



More or less

*Easy to know
that diamonds are precious
good to learn
that rubies have depth
but more to see
that pebbles are miraculous*

(Josef Albers)

The artist

Born on 19 March 1888 in the industrial city of Bottrop, in the Ruhr region of Germany, Josef Albers became one of the most renowned painters and teachers of the 20th century.

He considered his father – a master craftsman who taught him metalwork, stone carving, house painting, and carpentry – his greatest influence. At fourteen, he began training to become an elementary school teacher. In 1908, during a visit to the Folkwang Museum in Hagen, he was so deeply struck by two paintings by Cézanne that he said they changed his life forever.

In 1913, Albers went to Berlin to study art teaching. In 1915, he returned to Bottrop where he took up printmaking, and where, in 1917, he was commissioned to create a window for St. Michael's Church immersing himself in color and in stained glass. In 1919, he studied figure drawing in Munich. During those years, he made many little-known drawings and watercolors, but that showed his instinct for simplifying forms and his great dexterity as an artist.

From 1920 to 1933, Albers was at the Bauhaus, a pioneering school of art and design where, in 1925, he was one of the first students to be asked to teach. From its opening in Weimar, to its flourishing in Dessau until its closure in Berlin, because of pressure from the Third Reich, Albers was one of the most charismatic and influential teachers.

In 1933, Albers was invited to teach at Black Mountain College, which attracted him and his wife, the artist Anni Albers, mainly for its experimental nature.

While teaching younger artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Ruth Asawa, and Robert de Niro Sr., he took his own printmaking and painting in new directions, gaining attention all over America for its groundbreaking approach to abstraction.

In 1935, Anni and Josef Albers took their first trip to Mexico, where they were affected by pre-Columbian art and architecture and folk art. They developed the feeling that “art is everywhere”: a fundamental sense to their shared belief system. In 1947, Albers began his *Variants* series, in which he explored the effects of pure colors in geometric arrangements.

In 1950, Albers moved to Yale University where he headed the Department of Design and continued to teach color and form with infectious passion. He also lectured all over the U.S., in Latin America and Germany, having enormous influence on painters, architects and designers of every sort. That same year, he began his *Homage to the Square* series, which he continued to work on for the rest of his life. These “platters to serve color” allowed him to explore different color effects in a way that made the series one of the masterworks of 20th century art.

His work began to be shown worldwide, and in 1971 he was the first living artist ever to have a solo retrospective exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. He died on 25 March 1976 at the age of eighty-eight. Three years later, one of his *Homages to the Square* appeared as a U.S. postage stamp issued in 170 million copies, bearing the phrase “Learning Never Ends” Albers's art is still considered the exemplar of that statement.

The exhibition

*Stop. Catch your breath.
Inhale deeply as you go inside the colors.
Let them penetrate you as you immerse yourself
in them.*

(Nicholas Fox Weber)

The exhibition *Josef Albers: Meditations* was developed in response to the unique character of the Villa Panza and its collection. In the recent past, major contemporary artists have been asked to respond directly to the work in the Villa's permanent collection, which Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo donated to FAI. The current show, however, has a slightly different origin. While Josef Albers's work was never included in the Panza collection, it is a vital precursor to a great deal of the aesthetic passion evinced by Count Panza, and, with its rigor and uncompromising standards, fits in with that work coherently.

For this occasion, the spaces of Villa Panza host an extraordinary selection of twenty-nine works, rarely shown to the public, from important public and private collections in Europe and the United States. These paintings from Albers's *Variant/Adobe* and *Homage to the Square* series have been installed so as to capture their essence. This rarified and meditative presentation unfolds through the rooms of the house museum in dialogue with the Villa's eighteenth-century architecture. The natural light and precise measured proportions of its interiors offer a new perspective on Josef Albers's work and invite the visitor to see this superlative art calmly and with rare attentiveness.

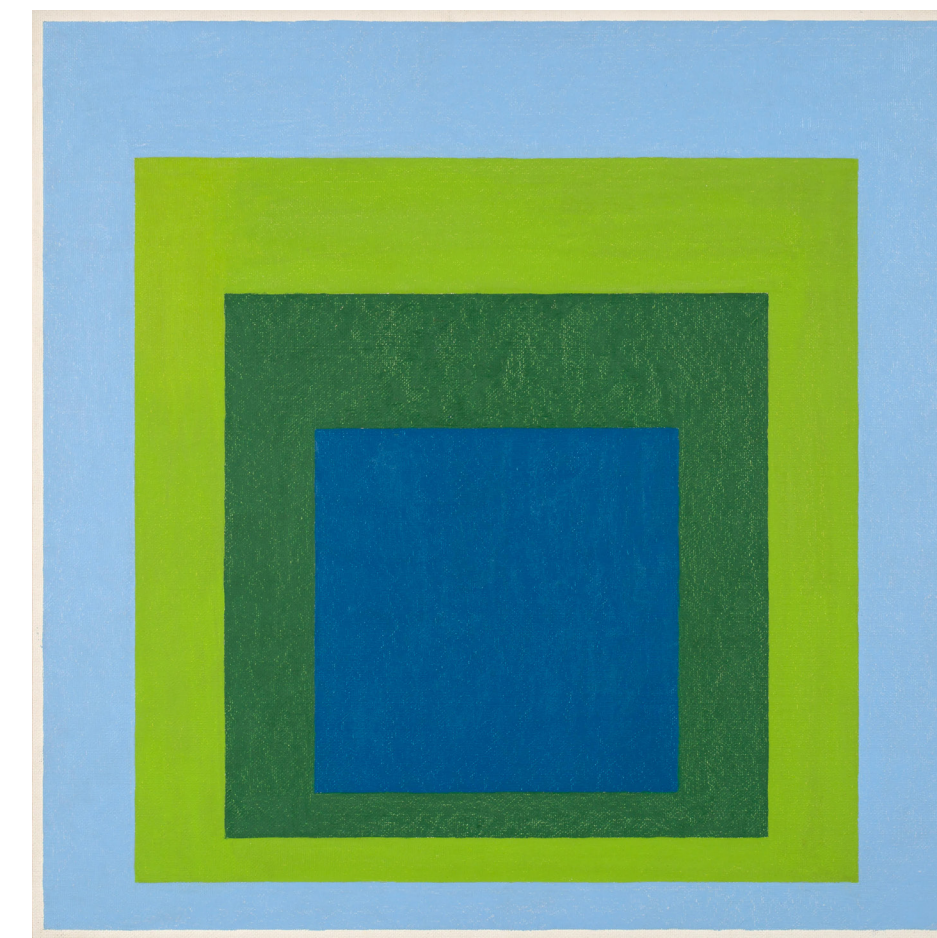
The works gathered in this exhibition ask, first of all, for this: to slow down. Remain before the paintings long enough for color to perform its magic. Spend the time necessary to recognize that what at first glance appears fixed and flat, perfectly measured begins to change. One tone advances, another recedes. The edges change nature from taut to relaxed. The light changes; right-angled corners appear circular. The movement is endless and subtle, and the colors penetrate one another.

Through essential geometric structures and meticulously calibrated colors, Albers transforms painting into a field in which seeing is tested. In this sense, *Meditations* does not simply present an extraordinary group of works by Josef Albers; it makes newly perceptible an essential quality of his research: the capacity to open, through color, a space of silence, concentration, and experience. And it is precisely in this suspension, at once optical and inward, that Albers's work meets, in depth, the spirit of Villa Panza and one of the most intense lines of inquiry within its permanent collection



FAI Villa Panza

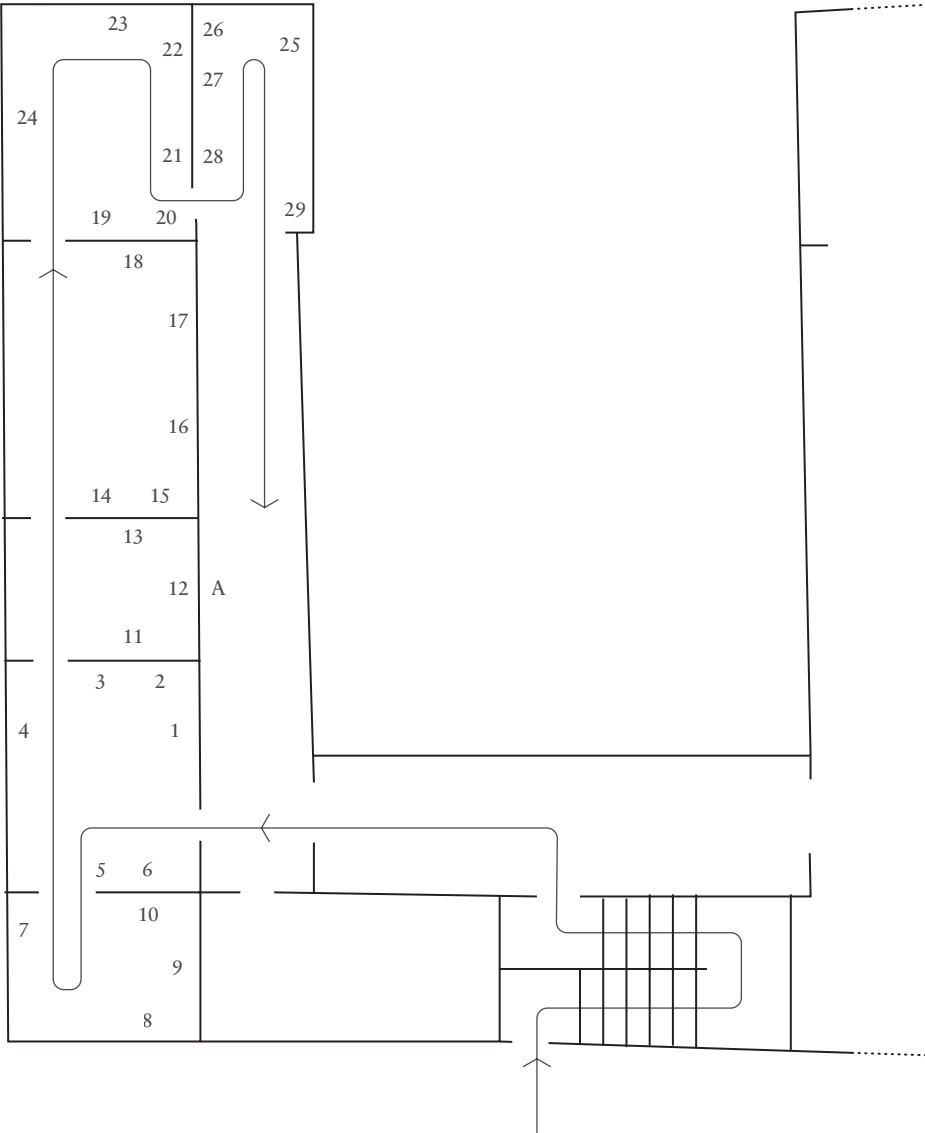
Josef Albers



Meditations

09.04.2026 - 10.01.2027

1st Floor, south wing



1. *Study for Homage to the Square: Lone Light*, 1962
Oil on masonite
45,7 x 45,7 cm

2. *Study for Homage to the Square*, 1964
Oil on masonite
62,2 x 62,2 cm

3. *Homage to the Square: Polar*, 1963
Oil on masonite
101,6 x 101,6 cm

4. *Homage to the Square*, 1963
Oil on masonite
41 x 41 cm

5. *Study for Homage to the Square: Corona*, 1968
Oil on masonite
81 x 81 cm

6. *Study for Homage to the Square: Awake A*, 1962
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

7. *Young Prediction (Homage to the Square)*, 1954
Oil on masonite
81,3 x 81,3 cm

8. *Homage to the Square: Profundo*, 1965
Oil on masonite
81 x 81 cm

9. *Study to Homage to the Square: New Island*, 1957
Oil on masonite
81,28 x 81,28 cm

10. *Study for Homage to the Square: Green Gleam*, 1963
Oil on masonite
76,2 x 76,2 cm

11. *Homage to the Square: Guarded*, 1952
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

12. *Homage to the Square (Study to Young Prediction)*, 1951
Oil on masonite
40,6 x 40,6 cm

13. *Orange Front*, 1948-58
Olio su Masonite
59,6 x 68,5 cm

14. *Study to Homage to the Square: Orange with Yellow and Gray*, 1956
Oil on masonite
45,7 x 45,7 cm

15. *Study for Homage to the Square: R III a-1*, 1970
Oil on masonite
81,3 x 81,3 cm

16. *Homage to the Square*, 1959
Oil on masonite
121,9 x 121,9 cm

17. *Homage to the Square*, 1955
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

18. *Study to Homage to the Square: Vernal*, 1957
Oil on masonite
45,4 x 45,4 cm

19. *Homage to the Square: Confirmed Promise*, 1954
Oil and casein on masonite
60,96 x 60,96 cm

20. *Study for Homage to the Square: Grisaille with Azure*, 1961
Oil on masonite
80,7 x 80,7 cm

21. *Study to Homage to the Square: Quiescent*, 1952
Oil on masonite
58,1 x 58,1 cm

22. *Study for Homage to the Square: Night Sound*, 1968
Oil on masonite
101,6 x 101,6 cm

23. *Homage to the Square: Tap Root*, 1965
Oil on masonite
101,6 x 101,6 cm

24. *Homage to the Square*, 1968
Oil on masonite
80 x 80 cm

25. *Dark*, 1947
Oil on masonite
68,3 x 97 cm

26. *Study for Homage to the Square: Dimly Reflected*, 1963
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

27. *Study for Homage to the Square: Lone Whites*, 1963
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

28. *Homage to the Square*, ca. 1951-52
Oil on masonite
61 x 61 cm

29. *Homage to the Square: Out and In*, 1954
Oil on masonite
60 x 60 cm

A. Video Projection

Variants

In 1947, Josef Albers, at age 59, began a series of paintings he called *Variants*. He and his wife Anni had started traveling regularly to the American southwest and to Mexico, where the architecture of adobe houses struck him with its clarity and elegance. The facades with two doors became the basis of the formats for these rectilinear pictures with their precise geometry in which nothing but vertical and horizontal lines, meeting at right angles, facilitate the presentation of pure, unmixed colors, each painted directly on the white background. We often feel that one color has been placed on top of another, but that perception of color mixtures and of transparency is an illusion. There is in fact no overlapping. Albers maintained a large collection of oil paints made by different manufacturers that enabled him to pick the right colors to give the impression of these visual events that are deliberate spoofs on reality.

In most of these paintings, there are equal quantities of each of the colors – there are either four or six of them, depending on the format – while viewers have the impression that there is far more of one hue than another. This is because of the personality of the colors, and the effect of neighboring paints.

Albers was passionate about early Italian Renaissance painting and was pleased when viewers observed the qualities of the art of Piero della Francesca in these constructions. The pacing, the ambient calm, the restraint and grace, and the rhythm and geometry of the splendid palette conjure Piero’s art, although Albers was too modest to make such a claim.

The two *Variants* in the exhibition, while very different from one another, are splendid examples of Albers’s use of his carefully devised formats to create entire universes in which you can lose yourself in long-lasting, rich meditations.

Homages to the square

In 1950, Albers simplified the geometric format of his paintings to nothing but three or four squares nested within one another. As with the *Variants*, he confined himself to vertical and horizontal lines that meet at right angles, only this time, starting with the innermost form of the composition and moving to the shape of the painting overall, the boundaries are equal. Albers was attracted to the square shape both because of its intrinsic perfection and because he felt that it was neutral, devoid of any particular association. The neutrality of the essential form allowed color to be what matters most. Indeed, Albers referred to these paintings as “platters to serve color.”

His father, whose craftsmanship and practicality he greatly admired, taught him that when you paint a door you always started at the middle, working directly on the flat background, and work your way out – so as to catch the drips and avoid getting your shirt cuffs dirty. Albers painted each square using a painter’s knife with which he applied pigment straight from the tube so as to create totally even surfaces. Starting at the center, he applied his same rule from the *Variants* of never putting one color on top of another; if we feel that the central coat of paint is sitting on top of layers of pigment lying behind it, that is illusory.

The consistent format of these squares was very precisely calculated. The distances underneath the central square are doubled to the left and right of it and tripled above. Having developed this arrangement, Albers found that it created compositions that move, he said, “up and down, left and right, inward and outward, all at the same time.” We very often have the impression that these paintings emit a glow, and that the surfaces of the individual unit are modulated while in fact they are flat. This was one of the many ‘miracles’ of color that Albers enjoyed presenting in this series of which he made over 2000 paintings, always experimenting further, revelling in the different color climates and the personalities of the various hues.

The *Homages to the Square* in this exhibition have been selected to reveal the majesty of these paintings at the very best. They have been arranged to engage viewers in an experience that is full of surprises. Some are ethereal and almost vaporous, others possessed of dramatic force and a sense of weight. In the spacious rooms of the Villa Panza, you have the opportunity to be with some of Albers’s greatest masterpieces, in a presentation where the ample space and deliberate juxtapositions of the work provides you with an experience we hope that you will savor. Do not rush. Relish the miracles of color and lose yourself in its wonder.