

MALIHEH AFNAN: PAYSAGES, PERSONNAGES, ECRITURES

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Maliheh Afnan's work both reflects and transcends the many cultural references that have informed a life spent between the Middle East, America and Europe.

She was born in 1935 to Persian parents in Haifa, Palestine, and during her childhood witnessed great upheaval in the Middle East. Her family was caught at the crossroads of huge historical change, and left Palestine for Beirut, Lebanon in 1949. Afnan graduated with a BA from the American University of Beirut in 1955 and then moved to Washington DC to study at the Corcoran School of Art, from where she graduated with an MA in Fine Arts in 1962. After a few years in Kuwait, Afnan returned to Beirut, where she lived until the outbreak of the civil war in 1974. She spent the following 23 years in Paris, before settling in London in 1997, where she lives and works today.

Dispossession, exile, and yearning for home are therefore recurring themes, rendered in an elegant, unsentimental and poetic style. The series, "Paysages" echo with nostalgia for what has been lost, mesmerising layers and mappings rendered in her familiar palette of earthy tones, warm ochres and sonorous reds. The series, "Ecritures" reveal repeated glyphs and ghostly outlines, which induce an almost trance-like state in the viewer. These are invented scripts and inscriptions, where Afnan "writes her paintings". As to the haunting "Personages", they are, she says, "anonymous figments of my imagination, based on all the faces I have seen in my life. Curiously, they are all male and almost always old. They seem to wear a map of their lives on their faces".

We are left with a sense of what it means to live in other times, in different places. In essence, Afnan's work is about memory and time passing, and her images of eroding traces, faces and places linger long in the memory.

Exhibition curated by Rose Issa