



« We learn courage from art work. We have to go where no one was before us.»

Anni Albers

« Learn to see and to feel life; that is, cultivate imagination, because there are still marvels in the world, because life is a mystery and always will be. But be aware of it. »

Josef Albers



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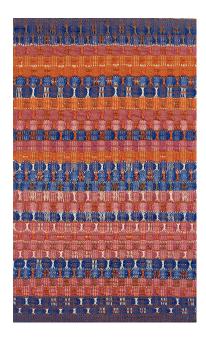
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Anni et Josef Albers

L'art et la vie

10 September 2021 – 9 January 2022





PRESS RELEASE

Museum director

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Curator

Julia Garimorth, assisted by Sylvie Moreau-Soteras

Advisory committee

Nicholas Fox Weber, director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, Connecticut Heinz Liesbrock, director of the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat, Bottrop, Germany

From 10 September 2021 to 9 January 2022 the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is devoting a unique exhibition to Anni and Josef Albers: more than 350 works – paintings, photographs, furniture, drawings, textiles – indicative of their artistic development.

In addition to its comprehensive presentation of their respective oeuvres, this is the first exhibition in France dedicated to the two artists as a couple: to the intimate, empathetic bond that underpinned a lifetime of mutual support and encouragement and an ongoing dialogue founded on shared respect. Not only did they create an oeuvre now considered the basis of modernism, they also passed on their educative values to a whole new generation of artists.

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Anni Albers Red and Blue Layers, 1954 Coton 61,6 x 37,8 cm The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Josef Albers
4 Central Warm Colors Surrounded by 2 Blues,
1948
Oil on Masonite
66 x 90,8 cm
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop



Anni Albers (born Annelise Fleischmann, 1899–1994) and Josef Albers (1888–1976) met in 1922 at the Bauhaus and married three years later. From the outset, they shared the conviction that art could profoundly transform our world and should be at the very heart of human existence: "We learn courage from art work. We have to go where no one was before us." (Anni Albers)

From the outset the pair made art and its function the core of their thinking. Not only did they insist on a revaluation of crafts and on the benefits of mass production (Bauhaus) as tools for the democratisation of art, they were also convinced that creation was essential to each person's education. As both artists and teachers, they constantly demonstrated the immeasurable impact of artistic activity on self-realisation and, more broadly, on relationships with others. Guided by these values, they sought to lead their students to greater intellectual independence and an awareness of the subjectivity of perception. As they saw it, teaching is not mere transmission of theory already consigned to books; on the contrary, it consists in constantly raising new questionings, firstly through close observation of the visual and tactile world around us, then via the creative discoveries that come from hands-on experiments with whatever materials available, regardless of their aesthetic "Learn to see and to feel life; that is, cultivate imagination, because there are still marvels in the world, because life is a mystery and always will be. But be aware of it." (Josef Albers)

The exhibition opens with two emblematic works by each artist, illustrating from the outset, like a prologue, the formal and spiritual values that link the couple. This is followed, in chronological order, by the different stages of their lives. The first section brings together their rich and varied output from the Bauhaus, from 1920 to 1933. The couple's departure for the United States in 1933 marks the beginning of the second section, dedicated to the works produced at Black Mountain College. Two other highlights are a selection of Anni's *Pictorial Weavings* and Josef's *Homages to the Square*. The exhibition closes with a section devoted to Anni's graphic work, which she began with Josef in the 1960s and continued until the end of her life.

A room specifically dedicated to their respective roles as teachers allows visitors to step into the shoes of the students and follow a "live" lesson, thanks to some remarkable film archives. A considerable quantity of documentary material – photographs, letters, notebooks, postcards, etc – assembled with the help of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, also provides a context for the work of the two artists.

The exhibition has been organised in close collaboration with the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Bethany, Connecticut.

It will also be shown at the IVAM (Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno) in Valencia, Spain, from 17 February to 20 June 2022.

A catalog is published by Paris Musées (272 pages, 45 €).

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

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Visitor information

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Exhibition itinerary

For the first time in France and on this scale, this exhibition gathers the work of two major artists of the 20th century. Born in Germany, Anni and Josef Albers met in 1922 at the Bauhaus school and 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 situated in the mountains of North Carolina. In this new environment, Josef went deeper into his research on colour, while Anni continued to explore different weaving techniques.

The intimacy of their close-knit relationship allowed them, throughout their lives, to support and encourage one another in an ongoing and respectful dialogue.

Particularly mindful of forms, materials, and colours, they produced a work that is considered nowadays as one of the foundations of modern art, and whose influence remains significant on following generations of artists.

Their work, as artists but also as teachers, constantly raised new questions through a sensitive observation of the visual and tactile world: "Learn to see and to feel life; that is, cultivate imagination, because there are still marvels in the world, because life is a mystery and always will be." (Josef Albers)

The exhibition follows a chronological path in which a dialogue is established between the works of both, while highlighting their differences and similarities.





Josef et Anni Albers dans le jardin de la maison des maîtres au Bauhaus, Dessau, vers 1925 Photographe anonyme The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation



The Bauhaus

"The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! [...] Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all return to the crafts! For art is not a "profession." There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman." The Bauhaus Manifesto, published in April 1919 by its founder, the architect Walter Gropius, did not leave Josef Albers and Annelise Fleischmann indifferent, each feeling a growing dissatisfaction with their own artistic training. Josef, born into a Catholic working-class family, was attending the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. Annelise, who belonged to the German bourgeoisie of Jewish origin, was studying at the University of Applied Arts in Hamburg.

The aim of the Bauhaus, which was to establish an interdisciplinary dialogue and lead students towards a creative individual autonomy, not only corresponded to the artistic research of the two young artists, but also responded to their view on teaching: favour learning through practical experience and increase the visual and tactile awareness of the materials and surrounding phenomena.



Josef Albers

Gitterbild, vers 1921

Verre, métal, fil de cuivre

32,4 × 28,9 cm

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers

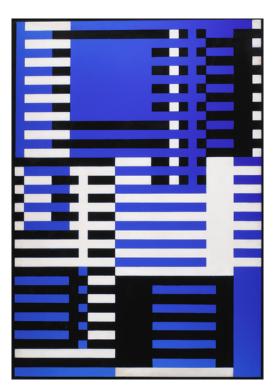
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Josef Albers and the glass workshop

It was in the autumn of 1920 that Josef Albers joined the Bauhaus in Weimar. At the age of 32, he was one of the oldest students. Like many of his fellow artists at the time, he experienced financial dill culties. The German economy in the 1920s was in the grip of the depression and a spiralling inflation. Forced to use salvaged materials from the rubbish tip in Weimar, Josef created miscellaneous assemblages and works from various pieces of glass. This glass work raised mixed reactions among the masters of the Bauhaus, who then attempted to direct Josef towards the mural painting workshop. Despite the threat of dismissal made by Gropius, Josef Albers persevered in his research. And, against all odds, he was not only allowed to continue his training at the Bauhaus but was also asked to open a glass workshop. First taking up the position of craftsman (Geselle), Josef Albers was quickly appointed technical director of the workshop and joined by Paul Klee as artistic director. This organisation of the workshops, with a technical director (Werkmeister) working alongside an artistic director (Formmeister), aimed at helping students on the one hand acquire a specialized knowledge of the materials and working methods, on the other hand receive strong artistic stimulation.



Josef Albers

Aufwärts (Upward), vers 1926

Verre plaqué, sablé, peinture noire

44,6 x 31,4 cm

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers

Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New

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Anni Albers and the weaving workshop

Annelise Fleischmann applied to enrol at the Bauhaus school in 1922. After a first rejection, she was accepted in April of the same year. She discovered a cheerful atmosphere and rapidly befriended her colleagues, notably Josef Albers. The two artists began a relationship and got married three years later: Annelise Fleischmann thus became Anni Albers. After following, like all students, the preliminary course of Johannes Itten, one of the first teachers at the Bauhaus, Anni joined the textile workshop in 1923. Weaving was probably not her first choice, but in the school, it was mandatory to sign up for a specific workshop. And, although the Bauhaus was theoretically built on the principle of equality, in accordance with Gropius's will to make "no distinction between the fair sex and the strong sex", the textile workshop was considered the "women's class". Nevertheless, once she had overcome her initial reservations, Anni fully invested herself into her chosen field and found her inspiration in this new environment. She enjoyed, in fact, a total freedom to experiment.



Anni Albers Wallhanging, 1924 Coton et soie 168,4 x 100,3 cm The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Adagp, Paris



A new language of architectonic forms

In April 1925, following increasing political pressure, the Bauhaus in Weimar was dissolved and transferred to Dessau. This choice can be best explained by the proposal the city made to Walter Gropius to design a new building for the school. The building was oll cially opened in December 1926. An entanglement of vertical and horizontal lines and surfaces, alternating transparency and opacity, it incorporated into its architecture the modern philosophy of the school, of which it became the emblem.

Anni and Josef Albers responded immediately to this new architectural setting. Josef developed a language of architectonic forms based on cased glass (a technique consisting in covering a piece of opaque or transparent white glass with a thin layer of handcoloured blown glass); Anni produced large strips of woven silk of similar shapes, the Wallhangings. More than ever, the two artists worked side by side, their works echoing each other's. They shared the same vision of a formal balance, each with his or her own technique, making use of the various properties of his or her preferred material. Although horizontality predominated — with Josef through the choice of the formats, with Anni through the very technique of weaving — , it generated a vertical dynamism and exuded a structural energy by way of the superimposition of bands of the same colour and length.



Anni Albers
Black White Yellow, 1926 / 1967
Soie tissée, rayonne et lin
207,6 x 121,4 cm
Conception : Anni Albers, 1926
Réalisation : Gunta Stölz, 1967
Victoria and Albert Museum, Londres
© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, 2021



Josef Albers, designer and photography

From 1926, Josef Albers started designing and making furniture and other objects from everyday life and participated in the creation of a typeface specifi c to the Bauhaus, called Universal. Whether he worked with wood, glass or metal, the artist always attached great importance to the properties of the materials. According to him, the design must be reduced to its simplest and most functional expression, while including the essential elements of balance, harmony and accuracy of proportion.

His glass works moved gradually towards shades of black, white, and grey, while the vertical and horizontal constructions gave way to curves and undulating shapes. This new direction without doubt arose from his recent interest in photography, which he began to practise in 1928. His collages and photomontages offered a radically new interpretation of the space of representation. Albers captured the subject in a series of close-ups, similar to a cinematographic process and displayed a pattern in a variety of forms by modifying its framing.



Josef Albers, Ensemble de quatre tables gigognes, vers 1927 Placage en frêne, laque noire, verre peint 62,6 x 60,1 x 40,3 cm (ensemble) The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



A new start in the United States

When in 1933, under the pressure of the Nazi regime, members of the Bauhaus unanimously decided to dissolve the school, the reputation of Anni and Josef Albers was already established. On the recommendation of Philip Johnson, then curator of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the couple was invited to teach at Black Mountain College, an experimental school that largely took up the pedagogical principles of the Bauhaus. Situated in a rural environment in the mountains of North Carolina, this school of progressive art was based on the educational principles of the American philosopher John Dewey ("Learning by doing"), involving experimental teaching methods and communal life. This place attracted artists, dancers, mathematicians, sociologists, and architects, such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller or Robert Rauschenberg. Anni set up an experimental weaving workshop that became central to the teaching at the school; and Josef became the head of the art department. Both sought to extend the educational values of the Bauhaus: an increase of the importance of experimentation, the total lack of prejudice against materials and techniques as well as an enhanced interdisciplinary dialogue. The strong presence of nature surrounding Black Mountain College also helped breathe new life into the teaching.



Discovery of pre-Columbian arts

The growing interest of the Alberses in Latin America and their in-depth knowledge of pre-Columbian traditions had a great impact on their teaching, but also on the production of their own works. Thus, Anni introduced into the workshop Peruvian weaving looms and encouraged her students to employ traditional techniques using the found materials. Between 1935 and 1967, the two artists visited Mexico and Latin American countries close to a dozen times. They went to many archaeological sites in Mexico and Peru. Josef took hundreds of photographs of pyramids and shrines. They began to put together a collection of ancient objects and fabrics. Fascinated by the fact that certain weavings, especially Peruvian ones, were used in their time that is to say before the invention of writing — to pass on knowledge, the two artists created works explicitly referring to these messages in coded characters.



Anni Albers Two, 1952 Lin, coton, rayonne 47 x 102,2 cm The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



Knots and Jewellery

At the end of the 1930s, the Alberses discovered the treasure of Monte Albán, excavated some years before from a tomb in Oaxaca, Mexico. Anni was impressed by the unusual combination of materials (gold and silver with crystal rock, pearls or shells) of the jewels from pre-Columbian civilizations. She then started to create jewels that represented a new fi eld of free experimentation. From the chosen materials, without prejudging their aesthetic or utilitarian value, the artist designed clear and simple shapes, while making visible the making process. She thus created a series of prototypes accessible to "everyone who cared to look about and was open to the beauty of the simple things around us".

In the mid-1940s, Anni and Josef Albers began to explore knots. They were probably infl uenced by the German mathematician Max Wilhelm Dehn, a pioneer in the development of knot theory. Dehn indeed joined Black Mountain College in 1945 and became a close friend of the Alberses.



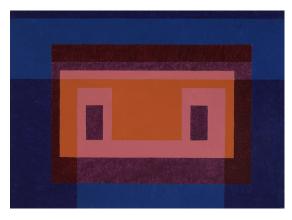
Anni Albers et Alexander Reed
Collier, vers 1940
Bonde d'évier, trombones, chaîne
50,8 x 10,8 cm
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation
© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



Variants and Structural Constellations

In 1947, Josef Albers undertook the series Variants, or Adobes. The palette of bright colours and the abstract geometric compositions evoked the painted walls of the adobe houses with fl at roofs that the couple had seen in Mexico. In a text from 1948, Josef expounded the method that underpinned this project: "All Variants are built on an underlying checkerboard-like structure. This provides a defi nite relationship of all parts and therefore unifi cation of form [...] In each painting the areas of the various colors are in most cases equal, sometimes of a quantity two or three times as large."

From 1949, Josef made the Structural Constellations, a series of works that embodied his experiments on visual ambiguity. The central idea consisted in showing that one could easily deceive the eye by creating an imaginary depth on a fl at surface when viewed from a certain angle. Thus, by playing with angles or the effects of perspective, the representation of a simple geometric shape could generate multiple interpretations and produce optical illusions.



4 Central Warm Colors Surrounded by 2 Blues, 1948 Huile sur Masonite 66 x 90.8 cm Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



Anni and Josef Albers, teachers

The principal ambition of the two artists as teachers was to make students more perceptive of the world around them. "To open eyes": this is how Josef Albers defined his mission, while he sought to make them aware of a new way of seeing things. According to him, teaching art did not consist in passing on theoretical knowledge, but above all in raising questions. Following a methodology of open exploration ("learning by doing"), he encouraged his students to favour direct observation through manual exercises and led them to realize that the perception of any pictorial element (colour, form, line) does not give us objective data but may change depending on its context.

As for Anni Albers, her pedagogical practice was based on a desire to increase tactile sensitivity. She encouraged her students to experiment with a large variety of materials — a length of string, a newspaper, an ear of corn, etc. According to her, learning to weave began with a tactile knowledge of the properties of the different materials: in the same way that an artist apprehends the language of colour by means of sight, he must also train his sense of touch to be able to speak the language of the material.



Pictorial Weavings

In the 1950s, Anni Albers began creating hand-woven works of a smaller format, whose sole function was to be looked at. Devoid of any utilitarian or architectural purpose, these pictorial weavings allowed her the opportunity to explore unique weaving forms, distinct from repeated woven patterns. For this purpose, she used small handlooms, with which she employed techniques called *leno* or gaze — two warp threads are twisted around a weft thread, which makes the fabric strong but transparent. This approach also enabled her to bring out the format of the final work, through the structure of the weaving and the pattern resulting from it. "To let threads be articulate again and find a form for themselves to no other end than their own orchestration, not to be sat on, walked on, only to be looked at." (Anni Albers)



Anni Albers From the East, 1963 Coton, plastique 63,5 x 41,4 cm

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation New York

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in honor of

Rylands for his commitment to the Peggy Collection © 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



Religious commissions

In the mid-1950s, Anni Albers began a series of religious commissions. After designing an ark covering a Jewish temple in Dallas, Texas, she created around 1961 a sanctuary for the B'nai Israel congregation, at Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The six panels, hand-woven in simple shades, are displayed here for the first time.

Six Prayers was her most ambitious pictorial weaving. In 1965, the Jewish Museum in New York commissioned her to create a memorial to the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. This commission gave her the opportunity to create an architectural work, by combining the form and function of the Torah scrolls as well as their Hebrew script. For a long time, Anni Albers was interested in the relationship between texts and textiles, the latter having been used as a means of communication in ancient Peru. The works Haiku and Code, whose titles refer explicitly to texts and languages with encoded or encrypted characters, testify to it.



On Weaving

Anni Albers published two influential books: in 1959, a short anthology of essays entitled *On Designing* and, in 1965, the founding book *On Weaving*. Presented as a kind of visual atlas, it explores the history of the last four thousand years of weaving across the world, while examining the technical aspects of the craft and the development of the loom.

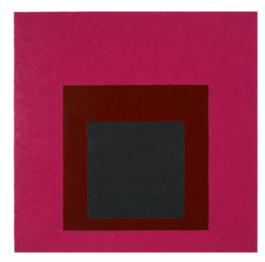
Although Anni kept very few sketchbooks, she produced throughout her career hundreds of textile samples that she carefully labelled and archived. Gathered together, they could be considered as a miniature retrospective of her woven works.



Josef Albers' Homage to the Square

Undertaken in 1950, shortly before Josef Albers accepted the position of head of the Design Department at Yale University, and continued until his death in 1976, the series *Homage to the Square* is comprised of more than two thousand paintings that explore the interaction of colours between each other and with their environment. Josef chose to limit himself to four elementary formats of squares set inside each other.

He abandoned the idea of compositional invention to concentrate on a sole pictorial element: colour. As he demonstrated first in a lesson devoted to the magic and logic of colour, then in his essential book Interaction of Color published in 1963, a colour can never be seen as it actually is, but always in relation to its environment. For instance, it appears darker on a light background and, conversely, brighter on a dark background. According to Josef, this discrepancy corresponds to the difference between the factual fact and the actual fact, between the physiological perception of a phenomenon and the way in which our mind interprets it. Each painting in the series Homage to the Square is therefore both a demonstration of the interaction of colours, an educational lesson, and an object of pure aesthetic contemplation.



Josef Albers
Homage to the Square: Guarded, 1952
Huile sur Masonite
60,9 x 60,9 cm
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT
© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/Adagp, Paris



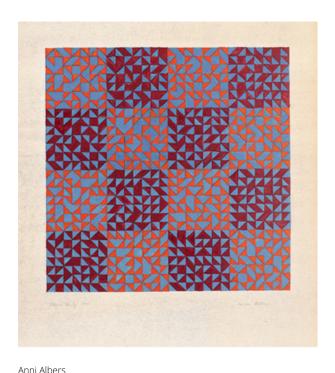
Josef Albers
Study for Homage to the Square: Yes-Also, 1970
Huile sur Masonite
61 x 61 cm
Collection particulière
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT
© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/Adagp, Paris



Drawings and prints of Anni Albers

In 1962, Josef Albers was one of the first artists to be invited to collaborate at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles. Anni accompanied him in 1963 and, surprisingly, was at once seduced by this world. She gradually abandoned weaving to devote herself to printmaking, experimenting in diverse techniques such as lithography, silkscreen printing, offset printing, printing or etching.

In the same way as she did with weaving, she let herself be guided by the printing process: "What I am trying to get across is that the material is a means of communication. That listening to it, not dominating it makes us truly active, that is to be active, be passive." Printing enabled her to pursue her interest in texture, patterns, colour, the qualities of the surface and other aspects of "textile language". Anni used simple grids and rows of triangles to create a great variety of effects revealing the influence of pre-Columbian textiles and artefacts. "Threads were no longer as before three-dimensional; only their resemblance appeared drawn or printed on paper. What I learned in handling threads, I now used in the printing process." (Anni Albers)



Anni Albers
Color Study, 1970
Gouache sur papier diazotype
58,7 × 45,7 cm
The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation
© 2021 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris 2021



Biography

- **1888** Josef Albers was born on March 19th in Bottrop, a small mining village in the industrial Ruhr region, Germany. He was the eldest son of a working-class Catholic family.
- **1899** Annelise Else Frieda Fleischmann was born in Berlin on June 12th into a bourgeois family of Jewish origin, converted to Protestantism.
- 1920 Josef joined the Bauhaus school, six months after its opening.
- **1922** Anni was admitted to the Bauhaus in her turn and joined the textile workshop.
- **1925** The two artists married on May 9th in Berlin.
- **1933** After the Bauhaus was dissolved, Anni and Josef were invited to teach at Black Mountain College, a new experimental school founded in Asheville, North Carolina.
- **1935** First trip to Mexico where they were to go back more than a dozen times throughout their lives.
- 1939 Anni and Josef became American citizens.
- **1949** In disagreement with the new direction the school was taking, they resigned from Black Mountain College. Anni opened a solo exhibition at the MoMA in New York.
- **1950** Josef accepted the position of head of the new Design Department at Yale University. He began the series Homage to the Square.
- **1959** Publication of On Designing, followed in 1965 by On Weaving, two famous books by Anni.
- 1962-63 Beginning of their collaboration with the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles.
- **1963** Publication of Interaction of Color, Josef's major book.
- 1968 Anni gradually gave up weaving to devote herself mainly to printmaking.
- **1976** Death of Josef in New Haven, Connecticut, on March 25th.
- 1994 Death of Anni in Orange, Connecticut, on May 9th.



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PLASTIC OMNIUM, main sponsor of the exhibition

Anni and Josef Albers firmly believed that art was central to human existence and could profoundly transform it, asserting that for humankind to thrive, people needed to be free to explore science and art. As a long-standing supporter of French museums, Plastic Omnium encourages and promotes the arts through its patronage. It is proud to be the main patron of the "Anni et Josef Albers, L'Art et la vie" (Anni and Josef Albers, Art and Life) exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris.

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Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them.



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- Bike: Bicycle parking spaces are available in front of the museum entrance.
- RER C : Pont de l'Alma (line C)

Opening hours

- Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-6pm (last entry 5:15pm)
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Full rate : 14 € Reduced rate: 12 € Free for under 18

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