

Anni Albers's Modernist Philosophy in Thread and Text

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Name(s):	Glover, Christina , author Bearor, Karen A. , professor directing thesis Jolles, Adam , committee member Carrasco, Michael D. , committee member Department of Art History , degree granting department Florida State University , degree granting institution
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derived from the Bauhaus, and united art, craft, and design through universalism. Her weavings and writings from 1924 to 1966 reflect this art philosophy. Looking at the formal aspects of her wall hangings and analyzing her writings, I outline the extent of Albers's understanding of the theories proposed by intellectuals sharing her milieu, in particular Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965). I show Albers borrowed aspects of his theories; however, I do not claim that she strictly adhered to Worringer's ideas. Instead, she deviates from them to emphasize characteristics unique to her medium of weaving and its history based in craft technique. This thesis begins by establishing Albers's understanding of geometric abstraction through the Bauhaus. I investigate claims that she was indebted to Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1908), which she and others likely read at the Bauhaus. Worringer's argument put forward a way to link ancient and modern art through a shared psychic state, characterized by feelings of chaos and the need for order, which he believed was manifested as geometric designs. My study shows that Worringer offered Albers one way to relate the textiles of the ancient past to her modern weavings, but that she also found other connections after her move to the United States. After 1933 she became increasingly devoted to the textiles of ancient America. This is confirmed by her use of Peruvian textile constructions, her collection of ancient American textiles, and her discussions of these weaving cultures in her writings. Additionally, Albers encountered other artists working in North and South America who likewise sought to apply abstractions from ancient American art to modernism. I compare works by Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949), Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), and Shelia Hicks (1934-) to show a pan-American desire to find indigenous roots applicable to the modern day through universalism. These different avenues of Albers's work, her Bauhaus education, study of Peruvian weavings, and dialogue with contemporary pan-American sources of universalism, point to her underlying belief that art was successful if it communicated a universal appeal and timelessness. In integrating Albers's weavings and writings in relation to her philosophy, I demonstrate the extent to which her art and writings engage intellectually and stylistically with modernism. This thesis contributes to the scholarship where previous studies of Albers have not thoroughly acknowledged her participation in the discourse of modern art through her use of modernist ideals, theories, and writings. I provide a unique intellectual history of a weaver's work that shows how theoretical foundations equate her weavings and writings with vanguardism. Using a language belonging to the plastic arts, she removed false divisions between art media and advanced her concept of universalism by creating a link between ancient craft and modern art.

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