

## The Arab Apocalypse: Art, Abstraction & Activism (Bern, 27–28 Sept, 18)

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Sep 27–28, 2018

Nadia Radwan

Etel Adnan International Symposium

“The Arab Apocalypse”: Art, Abstraction and Activism in the Middle East

Zentrum Paul Klee, Monument im Fruchtländ 3, Bern, Switzerland

Organizers:

Nina Zimmer, Kunstmuseum Bern/Zentrum Paul Klee

Nadia Radwan, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Bern University  
in collaboration with Silvia Naef, 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 a wide range of scholars working on these topics.

### PROGRAM

#### THURSDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 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

#### FRIDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 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, The 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, 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

Reference:

CONF: The Arab Apocalypse: Art, Abstraction& Activism (Bern, 27-28 Sept, 18). In: Arthist.net, Sep 19, 2018 (accessed Aug 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/18930>>.