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FAHRELNISSA ZEID'S EXHIBITION *IMMERSION* AT DIRIMART LONDON

Immersion

Fahrelnissa Zeid

Opening: 21 April 2026

Venue: Dirimart London

This exhibition can be visited 21 April–30 May 2026

(Mondays by appointment; Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm)

LONDON, 7 APRIL 2026 – Dirimart London presents *Immersion*, the first UK gallery exhibition this century dedicated to the pioneering Turkish–Arab modernist Fahrelnissa Zeid (1901–1991). Curated by Adila Laïdi-Hanieh, author of the revisionist biography *Fahrelnissa Zeid: Painter of Inner Worlds*, the exhibition focuses on the most innovative decades of Zeid's practice, from the 1940s to 1960s, bringing together works produced in Istanbul, London, Paris, and Ischia..

Following her 2017 institutional retrospective at Tate Modern, *Immersion* marks a significant UK gallery homecoming, with several works on public view for the first time. Spanning figuration and abstraction, the exhibition highlights Fahrelnissa Zeid's dynamic, expressionist language across monumental compositions and intimate works on paper. The title reflects her fascination with enveloping visual worlds – from vortex-like forms and maritime imagery to astral landscapes – and her bold, sensory exploration of colour and texture.

Emerging in the 1940s, Fahrelnissa Zeid developed a distinctive expressionist language that evolved into bold abstraction before returning to figuration in the 1960s. A member of the modernist *d Grubu* (d Group) in Türkiye and later associated with the *Nouvelle École de Paris*, she occupied a rare position across multiple artistic centres prior to the contemporary globalised era. In 1954, she became the first woman to hold a solo exhibition at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, marking a key moment in the city's post-war cultural history.

The exhibition is anchored by a selection of major gestural abstractions, presented alongside earlier figurative works from the 1940s and a notable portrait from the 1960s. Highlights include *Aquatic Depths (Sea Cave)* (1962), which beckons from the street-facing window with a lush palette of blues and greens. Through modulated colour and palette-knife marks, the composition evokes a dual perspective, both above and within the sea, where fantastical maritime forms emerge in unexpected shapes and hues.

Ischia Terra Incognita (1961) transforms an evening sky into a red and yellow maelstrom, echoing Fahrelnissa Zeid's kaleidoscopic evocations of the sublime. Together, these two paintings offer rare insight into her little-known Ischia period in the 1960s. Following her and her family's exile after the 1958 Iraq revolution, Ischia became a place of refuge, where her palette shifted from darker, foreboding tones to luminous compositions inspired by sea and sky.



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The artist's 1950s primitivist phase is represented by *Alice in Wonderland* (1955) and *Depth* (ca. 1953). Here, darker palettes, jagged markings, and symbolic forms signal a shift away from her earlier kaleidoscopic abstractions. In *Alice in Wonderland*, the familiar narrative is reimagined as a turbulent descent into a vortex of colour and motion.

Works from the 1940s further trace the extent of Fahrelnissa Zeid's artistic development. *Adam and Eve and the Broken World*, exhibited only twice before – first in 1948 at Gimpel Gallery, London and later in New York in 1950 – reflects her early experimentation with abstraction via kaleidoscopic painting. In dialogue are a series of figurative works, also produced in the 1940s, originally exhibited in landmark shows in Istanbul and Izmir in 1945 and 1946. These works contributed to her becoming the only female member of *d Grubu* and to her selection for international touring exhibitions in France and the UK. Three of these works are shown in the UK for the first time.

Works on paper – including lithographs, gouaches, sketches, and rare pochoirs – further reveal Fahrelnissa Zeid's enduring fascination with rhythm, the cosmos, and all-over colour compositions, with many also exhibited publicly for the first time.

Reflecting on her practice in 1950, Fahrelnissa Zeid wrote: 'I am a means to an end. I transpose the cosmic, magnetic vibrations that rule us.' *Immersion* invites viewers to experience this visionary artistic language firsthand.

The exhibition is on view at Dirimart London from 21 April to 30 May 2026.

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Fahrelnissa Zeid (1901, Istanbul–1991, Amman) was a pioneering Turkish–Arab modernist artist of the mid-twentieth century. She was a member of the 1940s modernist *D Grubu* (D Group) in Türkiye and later associated with the *Nouvelle École de Paris* in the 1950s. In 1954, she became the first woman to hold a solo exhibition at London’s ICA.

She studied at the Istanbul School of Fine Arts and at the Académie Ranson in Paris during the 1910s and 1920s, and held her first solo exhibition in Istanbul in 1945.

Based in London from 1946 to 1968, Fahrelnissa Zeid maintained a sustained and highly visible practice. She held her first exhibition in the city in 1948 at St George’s Gallery, and subsequently exhibited at Gimpel and Lord galleries in 1948, 1949, and 1957. During the 1940s and 1950s, she also participated in group exhibitions in Bristol, Dublin, and Edinburgh. Critics of the period, including George Butcher, Morris Collis, and Terence Mullaly, praised her work, which was reproduced on the covers of *ArtReview* and *Poetry London*. In 1954, Paule Vézelay invited her to join the UK chapter of the modernist group *Espace*. In 1960, she was included in *Dialogues on Art*, Édouard Roditi’s book of interviews with key figures of twentieth-century modernism, alongside Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Barbara Hepworth, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Gabriele Münter, and Eduardo Paolozzi. She was the subject of a major posthumous retrospective at Tate Modern in 2017. In the UK, her work is held in the collections of Tate and Bradford Museums and Galleries, the latter following a 1964 donation from the Contemporary Art Society.

Beyond the UK, Fahrelnissa Zeid maintained a studio in Paris from 1951 to 1975 and participated in the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, a key platform for international abstract art in the 1950s. She held solo exhibitions at the Colette Allendy, Galerie de Beaune, Kléber, La Hune, Dina Viorny, and Katia Granoff galleries between 1949 and 1972, and exhibited in New York at the Iolas Hugo Gallery in 1950. In 1975, she moved to Amman, where she continued to work and teach until her death.

Her retrospectives include exhibitions at the Neue Galerie, Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen (1990), and the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1990); Darat al Funun, Amman (1993); Istanbul Modern (2006); and Tate Modern, London, and Deutsche Bank Kunsthalle, Berlin (2017). Her work has also been featured in major international exhibitions, including the Istanbul (2015), Sharjah (2015), and Venice (2024) Biennials, as well as surveys of global modernism such as *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016); *Women of Abstraction*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Guggenheim Bilbao (2021); and *The Woman Question: 1550–2025*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2025).

Fahrelnissa Zeid’s work is held in major public and private collections worldwide, including the Barjeel Art Foundation; Elgiz Museum; the French State collections; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; the Huma Kabakci Collection; the Institut du Monde Arabe; Istanbul Modern; the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts; the Khalid Shoman Foundation, Darat al Funun; Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art; the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum Ludwig; the Papko Art Collection; the Sharjah Art Foundation; and the Wright Museum of Art.

Adila Laïdi-Hanieh is a writer, art historian, and a former museum director. A onetime painting student of Fahrelnissa Zeid, she published the artist’s revisionist biography, *Fahrelnissa Zeid: Painter of Inner Worlds* (Art/Books, London, 2017), based on exclusive access to the artist’s private papers and personal archive, providing the definitive scholarly account of her life and career. She publishes regularly on Fahrelnissa Zeid in academic journals and encyclopaedias, and provides expertise on her work to collectors and institutions.