

# Etel Adnan

Etel Adnan (1925–2021) was a Lebanese-American poet, painter, and philosopher whose life and work were deeply shaped by anti-colonial struggle. Born in French-mandated Beirut to a Greek mother and Syrian father, her early life unfolded in a multilingual, colonially stratified society that sharpened her awareness of power, exile, and identity.

Trained in philosophy in Paris and later teaching in the United States, she wrote in French, English, and sometimes Arabic—each language carrying its own political weight. Her writings consistently resisted imperial narratives, centering the experiences of colonized peoples, especially in her landmark novel *Sitt Marie Rose*, which exposed sectarianism, patriarchy, and the violent legacies of French colonialism in Lebanon.

Exile became a central theme of her life and art: she lived between Beirut, California, and later Paris, turning displacement into a creative force. Her paintings—bold, abstract, and non-representational—were also a form of quiet resistance, asserting beauty and self-determination outside Western artistic hierarchies.

Adnan's life can be read as a continuous anti-colonial practice: rejecting imposed identities, amplifying marginalized voices, and transforming personal diasporic experience into a broader political and artistic testimony.

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