

Foreword

Nicholas Fox Weber

In the austere, antiseptic kitchen which was the place where Anni and Josef Albers most frequently came together in their last house in Connecticut, there was only one dash of color amidst all the whiteness. The sheetrock walls had nothing on them whatsoever; the countertops had only a few straightforward appliances; the look was purely industrial—with one exception. On the windowsill there was a small, hand painted clay bird, covered with ornament of vibrant blues and oranges that seemed to sing.

Periodically, to demonstrate a point he was making, Josef would jump up from the plain Formica kitchen table and rush to that windowsill and pick up the little clay creature, which he would fondle like a talisman. “You see this bird! We’ll never know who made it, who the anonymous artist was. It’s no different from the same sort of thing that you could buy in any market place in any Mexican village. And it has eternity.”

Josef would then extol the good intentions behind the making of his beloved relic. The palpably cheerful bird made manifest an eye for design, the intention to add beauty to life. Josef would emphasize that its artist was not putting himself or herself forward, but was, instead, making art that was of a higher sphere than the needs of an individual.

“Ah, yes, in Mexico we always felt that art was everywhere,” Anni would add with a deep smile. She amplified. When she and Josef first saw pre-Columbian art in a Berlin museum in the 1920s, they were drawn to it magnetically, as they were to the work of ancient Egypt. Then, after they arrived in the United States at the end of 1933, as soon as they had the opportunity to travel south—first to Cuba, then to Mexico, then to South America—they felt that they were constantly feasting. They marveled at the ancient architecture and the relics of past cultures, and, also, at the eye that was manifest in people’s clothing, dishes, bead necklaces, blankets, and the other accoutrements that added such splendor to everyday life, regardless of economic situation or the hardships of existence.

After Josef died in 1976, on rare ceremonial occasions, Anni would put, on that plain white kitchen table, a Mexican cloth. The colors were bright, the stripes and other bits of decoration festive. The message was very simple: art could bring ineffable joy to life, and it was in Latin America that she and Josef, with a vision that they shared completely, discovered its greatest power.

This exhibition celebrates and pursues that marvelous connection between the vision of two great modernists, both of whom spent

over a decade making the renowned Bauhaus everything it was, and Latin America culture. It is the idea and exploration of another person of extraordinary vision, Brenda Danilowitz. Brenda, who knew Anni personally prior to the great weaver's death in 1994, and who has known Josef through osmosis because of a close proximity to his work and life and a deep understanding of his values, has brought to this show a passion and knowledge, and a perpetual willingness to look around the next corner, that make it a unique achievement. On behalf of Anni and Josef, there is no thanking her sufficiently.

On their behalf, I also express deepest gratitude to the other individuals whose dedication and tenacity have been essential to this show coming to life—most especially to Marta González, constantly engaged and energetic and prepared to go further in making this collaboration everything it could be. Ana Martínez de Aguilar has been the most thoughtful and open-eyed of colleagues. Belén Díaz de Rábago, exhibition coordinator MNCARS; Cristina Torra, publications department; Iliana Naranjo, registrar, and José Hernando all worked on the exhibition with great good humor and professionalism. Then, at home, at the Albers Foundation, I thank Jessica Csoma for tackling an infinity of details capably and enthusiastically, as well as Molly Wheeler, Andrés Garcés, Fritz Horstman, and Oliver Barker, each of whom has made a significant contribution toward the success of this exhibition and catalogue. At the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, my colleague and friend, director Dr. Heinz Liesbrock, with the able assistance of Dr. Ulrike Growe, did a masterful job of presenting the exhibition in a new way.

Heinz was the force behind this English language edition of the catalogue, for which

we are extremely grateful. Its design is the fine work of Michael Zöllner in Berlin, and Jeff McMillen in Connecticut. We greatly appreciate the gracious collaboration of Annette Kulenkampff, Tas Skorupa, and Christine Müller at Hatje Cantz on this publication.

How the Alberses loved to utter the words *muchas gracias*. It is my honor to be able to say them on their behalf—to Brenda Danilowitz and the other enthusiasts who have made possible this presentation of their learning and seeing, the affinity for the beauty of life and the wonder of art, that, to use two more of Anni's and Josef's favorite words, are "universal and timeless."

Nicholas Fox Weber
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