Anni Albers’s Modernist Philosophy in Thread and Text

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<td>Abstract/Description:</td>
<td>Anni Albers (1899-1994), weaver, printmaker, and writer, began her studies at the Bauhaus in 1922, and she soon became a leading figure in the weaving workshop there. Leaving Germany in 1933 when the Bauhaus closed under the pressure of Nazi power, Albers permanently moved to America and began teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Here, she headed her own weaving workshop, which was based on Bauhaus pedagogy. In 1935 she visited Mexico for the first of twelve times; she visited Peru and Chile in 1953. With each trip to Latin America, she developed an increased interest in the weavings of the ancient Americas. From the mid-1930s to the early 1960s, she allowed aspects of ancient textiles to figure into her own weavings, and she described her admiration for ancient weaving cultures in her numerous writings. Looking at the environments in which Albers worked, I situate her weavings and writings in the intellectual atmospheres of the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and her independent studies and travels in the Americas. Doing so reveals the complexity of her personal philosophy on art, which ultimately derived from the Bauhaus and its innovative approach to art and design.</td>
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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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