

ARTS

Anni Albers

Pat Kane reviews the work of textile artist Anni Albers (1899–1994) which is being exhibited at the Tate Modern, London.

Bringing together

Albers' most important works from collections in Europe and the U.S, this exhibition is the first major retrospective of her work, and a long overdue recognition of Albers' pivotal contribution to modern art and design.

The Bauhaus School of Art

Born in Berlin, Annelise Fleischmann became a student at the Bauhaus School of Art, Architecture and Design. In the nineteenth century there had been growing anxiety about the soullessness of mechanical manufacturing and art's loss of place and purpose in society. The Bauhaus addressed this through its revolutionary approach to design, combining architecture, crafts and the fine arts. This thirst for change found expression in simple, minimalist forms, which were in harmony with their function. Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, said that his aim was to contribute to 'the development of the domestic environment', making life better for everyone. The motto of *form follows function* is particularly expressed in the kitchen, where simple, fitted units were designed to be more hygienic and easy to care for than older freestanding cupboards. The ideas of the Bauhaus still resonate today.

A community of artists

Traditional teaching methods of the teacher-pupil relationship were replaced by the idea of a community of artists working together. This innovative approach produced a lively cross-fertilization of ideas across various disciplines, and included both hand-made and mechanical production. Art's relationship to technology and to society was redefined. Disciplines came together to produce a 'total' work of art. Teachers included Kandinsky, Klee, Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers (who became Anni's husband).



1. Anni Albers working at her loom

Yet, in spite of aspiring to equality between the sexes, women were still discouraged from engaging in certain disciplines, including painting. Textiles would have been seen as a more domestic medium, and therefore more 'feminine'. Anni Albers played a major role in challenging and changing this perception, when she combined the ancient craft of hand-weaving with the language of modern art. Channelled into textiles, and working within the restrictions of the loom, Albers created abstract works which were a profound influence on the Bauhaus and the Modernist movement. She advocated a new understanding between the architect and the inventive weaver. The Bauhaus was closed when the Nazis came to power in Germany. Anni and Josef Albers were Jewish, and made their escape to North Carolina where they continued their work.

The images shown here are of course flat, and do not show the wonderful textures found in the natural materials of Albers' weaving.

The exhibition of Albers' work is at the Tate Modern until 27 January 2019. 

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Let us together create the new building of the future which will be all in one: architecture, sculpture and painting.

Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School



Photos(3): © Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

3. 'Intersecting' 1962, pictorial weaving, cotton and rayon, 400 x 419 mm.

2. 'Six Prayers' 1966-67, cotton/linen, bast/silver, Lurex, 1861 x 2972 mm. The Jewish Museum, New York – memorial commemorating the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust

