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**THE MORGAN TO EXHIBIT JOSEF ALBERS'S PAINTINGS ON
PAPER, INCLUDING RARELY-SEEN STUDIES FOR HIS FAMOUS
HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE SERIES**

*SHOW EXPLORES THE PRIVATE SIDE OF ALBERS'S WORK AND THE
INFLUENCE OF THE U.S. AND MEXICO ON HIS CAREER*

Josef Albers in America: Painting on Paper

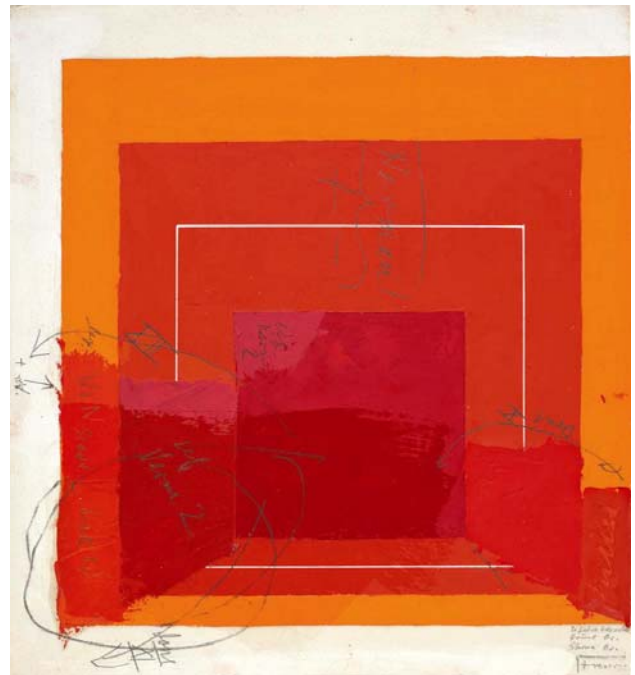
July 20–October 14, 2012

****Press Preview: Thursday, July 19, 10 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.****

RSVP: (212) 590-0393, media@themorgan.org

New York, NY, June 21, 2012—Josef Albers (1888–1976) is best known for his series of paintings *Homage to the Square*, in which he repeatedly explored color relationships within a similar format of concentric squares. Much less familiar, however, are the painted studies on paper that Albers made for his paintings. Expressively experimental, the works offer a revealing look at the artist's investigation of form and color.

Now, for the first time in New York, The Morgan Library & Museum will present an exhibition entirely devoted to this aspect of the artist's work. *Josef Albers in America: Painting on Paper*, on view from July 20 to October 14, features approximately eighty such studies spanning the four decades after the artist left Nazi Germany and immigrated to the United States.



Josef Albers (1888–1976)

Color Study for White Line Square, not dated

Oil on blotting paper (with gouache, pencil, and varnish)
29.53 x 29.66 cm

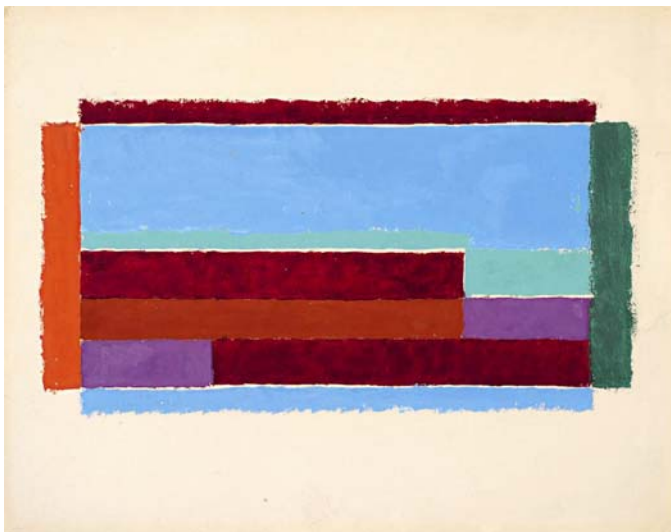
All works, unless noted: © 2012 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation /
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All works, unless noted: Digital Image by Imaging 4 Art
inv. no. 1976.2.22

The exhibition begins with studies for abstract geometric compositions from the late 1930s, when Albers—a onetime instructor at the Bauhaus— returned to painting after having devoted his recent years to working with glass. Albers’s studies for the *Variant / Adobe* series, from the 1940s, reveal the influence that his time in Mexico, and specifically the country’s pre-Columbian architecture, had upon his art. The majority of the exhibition—over fifty works—is devoted to the *Homage to the Square* series (1950–1976). These vibrant sketches—never exhibited in the artist’s lifetime and rarely seen after his death—provide important insight into Albers’s working method and, in contrast to the austerity and strict geometry of the finished paintings, are remarkable for their freedom and sensuality.

“The Morgan is noted for exhibitions that explore the artistic process and the often surprising, experimental drafts that lead to a finished work of art,” said William M. Griswold, director of the Morgan. “This show is a prime example for an artist whose name is ordinarily associated with a rigorous and highly disciplined approach to composition, but whose painterly studies exhibit an unexpectedly spontaneous informality.”

PAINTING ON PAPER



Josef Albers (1888–1976)
Untitled Abstraction, ca. 1940
Oil on blotting paper
48.2 x 61.1 cm
inv. no. 1976.2.344

Born in Bottrop, Germany in 1888, Albers came from a family of craftsmen, and the virtues of craftsmanship—precision, discipline, and technical proficiency—were of central importance to his work. Whereas his paintings themselves took only a few hours to complete, Albers’s preparatory work entailed producing series upon series of meticulous studies.

Of equal concern for Albers were the materials from which art was made.

At the Bauhaus, where he taught for thirteen years, he encouraged his students to explore the potential of paper and cardboard for their

work. The limitations and possibilities of paper were of particular interest to him. A less formal and rigid material than the Masonite panels or vinylite that he used for his finished works, paper provided Albers an ideal surface on which to experiment, and to process his ideas.

In 1933, the Bauhaus was forced to close under pressure from the new Nazi government. Albers and his wife, Anni, immigrated to America, where he would head the art department of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In the United States, Albers matured as a painter as his fascination with geometric form grew and his travels took him to Mexico, a place that would have a lasting influence upon his work.

MEXICO AND THE VARIANTS / ADOBES SERIES

The Albers' visited Mexico for the first time in 1935. They returned to the country regularly over the next several decades, sometimes staying for several months. The profound effect of Mexico's colors and pre-Columbian architecture and sculpture upon Albers's work is difficult to overestimate. "Mexico," he wrote to Nina and Wassily Kandinsky in 1936, "is truly the promised land of abstract art."

Mexico reconfirmed Albers's faith in the expressive power of color, and it was here—after years of producing nothing but stained glass, furniture designs, woodcuts, and linocuts—that Albers returned to painting. He significantly expanded his color range, incorporating magenta, turquoise, violet, and ocher, among other colors, in varying combinations.

The country's architecture, from adobe houses to Mesoamerican structures, inspired the artist's

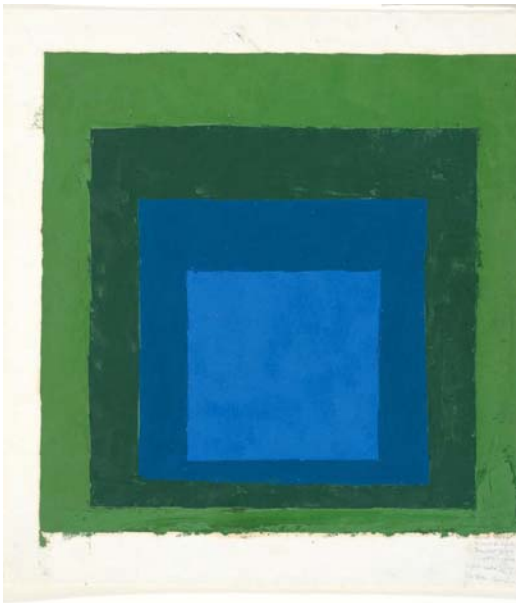
geometric abstract paintings from the 1940s, especially the *Variant / Adobe* series, which he



Josef Albers (1888–1976)
Variant / Adobe, 1947
Oil on blotting paper
48.3 x 60.9 cm

began in 1947. In studies for the series—whose compositions resemble a wall structured by abstract window openings—Albers investigated the effect of several pure, unmixed colors juxtaposed with one another. In a letter to friend Franz Perdekamp in September 1947, Albers wrote, “Since January [I have painted] only one theme in about seventy studies. What interests me most now is how colors change one another according to the proportions and quantities [I use]...I’m especially proud when [I can make] colors lose their identity and become unrecognizable.”

HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE



Josef Albers (1888–1976)
Study for Homage to the Square, not dated
Oil on blotting paper
33.5 x 30.3 cm
inv. no. 1976.2.71

In 1950, Albers found the ideal vessel through which to explore his fascination with the interaction of color: a group of nested squares.

Like the *Adobe* series, it is possible that *Homage to the Square* evolved from Albers’s preoccupation with the ancient architecture and sculpture of Mexico. His main concern in these paintings, however, was not the form of the square itself, but rather color.

“Color,” Albers said, “is the means of my idiom. It’s autonomic. I’m not paying ‘homage to the square.’

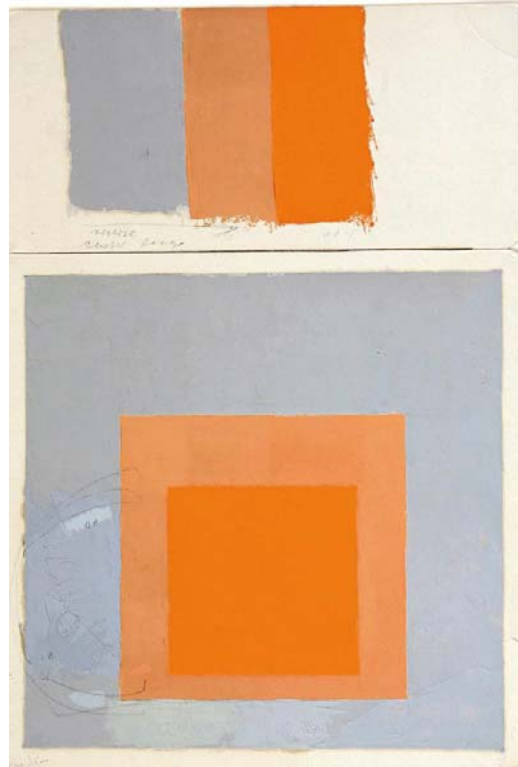
It’s only the dish I serve my craziness about color in.”

As evidenced in the notes Albers sometimes wrote in the margins of a work, or at times within the color field itself, these studies were essentially experimental in nature.

Albers restricted his first *Homage to the Square* paintings to shades of gray and black. Eventually, he used myriad color combinations, not subscribing to specific color harmonies, such as those based on complementary contrasts. Albers famously remarked that “color is the most relative medium in the world,” and many *Homage to the Square* paintings have colors that initially appear odd or discordant, but which engender a visual intensity when seen together: fiery oranges and reds; light grays and pale yellows; bright blues and dusky mauves.

The square never lost its appeal for Albers. It was a source of endless inspiration, and the form in which he most successfully investigated his fascination with the interplay of color. From 1950 until his death twenty-six years later, he created some two thousand *Homage to the Square* paintings.

Josef Albers in America is organized by the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich and the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, Germany. Works are drawn from the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Bethany, Connecticut and the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop. The Morgan is the sole United States venue and final stop for this exhibition, which first traveled to multiple venues in Europe. Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at the Morgan, is the coordinating curator of the exhibition at the Morgan.



Josef Albers (1888–1976)
Study for Homage to the Square with Color Study, not dated
Oil on blotting paper
44.3 x 30.2 cm
The Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, inv. no. 9/434
Photography: Werner J. Hannappel

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Gallery Talk

Josef Albers in America: Painting on Paper

Friday, July 20, 7 pm

Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at The Morgan Library & Museum, will lead this informal exhibition tour.

Free

Lecture

Josef Albers: At Home and At Work

Friday, September 21, 6:30 pm

Nicholas Fox Weber, who knew and worked with Josef Albers in the last years of the artist's life, will speak about how Albers worked and provide a personal glimpse into the life of the passionate, funny, original, crusty, and ferociously independent man who changed the way people look at color.

Free with admission; advance reservations: 212-685-0008, ext 560, or tickets@themorgan.org.

Film

Josef and Anni Albers: Art is Everywhere

Friday, October 5, 7 pm

(2006, 57 minutes)

Director: Sedat Pakay

This documentary is the first to present in tandem the lives of two artistic pioneers of 20th century Modernism. It includes rare footage of Josef and Anni Albers and features a number of unprecedented interviews with many personal friends and colleagues, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Sidney Janis, Denise Rene, John Szarkowski, John Cohen, and architect Philip Johnson. Produced in association with The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

Free

SPONSORSHIP

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The activities of The Morgan Library & Museum are made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$15 for adults; \$10 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.