

Josef and Anni Albers

Voyage inside a blind experience

"You celebrate beauty where you can find it. This is what the Alberses learned; in fact, it is what they knew, somehow, each of them, from the start of their lives. Josef thought, as a child, that it was thrilling to walk on the checkerboard-patterned floor of black and white marble squares when his mother took him to the local post office. If you are visually, blind, of course you cannot see this. But you can feel it, viscerally, in other ways. Thus, you who are blind have given us a fantastic opportunity, for which we are supremely grateful. You have opened the way to new experiences. You have encouraged us, simply by what others might perceive as deficit, to reconsider what that alternating black and white means. Not so much what it signifies as the visceral pleasure it affords. The rhythm, the contrasts, the systematic alternations of two extremes: we suddenly realise that these experiences are more profound, and richer, than we thought when we considered them as merely optical"

Nicholas Fox Weber, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation



THE JOSEF & ANNI ALBERS FOUNDATION

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Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

The Form of Colour

During his time teaching in America, Josef Albers and his students began experimenting with studies of the relationships between colours using assemblages of coloured paper and collages of dried leaves. Colour, for both Josef and Anni Albers, was an important field of research. The influence between colours affected the forms and their interaction in the space.

The basins here contain warm, lukewarm and cold water. If you immerse your left hand in the warm basin and your right hand in the cold basin simultaneously, and then subsequently place both hands in the lukewarm basin, your hands should feel differently in the same water temperature. Touching can deceive us in the exact same way as sight does.

New Ways of Seeing

You will be able to touch everything that you find placed on the horizontal planes. Place your sensor near the signs on the tactile surfaces and the audio will start and guide you in your investigation. The exhibition unfolds along thematic lines, with original works by Josef and Anni Albers displayed on the walls, alongside tactile reproductions by the Milan Institute of the Blind.

Josef Albers, Drawing Music

Between 1959 and 1961, Josef Albers designed seven vinyl record covers for Command Records. The compositions are based on differences of scale and colour to convey syncopation, rhythm and tone. The single elements seem to have been released from a rigid grid to move around in space. Circles, squares and simplified geometric shapes create rigorous schema and compositions.

Josef Albers, teacher and student

Josef Albers was first a pupil and then teacher at the Bauhaus, the German design school founded by Walter Gropius in 1919. He subsequently repeated his teaching experience in the American Black Mountain College and at Yale University. This room displays diverse types of exercises and studies which the artist carried out with his students.

Drawing

The preliminary drawing courses which Albers held after 1930 at the Bauhaus and for the entire period in which he taught at Black Mountain College and Yale University were based on the firm belief that anyone could learn to draw. In order to perfect his students' technique, Josef proposed a series of exercises that stimulated specific aspects of drawing. The students practiced with parallel, curved, intertwined, soft and irregular lines expanding in every direction and done at various speeds.

The Matière

As artists and teachers, Anni and Josef Albers confronted the challenges of their materials. The term used to describe the manipulation of textures was Matière. Many of these exercises that they and their students used have been lost to history aside from a few surviving examples in photographic archives. These Matière have been reproduced and can be gently touched, allowing visitors to investigate the properties of the materials and to understand how they were made.

Homage to the Square

The exhibition presents a selection of the works of Josef Albers, entitled *Homages to the Square*. Albers produced hundreds of variations on the basic compositional scheme of three or four squares set inside each other. Here you can view both paintings, prints as well as two original *Unfinished Homages to the Square* that reveal the considerable thought that Albers gave to the interaction between different colour combinations.

On Weaving

Anni Albers came from a wealthy family but, unable to adhere to the expectations of this world, she became a student at the Bauhaus. Her creations celebrate the physical elements of her medium, drawing beauty from the threads and knots intertwined with unusual materials. She spent the rest of her life in search of new ways to do things and her seminal text *On Weaving* was published in 1965.

Josef, Anni and Mexico

Between 1935 and 1936, the Albers travelled for the first time to Latin America. They would always go back there enthusiastically to visit archaeological sites, to collect findings and to start a vast collection of artefacts. The typical step-pyramid constructions, the maps of ancient sites, as well as the façades of buildings and ornamental patterns of Andean fabrics, are echoed in the works of both artists.