



Anni Albers
Work with Materials



But if we want to get from materials the sense of directness, the adventure of being close to the stuff the world is made of, we have to go back to the material itself, to its original state, and from there on partake in its stages of change.

Anni Albers, “Work with Materials,” 1937

Comprising over 100 objects from the collection of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, *Anni Albers: Work with Materials* spans the artist and designer’s wide range of production over a career of seven decades. Taking its title from her 1937 essay of the same name, the exhibition highlights the nimbleness with which Albers moved between mediums, and her fluid transitions between creating artwork and designing more functional objects. Albers’s drawings, prints, textile samples, rugs, and one of her looms fill the Joe and Emily Lowe Galleries of the Syracuse University Art Museum. The exhibition, which has a particular focus on works on paper, also features drawings and archival material from Albers’s essential 1965 book *On Weaving*. An interactive, gridded “triangle table” allows visitors to experiment with one of the basic forms that she used in numerous drawings, prints, and designs.

Cover: Textile sample, n.d., cotton.

Opposite page: Anni Albers, photograph by Josef Albers, ca. 1940.

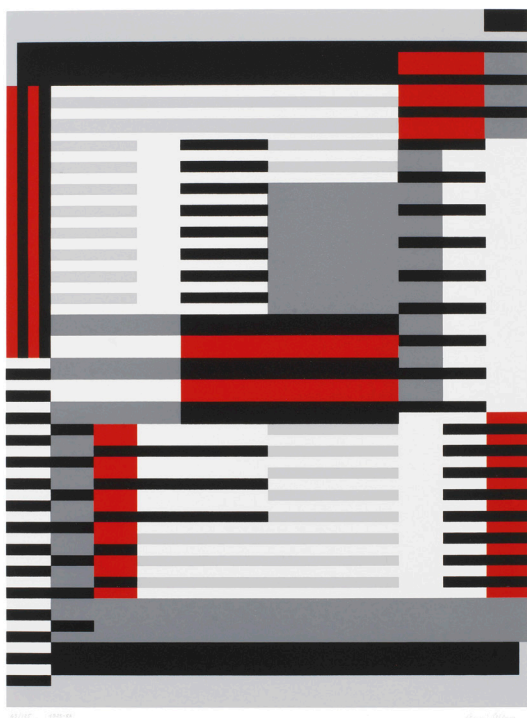


Fig. 1

Anni Albers: Work with Materials begins with a series of nine silk-screen prints from 1983 entitled *Connections*. For this portfolio, Albers recreated images from every decade of her career as a weaver, designer, and printmaker. *Connections* embodies Albers's ability to flow easily between mediums and techniques and shows both the range and consistency of her output. Emblematic of this fluidity, *Smyrna-Knuepfteppich* (Fig. 1) is a design that feels completely natural as a print in *Connections*, even though its title translates as "Smyrna knotted rug" (Smyrna is a technique of rug knotting). This pattern for a rug that she designed as a Bauhaus student in 1925 and reimagined as a print in 1983 is seen again on a nearby wall as a large rug. Again and again through the exhibition, in images and patterns that she applied to different purposes and mediums, her agile mind and never-ending curiosity about material and process are evident – from her earliest work, right up until her last drawings and designs.

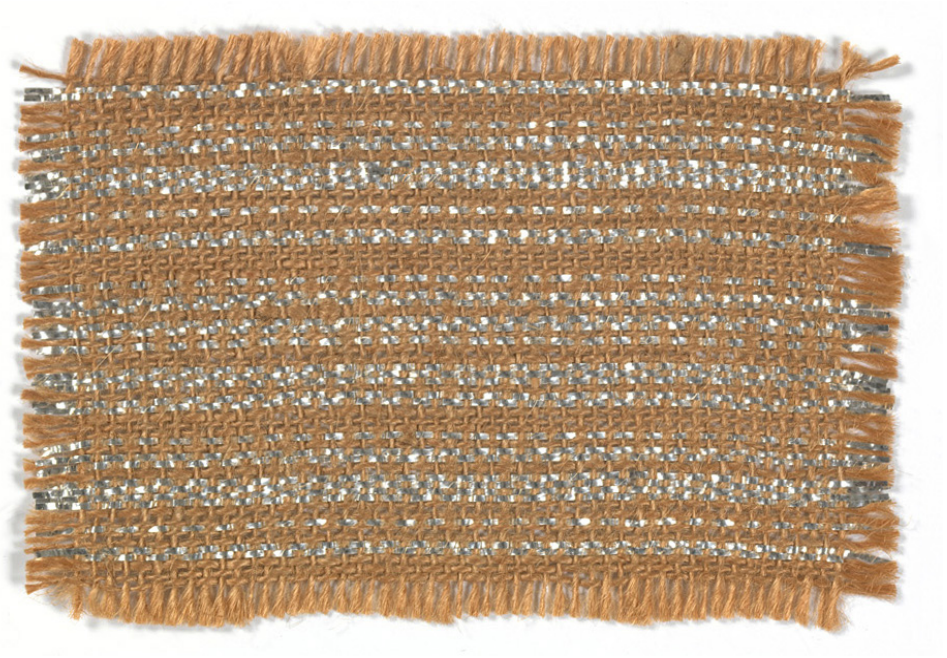


Fig. 2

Connections is followed in the exhibition by a large group of Albers's experimental textile samples – small swatches that in some cases are ideas or sketches, while others were sent to fabric companies as prototypes for wholesale or industrial production. Albers often wove standard weaving fibers like linen and jute with unconventional materials including cellophane and metallic threads, playing rough textures against shiny to beguiling effect. Part of her practice from the 1920s until the early 1980s, these textile samples typify her curiosity about material and process as it was applied to functional ends.

Figure 1: *Smyrna-Knuepfteppich*, 1925/1983

From the portfolio *Connections*, Screenprint on paper, 27 3/8 x 19 1/2 in.

Figure 2: Textile sample, n.d.

Linen and metallic thread, 3 1/2 x 5 5/8 in.



Fig. 3

Though weaving is inherently made up of vertical and horizontal threads, Albers in the 1950s began experimenting with drawings for that incorporated thread-like imagery in looping and non-rectilinear forms. With a first foray into printmaking in 1963 at Tamarind Lithography Studio in Los Angeles, she returned in 1964 to produce *Line Involvements* (Fig. 3), a series of lithographs depicting curls and knots of thread that seem to revel in breaking every orthodoxy of weaving.

By the end of the 1960s Albers had given her looms away or sold them, saying she no longer had room for them in her house, and in 1968, at the age of sixty-nine, embarked on a breathtaking decade-plus in which she worked almost exclusively in drawing and printmaking.

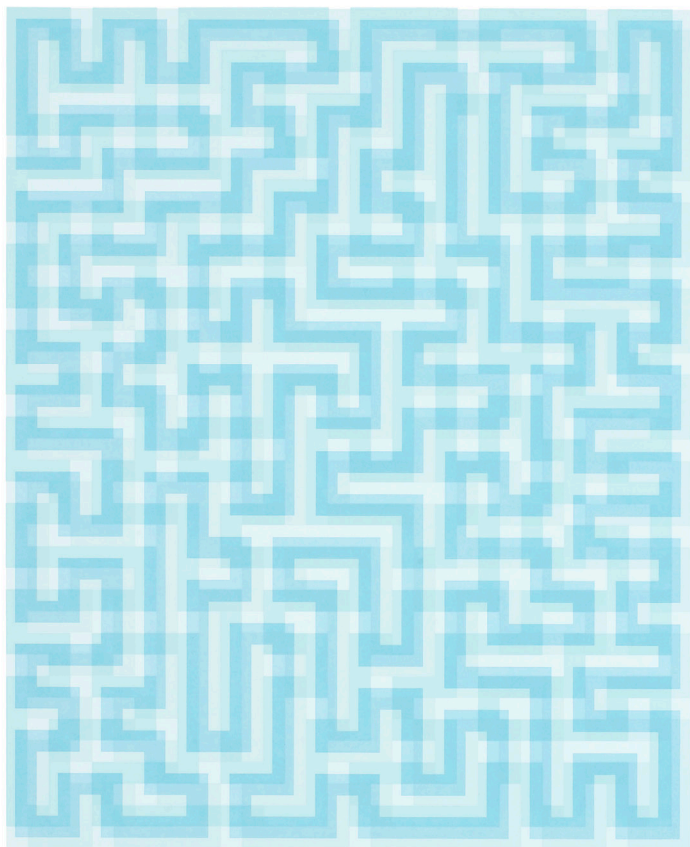


Fig. 4

In the *Meander* (Fig. 4) silkscreen prints of 1970 Albers returns to the grid, while demonstrating a brilliant economy of effort and effect. The process of silkscreen involves creating an image on a piece fabric (originally silk, now more commonly a synthetic material), through which ink is pressed, transferring the image onto paper or other material. Each *Meander* image is made from three printings of a single screen, which was rotated and printed with different densities of ink, one on top of another, creating a texture that is simultaneously comprehensible and bewildering.

Figure 3: *Line Involvement I*, 1964
 Lithograph on paper, 19 3/4 x 14 1/2 in.
 Figure 4: *Blue Meander*, 1970
 Screenprint on paper, 28 x 24 in

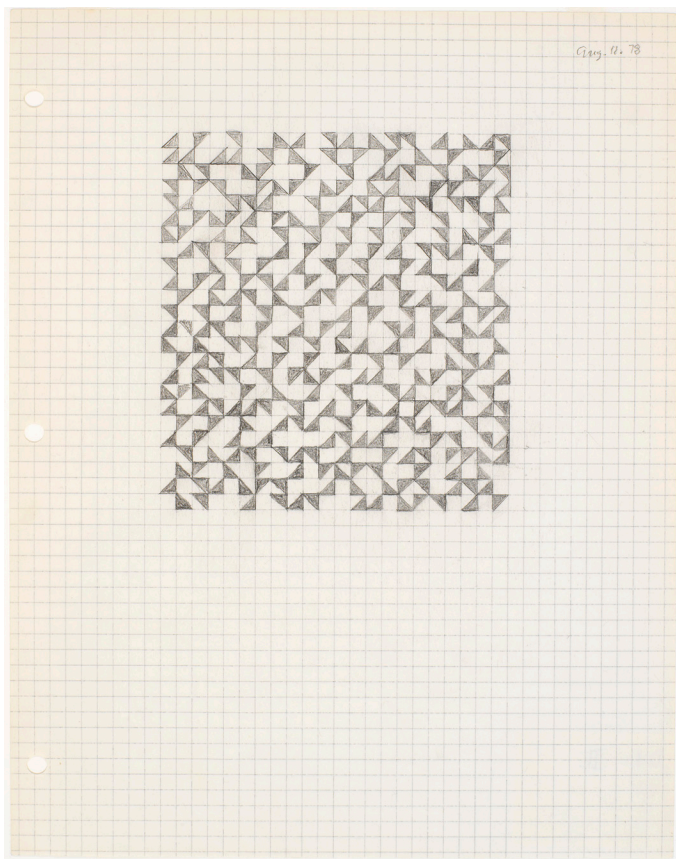


Fig. 5

Repeated triangular motifs appeared in her designs as early as the 1950s, but truly found their footing in a wide range of print techniques including screenprint, inkless embossing, photo-offset, lithography, copper plate etching and aquatint. Starting from sketches on gridded paper, she worked closely with master printers, respecting their expertise, and pushing them with her curiosity. Though she never said explicitly why she used triangles, she spoke frequently of her love of abstraction, texture, and pattern, all of which are inherent to textiles, and which she was able to amplify in her prints.

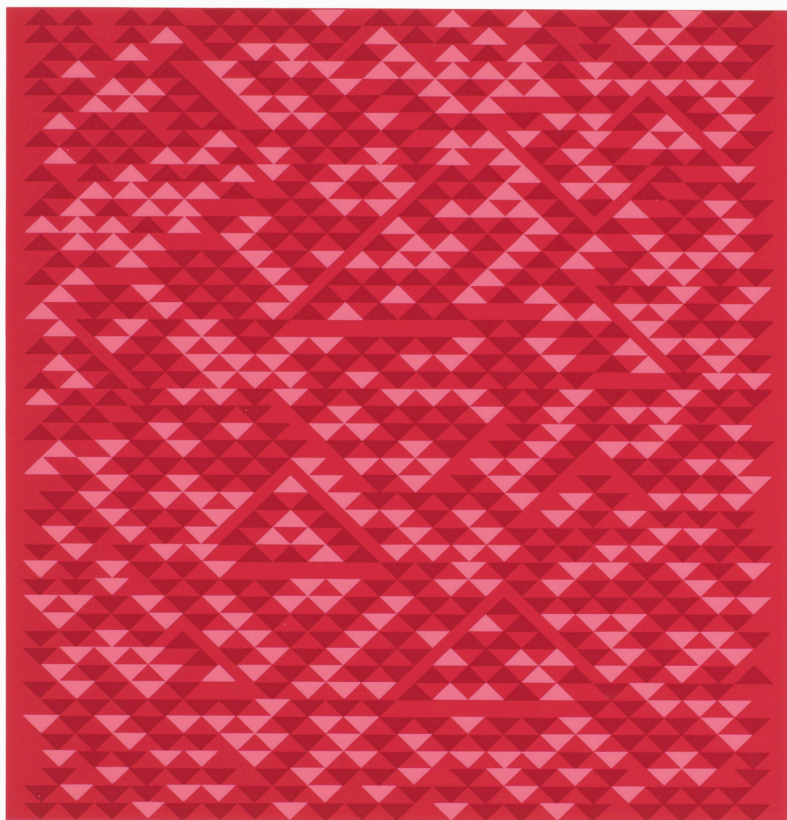


Fig. 6

In 1967 Albers was commissioned to design a wall hanging for the Camino Real hotel in Mexico City. The large appliqué textile that resulted, also called *Camino Real* (Fig. 6), became the basis for a print of the same coloring and pattern, but at a vastly reduced scale. That flexibility of thinking and reapplication of her designs led to further experiments with color and pattern, always in close collaboration with the master printers who would execute her ideas. Many more drawings and prints in which she varied color, texture, and scale, while adhering to the basic pattern of triangles are featured in the exhibition.

Figure 5: *Study for Double Impression II*, 1978

Pencil on paper, 10 3/4 x 8 7/16 in.

Figure 6: *Camino Real*, 1967-69

Screenprint on paper, 23 1/2 x 22 in.

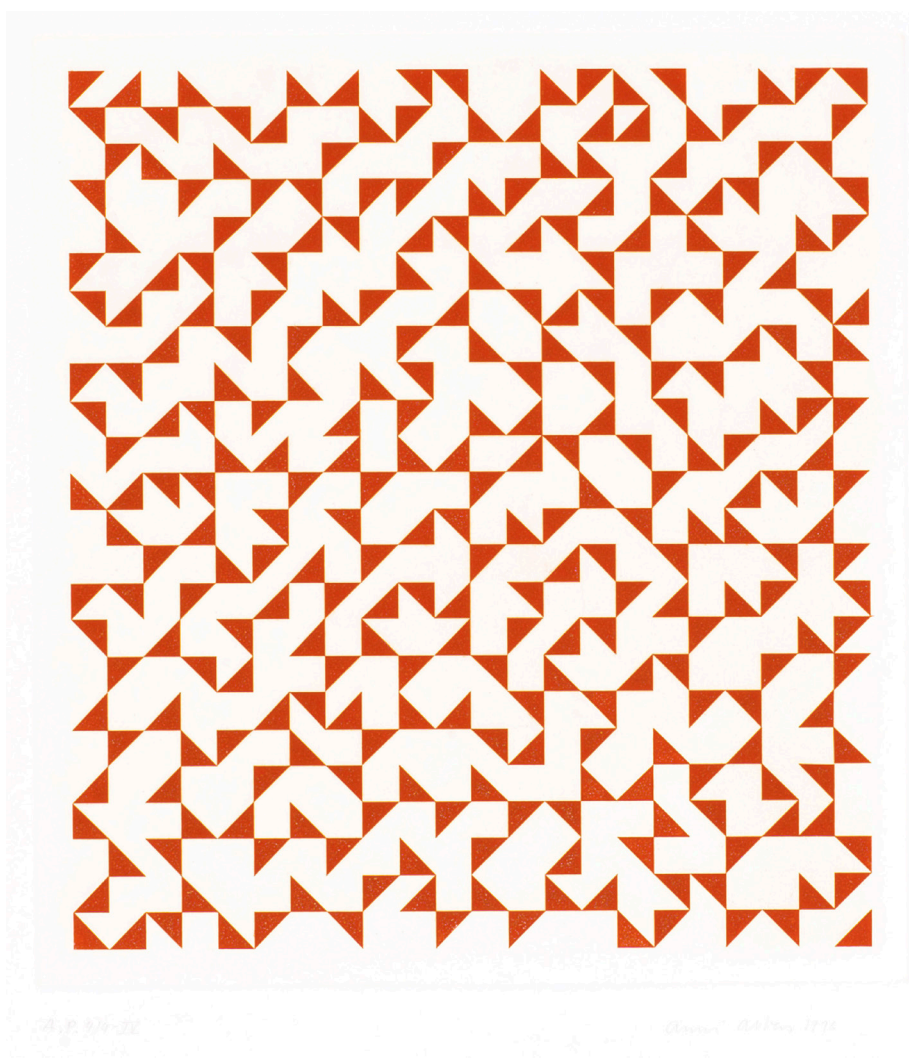


Fig. 7

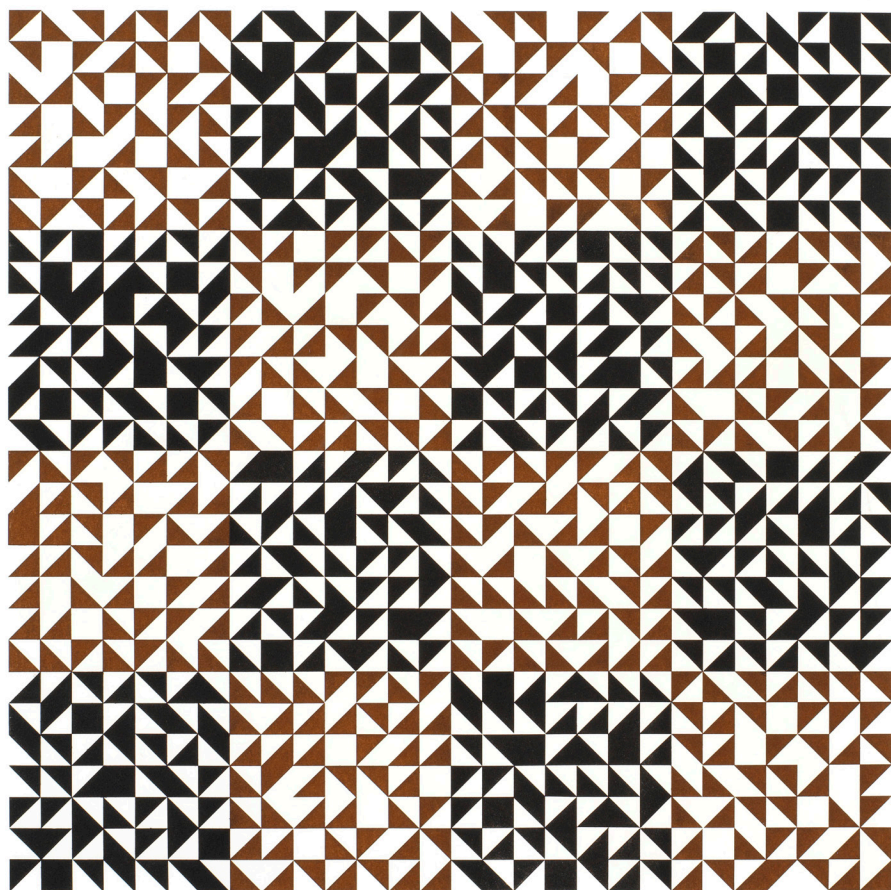


Fig. 8

Figure 7: *Triangulated Intaglio IV*, 1976
Etching/aquatint on paper, 24 x 20 in.

Figure 8: *Second Movement IV*, 1978
Two-color copper plate etching and aquatint on paper, 28 x 28 in.



Fig. 9

Triangulated Intaglio VI (Fig. 9) is from a series of prints from 1976 and extends her geometric textures further, at first glance seeming to leave the idea of triangles behind. Knowing that she developed her designs on gridded paper – the same starting point she would have used in preparing weavings – the triangulated nature of the maze-like lines becomes evident. The leap from closed triangle to open diagonal maze is echoed in other media. The motif first seen in *Triangulated Intaglio VI* was a few years later explored in a rug (*Red Lines on Blue*), industrially produced curtains (*Maze* (Fig. 10)), and posthumously as a wallpaper (a collaboration between the Albers Foundation and Christopher Farr Cloth), all on view in the exhibition.

Figure 9: *Triangulated Intaglio IV*, 1976
Single-color copper plate etching, 24 x 20 in.
Figure 10: *Maze*, 1979
Acid-etched polyester and cotton, 119 x 62 in.



Fig. 10

The final room of the exhibition is filled with some of Albers's most elegant work. Two large tapestries in soft grays, blues, and golds from 1984 that she was commissioned to design for the sky lobby of the AT&T building in Manhattan are placed alongside a group of ephemeral white fabrics that she designed for the textile companies Sunar and S-Collection between 1979 and 1982. That those companies primarily served the needs of office furnishing, and that she nevertheless made from their materials and processes something so graceful, further underscores the breadth of Albers's talents. Five inkless embossed prints from the 1978 series *Mountainous* conclude the exhibition. Comprising triangulated shapes pressed into pure white paper, the forms are visible only in the small shadows of the raised embossing. They are the quietest of prints, extending Albers's lifelong interest in materials into the light and shadow that make the world visible. As with so many objects in the exhibition, they offer, in her words, a "sense of directness, the adventure of being close to the stuff the world is made of."

Born in Berlin in 1899, Annalise Fleischmann's early desire to be an artist led her in 1922 to the Bauhaus, the famous German school of art and design. It was among the first art schools in Germany to accept both men and women, though most women, including Anni, were placed in the weaving workshop. It was there that her genius with threads first started to show itself, as she created masterful designs for textiles and rugs, and eventually ran the workshop for a short period. At the Bauhaus Anni met a fellow-student, Josef Albers, whom she married in 1925, taking the name Anni Albers.

The Bauhaus closed in 1933 under pressure from the Nazis. The Alberses took the brave step of accepting teaching positions at the newly-formed Black Mountain College, a small progressive liberal arts school outside Asheville, North Carolina. It was at Black Mountain that Anni began to focus her weaving practice on what she called her pictorial weavings – weavings that transcend the medium's everyday useful connotations and move into the realm of pure art.

After sixteen years at Black Mountain College, the Alberses left North Carolina in 1949. In that same year Anni became one of the first female artists to have a one-person exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York – also the first solo exhibition at that museum of a textile artist. When Josef was made Chair of the Department of Design at Yale University in 1950, the couple moved to Connecticut. They lived in New Haven until 1970, and then in nearby Orange until Josef's death in 1976 and Anni's in 1994.

Fritz Horstman

Curator of *Anni Albers: Work with Material*,

Education director, the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

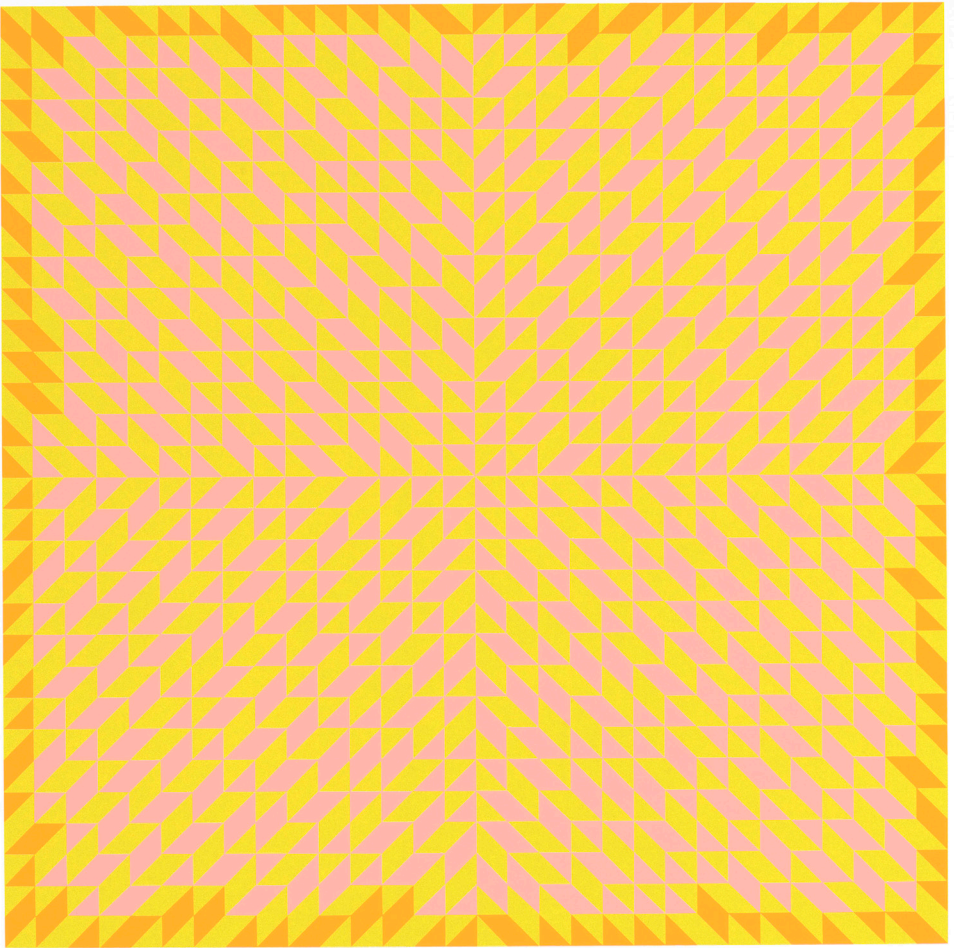


This page: Anni Albers, 1948

Photograph by Nancy Newhall

Back Cover: *Do I*, 1973

Screenprint on paper, 25 5/8 x 25 5/8 in.



Day 2, 2/12

Anni Albers 1933

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