

Formulation: Articulation | Josef Albers

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Josef Albers discussing prints for *Formulation: Articulation*, 1972
Photo by John T. Hill, courtesy of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation
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(Santa Fe, NM) Zane Bennett Contemporary Art announces *Formulation: Articulation*, an exhibition of Josef Albers's seminal print portfolio of the same name.

For the first time in the Southwest, *Formulation: Articulation* | Josef Albers displays the entirety of the late-artist's most ambitious print portfolio across four exhibition spaces. Printed by Sirocco Printers, and co-published as a limited edition by Harry N. Abrams, New York, and Ives-Sillman, New Haven, the portfolio of *Formulation: Articulation* comprises 127 screen prints across sixty-six folders, reflecting more than four decades of Albers's sustained investigation into the relationship between color and optical perception. In his pioneering text on color theory, *Interaction of Color* (1963), Josef Albers wrote, "In order to use color effectively, it is necessary to recognize that color deceives continually." *Formulation: Articulation*, printed in 1972, just four years before the artist's death, stands as one of the most fully realized expressions of Albers's thinking on color at the end of his life. The exhibition of *Formulation: Articulation* in part serves to visually communicate Albers's assertion that color is "the most relative medium."

The exhibition features all of the portfolio's sixty-six folders floated underneath plexiglass, allowing for a heretofore unrealized and simultaneous study of Albers's engagement with silkscreening as a site of independent investigation into the psychological phenomenon of color perception related to—but distinct from—his paintings. Seventeen compositions on view feature reinterpretative studies of Albers's most famous series, *Homage to the Square*. These chromatic squares nested within one another show how colors interact. In his description accompanying one such composition, *Folio 1: Folder 15*, Albers writes:

This interaction of colors exists in all color combinations to a larger or smaller degree, but is in most cases unrecognized even to the trained eye. Interaction permits the knowing colorist to make opaque colors look transparent, heavy ones turn light, colorless neutrals become colorful, warm ones seem cool, and vice versa. It becomes possible to make equal colors look different and different ones look alike, and even defined shapes as well as color areas vanish from our sight.

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In a state whose unique combination of climate and geography have inspired artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Agnes Martin, *Formulation: Articulation* serves as an art historical and aesthetic complement to the exciting developments in color theory that unfolded in the Southwest of the United States during the 20th century. With its scrupulous curation, dynamic arrangements, and broad scope, this exhibition tracks the lasting impact of Albers’s oeuvre on contemporary art and the visual effects of one of the most fickle compositional elements: color.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Josef Albers (1888–1976) was a German-born American artist and educator whose abstract geometric paintings and pioneering theory of color perception heavily influenced the approaches of hard-edge abstraction, Op art, and conceptual art. The enduring legacy of Josef Albers as one of the most significant figures in 20th-century art began in 1922 when he joined the faculty of the Weimar Bauhaus, an avant-garde institution whose guiding philosophy sought to merge fine art, artisanship, and technology to create objects that were considered beautiful for their functionality, refinement, and ability to be mass-produced.

As the Bauhaus school sought to merge disparate fields, so too did Albers’s artistic practice unify the divergent endeavors of art and cognitive psychology. Defined by a unique blend of artistic inquiry and scholastic rigor, his oeuvre distills extensive, iterative research into formally minimal compositions of outsized visual impact. Best known for his *Homage to the Square* series, which features chromatically saturated squares nested within one another, Albers also applied his compositional discipline to his parallel practices as a designer, photographer, and printmaker.

His 1963 book, *Interaction of Color*, is considered a seminal text on color theory and influenced the trajectory of postwar Western visual art. His emphasis on experiential instruction as an instructor at the experimental Black Mountain College and as the head of the department of design at Yale instilled in his pupils, such as Richard Anuskievicz, Ruth Asawa, and Robert Rauschenberg, a focus on process.

Works by Josef Albers are held in numerous public and private collections globally, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Pinault Collection, and Tate Modern.

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