Etel Adnan Symposium

The Arab Apocalypse

Art, Abstraction and Activism in the Middle East

Zentrum Paul Klee / Monument im Fruchtland 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