

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on October 6, 2017

## **Anni Albers: Touching Vision**

## *Anni Albers: Touching Vision*

- Dates: October 6, 2017–January 14, 2018
  - Curated by Manuel Cirauqui
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- One of the Bauhaus's most distinguished artists and a key figure at Black Mountain College, Anni Albers pioneered the reinvention of Fiber Art and the use of modern visual language in traditional crafts.
  - Her aesthetic principles were shaped by a deep understanding of materials, particularly textiles and prints, with which she created remarkably subtle and intricate motifs.
  - The exhibition features a wide selection of "pictorial weavings" illustrating Albers's original take on modern and abstract painting's concerns through textile work, understood as both an ancient art and a cornerstone of industrialized society.
  - In 1963, Albers found in printing techniques a fertile terrain for new investigation. Experiments with screenprints, etchings, lithographs, and offset printing, were to replace her hand-made textile work in the 1970s onward.
  - Albers always championed the great Bauhaus ideals, such as the wide distribution of design among the public. After she gave up her work at the loom, she went on to collaborate with various industrial manufacturers in the production of many designs for fabrics, also featured in the exhibition.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is pleased to present *Anni Albers: Touching Vision*, an in-depth survey of seven decades in the career of a pioneering figure in the field of Fiber Art. Organized in collaboration with The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, the show provides a chronological overview of Albers's oeuvre while also revealing the connections between different periods and series, highlighting recurrent motifs and flashing ideas. Also emphasized are the compelling ways in which a deep insight of materials and techniques preceded visual development in many instances of Albers's work.

The life of Anni Albers (b. 1899, Berlin; d. 1994, Orange, Connecticut) was marked by an intimate relationship with the materials and mediums that guided her work. Best known for her pioneering role in the field of Fiber Art, her innovative treatment of warp and weft, and her constant quest for new patterns and uses of fabric, Albers was instrumental in redefining the role of the artist as a designer. Her art was inspired by pre-Columbian arts and modern industry, and transcended conventional notions of craftsmanship and gender-specific labor.

Anni Albers studied at the avant-garde Bauhaus in Weimar, where she met her husband, the painter Josef Albers. Accepted as a student in 1922, she eventually became director of the school's weaving workshop in 1931. After the institution was closed by the Nazi party in 1933, the Alberses moved to North Carolina,

where they were both hired to teach at a free-form school that would become a benchmark of modern American art, Black Mountain College. There Anni Albers continued to combine her educational activity with artistic experimentation, while also authoring texts that are now considered to be seminal in the history of contemporary textile art. After showing her wall hangings and pictorial weavings in numerous solo exhibitions (MoMA in New York and other American museums between 1949 and 1953, and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1959), in 1963 Albers began to explore different techniques and processes in printmaking.

Albers discovered a new field of investigation in the wide range of printing practices, and by the late 1960s she had abandoned weaving altogether to focus on this new interest. Screenprints, etchings, lithographs, and offset prints gave the artist a new means of developing visual concepts that had already surfaced in many preparatory drawings for earlier fiber pieces. In printmaking, she found the ideal vehicle for testing new compositional patterns and exploring their almost infinite variations.

In the following decades, and until the end of her career, Anni Albers collaborated with various textile manufacturing companies and workshops in an attempt to make her designs available to a larger number of people, thus reaffirming her commitment to the guiding principle of the Bauhaus: to view art and design as a single field, and produce prototypes that would facilitate an egalitarian distribution of artistic forms.

## OVERVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION

### Gallery 305

This first gallery features works ranging from Albers's time at the Bauhaus to her Black Mountain College years. The Bauhaus period is represented by a selection of preparatory drawings for textile works and key examples of her research for new weaving patterns and functional textiles. On the visual level, this gallery illustrates the progressive transformation of predominantly orthogonal motifs from her early years (1920s and 1930s) toward freer compositions and the artist's distancing from geometric abstraction.

Albers's presence in the American art world, her involvement in the dialogues that defined modernism in the middle of the century, and her trips to Mexico, Cuba, and Peru with Josef Albers (where they gathered many of the pre-Columbian artifacts that inspired her creations) were accompanied by an increasing openness to experimental abstraction. This led to new motifs in her work that alternately evoked landscapes (*La Luz*) or returned to abstract composition in spontaneous ways (*With Verticals*). In addition, this gallery presents a selection of the jewelry collaboratively designed by Albers at Black Mountain College—another example of the spirit of experimentation that pervaded this unique institution, considered to be the epitome of creative freedom and cooperation among artists during its time.

### Gallery 306

After leaving Black Mountain College, Anni moved with Josef to the New Haven area in Connecticut. There she produced many of her mature works and set down her textile theories in writings that are now considered fundamental for the understanding of Fiber Art. Consequently, this gallery contains selected sketches, diagrams, and photographs associated with Albers's theoretical work. Her ideas were condensed in the seminal volume *On Weaving*, first published in 1965; a new expanded edition in Spanish and English from Princeton University Press and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will accompany this exhibition.

Gallery 306 also presents a large number of pictorial weavings, unique pieces that reinterpret the ancient tradition of tapestries in a modern, abstract language and illustrate the formal perfection of Albers's treatment of warp and weft. In these woven works of art, Albers appropriated the preoccupations of modern and abstract painting and transferred them to the ancient, essential terrain of textile production. This gallery also contains the work that signaled the end of Albers's weaving period, *Epitaph*.

### **Gallery 307**

In the late 1960s, Albers focused all of her energy on investigating different printing practices, primarily screenprints, lithographs, and offset printing. Her quest for greater degrees of graphic complexity that linked drawing to densely woven fibers gave rise to such series as *Domberger*, where mingling triangle and diamond patterns prompt a hyperactive viewing experience. These forms alternate with other works dominated by intricate curved lines, reminiscent of mazes, knots and tangled threads. Sometimes these designs were translated into mass-produced textile creations, made in collaboration with various manufacturers—a practice which the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation has continued after the artist's passing, in accordance with her wishes.

The parallels between the industrialization of textile products and printed objects and the possibilities of democratizing the art object and erasing the boundary between art and design are evident in this final period. Indeed, the *Connections* print series is presented as a concise synopsis of the major visual milestones in Albers's oeuvre. In every case, we see Albers's tactile and touching vision, her peaceful humanism, and her quest for purity in ideas and clarity in execution.

### **DIDAKTIKA**

The Didaktika project offers visitors a chance to learn more about the exhibition content through educational areas and special activities.

#### Educational area *Anni Albers: Artist of Conviction*

In the third-floor corridor, visitors will discover an artist of profound convictions who embraced a philosophy based on experimental education. Texts, videos, and audio recordings of Albers herself will be accompanied by samples of the materials she used. As they touch and handle these samples, visitors will gain insight into the development of textile creation as an artistic discipline and the modernity of her work, which ranged from "anti-luxury" jewelry designs to pictorial weavings, wall hangings, drawings and prints. This area will also include a participatory activity for visitors related to textile production.

### **Activities**

- Talk on Anni Albers (October 4): Nicholas Fox Weber, Director of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, will discuss various aspects of the pioneering fiber artist.
- Jewelry design workshop (November 7 and 9): At Black Mountain College, Anni Albers met a student named Alexander Reed, and together they created an "anti-luxury" jewelry collection using paper clips, bobby pins, bolt nuts, and other unlikely materials. In this two-session workshop led by designer Matxalen Krug, participants will use household objects from the 1940s and interpret them in contemporary design.

- Textile experimentation workshop (November 25): Led by artist Teresa Lanceta, this workshop will explore how Anni Albers worked with materials and experimented with metallic thread and copper to create her extraordinary pictorial weavings and wall hangings.
  - Guided tour of the exhibition (November 25): artist Teresa Lanceta will take visitors on an hour-long tour of the show, commenting on selected works.
  - Shared Reflections: Discover the behind-the-scenes setup process and other fascinating facts about the exhibition on these tours led by museum professionals.
    - Curatorial Vision (October 25): Manuel Cirauqui, exhibition curator
    - Key Concepts (November 8): Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Education and Interpretation
- \*Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre

The Museum will also offer daily **free express tours** for a dynamic, focused survey of the artworks on display.

**Cover image:**

Anni Albers in her weaving studio at Black Mountain College, 1937

Photograph by Helen M. Post

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017

**For more information:**

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Complete information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at [www.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es) (press room).

Images for press usage  
*Anni Albers: touching vision*  
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: [media@guggenheim-bilbao.es](mailto:media@guggenheim-bilbao.es)

1. Anni Albers  
*Wallhanging*, 1924

168.3 x 100.3 cm

Cotton and silk

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT

Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



2. Anni Albers  
*Study for Unexecuted Wallhanging*, 1926

31.1 x 24.7 cm

Gouache with pencil on photo offset paper

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT

Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



3. Anni Albers  
*Knot*, 1947

43.2 x 51 cm

Gouache on paper

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT

Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



4. Anni Albers  
*City*, 1949

44.4 x 67.3 cm

Linen and cotton

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT

Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



5. Anni Albers  
*Red and Blue Layers*, 1954

61.6 x 37.8 cm

Cotton

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT  
Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art  
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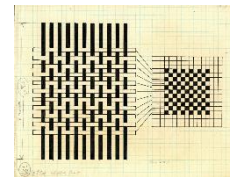
6. Anni Albers  
*Design (multicolours)*, c. 1980  
45.7 x 28.6 cm  
Marker on paper  
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT  
Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art  
© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



7. Anni Albers  
*Wall XII*, 1984  
72.4 X 57.2 cm  
Watercolor on squeeprint  
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT  
Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art  
© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



8. Anni Albers  
*Diagram showing method of weaving draft notation (plain weave)*, Plate 10  
from *On Weaving*, 1965  
27.8 x 21.6 cm  
Ink on pencil on gridded paper  
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT  
Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art  
© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



9. Anni Albers  
Necklace, ca.1940  
Length: 40.6 cm, strainer: 7.6 cm  
Drain strainer and paper clips  
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany CT  
Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art  
© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2017



10. Anni Albers in her weaving studio at  
Black Mountain College, 1937.  
Photograph by Helen M. Post  
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