

For Immediate Release



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In Celebration of Humanistic Inquiry: AUB's University Medal Conferred on Etel Adnan

The American University of Beirut (AUB) is very pleased to announce that it has conferred the University Medal on Etel Adnan in recognition of her extraordinary achievements as a writer and visual artist. AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri bestowed the medal on Adnan in a celebration at her home in Paris on May 14, 2017 in the presence of some close friends, consisting of artists, architects, and AUB professors. Among its honorary degrees, the University Medal represents AUB's most prestigious recognition.

Born in Beirut in 1925, Etel Adnan is an internationally acclaimed writer - both in French and in English - known in particular for her 1977 novel *Sitt Marie Rose*, one of the very first novels to come out of the Lebanese Civil War. She has published more than thirty volumes of poetry and prose, among them *L'Apocalypse Arabe*, *The Indian Never Had a Horse*, *Paris When It's Naked*, and *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country*, works which break free from literary as well as social and political conventions in pursuit of humanistic inquiry. Her work has been translated into many languages, including Arabic, which Adnan describes as "the forbidden paradise" of her childhood.

Having grown up in "a house of many mansions," as Kamal Salibi has titled his history of Lebanon, Adnan has roots in many corners of the region. Her mother was Greek and her father was an Ottoman army officer from Damascus. They met in Smyrna and came to Beirut after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Growing up in Lebanon under the French Mandate, Adnan spoke Turkish and Greek with her parents at home and French in school.

It was in visual art, and in particular in abstract painting, that she later found a language free of barriers constructed of words. Adnan's work has been shown in major art biennales and collective and individual exhibitions throughout the world. She is internationally recognized as one of our greatest living artists.

Adnan studied French literature at the École Supérieure des Lettres in Beirut from 1945 to 1949, teaching at the same time at the Ahliya High School. She received a scholarship to study philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, then moved to the United States in 1955 to continue her studies at Harvard University. However, after arriving in the U.S., she decided not to pursue her PhD but to teach Humanities at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. There, she found a new voice writing in English, especially as an active participant in the anti-Vietnam War movement. She returned to Beirut in the early 1970s, where she worked for the cultural pages of the Lebanese daily L'Orient Le Jour, then left Beirut again at the outbreak of the civil war.

Having spent much of her life between Beirut, Paris, and California, and having visited hundreds of cities across the globe, Adnan can be described as a citizen of the world – which is part of what makes her a consummate “citizen” of AUB. “I grew up in the vicinity of AUB and lived part of my adult life in Ras Beirut,” says Adnan. “I have always dreamt of teaching at AUB. Receiving this medal touches me very much. I feel as though I enter AUB through its beautiful gates. It feels like a homecoming.”

Etel Adnan’s life spans a historical threshold and nearly a century. She carries the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and the diverse stories of exile, which she inherited from her parents about a world forever lost. In her literary and artistic work she has explored alternatives to the political realities which she has experienced first-hand. Despite all the horrors she has lived through – from WWII to the nakba of 1948, the Arab defeat in the June War of 1967, the Vietnam War, the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 to 1990, the Iraq wars of 1991 and 2003, and the ongoing war in Syria – she has held on firmly to hope for a more humane world. In conferring the University Medal on Etel Adnan, which she wore proudly and happily around her neck throughout President Khuri’s visit, AUB is celebrating her as a beacon of humanistic inquiry and partaking in her dream of a better future.

AUB Medal Historical Background:

The University Medal was created by the Board of Trustees in the spring of 1990 to be awarded periodically by the vote of the Board to selected individuals in the recognition of distinguished and meritorious service to the University. It is accompanied by a citation signed by the Chairman of the Board and the President of the University. It was historically awarded to:

Rafic B. Hariri (1990, 1998); Constantine Zurayk (1991); Samir Makdisi (1998) ; Soumaya Khuri for Raja N. Khuri (2000); Suliman Olayan (2000); George Mitchell (2002); Paul Volcker (2002); Richard A. Debs (2005); Kamal A. Shair (2007); Nicola N. Khuri (2009); Thomas Q. Morris (2009); Ann Z. Kerr-Adams (2010).

ENDS

Text written by:

**Sonja Mejcher-Atassi
Department of English, AUB**

For more information please contact:

**Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: 03427024 Office: 01374374 Ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb**

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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