

Artist Resources – Josef Albers (German, 1888-1976)

[The Josef & Anni Albers Foundation](#): biographies, artwork, writing, archives, residencies, exhibitions.

Albers' time at [Black Mountain College](#) from 1933 until 1949 was a mutually beneficial and impactful relationship between himself and the curriculum, which he molded with courses in painting, drawing, figure-ground patterns, abstract wire and paper constructions, and color.

Albers discussed his education, teaching career at the Bauhaus, and his creative process in an [oral history](#) with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in the summer of 1968. "Why do I paint squares since 1959, in the same design, in the same arrangement; Because I do not see that there is, in any visual articulation, one final solution... In science what seems true today may not be true tomorrow. There science is dealing with physical facts, in art we are dealing with psychic effects. With this I come to my first statement: The source of art - that is, where it comes from - is the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect. That's what I'm talking about."

The Hirshhorn in Washington D.C. holds [one of the largest collections](#) of Albers' creative output. Their [2010 retrospective](#) traced his artistic and teaching career through seventy works, many on view for the first time in public. [Listen to curator Valerie Fletcher's walkthrough](#) of the gallery.



Albers, 1967 Photograph: Sedat Pakay



Albers at Black Mountain College, ca. 1944
Photograph: Genevieve Naylor/Getty

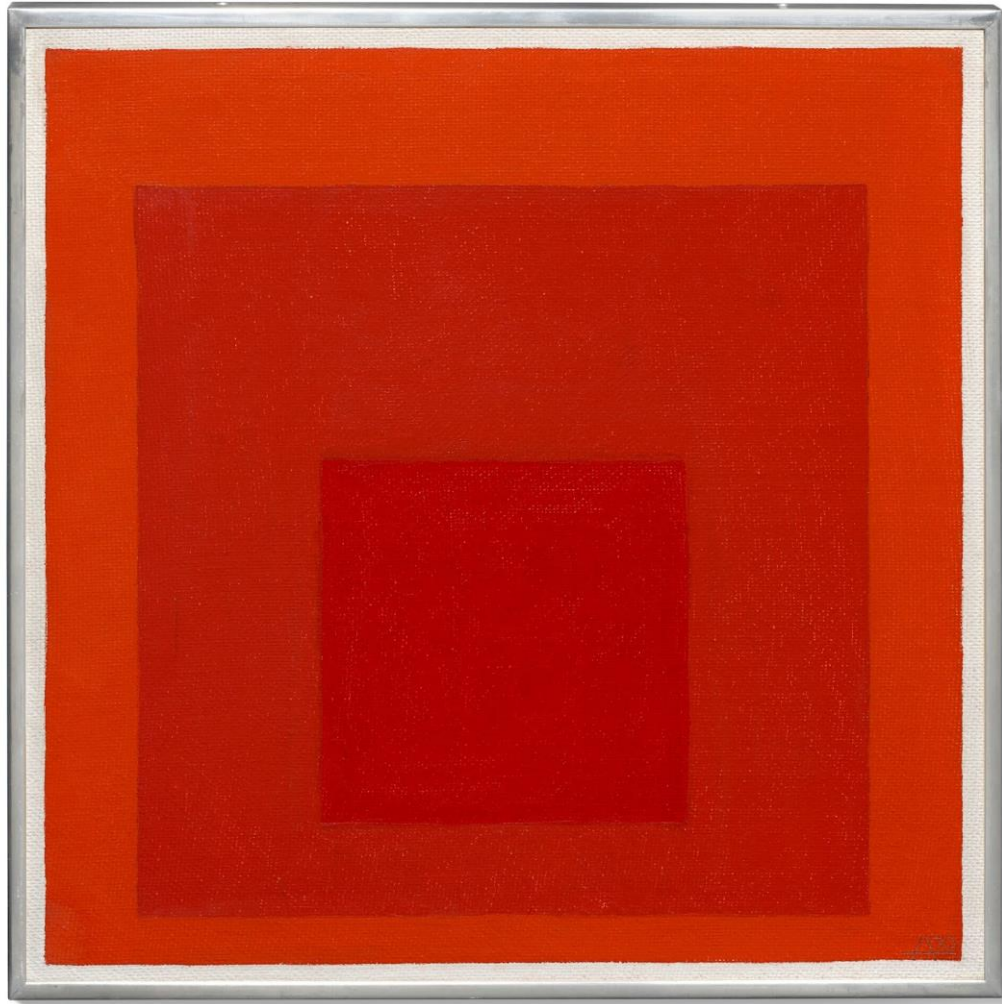
In 2016, filmmaker Anoka Faruqee [sat down with Albers' former students and colleagues](#) to collection reflections about the artist's time as a professor and department head at Yale in the 1950s. In-person interviews are enhanced with archival footage of Albers teaching in the classroom. Taped in conjunction an exhibition at the [Yale School of Art](#), pairing Albers' work with that of current students.

Yale University Art Gallery played host to [a 2017 conversation](#) between collectors and professors about the continued importance of Josef and Anni Albers, in conjunction with the exhibition [Small-Great Objects: Anni and Josef Albers in the Americas](#).

[The Guardian](#) traced Josef and Anni's teaching careers from the Bauhaus to Black Mountain College, in honor of Anni's first retrospective at the [Tate Modern](#) in 2018.

David Zwirner Gallery's 2019 exhibition [Sonic Albers](#) celebrated the artist's interest in "music, musical imagery, and sonic phenomena," an underrepresented facet of Albers' oeuvre, which he explored through painting, glass work, and drawing.

In January 2020, the [Pannell Art Gallery](#) at Sweet Briar College in Virginia debuted an interactive exhibition of silkscreens exploring Albers' relationship to color, epitomized by his 1963 publication *Interaction of Color*. In the introduction, Albers mused, "In visual perception a color is almost never seen as it really is—as it physically is. This fact makes color the most relative medium in art."



Josef Albers (German, 1888-1976)

Study for Homage to the Square: Either Or, 1970

Oil on Masonite

Private Collection; L2024:118.1

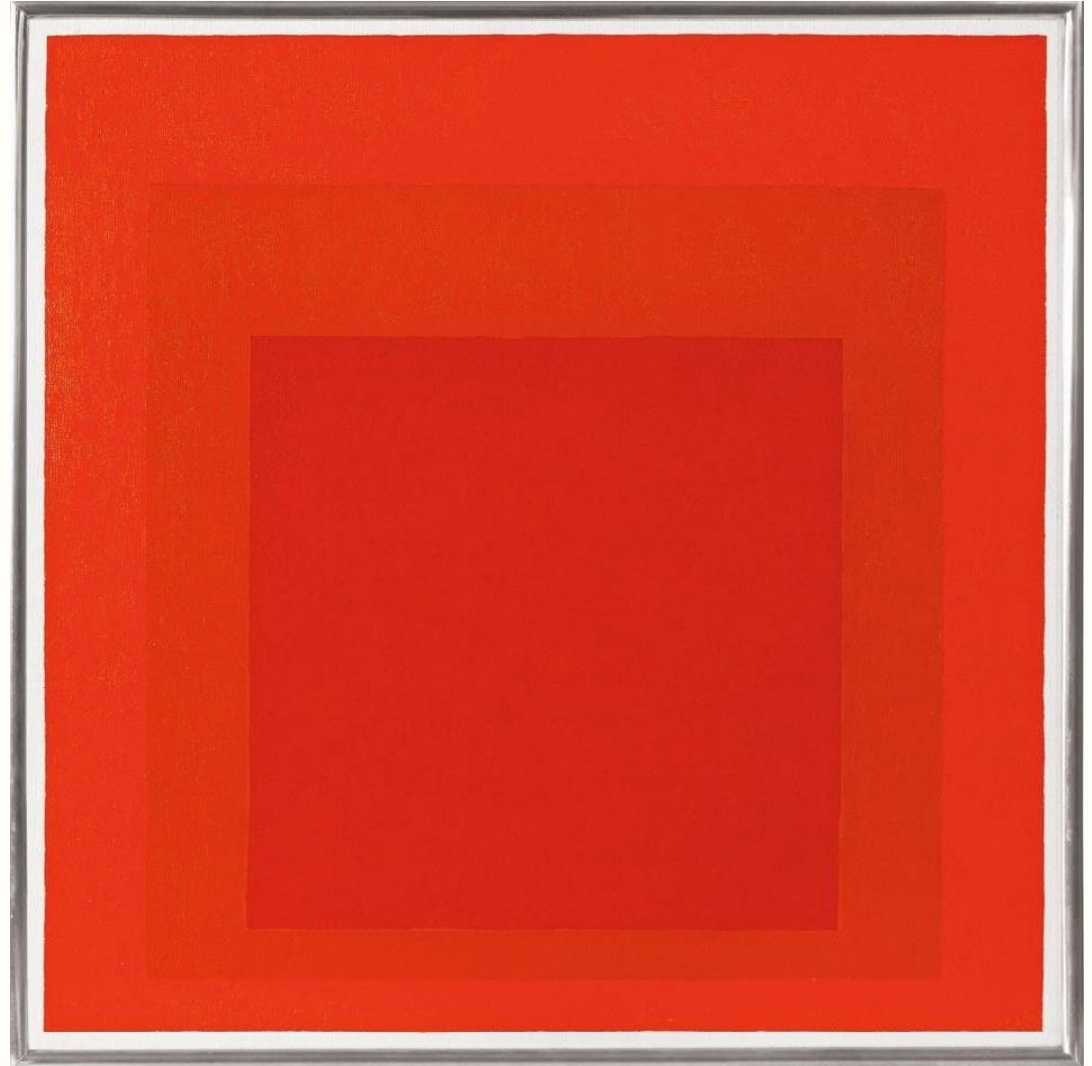
Born in Bottrop, Germany, Josef Albers studied and taught at the Bauhaus art school before it closed in 1933 under Nazi pressure. The artist came to the United States, where he taught at Black Mountain College and Yale University alongside his wife, the textile artist Anni Albers (1899-1994). In 1950, Albers began to create his *Homage to the Square* series as a study in color theory and form that lasted until his death in 1976. **Study for Homage to the Square: Either Or** is one of over 1,000 works in this series, offering three gradations of the color red. As the artist described, this study aimed “to prove that color is the most relative means of artistic expression, that we never really perceive what color is physically.”

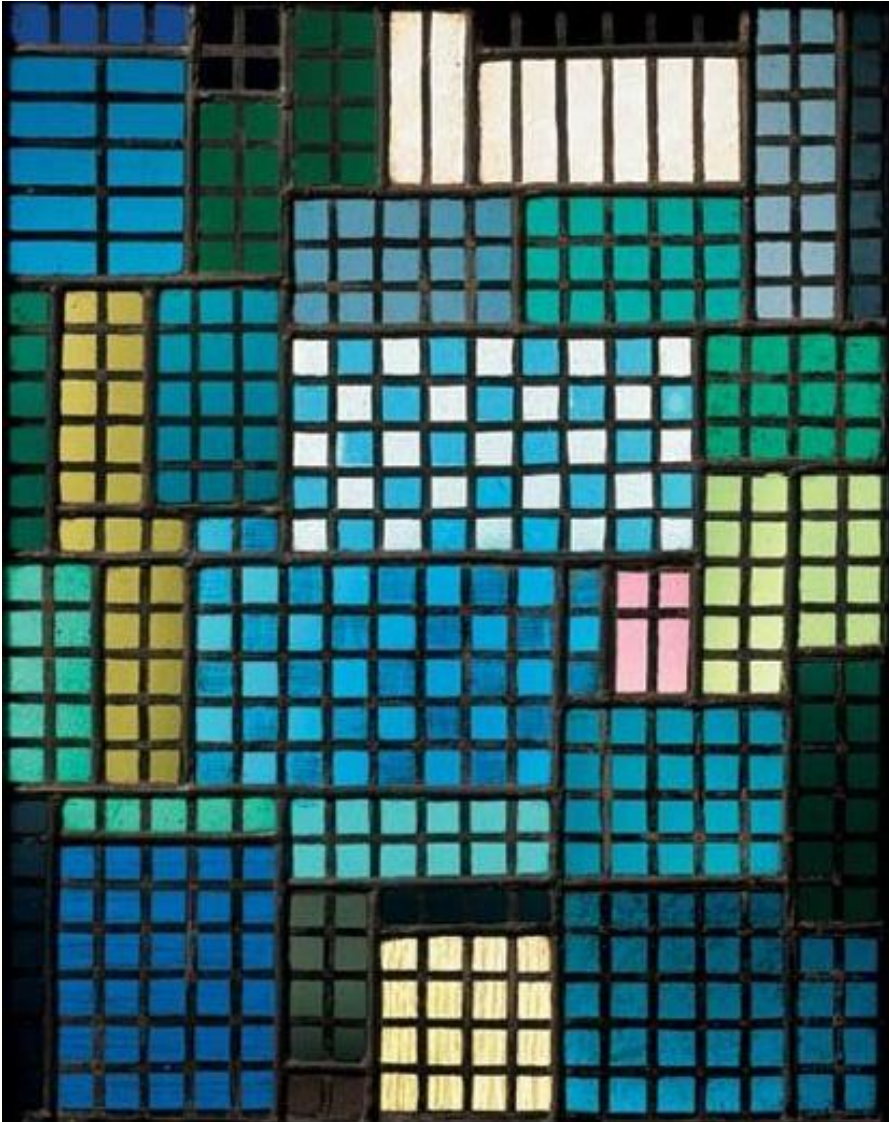
On view February 19 – May 25, 2025

Josef Albers (German, 1888-1976)
Homage to the Square, Soft Sign, 1967
Oil on Masonite

Private Collection; L2021:73.1

On view May 26 – August 29, 2021





Josef Albers (German, 1888-1976)

Park, ca. 1923

Partially painted glass, set in lead, wood frame

Private Collection; L2020:129.1

Before becoming one of the most important figures of modern art in both Europe and the United States, artist and color theorist Joseph Albers was an elementary school teacher, art instructor, and fledgling painter and printmaker in his hometown of Bottrop, Germany. Albers entered the groundbreaking curriculum of the Bauhaus school in Weimar in 1920, spending five years as a student before he was asked to join the staff as a professor—the first student to receive such recognition. A stunning work from Albers’ student days at the Bauhaus, **Park** displays the artist’s affection for his earliest specialty: glass. “I wanted to work with direct light, the light which comes from behind the surface and filters through that surface plane,” Albers reflected in 1970. “Light [as] a volume, not a surface illusion.” He first transformed light into surface and volume through assemblages made from found remnants of stained glass and leftovers from the town dump. With **Park** and contemporaneous works, he developed compositions using pre-cut squares sourced from glassmakers, which he partially painted and placed in a lead framework. In Albers’ hands, light becomes tangible through a delicate balance of tonal opacity, transparency, and texture.

On view February 17 – May 23, 2021

Extra Resources:

[David Zwirner Gallery feature on *Park*](#)

Josef Albers (German, 1888-1997)

Homage to the Square "Fall Fragrance," 1964

Oil on Masonite

Private Collection; L2020:37.1

Josef Albers was a pivotal figure of modern art – first as a student and then as a professor of the Bauhaus school in Weimar, Germany before it closed in 1933 under duress from the Nazi party. After fleeing Germany, Albers extended the philosophy of the Bauhaus during his tenure at the prestigious Black Mountain College in North Carolina before ultimately joining the faculty of Yale University. At each post, in his pedagogy and in his own work, he explored the conceptual possibilities of pure form, line, and color. His most influential work was in color theory, exemplified by his 1963 treatise, *Interaction of Color*, and in his signature series, *Homage to the Square*, which he began in 1950 and continued until his death. As **Homage to the Square "Fall Fragrance"** demonstrates, the series explored simple compositions of concentric squares that Albers envisioned as "climates" of color that express emotion and character without external reference. Each variation explores the interaction between a rhythm of chromatic values intended to exercise the viewer's muscles of observation and perception. Whimsical subtitles like "Fall Fragrance," "Beaming," "Departing in Yellow," and "Spring Starting" add personality to each composition.

On view June 10 – September 13, 2020

