, no. 12.

Summer, Autumn, Winter and 1988. Excerpt from *The Arab Apocalypse. Compages*, nos. 18, 20, 21, 22.

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July and December 1993. "Les Intellectuels & La Guerre." *Strategies: Peuples Méditerranéens*.

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Winter & Spring 1998. "The Unfolding of An Artist's Book." *Discourse: A Journal of Theoretical Studies in Media & Culture*.

Autumn 1998. "What Besets Lebanese Arts, Poetry And Theater." *Al Jadid*, vol. 4, no. 25.

Spring & Summer 1999. "25 Years Later." *Penumbra*.
Insomnia. Fourteen Hills.

Spring 1999. "Letter from Beirut." *Al Jadid*, vol. 5, no. 7.

Autumn 1999. "The Nomadization Of Culture." *Al Jadid*, vol. 5, no. 29.

Summer 2000. Excerpt from *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*. *Archipelago*, no. 4.

Autumn 2000. "The Power Of Death." *First Intensity*, no. 15.

Autumn 2002. "Letter to Tripwire." *Tripwire*, 6.

Autumn 2002. "The Politics of My Garden." *Five Fingers Review*.

2002. "Dear Captain Ahab." *Pom2*, no. 4.

Winter 2004. "Time, Desire and Fog." *Blithe House Quarterly*.

2004. "A Library Set on Fire." *Fourteen Hills*.

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2006. "The Unfolding of an Artist's Book." *Bombay Gin* (Naropa Press).

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1973 "The Battle of Angels." *From the Belly of the Shark*. Walter Lowenfels (ed.). New York: Vintage Books.

1975 "Pablo Neruda Is a Banana Tree." *For Neruda For Chile*. Walter Lowenfels (ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.

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- 1977 "In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country." *Mundus Artium: Arabic Issue, vol. x, no. 1*. Dallas: University of Texas at Dallas.
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- 1984 "Wild with Gentleness: Introducing Russell Chatham." *Russell Chatham a Monograph*. Seattle: Winn Books.
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- 1992 Excerpt from *The Arab Apocalypse. Resurgent: New Writing by Women*. Lou Robinson & Camille Norton (eds.). Champagne: University of Illinois Press.
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- 1997 Excerpt from *Journey to Mount Tamalpais. Beside the Sleeping Maiden: Poets of Marin*. C.B. Follett (ed.). Sausalito: Arctos Press.
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THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS

Poetry put to music by contemporary musicians:

A performance of the Adnan Songbook, which sets a group of eight love poems by Etel Adnan to music composed by Gavin Bryars, was performed as part of the opening events of Mathaf, Doha, on 16 March 2014. Produced in partnership with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra.

Tania Leon: *The Queen of the Sea* performed in New York.

Gavin Bryars: Love Poems, first commissioned by the BBC, then, under the title *Adnan Songbook*, premiered at the Almeida Theatre in London, in 1996, then performed at the Festival of Music in Cologne, in Vancouver, Bergen, in the Festival of Other Minds in San Francisco, and a great number of other venues. Adnan Songbook is part of the 2 CDs, *A Portrait*, by Gavin Bryars.

Henry Threadgill put to music 5 sections of *The Arab Apocalypse* performed in Oakland in 1999.

Annea Lockwood put to music parts of her poem, *Sea*, which was performed under the title *Luminescence* at La Mamma within the Festival Sounds Like Now, in October 2004, in New York.

Zad Moultaka was commissioned by the Baalbeck Festival in Lebanon to put to music *Five Senses for One Death*. It was performed in Baalbeck under the title *Nepsis*, then at the Saintes Festival in France, and at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, France, all in 2005.

Zad Moultaka was again commissioned by the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam to write an opera. The text contains 5 sections of *The Arab Apocalypse*. The work was performed in Amsterdam on 1 December 2007.

Writing for the Theatre:

The French part of *Civil Wars*, a multilanguage opera by the American stage director Robert Wilson was performed in Lyon, and Bobigny, in 1985.

The Actress was performed in the author's own French translation, at La Ménagerie de Verre Theatre in Paris, in March 1999.

Like a Christmas Tree was performed in San Francisco, at Venue 9, in 2003; in Dusseldorf, at the Schauspielhaus, in 2003, in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, in 2003, and in Udine, Italy, in 2005.

Jennin (a poem) was adapted for the stage and produced at Attis Theatre, in Athens, in 2005.

Proximite et éloignement de la mémoire (written in French by the author), was performed at La Panta Theatre, Caen, France, in 2009.

The novel, *Sitt Marie Rose*, in an adaptation for the stage, was produced at the Forum Freies Theater, in Düsseldorf, in 2009.

Crime of Honor was published in a French translation by L'Arche, editors, in Paris in 2011.

In October 2011, in Düsseldorf, a play based on *To Be In a Time of War*, with texts by Heiner Müller, was produced at the Forum Freies Theater, in Düsseldorf, then presented in Berlin and Beirut.