

Victoria Miro

Looking Outwards to Look Inwards: *Etel Adnan, Milton Avery, Ilse D'Hollander*

Exhibition: 14 March–18 April 2026

Victoria Miro Venice, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Milton Avery, *Fishing Bird*, 1962
Oil on canvas board
61 x 50.8 cm
24 x 20 in
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Courtesy Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *Looking Outwards to Look Inwards*, a three-person exhibition of paintings by Etel Adnan, Milton Avery and Ilse D'Hollander. The exhibition is accompanied by a new essay by Christopher Riopelle, Curator, National Gallery, London.

This exhibition features three artists whose lives spanned the twentieth century, working across different generations and geographies yet united by their distilled observations of place and the journeys that inspired them.

For Milton Avery (1885–1965), it was long, hot summers spent on America's East Coast that were an enduring source of inspiration; for Etel Adnan (1925–2021), the memory of her childhood in Lebanon, or the fertile valleys of California, where she settled in the 1950s. Ilse D'Hollander (1968–1997) would spend hours walking and cycling the flat, agricultural land, rivers and canals of East Flanders, returning to her remote studio where she would translate the pathways she had travelled into paintings.

None of the paintings on view, which date from the 1950s to the 1990s, were made *en plein air*; the artists inhabited and experienced landscapes only to draw on them from memory back in the studio. In their canvases, the living landscape is translated into simplified, sometimes geometric, though always intensely charged passages of colour.

An accompanying text by Christopher Riopelle explores how landscape painting was an important route into abstraction: ‘In recent years, explanations for the spiritual origins of abstract painting have been ascendant. Yes, the aspiring soul plays a huge role here but so too does straightforward material observation. Look long enough and landscape falls into broad patterns of shape and colour. Follow the eye. Abstraction inevitably emerges.’

About the artists

Etel Adnan was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1925 and died in Paris, France, in 2021. An acclaimed poet, novelist and artist, she began painting in her thirties and gained widespread recognition as a visual artist through her inclusion in Documenta 13 in 2012. Adnan developed a distinct visual language, one rooted in colour, form and intuition, as her abstract paintings sought to capture the essence of land, sea, sky and cosmos. She revered nature and believed that its power was revealed through colour. She described painting as an impulsive act, completing each work in a single sitting, working indoors and entirely from memory. Laying the stretched canvas flat, like a page on a table, she applied oil paint directly with a palette knife, creating planes of colour that convey a placeless landscape from afar and reveal a brilliant intensity upon close observation.

One of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, **Milton Avery** (1885–1965) pursued an independent and steadfast course throughout his career. Drawing imagery from the world around him, in particular the landscapes and people he loved, his art is as intimate and accessible as it is towering in its ambition and achievement. With his focus on simplified forms and use of colour as a primary means of expression, in the 1930s Avery profoundly influenced and won the devotion of fellow US artists including future abstract expressionists Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman. Yet, while seeking to express an idea in its simplest form, Avery never sought pure abstraction for himself. Above all, he is an artist who resists categorisation. ‘I never have any rules to follow,’ he stated in 1952, ‘I follow myself.’

In her short life, **Ilse D’Hollander** (1968–1997) created an intelligent, sensual and highly resonant body of work. Her often small-scale canvases and works on paper are charged with references to the everyday. Yet, enlivened by an expressive, economical touch, her work resonates just as strongly as a sustained, self-reflexive enquiry into the act of painting. D’Hollander drew upon her impressions and experience of place, particularly the Flemish countryside where she spent the last, highly productive years of her life. While alluding to objects and places in the world, as well as specifics of temperature and light, D’Hollander’s paintings are seldom immediately recognisable as straightforward landscapes. Rather, they can be read as a series of accumulated impressions, adjustments and layerings – a visual record of the artist’s thought processes.

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