

ANNI ALBERS

Constructing Textiles

Lower Belvedere
30 April to 16 August 2026



Anni Albers with her weaving *Two*, New Haven, Connecticut, 1952
Photograph by the New Haven Evening Register. Image courtesy of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.
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The exhibition *Constructing Textiles*, whose title is taken from an essay by the artist written in 1946, is devoted to Albers's wide-ranging oeuvre. It shows numerous works from all of her creative periods, from the beginning at the innovative Bauhaus and her time at the legendary Black Mountain College to the 1980s. It features all aspects of her career: textiles and architecture, weaving and building, past and present.

General Director Stella Rollig: Anni Albers's work, which places textiles, architecture, and design in a lively dialog, continues to offer inspiration for a new generation of artists, architects, and designers. She was a pioneer who blurred the boundaries between free and applied art—an approach that has become established in contemporary art, not least thanks to pioneers like her.

Anni Albers's creative and experimental approach began in the 1920s at the Bauhaus in Weimar. In 1933 she emigrated to the USA and established herself there as a multifaceted designer and artist. She developed complex weaving structures and used new types of fiber. Apart from decorative weavings, works of art in their own right, she also explored new textiles for buildings and interiors, in other words functional objects. She regarded weaving as the most advanced form of modern architectural thinking. Through her profound understanding of the material and its refined processing, Albers's work is of great contemporary relevance in the light of today's challenges relating to energy and material resources.

In this exhibition, we focus particularly on Anni Albers' role as a textile designer, her deep understanding of the central importance of materials in the design process, and her precise and forward-thinking collaborations with architects and other creators. Anni Albers: Constructing Textiles highlights the diversity of materials, techniques, and applications that characterize her experimental approach, and shows how she considered textiles as part of architecture, while also exploring her artistic practice. This opens up a

broader perspective on the multifaceted work of this extraordinary artist, say curators Fabienne Eggelhöfer and Brenda Danilowitz.

With numerous works from all of her creative periods, from the beginning at the innovative Bauhaus, Dessau, and Berlin, and her time at the legendary Black Mountain College in North Carolina to the 1980s, the exhibition features all aspects of her career: textiles and architecture, weaving and building, past and present. It includes material studies, textile samples, and designs, and also decorative weaving, large-format room dividers, carpets, and curtain materials.

Anni Albers (1899–1994) Biography

Anni Albers was one of the most influential twentieth-century textile artists and designers. Born in Berlin in 1899, her determination to pursue a career in art led her to the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1922, where her early training in the weaving workshop informed her craft, her art, and her outlook on life. After receiving her Bauhaus diploma in 1930 for her experimental use of new materials and her mastery of structural possibilities in textiles, she became acting director of the workshop from 1931 to 1932. For Anni Albers, to create work that endured was to pay close attention to the material at hand, and to let the thread lead the way.

Following the school's forced closure in 1933, she emigrated to the United States with her husband, Bauhaus artist and teacher Josef Albers. There her work became celebrated in important exhibitions, including the first one-person exhibition of a textile artist at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1949. At the progressive Black Mountain College in North Carolina, she developed an innovative teaching curriculum that combined traditional hand-weaving techniques with modern art and industrial design.

Albers's belief in the relationship between textiles and architecture was grounded in her understanding that textiles could be functional objects but also autonomous works of art at the same time. Her conviction that materials played a key role in both textile art and design led her to experiment with a wide range of unusual fibers to create bold and subtle woven designs and fabrics. Her influential book *On Weaving*, published in 1965, remains a fundamental text on the topic. Anni Albers was a defining influence on textile design and promoted its recognition as a recognized art form. Her work continues to influence artists, designers, and architects across the world to this day.

EXHIBITION TEXTS

Weaver, author, designer, artist, visionary, and teacher—Anni Albers uniquely combined all of these roles. Weaving for her was a constructive act, a process of building from threads to create textile structures that unite form, function, and aesthetics. While studying weaving at the Bauhaus, Albers developed an experimental approach to material in which the starting point for every design was the fiber itself. She was interested in the individual thread, its feel, and its visual expression. Her encounter with pre-Columbian textile art in Mexico and the Andes also had a lasting influence on her work. The highly developed Incan and Mayan weaving techniques, their abstract formal vocabulary, and the use of textiles as a conveyor of information broadened her perspective. The exhibition *Constructing Textiles*, whose title is taken from an essay written by the artist in 1946, is devoted to Albers's wide-ranging oeuvre. It focuses on five projects in which Albers collaborated with architects. These commissions clearly illustrate how she took account of the requirements of the different spaces when developing new textiles. Apart from innovative textile designs, the exhibition also explores her experimentation with the limits of weaving itself, as reflected not only in her pictorial weavings but also in her graphic art. Anni Albers saw her work as an adventure. It is to be hoped that this exhibition will also inspire, shift perspectives, and arouse curiosity.

Beginnings at the Bauhaus

Anni Albers enrolled in the weaving workshop at the Bauhaus in spring 1922. This school of design, first located in Weimar and later in Dessau, sought to create functional modern design while espousing the unity of arts, handicrafts, and technical disciplines. Textile art was considered an experimental field combining material, technology, and function. The students in the weaving workshop received very little formal instruction and developed their techniques by experimenting on their own and exchanging information with colleagues. Albers discovered a new form of expression in textiles, and designed and wove wall hangings with rhythmic, asymmetrical patterns. She also completed commissioned works, including a stage curtain for a theater in Oppeln (then part of Germany, now Opole, Poland) and a wall covering for the auditorium of the ADGB Trade Union School in Bernau.

Lessons from pre-Columbian cultures

Anni Albers first encountered Andean weaving in the 1920s at the Berlin Museum of Ethnology, as it was called at the time. Between 1935 and 1967 she and her husband, Josef Albers, made numerous trips to Mexico and in 1953 also traveled to Peru and Chile. She was fascinated by the architecture and textile art of pre-Columbian cultures. It was not only the formal vocabulary, materiality, and weaving technique that were to strongly influence Albers's work, but she also reflected on textiles as carriers of meaning, a notion common in the Andean region. She frequently explored the relationship between weaving and text in her own works. She also expressed her admiration for pre-Columbian weavers in the 1965 publication *On Weaving*, dedicated to her "great teachers, the ancient weavers of Peru."

Collection of pre-Columbian objects

Anni and Josef Albers acquired many pre-Columbian textile fragments and objects during their travels in Mexico, Peru, and Chile. Textile art played a central role in the culture of the Maya (around 2000 BCE to 1500 CE) and Inca (around 1200 to 1533 CE). Fabrics not only served as everyday objects but were also status symbols and signifiers. Patterns, colors, and materials indicated social rank, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. In Inca society textiles sometimes performed the functions of text, and in Mayan culture they supplemented written systems. Anni Albers was deeply impressed by the art and architecture of pre-Columbian cultures, and her exploration of their formal vocabulary, materiality, and techniques had an enduring influence on her work.

Black Mountain College

The Bauhaus was closed in 1933 under pressure from the Nazis. Black Mountain College was founded in the United States in the summer of that year near Asheville, North Carolina. Anni and Josef Albers were invited to teach at this progressive school, whose interdisciplinary approach was an amalgam of art, experimentation, community, and creative thinking. Albers applied her own methods of teaching weaving. She encouraged her students to try out new materials and techniques at the loom and to design both functional fabrics and stand-alone textile artworks. In 1940 Albers also remained true to her principle of experimentation and tried her hand at designing jewelry.

Disrupting the grid

Weaving has a clear framework—its fundamental structure is based on two axes. It is defined by vertical warp threads and horizontal weft threads. Against this controlling structure, Anni Albers described her shift toward works on paper as a great relief and liberation from the strict organizing principles of weaving. This new freedom also opened up new formal possibilities for Albers. She transcended the inflexible grid in favor of asymmetrical, ambiguous compositions and labyrinthine patterns. In the process, she reflected fundamentally on the function of art, which, she believed provided certainty and orientation through the organization of forms.

Designing with new materials

Anni Albers's writings often focus on material and its central importance to the creative process. The artist was very attentive to her surroundings and also searched for new materials in unusual places. Over the decades, she made numerous fabric samples experimenting with different combinations of natural and synthetic materials. These included straw, jute, cotton, silk, wool, chenille, metal thread, plastic, and cellophane. In doing so, she purposefully highlighted the contrast between rough and smooth, shiny and matte, hard and soft. In her designs for industrial textiles, Albers also followed clear creative strategies. She designed fabrics whose impact was not only visual but extended to the haptic structure.

Knots and writing

Works on paper in the form of drawings and prints liberated Anni Albers from the strict verticality and horizontality of the loom. However, the subject of thread and its possibilities was also addressed by the artist in her graphic works. Alongside various representations of knots and free-flowing linear structures, Albers also took up the idea of an abstract script in her later graphics. Here, she reflected on the connection between textile and meaning already practiced in Andean cultures. In Inca culture, patterned textiles and complex systems of knots and strings, known as quipu, served as conveyors of information. This context is also touched upon by Albers in the abstract linear forms of her pictorial weavings and the titles of her works.

Experimentation and innovation

This room brings together works on paper, pictorial weavings, and textiles from different creative phases. Anni Albers's experimental approach is again evidenced in the diversity of materials and innovative technical solutions. The guiding principles of the Bauhaus, with its desire for clear structure and material-appropriate design, defined the artist's entire oeuvre. Albers emancipated weaving from its functional and artisanal attributes, establishing it as a unique, modern medium of expression. By combining material, structure, and idea, she visualized design as conscious order in a complex world.

Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, Bernau, 1929/30

Experimenting with different materials was a founding principle of the Bauhaus school. In 1928 architect and Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer designed the ADGB Trade Union School buildings in Bernau together with Hans Wittwer. The architectural project involved the work of various Bauhaus workshops. Anni Albers was invited to find a solution for the problematic lighting and acoustic situation in the auditorium. She designed an original two-sided fabric with light-reflecting and sound-absorbing properties, combining a vertical black cotton warp with a transparent and shiny cellophane weft on the front. She had discovered this straw-like material in Italy in a hat, which she unraveled. On the reverse side she used a sounddampening, velvety chenille yarn.

Camino Real, Ciudad de México, 1968

In February 1967, Mexican architects Luis Barragán and Ricardo Legorreta visited Albers's studio in New Haven. At that time, they were working on the design of the Hotel Camino Real in Mexico City, built for the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games. They commissioned Anni Albers to create a large-format wallhanging for the bar in the hotel lobby. Since the work was to be hung in a central location, an impressive artistic contribution was needed. Albers designed a composition of complex geometric triangles in various shades of red suggestive of Mexico's pre-Columbian architecture.

Anni Albers Textiles, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1949

Anni Albers Textiles, the first solo exhibition ever devoted to a textile artist at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was held in 1949. In 1948 Albers spent long hours creating new textiles for the exhibition. These included hand- and machine-woven designs for curtains, wall coverings, upholstery, and items of clothing. Eighteen studies for teaching and two new framed weavings were also presented at the exhibition, along with five free-hanging room dividers. Albers's use of uncommon materials and her innovative architectural elements received positive media coverage across the country. Over the course of three years, the exhibition was shown in twenty-six different locations across the United States and Canada.

Graduate Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950

When Walter Gropius commissioned fabric designs from Albers for the spacious dormitories of the new Harvard Graduate Center, he requested that the materials have a "masculine" character. Albers interpreted this instruction as a reference to the materials' properties. She designed textiles that were robust, simple, and functional. For the bedspreads, Albers experimented with materials, construction, and color effects, developing several prototypes. In the end, she created three versions of low-maintenance plaid textiles to enliven the space and conceal marks made by what she described as "dirty shoes and cigarette holes." To provide privacy for double-occupancy rooms, she conceived a fabric of heavy black cotton relieved by threads of natural bast which, when hung, served as a room divider.

Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, 1957

The Temple Emanu-El in Dallas has seating for three thousand worshipers and a five-meter-tall ark housing the Torah scrolls. György Kepes, who was entrusted with the artistic design of the building's interiors, commissioned Albers to design a covering for the ark. Instead of traditional curtains, Albers designed eight sliding panels covered with machine-woven fabric in blocks of sparkling gold, green, blue, and silver Lurex thread, in one long single repeat. The striking modular design produces a dynamic composition through the staggered arrangement of the color blocks and the inversion of the two center panels. The colors echo the tones of Kepes's stained-glass windows, while the interior of the ark is lined with a separate silver fabric.

Rug Designs, 1959–64

In 1959 Anni Albers collaborated on the creation of a nylon rug with Gloria Finn Dale, who made hooked rugs from designs by contemporary artists. In painstaking detail, Albers transferred her study—an infinite winding form—to its support, on which Dale realized the textile using a hooked rug technique in which yarns are pulled through a stiff linen base by a specially designed hand-held tool. That same year, Albers was asked to design a rug for the living room of psychoanalyst Samuel Ritvo, who wanted to make it himself for his home. Inspired by the irregular fieldstone pattern of the walls and fireplace, she developed a vibrant design that intentionally avoided straight lines. In 1964 Albers again worked with Dale to execute a more formal design with precise lines and a heavy linen base for a newly completed Connecticut home.

CHRONOLOGY

1899 — Annelise Else Frieda Fleischmann, the eldest of three children, is born to Siegfried and Antonie Fleischmann in Berlin on June 12.

1922 — Enrolls as a student at the Bauhaus in Weimar.

1925 — Marries Josef Albers.

1930 — Receives first diploma for weaving awarded by the Bauhaus.

1933 — Closure of the Bauhaus under pressure from the Nazi authorities. Philip Johnson invites Anni and Josef Albers to teach at Black Mountain College in North Carolina.

1934 — Initiates a weaving course at Black Mountain College. In December, travels with Josef Albers to Havana, Cuba.

1935 — Anni and Josef Albers take their first trip to Mexico, where they begin collecting pre-Columbian objects and textiles.

1939 — Becomes a naturalized American citizen.

1946 — Year-long sabbatical, with travel through North America and an extended stay in Mexico.

1947 — The weaving *La Luz* marks the start of freer works, which she calls "pictorial weavings."

1949 — Anni and Josef Albers leave Black Mountain College. After spending the summer in Mexico City, they move to New York, where the exhibition *Anni Albers Textiles* opens on September 14 at the Museum of Modern Art.

1950 — Josef Albers is appointed chair of the Department of Design at Yale University. The couple moves to New Haven, Connecticut.

1954 — Begins to collaborate with Gloria Finn Dale, who executes Albers's rug designs.

1957 — Albers designs eight panels for the ark at Temple Emanu-El in Dallas and fabrics for the manufacturer Knoll Textiles, a collaboration that continues for twenty years.

1959 — Publication of Albers's book *On Designing*, a collection of ten essays written between 1937 and 1957. Opening of the exhibition *Anni Albers: Pictorial Weavings* at the New Gallery at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

1960 — The Alberses spend four months in Europe, Anni Albers's first visit to the continent since 1933.

1963 — Creates her first prints at Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles.

1965 — Wesleyan University Press publishes Albers's book *On Weaving*, which she dedicates to "my great teachers, the weavers of ancient Peru."

1967 — Exhibition of the commissioned work *Six Prayers* at the Jewish Museum in New York commemorating the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust.

1968 — Creates *Epitaph*, her final pictorial weaving, before shifting her attention to printmaking and works on paper.

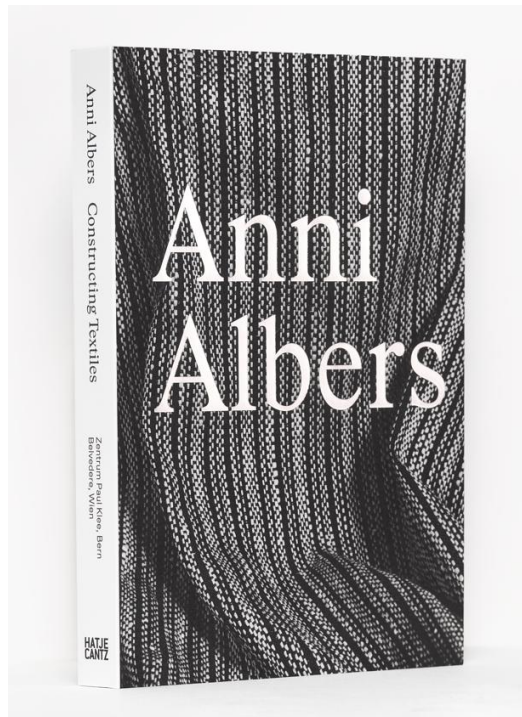
1970 — The Alberses move to Orange, Connecticut. Albers makes significant donations of her textiles to museums.

1976 — Josef Albers dies on March 25.

1985 — Opening of the retrospective *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers* in the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

1994 — On May 9, Anni Albers dies in Orange, Connecticut, at the age of ninety-four.

CATALOGUE



Anni Albers. Constructing Textiles

Editors: Brenda Danilowitz, Fabienne Eggelhöfer, Stella Rollig und Nina Zimmer

Authors: Glenn Adamson, Anni Albers, Brenda Danilowitz, Fabienne Eggelhöfer, Karis Medina, Amy Jean Porter, Stella Rollig, Jeffrey Saletnik, Nicholas Fox Weber, Nina Zimmer

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AUDIO TOUR

This multi-perspective audio tour of the exhibition presents various approaches to the work of Anni Albers, which ranges from functional textiles to pictorial weavings. It focuses on Albers's innovative approach to material, form, and function. Featuring insightful contributions from Brenda Danilowitz (Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT) and Fabienne Eggelhöfer (Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern), curators of the exhibition, Katharina Jebesen-Plättner (Westfälische Hochschule Zwickau), professor of textile art and design Doris Robles (Amano Museum of Pre-Columbian Textiles, Lima), expert on ancient Peruvian textiles

SCAN AND LISTEN!



Link to tour:

<https://app.smartify.org/tours/anni-albers-constructing-textiles>

Available in: German, English

Until 16 August 2026

Lower Belvedere

13 audio stops, 45 min.

Available to listen to for free, anywhere

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Voices: Iris Borovcnik, Samantha Pyra

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition	Anni Albers. Constructing Textiles
Curators	Brenda Danilowitz (Josef & Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT) and Fabienne Eggelhöfer (Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern)
Assistant Curators	Kai-Inga Dost (Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern), Amy Jean Porter and Karis Medina (Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT), Kati Renner (Belvedere, Vienna)
Exhibition Design	Robert Rűf
Graphic Design	Larissa Cerny
Exhibition Management	Tatjana Gawron-Deutsch
Conservation	Stefanie Jahn, Elias Campidell, János Korényi, Reka Kralik, Matthias Müller, Ana Stefaner
Installation	Michael Krupica, Johannes Stacher
Art Mediation	Michaela HöB, Katalin Várdai, Julia Haimburger
Exhibition Texts	Brenda Danilowitz, Fabienne Eggelhöfer, Julia Haimburger, Karis Medina, Amy Jean Porter, Kati Renner, Katalin Várdai
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The exhibition was organized by the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, and the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, Connecticut, in collaboration with the Belvedere, Vienna.

For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit
www.belvedere.at/en/press