



Fig. 6 Anni Albers, *La Luz I*, 1947. Linen and metallic thread; 18½ x 32½ in. (47 x 82.5 cm). The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.12.2 Photograph by Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art
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From Sea to Shining Sea: Anni Albers in America

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The story of Anni Albers (1899–1994)—coming to America in the context of Nazi Germany’s rise to destructive power both politically and with regard to cultural, in addition to social and economic realities—is a complex success story of adaptability and identity continuity as much as it is one of transformation. On the one hand, if she created her art in some respects in the shadow of her husband, Josef Albers, on the other hand she attained renown in her own right within a very different field from his.

I. From Brandenburg to Bauhaus

She was born Annelise Elsa Frieda Fleishmann in Berlin, into an artistically—albeit commercially—inclined family; her mother’s family, the Ullsteins, were successful publishers and her father owned a furniture design and manufacturing company. In a move not uncommon for the German Jewish haute-bourgeoisie since the early nineteenth century—particularly as it became increasingly clear that, in spite of nominal socioeconomic and politico-cultural emancipation, Jews would continue to be held back from all kinds of potential

interests—her family had nominally left Judaism; Anni was confirmed in the Lutheran church, but her sense of Jewish/Christian identity remained ambiguous.¹

Anni was drawn to visual art from early childhood. As a young painter she studied for three years (1916–1919) with the Prussian neo-impressionist Martin Brandenburg (1870–1919). Brandenburg stood out in three rather different ways within the visual arts in Berlin. He saw himself as a modernist, not a classicist, having joined the Berlin Secession in 1898—an art movement formed on May 2 of that year in reaction to the Association of Berlin Artists and the restrictions on contemporary art imposed by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Sixty-five artists “seceded” from the Association with its standard academic, government-endorsed artistic style, in favor of modernist aesthetic ideas such as those conveyed in Impressionism and Art Nouveau/Jugendstil.

As an impressionist painter, Brandenburg’s landscapes tended to offer bolder, more strident blues and pinks than was characteristic, say, of the French Impressionists; and more significantly, they were often filled with figures that had a fantastical quality to them. Moreover, he ran a class from 1908 to 1918 specifically for young women, opening a door into the profession that was typically still closed to females. The class was within the Studienatelier für Malerei und Plastik, (Study Atelier for Painting and Sculpture) also known as the Lewin-Funcke Schule, after its founder, the sculptor Arthur Lewin-Funcke. So, as a student in *that* class, in *that* school, Anni Fleishmann was part of an artistic lineage that was both figurative and yet “different” (given Brandenburg’s phantasmagorical imagery and Lewin-Funcke’s 1920s’ blind-figure sculptural focus).

On the other hand, she was discouraged from continuing to paint when, as a teenager, some time before studying with Brandenburg, she met one of the key emerging figures in the German-speaking modernist world, the individualistic Austrian Expressionist Oskar Kokoschka. Upon seeing Anni’s portrait of her mother, he said “‘Why do you paint?’ I was fifteen or sixteen so that was the smashing answer and that was the end of that.”² It is symptomatic of both her talent and the connections of those who supported her (in this case, her mother) that her work was shown to Kokoschka in the first place. It is also symptomatic of her inner strength that she decided to attend art school in spite of that unhappy interview. This strength would serve her well, in finding herself as an artist and in maintaining and further developing her identity in the double context of being Josef’s wife and their removal from Germany to begin new lives in the United States.

After her three years of study with Brandenburg, she left home to attend the Hamburg Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) in 1920. This also meant accepting the challenges of an artist’s life—considerably harsher than that rather affluent and certainly comfortable lifestyle to which she had been accustomed in the bosom of her family. She remained for only two months in Hamburg—leaving out of dissatisfaction with their program—but thanks to a pamphlet that came her way, eventually returned to her art studies: at the Bauhaus in Weimar in April 1922. Founded by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919, the very modernist Bauhaus combined crafts and fine arts. Its ideology was centered on the principle of creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (comprehensive artwork), in which all the arts would be brought together,

and of combining the relatively new idea of mass production with individual artistic vision and pleasing aesthetics with everyday function.

The Bauhaus style later became highly influential in architecture and art, interior and graphic design, industrial design, and typography—as well as in arts education. Its style tended toward simple geometric shapes both rectilinear and curved, without elaborate decorations. Buildings, furniture, and type fonts often feature rounded corners and sometimes rounded walls.³ The aesthetic of radically simplified forms, rationality, and functionality—and the idea that mass production could be reconcilable with the individual artistic spirit—were ideas that were already partly developed in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe) before the Bauhaus was founded, but the Bauhaus extended and expanded this sort of thinking well beyond its roots.

When Anni Fleischmann began attending the school at Weimar in 1922, with Gropius as the Director—living “in a rented room, with a bath available only once a week, [her application having been] rejected at first, but admitted on her second attempt”⁴—she began her first year of study under Georg Muche⁵ and then Johannes Itten,⁶ but struggled to find her particular workshop focus. Women were barred from certain disciplines,⁷ and during her second year, unable to gain admission to a glass workshop with Josef Albers,⁸ she turned reluctantly to weaving, the only workshop available to women. She had never tried weaving and believed it to be too “soft” a craft.⁹ With her instructor Gunta Stölzl, however, Fleischmann soon learned to appreciate the challenges of tactile construction and began producing geometric designs.¹⁰ In her essay “Material as Metaphor,” Albers mentions these beginnings: “In my case it was threads that caught me, really against my will. To work with threads seemed sissy to me. I wanted something to be conquered. But circumstances held me to threads and they won me over.”¹¹

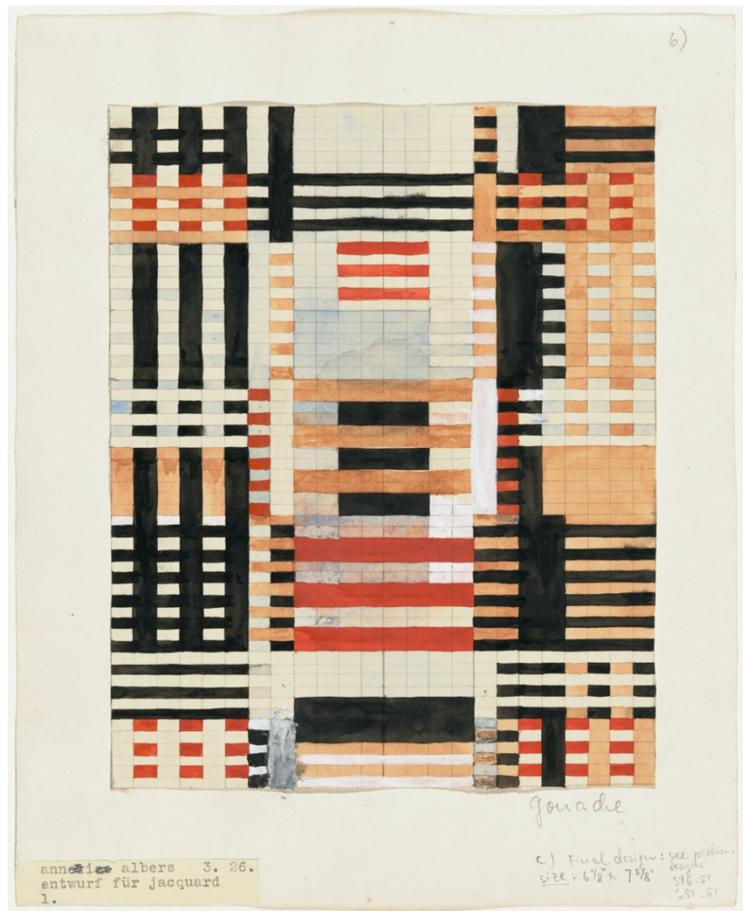


Fig. 1 Anni Albers, *Preliminary Design for Wall Hanging*, 1926. Gouache and pencil on paper; 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm) Museum of Modern Art, New York 398.1951. Gift of the designer. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The school migrated through three German cities—each change in venue included changes in leadership, although all three Directors were architects—which led to some changes in faculty as well as in focus, technique, and political thinking. The school remained in Weimar through early 1925—the year when Anni and Josef Albers became husband and wife. He had rapidly advanced from being an instructor to being a “Junior Master,” and in mid-1925 the school moved to Dessau, where, by November 1926, it operated in a new, glass-walled edifice designed by Gropius. The pottery shop was discontinued—oddly, given that ceramics had offered an important revenue stream—and a new focus on production rather than craft (“a shift took place from the free play with forms to a logical building of structures”¹²) prompted Fleischmann—now Anni Albers—to develop many functionally unique textiles combining properties of light reflection, sound absorption, and durability, with minimized wrinkling and warping tendencies.

In 1926 she began working on the double and jacquard looms; color illustrations of her wall hangings were published in both the German journal *Offset* [Fig. 1], and in the French volume *Tapis et Tissus* (Carpets and Fabrics), for which a portfolio of her works was selected by Sonia Delaunay. In the next few years, she began to receive contracts for wall hangings. In 1928 she became an assistant in the weaving workshop under Stölzl. While Gropius continued to

direct the school until 1928, Hannes Meyer, a radical functionalist, took over from that year until 1930. When Mies van der Rohe took over the Directorship in 1930, complications initially ensued—a reminder that personality politics are part of the human enterprise, alas, regardless of the intellectual and cultural level of the humans involved.¹³

At Dessau, Anni was a student of Paul Klee for a time: her ambition was still to be a painter, and in 1927, the weaving workshop students had asked him to teach a class in design.¹⁴ In fact, after Gropius left the school, she and Josef moved into quarters next to the Klees and the Kandinskys. Particularly at that time, one may discern some influence from Klee’s interest in complex geometric form and color gradation in Anni’s own experiments with various series of boxes of graduating hues [Fig. 2].

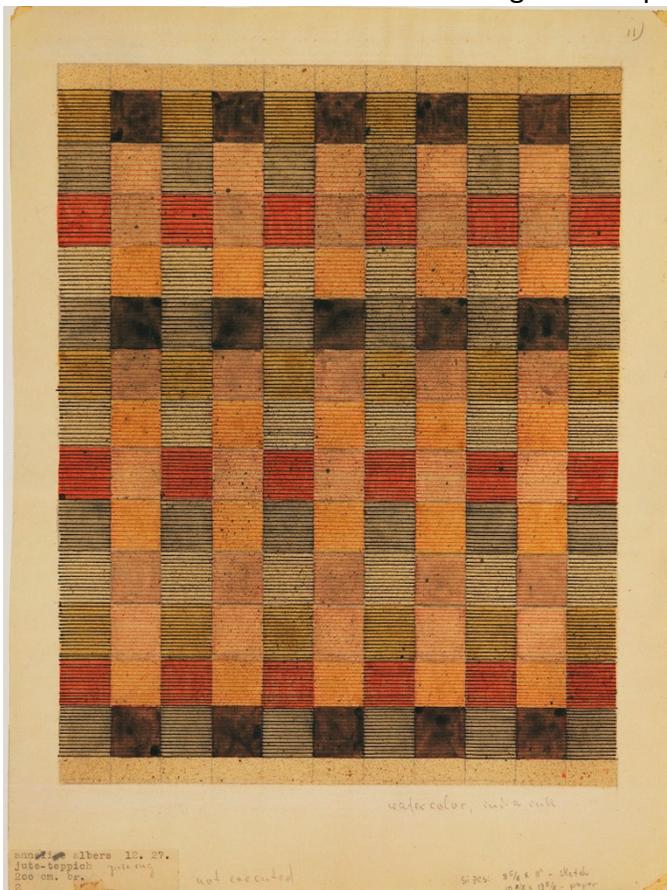


Fig. 2 Anni Albers, *Design for Jute Rug*, 1927. Watercolor and india ink on paper; 13 5/8 x 10 3/8 in. (136.4 x 26.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York 403.195. Gift of the designer. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The language of geometric, modular forms—following principles of rotation, color exchange, and repetition—was part of what Klee taught; the structuring of visual representation in grid formations became essential to Albers’s wall hangings [Fig. 3]. To this key inspirational source must be added her admiration for Andean textiles—of which she would have seen many examples in the folk-art museums in Berlin and Munich.¹⁵



Fig. 3 Paul Klee, *May Picture*. 1925. Oil on cardboard, 16 5/8 x 19-1/2 in. (42.2 x 49.5 cm.). The Berggruen Klee Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1984.315.42). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The young couple also traveled during this rather halcyon period—mainly to Italy, Spain, and the Canary Islands.¹⁶ In 1930 Anni received her Bauhaus diploma for innovative work: she had designed the wallcovering for the auditorium of the Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbundesschule (German Federal Government Trade School) in Bernau, for which Hannes Meyer was the architect. Her wall covering was light-reflecting and shimmering—she used the new material cellophane as the weft on the outer side—and sound-absorbing, thanks to her use of soft cotton chenille yarn as the weft for the inner surface.

When Gunta Stölzl left the Bauhaus the following year, Anni was made acting head of the weaving workshop, albeit Lilly Reich—who had assisted Mies van der Rohe in the design of the German pavilion at the Barcelona International Exposition—was soon appointed by Mies to that position.¹⁷ However, at the *Deutsche Bauausstellung* (German Building Exhibition) that took place that July in Berlin, Anni was awarded the prestigious Stadt Berlin Preis (City of Berlin Prize).

In 1932 the Bauhaus was forced to move from Dessau to Berlin, under pressure from the ascendant Nazi Party, which had cut off all local government funding. There Mies transformed it into a private school; it lasted less than a year, as Hitler extended the specifics of his power. The school was forced to close permanently in August 1933. For the rapidly expanding Nazi regime, the Bauhaus was considered a center of Bolshevik intellectualism and under excessive Jewish influence. Much of the staff of the school managed to leave Germany—

including Anni and Josef Albers—emigrating to different parts of the world and bringing with them the influence of Bauhaus thinking.

II. Coming to America

Flight was inevitable given Anni's Jewish background. Nazism rapidly embraced the idea articulated in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr that Jews were not a religious but a racial/ethnic category (thanks to Marr, the term "Semite" to refer to the Jews as a race became increasingly widely used),¹⁸ and that therefore "conversion" from Judaism did not remove the blood-carried taint of being Jewish. Emigration was facilitated by an almost casual invitation extended to them by Philip Johnson—he was then a former Harvard student visiting Berlin when he saw Anni's unique wall hangings—to teach at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Johnson had connections to Black Mountain—the school was taking shape as a new experiment in college-level arts education with an emphasis on hands-on learning—and six weeks later a formal letter of invitation arrived from Johnson in the name of the College Board of Trustees.¹⁹ The young Jewish American philanthropist and art collector (and later professor of art history) Edward Warburg was on the Board of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) at that point, which further cemented his relationship with Johnson, and through that relationship, his involvement in the Alberses' situation. Warburg agreed to help fund their steamship tickets.²⁰

The Alberses arrived on the *SS Europa* into New York harbor in November. They received a warm reception. As Josef reported in a letter to Kandinsky: "We were met by four Bauhaus colleagues. . . . Four hotels had been booked. Four journalists were waiting to interview us. First night dinner at the Dreiers [one of Black Mountain's founders] . . . Museum of Modern Art very good."²¹ It was Anni who actually spoke to the press, since Josef's English was minimal and she was quite comfortable in the language.²² Notably, his comments through her pertained to the suppression of free expression in Germany (the requirement for art to conform to Nazi Realism) and his hope and expectation that here in the United States he would find artistic freedom.²³

For the purposes of this discussion, what is particularly important is that, seemingly, the complications of a new language and a new culture, as well as a new social and political reality, were not felt by either of them to be a disability. Add to this the specific potential complication of the venue: they had left what had been—but perhaps they well understood was no longer—a fast-paced urban environment embedded in and surrounded by an intensely cosmopolitan intellectual and cultural framework; they would be arriving into a rural world, far from the cosmopolitan centers even of America—yet it was an island of particular intellectual and cultural intensity within that world.

Anni was described by the New York press as "tall, slim, and vivacious, . . . look[ing] more like a student than the leader of a movement." Interestingly, they also noted that "today she is known not only for the uniqueness of her designs, which are woven directly 'into the material,' but her experiments with materials"—suggesting clearly that both she and Josef arrived here already with reputations as artistic celebrities of sorts.²⁴

Anni was appointed assistant professor of art (and Josef was appointed professor of art). Although there were other outstanding weaving programs here and there in the US, Black

Mountain was unique for “its emphasis on the thread rather than purely coloristic or textural effects and for their limited range of colors. They reflected Anni’s aesthetic that ‘textiles are serving objects that should be modest in appearance and blend into the background.’”²⁵ There is a double irony of sorts in this: first, that having begun by desperately wishing to be a painter-artist and having fallen into weaving by default, she was now on the faculty, officially, as an artist; and second, that she was a pioneer in elevating the *craft* of weaving to an *art* in the eyes of art historians and the public. In other words, a weaving can share space on a museum wall with paintings, even as her modest aesthetic was that a weaving not be obtrusively present on the wall. Her weavings seek not to draw the eye the way, say, an abstract painting intends to do, and yet they almost inevitably draw the eye as a good painting will.



The Alberses seemed to fit into the Black Mountain Community—about sixty students and a large handful of faculty and administration—right from the beginning, both professionally and personally. They proved to be the first among a substantial stream of emigres with diverse skills to arrive there as refugees from the Nazis over the following few years [Fig. 4].²⁶ There, “removed from the competitive stresses of often stuffy American universities, they could adapt to their new world at a leisurely pace.”²⁷

Fig. 4 Anni Albers at Loom, Black Mountain College 1937. Photograph by Helen M. Post. Helen Post Modley Photograph Collection, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina Audio-Visual Collections AV.7002. Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In 1934, Josef was invited to lecture in Cuba, so he and Anni, together with the Dreiers, drove to Key West and got onto a boat to Havana. The year after that, the four vacationed in Mexico to see the pre-Columbian sites (as they did more than a dozen times thereafter). The many visits to Mexico and South America also reinforced the influence of Andean textiles on

Anni's work. In one of the first two wall hangings she made in the United States, *Monte Alban* (1936) [Fig. 5], she applied a new technique that she would continue to use over many decades: "The supplementary, or floating, weft, in which an extra weft thread is threaded, or 'floated,' above the woven surface."²⁸

In Veracruz, Mexico, Josef and Anni met up with Anni's parents, who had come in from Germany in June 1937 on a visit but returned to Germany at summer's end. This was, after all, several months before the widespread catastrophe known as *Kristallnacht* (November 9–10, 1938), so that most German Jews were still not awake to the real danger posed to them by Hitler's regime.



Fig. 5 Anni Albers, *Monte Alban*, 1936. Silk, linen, wool; 57 1/2 x 44 1/8 in. (146 x 112 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard G. Leahy. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum BR81.5. © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The following year, Anni helped the Gropiuses (now in New York) and Herbert Bayer assemble and organize material for an exhibition at MoMA, *Bauhaus 1919–1928*. Anni's weavings were included, and her article, "The Weaving Workshop," was included in the catalogue. Anni became an American citizen on May 17, 1939, and Josef did so on December 12. They traveled again to Mexico for three reasons: to visit the ancient sites; so that Josef could teach at Gobers College in Tlalpan; and so that they could again meet up with Anni's parents, who were now moving to Mexico permanently: "[Last] time it was a trip to see our children again. . . . Today it is a departure from our native land, which we must leave forever" — as the world was hurtling downhill toward World War II.²⁹ It is likely that coming directly to the

United States was not possible due to quota limitations. Her siblings and their families gradually arrived in America.

And of course, while these events were transpiring, Anni and Josef were teaching. In the late 1940s (following the revolution of *Monte Alban*, and *Ancient Writing*, also from 1936), she began to make small-scale weavings “that I call ‘pictorial weaving’ . . . I went into the art side. . . . It was the one thing that gradually made me a little more known.”³⁰ She was, one might say, painting with threads—albeit her “pictures” remained entirely abstract [Fig. 6], and she added a calligraphic element and more technical innovations, such as “the supplementary knotted weft, a technique derived from a Peruvian source.”³¹



Fig. 6 Anni Albers, *La Luz I*, 1947. Linen and metallic thread; 18½ x 32½ in. (47 x 82.5 cm). The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.12.2 Photograph by Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Her weavings were widely exhibited in the 1940s, and she was in demand as a guest teacher and lecturer, and on occasion, as a curator and a writer. At Black Mountain in the early 1940s, the Albers moved classrooms and, while the looms were not yet set up, Anni had her students go outside and find their own weaving materials. This was a basic exercise on material and structure, and to allow her students to imagine what it might have been like for weavers in antiquity.³²

She also became involved, together with Alex Redd, a Black Mountain student, in innovative jewelry-making that utilized odd objects like hairpins, bottle caps, paperclips, glass drawer knobs, clay insulators, and kitchenware [Fig. 7]. We might call these *neo-Bauhausian*



works—both transforming utilitarian elements into aesthetic entities and recognizing the inherent aesthetic value of everyday, utilitarian, household objects. These works were exhibited at Willard Gallery in New York in May 1941, before traveling to four other galleries. Reviewers were excited by such interesting pieces contrived of “strange things” and created through the agency of “a fertile imagination.”³³ The jewelry was subsequently included in *Modern Handmade Jewelry* at MoMA, which then traveled, beginning in 1946, to fifteen other museums.

In fall 1949, Anni Albers became the first textile designer to have a solo exhibition at MoMA, *Anni Albers Textiles*, that also toured the US and Canada (to twenty-six museums) from 1950 to 1953

Fig. 7 Anni Albers and Alexander Reed, Necklace, ca. 1940. Aluminum strainer, paper clips, and chain; Length: 20 in. (50.8 cm); strainer: 3 in. (7.6 cm) diameter. The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.14.16 Photograph by Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

[Fig. 8]. She was clearly established by that point as one of the most significant designers of her era. Within this same period, Philip Johnson—by then making a name for himself as an architect—commissioned her to do draperies for the Rockefeller guest house on East Fifty-Second Street. For these, she chose the unexpected combination of cotton chenille with white plastic and copper foil. This offered an unassuming aspect by day and a sparkling surface by night—and more to the point, offered another instance in which the importance of Anni’s work derives both from whatever design elements she provided (her experiments with color, shape, scale and rhythm, in abstract, crisscrossing geometric patterns), and from her

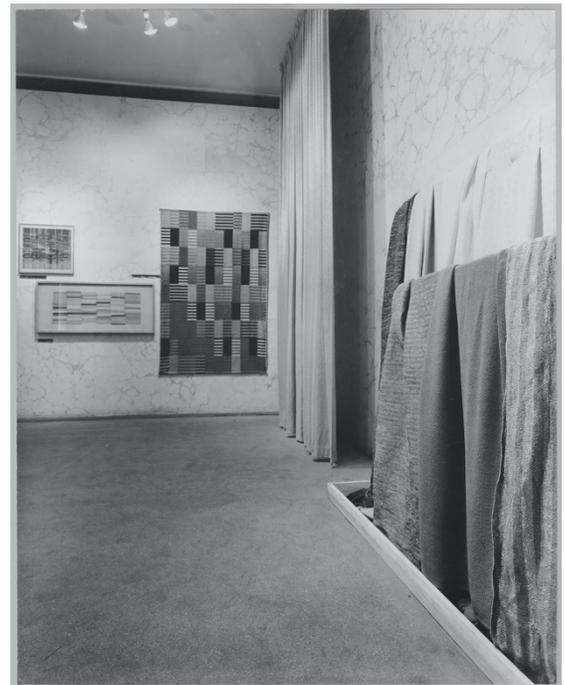


Fig. 8 Installation view of *Anni Albers Textiles*, September 14, 1949–November 6, 1949. Gelatin silver print, 7 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (19 x 24.1 cm). Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York IN421.3. Photograph by Soichi Sunami. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

innovative ideas with regard to the materials that she utilized [Fig. 9].

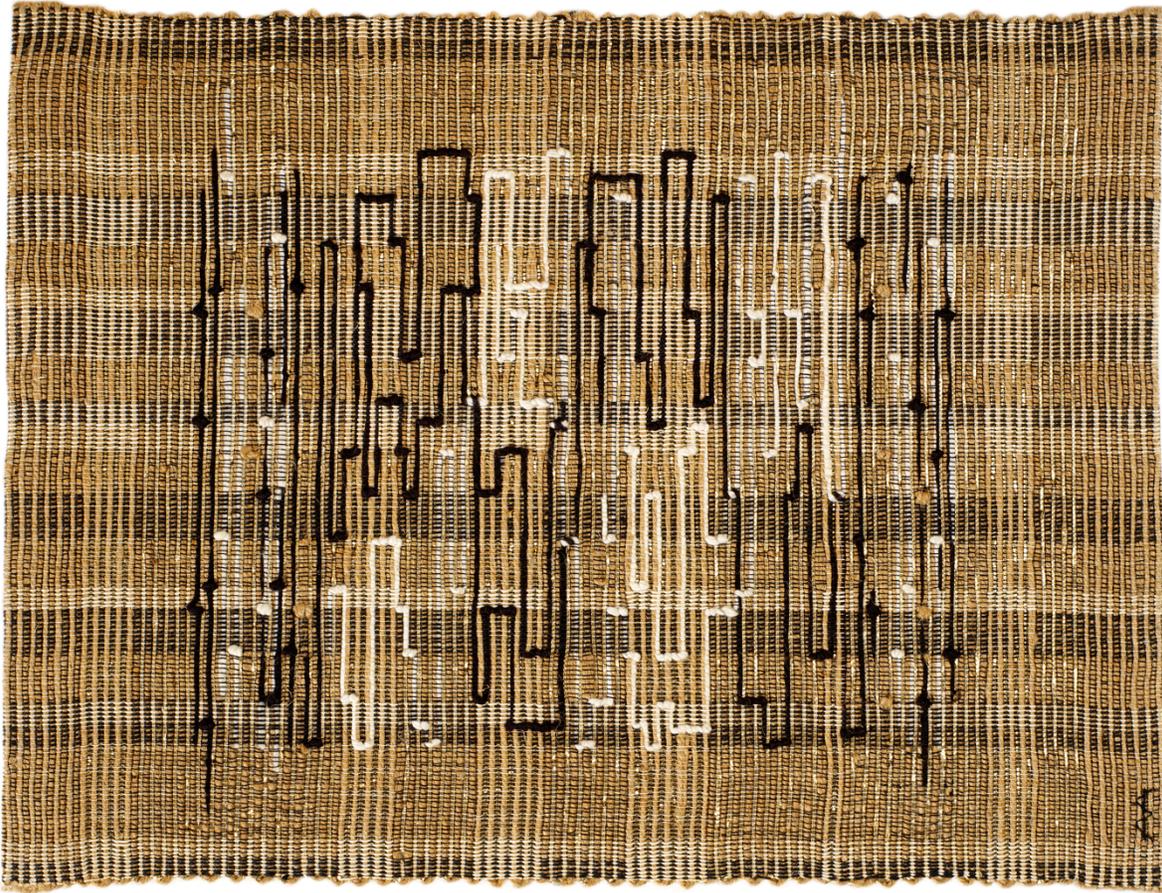


Fig. 9 Anni Albers, *Black-White-Gold I*, 1950. Cotton, lurex, and jute; 25 1/8 x 19 in. (63.8 x 48.3 cm)
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1996.12.1 Photograph Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art
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III The Decades after Black Mountain College

By the time of the MoMA exhibition, Josef and Anni had left Black Mountain College—by then both were well-established fixtures in the American art community—and moved to New York City. In 1950, Josef was appointed chairman of the Department of Design at Yale University and they moved to New Haven, where his renown as a teacher would expand.³⁴

Gropius commissioned Anni soon thereafter to do work for the Harvard Graduate Center. She created partitions and bedspreads for the dormitories [Fig. 10]: “black and white . . . very masculine, . . . heavy [with a] strong structure so that you didn’t see immediately, ‘Oh, he didn’t wipe his feet.’”³⁵ So one might say that while Josef was recognized by Yale, Anni was recognized by Harvard.³⁶



It was during the decade of the 1950s that she produced most of her pictorial weavings while working with Knoll, the manufacturer, on mass-producible patterns, while also teaching and lecturing throughout the country. Her approach, as she explained in lectures to Yale's architecture students, was not to begin with references to precedents—to architectural history—but rather to begin from conceptual ground-zero by asking what it is that you are about to try to create. What will be its purpose? What need must it fulfill? *That* is the point from which the creative process must begin, and the aesthetics will follow.³⁷

Josef also made a return visit to Germany—to Ulm, in 1954, where he had been invited to teach a course in design at the new Hochschule für

Fig. 10 Anni Albers, Free-Hanging Room Divider, 1949. Cellophane and cord, 94 x 32 ½ in. (238.7 x 82.5 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York 409.1960. Gift of the designer. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Gestaltung (University of Applied Design).³⁸ Anni joined him on a three-month visit later, in 1960. Interestingly, there is no written record of what that experience was like emotionally—for either of them—and of whether they felt a sense of triumphant vindication of sorts, or regret, or perhaps replenished relief not to be permanently in the country that they had fled two decades earlier, but rather to be participating in the burgeoning reality of America at its world-devouring apogee. One can only speculate. On the other hand, the design for Torah Ark panels for Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, Texas, in 1957, was Anni's first commission that explicitly involved a Jewish context [Figs. 11, 12].

By the end of the decade, a collection of Anni's writings, *On Designing*, was published by Pellango Press, and another large exhibition, *Albers: Pictorial Weavings*, traveled to five museums—including Yale University's Art Gallery. As the new decade opened, she received her second synagogue commission in 1961, for Torah Ark panels for Congregation B'nai Israel, in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. In that same year she was awarded the Craftmanship Medal by the American Institute of Architects.



Fig. 11 Anni Albers, *Study for Temple Emanu-El Ark Panels*, 1957. Foil and metallic thread on card; 17 x 14 1/2 in. (43.2 x 36.8 cm). The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.10.95 Photograph by Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Fig. 12 Interior of the Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, Texas, showing ark covering designed by Anni Albers, 1957

Regarding the synagogue commission, this time she commented that “a commission for a work that is to be part of a building devoted to worship is a most gratifying one. . . . It is a source of special satisfaction to be able to participate in a task directed toward something we hold in reverence.”³⁹ It certainly will not be lost on the reader that her enthusiasm for helping beautify a sacred space with a utilitarian object is expressed broadly, without reference to the specifically Jewish context. Nor—not unexpectedly, given her own understated, at most, relationship to Judaism—do any of those who write about her work place any emphasis on that context.⁴⁰ What mattered to the Nazis and thus helped force her and, by extension, her husband, out of Germany did not otherwise matter to her sense of identity or even to artworks that might have elicited such thinking from her.

Of further interest to Anni’s ongoing sense of artistic adventure and creative urge, she was actually starting to wind down her productivity in weaving. By 1963 she was shifting into printmaking, which she discovered almost by chance: she was with Josef at the Tamarind



Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles where he was giving a lecture. Anni was invited to experiment with print media: “I, as a useless wife, was hanging around, until June Wayne, head of the workshop, asked me to try lithography myself.”⁴¹ She quickly became enamored of the technique, so that thereafter she began to devote most of her time to lithography and screen printing. She was invited back as a fellow to Tamarind in 1964. There she created the seven-print portfolio entitled *Line Involvements* [Fig. 13].

She found a kind of freedom in printmaking that was lacking for her in weaving—so, as she put it: “I could never let go.” Moreover—and perhaps one senses in this an unresolved artistic issue going back to

Fig. 13 Anni Albers, *Line Involvement V*, 1964. Two-color stone lithograph, 19 3/4 x 14 1/2 in. (50.2 x 36.8 cm). The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.11.5.e Photograph by Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

her hopes and ambitions when she began at the Bauhaus—“I find that, when the work is made with threads, it’s considered a craft; when it’s on paper, it’s considered art, [and besides that], printmaking allow[s] for broader exhibition and ownership of work.” This last comment returns her and us to her Bauhaus and Black Mountain years, during which the equality of reproducible art forms with singular works of painting and sculpture was emphasized.⁴²

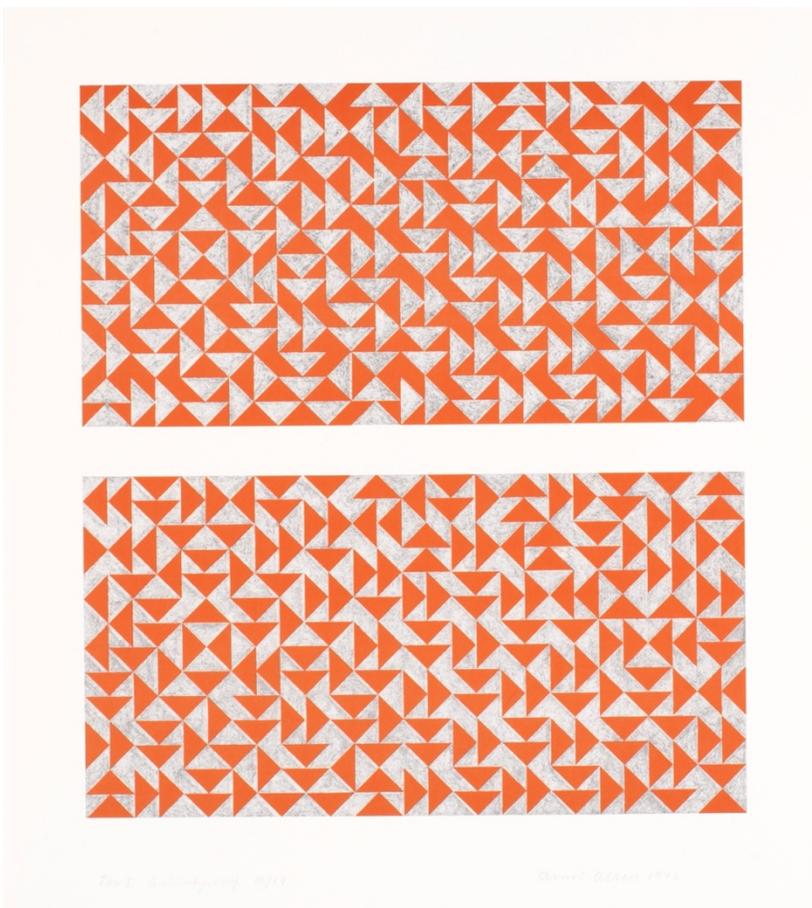
Yet her weaving career was not quite ended—in two ways. In the same year when she discovered printmaking at Tamarind, she wrote the entry on hand-weaving for a new edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and expanded it as the first chapter of her 1965 book, *On*

Weaving. That volume was, in turn, a central work in transforming design history into a serious academic discipline. And in 1966 she was commissioned by the Jewish Museum in New York to do a commemorative tapestry, *Six Prayers* [Fig. 14]. While Anni writes about the way she produced the result—"I used the threads themselves as a sculptor or painter uses his medium to produce a scriptural effect which would bring to mind sacred texts. . . . The panels were mounted on rigid backgrounds to produce the effect of commemorative stelae,"—rather astonishingly (or not), no reference is made to *what* was being commemorated: the six million Jews who, trapped in Europe, perished during the Holocaust.⁴³



Fig. 14 Anni Albers, *Six Prayers*, 1966-67. Cotton, linen, bast and silver thread; 73 1/4 x 117 in. (186.1 x 297.2 cm). Gift of the Albert A. List Family, The Jewish Museum, New York, JM 14972.16 Photo: The Jewish Museum/Art Resource, NY

By 1970 Anni had given up weaving altogether in favor of printmaking: "It took me too long and it always produced just one piece. . . . I just outgrew it in some way."⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, however, her printmaking was as experimental as her weaving had been—and also favored the abstract geometries that she had found as "'visual resting places' removed from the often painful realities of the natural world."⁴⁵ She would "print lines multiple times, first positive, then negative, [and print] off-register . . . [always] explor[ing] the limits and possibilities of her tools."⁴⁶ Although this sort of influence is never mentioned, Anni's interest in doubling patterns and reversing positive and negative—outreaching and receding—elements resonates from the tradition of Islamic art [Fig. 15].



Notably, her first major exhibition in Europe, which took place during this period, was shown in two German cities—at the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf and the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin—both in 1975. Josef died in New Haven the following year, just after his eighty-eighth birthday. The following two decades were marked for Anni by diverse exhibitions and accolades: honorary degrees and awards included a second American Craft Council Gold Medal for “uncompromising excellence” in 1981. At the presentation she was called a visionary, to which she responded that she preferred the term “experimenter.”

Fig. 15 Anni Albers, *Fox I*, 1972. Photo-offset, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 50.8 cm).
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany 1994.11.23. Photograph by
Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

She also continued to travel to Europe to design and to make prints. She presided over the opening of the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, his birthplace in Germany. This was also the second venue for a broadly focused *Josef and Anni Albers* exhibition organized by their friend Maximilian Schell in 1989. The following year—to come full circle—MoMA once again mounted an exhibition of her work alongside work by her one-time senior Bauhaus colleague Gunta Stölzl. Since Anni’s death in 1994 several dozen exhibits have continued to promote her unique visual and conceptual contribution to the history of art in the United States and elsewhere across six decades of the twentieth century.



Anni and Josef Albers, Black Mountain College, 1949. Photograph by Ted Dreier. Courtesy of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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1. See the acute analysis of this by Nicholas Fox Weber in “The Last Bauhausler,” Nicholas Fox Weber and Pandora Tabatabai Asbaghi, eds., *Anni Albers* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1977), 138–140.
 2. Anni Albers, interview by Maximillian Schell, 1989, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation Archives; quoted in Pandora Tabatabai Asbaghi, “Anni Albers 1899–1994,” in Weber and Asbaghi, 154.
 3. See Nikolaus Pevsner, ed., *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, 5th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 880.
 4. Nicholas Fox Weber, “Anni Albers to Date,” in *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 16. Published in conjunction with the exhibition presented at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, June 12, 1985–January 5, 1986.
 5. Muche (1895–1987) became the youngest Master of Form at the Bauhaus; he had also, by coincidence, studied with Martin Brandenburg.
 6. Swiss-born Itten (1888–1967) developed the innovative “preliminary course” that was designed to teach students the basics of material characteristics, composition, and color. “Itten theorized seven types of color contrast and devised exercises to teach them. His color contrasts include[d] (1) contrast by hue, (2) contrast by value, (3) contrast by temperature, (4) contrast by complements (neutralization), (5) simultaneous contrast (from Chevreuil), (6) contrast by saturation (mixtures with gray), and (7) contrast by extension (from Goethe)” —as described by David Burton in “Applying Color,” *Art Education* 37, no. 1 (Alexandria, VA: National Art Education Association, 1984): 40–43. Itten’s so-called color sphere (*FarbKreis*) expanded Adolf Hölzel’s idea of a color wheel into a system of twelve colors. It was Itten who invited Paul Klee and Georg Muche to join him at the Bauhaus in 1920.

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7. For a full discussion of this issue, see Christiane Schönfeld & Carmel Finnan, eds., *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).
8. She made this comment in her Dec 16, 1989, Schell interview, quoted by Asbaghi in Weber and Asbaghi, 156. (See n.1,n.2.)
9. Oral history interview with Anni Albers by Sevim Fesci, July 5, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-anni-albers-12134#overview>.
10. *Gunta Stölzl and Anni Albers*, exhibition pamphlet (NY: Museum of Modern Art, February–July 1990). It is instructive of the stature eventually achieved by Anni Albers that the pamphlet essay treats the two artists simply as colleagues, which would not have been their relationship at that point.
11. Anni Albers, “Material as Metaphor,” in Anni Albers & Brenda Danilowitz, *Anni Albers: Selected Writings on Design* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000).
12. Anni Albers, “Weaving at the Bauhaus” (September 1938; revised July 1959), in *On Designing*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 2.
13. Brenda Danilowitz, Chief Curator at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, has directed me to the specifics of these complications: As-Howard Dearstyne, a student under Hannes Meyer, wrote in his posthumously published volume: “When Mies arrived at the school, his reception was scarcely wholehearted. A large number of students, egged on by a handful of militant communists, gathered in the canteen and demanded that he exhibit his work, to enable them to decide whether or not he was qualified to direct the Bauhaus. . . . The internal disorder caused the closing of the school for six weeks. By the time the Bauhaus reopened in the summer of 1930, Mies had expelled the main troublemakers and tranquility reigned.” Howard Dearstyne, in David Spaeth, ed., *Inside the Bauhaus*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 220–222.
14. At the time, she would later recall, she felt unready for “Klee and his thinking,” which she decided was above her head. Oral history interview by Sevim Fesci, July 5, 1968. (See n.9.)
15. See the fuller discussion of the influence on Albers of both Klee and Andean textiles in Virginia Gardner Troy, “Thread as Text: The Woven Work of Anni Albers,” in Weber and Asbaghi, 28–31. (See n.1.)
16. Weber and Asbaghi, 157. They spent their honeymoon in Italy, visited the Canary Islands in July 1927, and travelled to Switzerland, France, and the International Exposition in Barcelona in summer 1929.
17. Perhaps more to the point, Reich was his mistress.
18. Marr’s Essay “Der Weg zum Siege des Germanenthums über das Judenthum” (The Way to Victory of Germanicism over Judaism), which reached extreme renown by the 12th edition of 1879, warned that “the Jewish spirit and Jewish consciousness have overpowered the world.” He called upon his fellow Christian Germans—his “fellow Germans”—to resist “this foreign power” before it was too late. He referred to that power as a race—Semites—from the Asiatic Middle East, as opposed to a religion.
19. In 1930, Johnson (1906–2005) joined the architecture department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. There he helped arrange for American visits by rising stars in the architectural modernist movement, such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, and negotiated the first American commission for Mies van der Rohe when Mies fled Nazi Germany. In 1932, he organized the first exhibition on Modern architecture at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1941, at age 35, he enrolled as a student at Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he studied with masters whom he had help escape the Nazis: Gropius and Marcel Breuer. There is some irony in Johnson’s usefulness to a number of artists fleeing the Nazis, given his own flirtation with fascism and with the Nazi party. See Marc Wortman, *1941: Fighting the Shadow War* (New York City: Grove Atlantic, 2016).
20. To be more precise: Brenda Danilowitz has explained that Warburg contributed half of the cost of the \$1,000 fare, and that, thanks to his urging, Abby Rockefeller (one of MoMA’s founders) contributed the other \$500. This is mentioned in a letter from Edward Warburg to Ted Dreier, October 27, 1933, in the Black Mountain College Collection, Western Regional Archives of the State Archives of North Carolina, Asheville, NC: Dreier Correspondence PC 1956.
21. This from the December 12, 1933, letter found in *Kandinsky–Albers: Une Correspondance des années trente* (Kandinsky–Albers: A Correspondence from the Thirties) (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1998), 17; quoted in Weber and Asbaghi, 164. (See n.1.)

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22. This would have been part of her education that included an English-speaking governess; Josef did not come from an haute bourgeoisie family, and so English would not have been a standard part of his own education.
23. "Art Professor Here to Teach Fleeing Nazis," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 26, 1933, 8A.
24. "One of Germany's Foremost Textile Designers Comes Here to Teach in Southern Mountain School," *New York Sun*, December 4, 1933, 34. The quotes are from the article. Note the title with regard to the already-perceived stature of the Alberses when they arrived on these shores.
25. Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 24.
26. Eugene Blume, Matilda Felix, Gabriele Knapstein, and Catherine Nichols, eds., *Black Mountain: an interdisciplinary experiment 1933–1957*, exhibition catalog (Berlin: Nationalgalerie and Spector Books, 2015), 58–95.
27. Brenda Danilowitz, "From Albers to Wolpe: Unravelling the Networks of Emigre Scholars and Artists at Black Mountain College," in Blume, et al., 71.
28. Virginia Gardner Troy, "Thread as Text: The Woven Work of Anni Albers," in Weber and Asbaghi, 31. (See n.1.)
29. The quote is from Toni Ullstein Fleischmann's unpublished account of the Fleischmanns' emigration from Germany, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation Archives; quoted in Weber and Asbaghi, 169.
30. Schell interview with Albers, December 16, 1989. (See n.2.)
31. Troy, "Thread as Text," 32. (See n.1.)
32. Ann Coxon, Briony Fer, and Maria Müller-Schareck, eds., *Anni Albers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
33. Dorothy Randall, "Hardware, Plumbing Gadgets Make Jewelry," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, November 18, 1941. More of the review is quoted in Weber and Asbaghi, 171. (See n.1.)
34. Serendipitously, one of his students in the mid-1950s was Eva Hesse. (See the article on Hesse on this site.)
35. Anni Albers, interview by Richard Polsky, "The Reminiscences of Anni Albers," transcript, Albers Foundation Archives, January 11, 1985, 31–32.
36. This is the only time period in which one gets a possible sense of artist-recognition complication in the Josef-Anni relationship—if one accepts the 1995 reminiscence of Charles Sawyer, Dean of Yale School of Art at that time: ". . . Harvard was giving her more recognition as a creative artist than Yale. . . . I don't think Josef was entirely sympathetic to her concerns. And I think he could have been." Quoted in Weber & Asbaghi, 174. (See n.1.)
37. Polsky interview with Albers, 17–18; quoted in Weber & Asbaghi, 174–175. I am paraphrasing Albers's comments.
38. See Weber, "The Last Bauhausler," in Weber and Asbaghi, 143–146. Josef taught there in 1953–1954 and again in 1955. Most of that time, Anni remained behind in New Haven, as their letters back and forth attest.
39. Anni Albers, unpublished typewritten statement, June 1962, Albers Foundation Archives; quoted in Weber and Asbaghi, 176.
40. The exception to this is the insightful discussion in Weber's "The Last Bauhausler," in Weber and Asbaghi, 138–140. (See n.1.)
41. Anni Albers, interview by Gene Baro, in Gene Baro (with Nicholas Fox Weber), *Anni Albers*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1977), 7. Exhibition dates: October 1–November 11, 1977.
42. Polsky interview with Albers, January 11, 1985, 21. Both quotes in this paragraph are from that interview. (See n.35.)
43. Anni Albers, statement in undated press release for *Anni Albers*, 1977, Jewish Museum, New York, found in the Albers Foundation Archives.
44. Schell interview with Albers, December 16, 1989. (See n.2.)
45. See Weber, "The Last Bauhausler," in Weber & Asbaghi, 126. He is referring to Albers's embrace, in her Bauhaus days, of Wilhelm Worringer's ideas regarding abstraction in his book, *Abstraction and Empathy*. (See n.1.)
46. Baro interview with Albers, *Anni Albers*. (See n.41.)