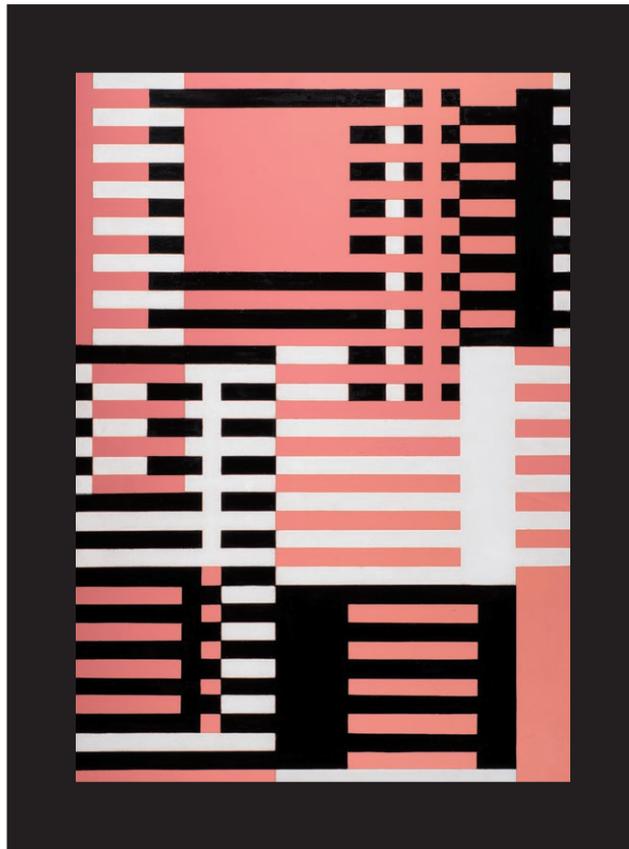


Exhibition

# Anni and Josef Albers. Art and Life

24 Feb.—19 Jun. 2022



Josef Albers, *Goldrosa*, ca. 1926

Press Dossier  
IVAM Centre Julio González

IVAM

Exhibition

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24 Feb.—19 Jun. 2022

Curator:  
Julia Garimorth

Production:  
Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris,  
co-organised by IVAM

Collaboration:  
Fundació Banc Sabadell

The exhibition is part of the  
official programme of the World  
Design Capital Valencia 2022



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# Anni and Josef Albers. Art and Life

Produced by the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and co-organised by the IVAM, the show brings together 325 works by two great 20th-century artists, Anni and Josef Albers. Born in Germany, they met in 1922 at the Bauhaus School and were married three years later. In 1933, they emigrated to the United States, where they were invited to teach at Black Mountain College, an experimental school in the mountains of North Carolina. In that new environment, Josef pursued his research into colour and Anni continued exploring different techniques of weaving.

Their intimacy, the fruit of their close relationship, led throughout their lives to mutual support and encouragement within a framework of respectful and uninterrupted dialogue. Always conscious of forms, materials and colours, they produced an oeuvre that is now considered one of the foundations of modern art, and their influence on later generations of artists has remained constant.

In both their art and their teaching, they ceaselessly raised new questions through a sensitive observation of the visual and tactile world: "Learn to see and to feel life, cultivate imagination, because there are still marvels in the world, because life is a mystery and always will be" (Josef Albers).

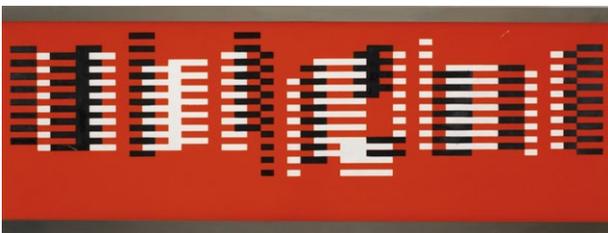
The exhibition, which includes paintings, photographs, woven fabrics, drawings and glass pieces, follows a chronological order and establishes a dialogue between the two artists, emphasising their differences and similarities.

## THE BAUHAUS

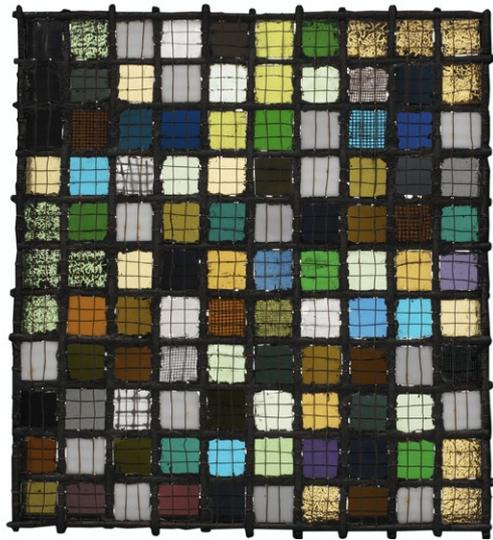
The Bauhaus Manifesto, published in April 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius, the school's founder, made a great impression on Josef Albers and Annelise Fleischmann. Both felt increasingly frustrated with the artistic education they had received, and the Bauhaus provided answers for their way of understanding teaching: the encouragement of learning through practical experience and the development of a visual and tactile awareness of materials and their surrounding phenomena.

### JOSEF ALBERS AND THE GLASS WORKSHOP

In the autumn of 1920, Josef Albers enrolled at the Bauhaus in Weimar. The German economy had entered a depression, and inflation was out of control in the 1920s. Forced to salvage materials from the rubbish of Weimar, Josef used them to make assemblages and works with fragments of glass. The teachers at the Bauhaus, who were trying to steer Josef towards the mural painting workshop, were not unanimous in their response to these glass pieces. Gropius threatened him with expulsion, but Albers persisted. Finally, against all the odds, Josef was not only permitted to continue his training at the Bauhaus, but was asked to open a Glass Workshop. After initially filling the post of *Geselle* (artisan), Josef Albers very soon went on to become the technical director of the workshop, with Paul Klee as artistic director.



Josef Albers, *Fuge*, ca. 1926



Josef Albers, *Gitterbild*, ca. 1921

### ANNI ALBERS AND THE WEAVING WORKSHOP

Annelise Fleischmann applied to enrol at the Bauhaus School in 1922. After initially being turned down, she was admitted in April that same year. She found the atmosphere jovial and soon made friends with several of her schoolmates, particularly Josef Albers. The two artists began a relationship and were married three years later. Annelise Fleischmann thus became Anni Albers.

In 1923, Anni enrolled in the textile workshop. Weaving was probably not her first choice, but it was obligatory at the school to sign on for a specific workshop. Although equality was theoretically one of the basic principles of the Bauhaus, in keeping with Gropius's wish to establish "no difference between the beautiful sex and the strong sex", the textile workshop was regarded all the same as the "women's class". After overcoming her initial misgivings, Anni ended up devoting herself to her chosen field and found inspiration in her new surroundings, enjoying complete freedom to experiment.

## A NEW LANGUAGE OF ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

In April 1925, growing political pressure forced the Bauhaus School in Weimar to close down and move to Dessau. The decision was a result of the city's request to Walter Gropius to design a new building for the school. The building was officially inaugurated in December 1926.

Anni and Josef Albers immediately reacted to the new architectural setting. Josef developed a language of architectural forms made with a technique that consisted of covering a piece of transparent or opaque white glass with a thin layer of blown and hand-coloured crystal, and Anni produced long strips of woven silk in similar sizes that she called *Wallhangings*.

## JOSEF ALBERS, DESIGN AND PHOTOGRAPHY

In 1926, Josef Albers started to design and create furniture and other everyday objects, and took part in the creation of a typeface, Universal, that was specific to the Bauhaus. Working in wood or in glass and metal, the artist always attached great importance to the qualities of the materials. For him, design was to be reduced to its simplest and most functional expression, but



Josef Albers, *Writing desk*, ca. 1927



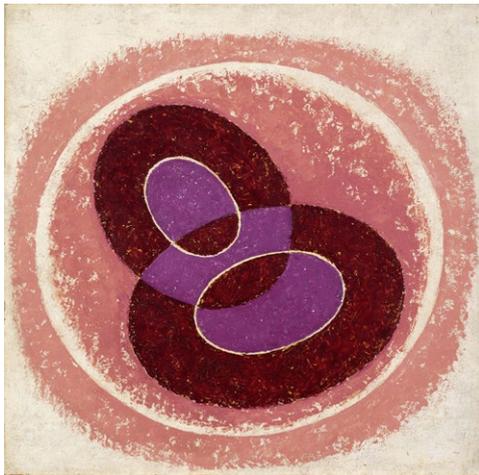
Josef Albers, *K-Trio*, ca. 1932

without neglecting the basic elements of balance, harmony and exact proportions.

His work in glass gradually shifted towards black, white and grey tones, and the vertical and horizontal constructions gave way to curves and undulating forms. This new orientation no doubt derived from a growing interest in photography, which he started to practise in 1928. His collages and photomontages offer a totally new reading of the representational space. Albers captures the subject in a series of close-ups, recalling a cinematic process, and shows the motif in different forms by modifying the framing.



Josef Albers, *Sport auf nassem Strand*, Biarritz, França, 1929



Josef Albers, *Proto Form A*, 1937

## A NEW BEGINNING IN THE UNITED STATES

In 1933, the couple was invited to teach at Black Mountain College, an experimental school that based many of its educational principles on those of the Bauhaus, introducing experimental methods of teaching and communal living. The place attracted artists, dancers, mathematicians, sociologists and architects like John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller and Robert Rauschenberg. Anni created an experimental weaving workshop that eventually played a key role in the school's curriculum, and Josef became the head of the art department. The natural surroundings of Black Mountain College also helped to invigorate the teaching at the school.

## DISCOVERY OF PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

The Albers' growing interest in Latin America and their extensive knowledge of pre-Columbian traditions had a great impact on their teaching activity, as well as on the production of their own works. Anni thus introduced Peruvian

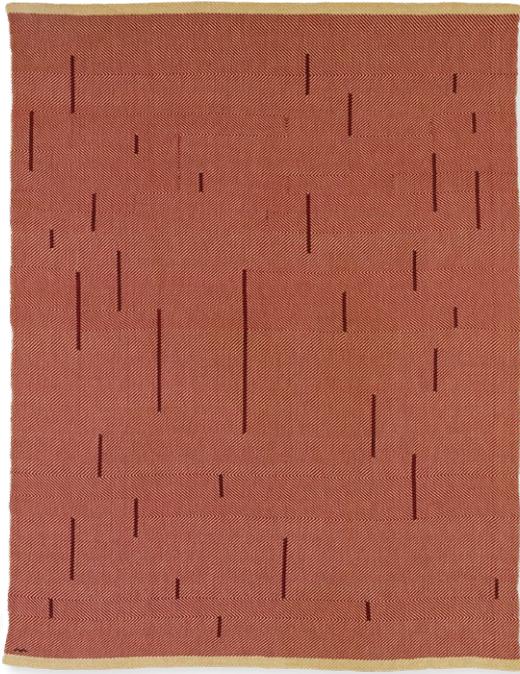
looms to the workshop and encouraged her pupils to use traditional techniques with found materials. Between 1935 and 1967, the two artists went on nearly a dozen trips to Mexico and other Latin American countries, where they visited numerous archaeological sites. Josef took hundreds of photographs of pyramids and shrines, and they both also began to collect ancient objects and fabrics. Fascinated by the fact that certain textiles, especially Peruvian, had served before the invention of writing as a means of transmitting knowledge, the two artists created works that allude explicitly to these messages in encoded characters.

## KNOTS AND JEWELLERY

In the late 1930s, the Albers discovered the treasure of Monte Albán, unearthed some years previously from a tomb in Oaxaca, Mexico. Anni was enthralled by the unusual combination of materials (gold and silver with rock crystal, pearls or shells) in the jewellery of the pre-Columbian civilisations. She then started to make jewels, opening up a new field of free experimentation.

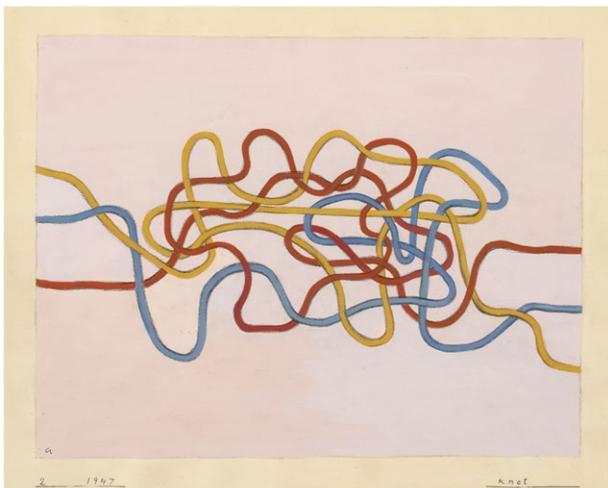


Anni Albers y Alexander Reed,  
*Necklace*, ca. 1940



Anni Albers, *With Verticals*, 1946

In the mid-1940s, Anni and Josef Albers started to investigate knots, probably influenced by the German mathematician Max Wilhelm Dehn, a pioneer in the development of knot theory. Indeed, Dehn joined Black Mountain College in 1945, becoming a close friend of the couple.

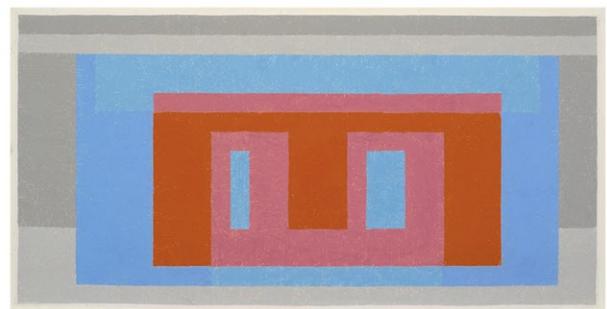


Anni Albers, *Knot*, 1947

## VARIANTS AND STRUCTURAL CONSTELLATIONS

In 1947, Josef Albers started to produce his *Variants* or *Adobes*. With their bold colours and abstract geometric compositions, the series relates to the painted walls of the flat-roofed adobe constructions the couple had seen in Mexico.

In 1949, Josef started to produce *Structural Constellations*. The central idea was to demonstrate how easy it is to deceive the eye by creating an imaginary depth on a flat surface seen from a certain angle. By playing with angles or the effects of perspective, the representation of a simple geometric form can thus give rise to multiple readings and generate optical illusions.



Josef Albers, *Luminous Day*, 1947-52

## PICTORIAL WEAVINGS

In the 1950s, Anni Albers started to create smaller hand-made fabrics whose sole function was to be looked at. Deprived of a functional or architectural purpose, these pictorial fabrics offered an opportunity to explore singular forms of weaving, so avoiding the repetition of patterns. To make them, Anni employed small manual looms on which she wove with the so-called “leno” or “gaze” technique, consisting of rolling two warp yarns around a weft yarn



Anni Albers, *Open Letter*, 1958

to ensure the cloth remained strong and at the same time transparent. The method itself led her towards the final format of the piece, following the structure of the fabric and the motif created by that same structure.

## RELIGIOUS COMMISSIONS

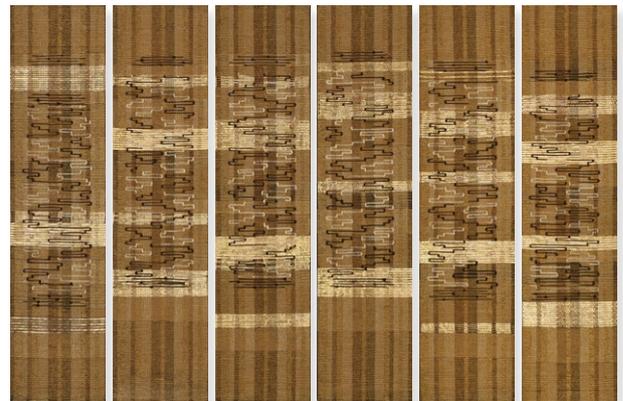
In the mid-1950s, Anni Albers started to work on a series of pictorial commissions. After designing a cover for the ark of a synagogue in Dallas, Texas, she created a shrine in 1961 for the B'nai Israel congregation of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The six panels, hand-woven in simple colours, are exhibited here for the first time.

*Six Prayers* is her most ambitious pictorial weaving. In 1965, the Jewish Museum of New York commissioned her to create a work in memory of the six million Jews who had died in the Holocaust. The project gave Anni Albers the chance to create an architectural piece that combines the form and function of the scrolls of the Torah with their writing in Hebrew. Anni had long been interested in the relationship between texts and textiles, which



Anni Albers, *Red and Blue Layers*, 1954

had been used in ancient Peru as a means of communication. This is shown by the works *Haiku* and *Code*, whose titles allude explicitly to texts and languages with codified or encrypted characters.

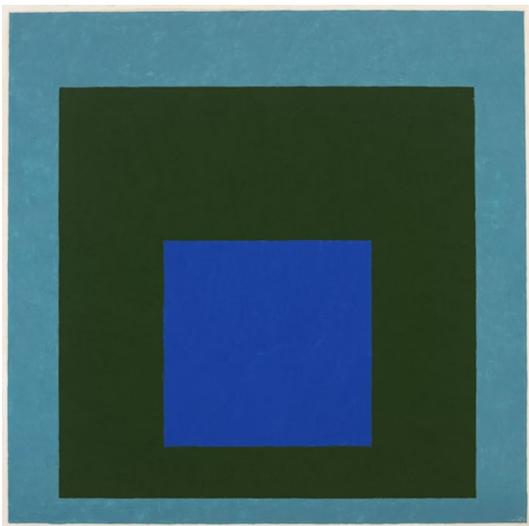


Anni Albers, Ark panels for Congregation B'nai Israel, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 1962

## JOSEF ALBERS'S HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE

The series *Homage to the Square* contains over two thousand paintings in which the artist explores the interaction of colours with each other and with the environment. Josef chose to restrict himself to four elementary square formats, which he placed one inside the other.

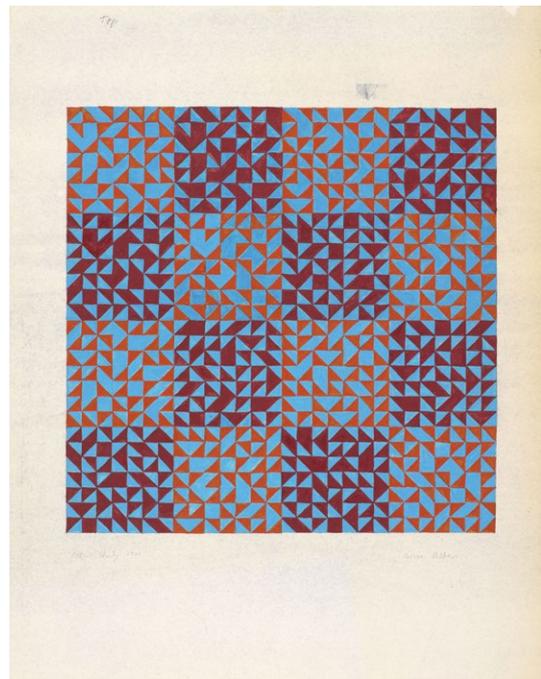
Abandoning the idea of the inventive composition, he focused on the single pictorial element of colour. As he showed, a colour can never be perceived as it really is, but only in relation to its surroundings. The same colour thus looks darker against a light background and lighter against a dark background.



Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Renewed Hope*, 1951

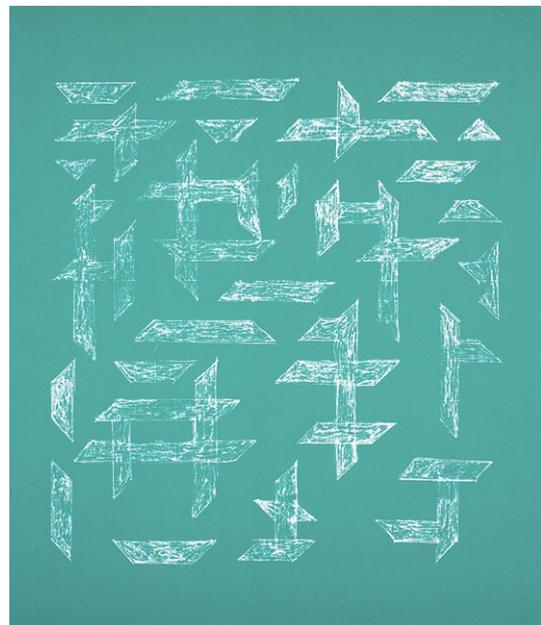
## DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS BY ANNI ALBERS

In 1962, Josef Albers was one of the first artists invited to take part in the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles. Anni accompanied him in 1963, and surprisingly succumbed immediately to the world of engraving. She



Anni Albers, *Color study (blue and reds)*, 1970

gradually abandoned weaving in favour of the print, experimenting with its different techniques, including lithography, silkscreen, offset and etching.



Anni Albers, *Double Impression III*, 1978

# Activities

**Conversation between the director of the IVAM, Nuria Enguita, the curator, Julia Garimorth, and Nicholas Fox Weber, Executive Director of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition**

**Dates:** 24 February 2022, 7 pm.

**Piece:** auditorium

**“On Weaving” by Andrea Canepa**

In a dialogue with the exhibition on Anni and Josef Albers, the artist will make a textile piece combining patterns that use binary code (8 bits) applied to a loom to codify fragments of Anni Albers’s book “On Weaving”, together with coloured geometric compositions that evoke the experimental language of the Bauhaus. Each line of weft on the loom corresponds to a letter in an excerpt from the book, while the position of the weft with regard to the warp corresponds to the 0 and the 1 of the computational binary code used to encode data.

**Piece:** vestibule of the IVAM

# Education

**Workshop: Estira del fil! (Pull the thread!)**

Although their production is very different, Anni and Josef Albers share the conviction that art should be at the centre of existence, as that is the only way it can come to transform life. Art is parallel to life and blends with it, so artistic creation cannot be limited to disciplines like painting and sculpture but must embrace all kinds of work, including what are traditionally regarded as “handicrafts”, in order to reach all types of everyday object.

On the basis of the Albers’ work, the activity proposes a reflection on students’ everyday lives as a tool for transformation through small

actions. For the activity, students are asked to bring an object from home with which they have some emotional attachment (or a photo of the object on their mobile devices) in order to reflect on the value of objects and the bonds we form in caring for them.

**Aimed at:** Secondary education, Baccalaureate, cultural groups and other collectives

**Dates:** 3, 10, 24 and 31 March, 7 and 28 April, 5, 12, 19 and 26 May, 2, 9 and 16 June 2022

**Times:** Thursdays from 10.15-11.15 and 11.30-12.30

**Duration:** 60 minutes.

**Design and mediation:** Darío Cobacho, Clara Solbes

## Guided visits

On guided visits, mediation is provided by specialists with a training in History of Art, Fine Arts and Humanities. The intention is to provide visitors with positioned readings of the exhibition in the two official languages of the Valencian region.

**Duration:** approx. 45 minutes

**Aimed at:** general public

**Dates:** consult the IVAM website

# Publication

Coinciding with the exhibition, the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris has published a catalogue that includes texts by the mayoress of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, the curator Julia Garimorth, and the authors Fabrice Hergott, Nicholas Fox Weber, Maria Stavrinaki, Judith Delfiner, Virginia Gardner Troy, Fritz Horstman, Clara Salomon, Heinz Liesbrock, Jeannette Redensek, Ida Souldard, Vincent Broqua, Hervé Vanel, Brenda Danilowitz and Sylvie Moreau-Soteras. Accompanying the publication is a brochure published by the IVAM that includes a presentation by the director, Nuria Enguita. The catalogue will be available in the reception area of the museum.

Photographic Credits:

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