

Etel Adnan Symposium

The Arab Apocalypse

Art, Abstraction & Activism
in the Middle East

Zentrum Paul Klee
27 - 28.09.2018

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**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**

Philosophisch-historische Fakultät
Institut für Kunstgeschichte
Centre for Global Studies

Gegründet von Maurice E.
und Martha Müller
sowie den Erben Paul Klee


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**UNIVERSITÉ
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Etel Adnan Symposium

The Arab Apocalypse

Art, Abstraction and Activism in the Middle East

Zentrum Paul Klee / Monument im Fruchtländ 3, 3000 Bern
27 - 28.09.2018

Organizers:

Nadia Radwan, Institute of Art History/Centre for Global Studies, University of Bern
Nina Zimmer, Kunstmuseum Bern/Zentrum Paul Klee
in collaboration with **Silvia Naef**, Arabic Studies Section, University of Geneva

On the occasion of the Etel Adnan exhibition (Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, 15.06-07.10.2018), the University of Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee are jointly organizing a symposium focusing on themes that are reflected by the work and career of the American-Lebanese artist and writer Etel Adnan. "The Arab Apocalypse" refers to her series of 59 illustrated poems about the Lebanese Civil War (originally published under the title *L'Apocalypse arabe*, 1980) and offers a starting point to discuss the issues of art and activism in the Arab World. This symposium questions the ability of art and the museum to function as mediums for political protest and humanitarian activism. What does the relationship between art and activism tell us about the aesthetization of politics? Additionally, the symposium seeks to address the issue of abstract forms of art and avant-garde in the region by examining its current goals and historical roots. What does it mean to be an abstract artist in the Middle East? How can abstraction inform us about political and social dissent? Other themes will be addressed in relation to Adnan's works, such as the role of Arab women in the global art scene. This event will bring together scholars, as well as PhD students working on these topics.

Etel Adnan (1925), *Untitled* (detail), 2010, Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg / Beirut

Program

27.09.2018

17:00 Visit of the exhibition

Fabienne Eggelhöfer,
Head Curator, Zentrum Paul Klee

18:00 In conversation with Etel Adnan
(via Skype)

Nadia Radwan, University of Bern

28.09.2018

Morning session:

9:30 **Nina Zimmer**, Director,
Kunstmuseum Bern/Zentrum Paul Klee
Nadia Radwan, University of Bern
Welcome address and introduction

10:00 **Silvia Naef**, University of Geneva
"Painting in Arabic": Etel Adnan,
Diasporic Existence and the Arab World

10:30 **Sonja Mejcher-Atassi**,
The American University of Beirut
Cross-cultural Encounters in Contemporary Book Art between Baghdad and Beijing: Etel Adnan and Rafa Nasiri's A Library Set on Fire (2008)

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 **Nadine Atallah**,
Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
Women Artists from Egypt on the Globalised Scene

12:00 Lunch break

Afternoon session:

13:30 **Kirsten Scheid**,
American University of Beirut
Visual Objections: Subjectivity and Sovereignty in Art by Arab Women

14:00 **Nadia von Maltzahn**,
Orient-Institut, Beirut
The Museum as a Platform for Emancipation? Women artists in Beirut's Sursock Museum

14:30 **Morad Montazami**,
Tate Modern, London
Hamed Abdalla:
an Arab Letterist/Leftist Fighter

15:00 Coffee break

15:30 **Charlotte Bank**,
Art-Lab, Berlin
Critical, Committed, Engaged. Modern and Contemporary Artistic Practice in Syria

16:00 **Sébastien Delot**,
Director of LaM, Villeneuve-d'Ascq/
Curator of the Etel Adnan Exhibition
Civil Wars, Etel Adnan, Bob Wilson and Delphine Seyrig. An Unedited History

16:30 Break

17:00 **Joan Grandjean**, **Riccardo Legena**,
Mirl Redmann, **Firouzeh Saghafi**,
Zouina Ait Slimani
Moderator: **Noémie Etienne**, University of Bern
Roundtable and conclusive discussion with the PhD students

17:30 Keynote: **Samia Halaby**,
Artist and Activist
The Political Basis of Abstraction in the 20th Century