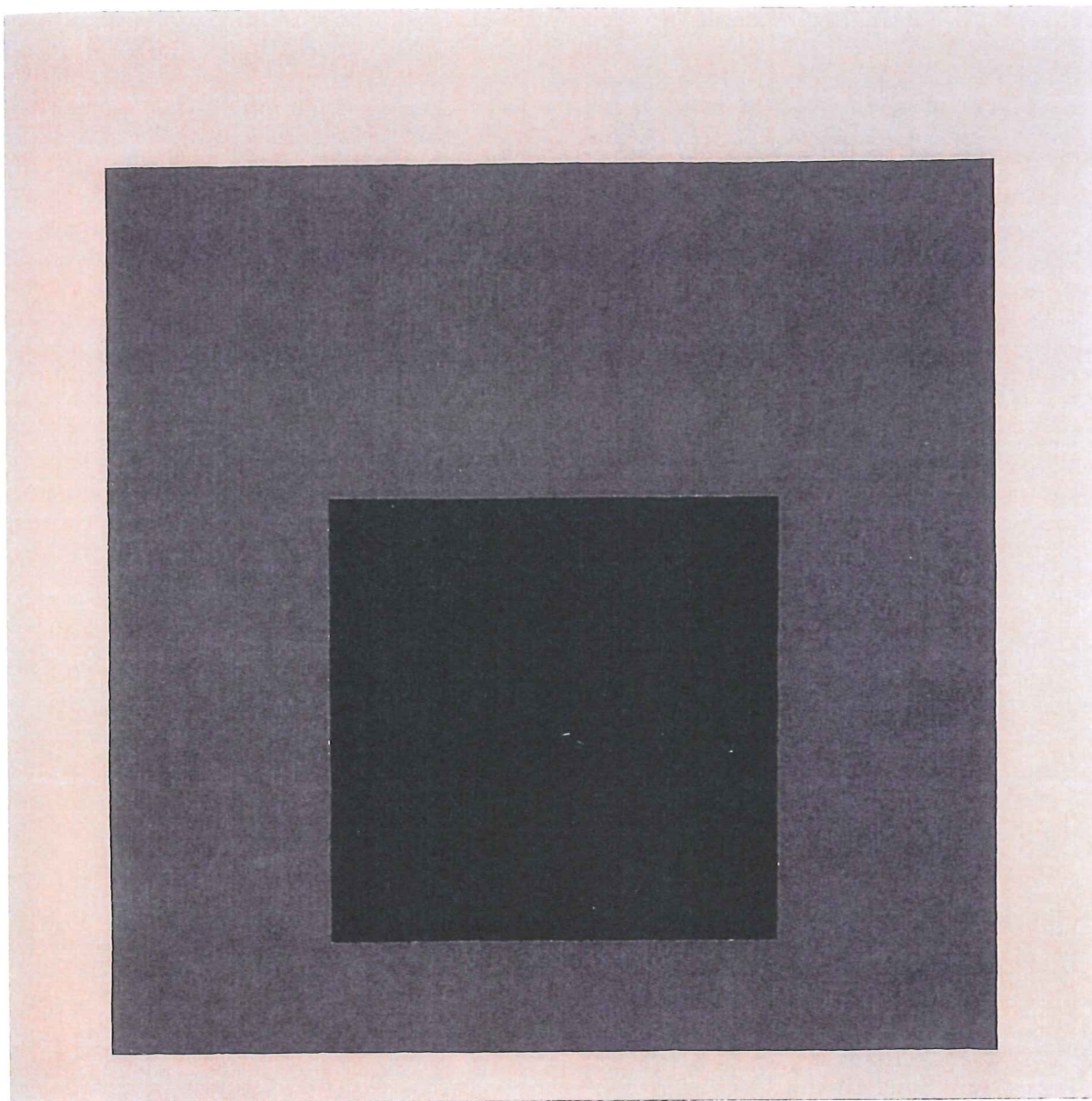




Untitled, Continuous Form within a Form, circa 1950s.
© The Inogen Cunningham Trust, 2013. All rights reserved. © Ruth Asawa



Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square (A)*, 1950.
© 2015 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

ruth asawa and anni and josef albers: splendid soulmates

Nicholas Fox Weber

This exhibition at Christie's gave me the occasion to read through the correspondence between Ruth Asawa and Josef and Anni Albers. Ruth had known the Alberses ever since her student days at Black Mountain College, and Josef and Anni both considered her a genius. They adored her personally, and prized Ruth as one of the finest artists of the twentieth century, and she admired and respected both of them as warm human beings and artists of immeasurable originality and skill, so I knew the letters would provide rich pickings.

One of the most striking aspects of the correspondence was that Ruth always continued addressing them as "Mr. and Mrs. Albers," even though she invariably signed the letters "Love." Her use of the formal "Mr." and "Mrs." strikes me as a perfect reflection of two cultures that emphasize discipline and a rigorous sense of order: Ruth's traditional Japanese

side, and the Alberses' German origins. The "love" and "lots of love" at the end of the letters seems pure Black Mountain to me—the warmth and informality and simple expression of heart. One of the letters, in particular, encapsulates a lot of the rapport among these talented, outgoing people. It was written on January 5, 1965:

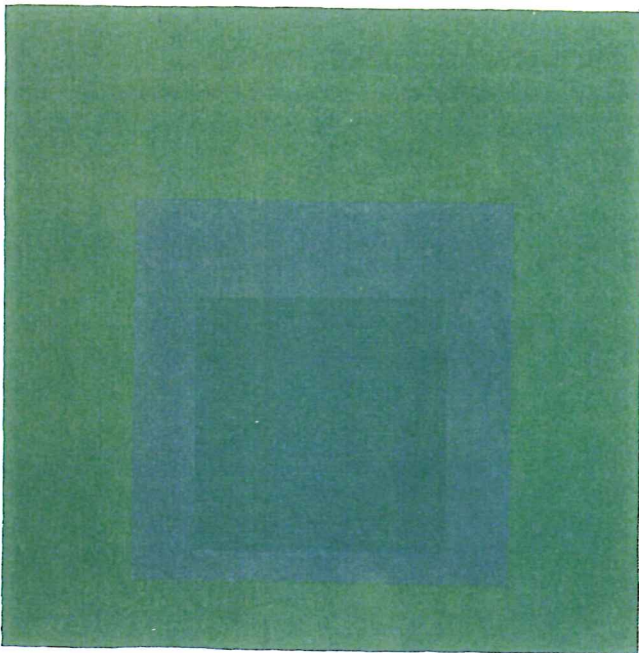
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Albers,

This painting is magical. It vibrates, merges, reappears, and changes each hour of the day. Only a magician could do it. You have given me more than my share of your love. I cherish it, as I still cherish the memories of those years as your student.

Big hug Love Ruth

What Ruth said about a beautiful 18"x18" Homage to the Square Josef had recently given her is not unlike what he and Anni often pointed out to me in Ruth's work. They believed that her hanging wire pieces had non-stop motion, and qualities beyond explaining. And they spoke of her and her accomplishment with the lively enthusiasm she showed toward them.

For many years, Anni kept her Christmas cards in a mesh basket made by Ruth. As a weaver, she admired its structure, and as the cards would arrive each day from all over the world, she would remove them from their envelopes and place them loosely in the basket, so that the holiday cheer seemed to build up, the sparkling construction of copper wire in the background always imparting grace and energy. They belonged to the same world.



Josef Albers, *Study for Homage to the Square: Cool Rising*, 1962.
© 2013 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Josef & Anni Albers with Asawa sculpture on wall at right. © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos.

Ruth and her husband Albert Lanier attended the opening of the Josef Albers Museum in Josef's hometown of Bottrop, Germany on June 25, 1983. I still remember that, among all the visitors, including well-known world leaders like Helmut Kohl and people from the film world like Maximilian Schell, Ruth was an elite that seemed to get the most out of the occasion. And she certainly gave the most. She was so warm and enthusiastic, so understanding of the values of art that is timeless and universal in its qualities. She spoke with total joy of what she saw at that museum, of what it would provide for the world well past our own lifetimes. She said how pleased Josef would have been. Ruth and Josef

and Anni belonged to the same small tribe of people who have an eye for beauty and for a sense of energy and a reverence for form that goes beyond anything having to do with the epoch or the location. What a gift they all had, and what gifts they made to the world!

*Nicholas Fox Weber is a cultural historian. He is the Executive Director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation and has written extensively about each artist. He has curated many major exhibitions and retrospectives of their and other artists' work. Weber is a graduate of Columbia College (B.A., Art History) and Yale University (M.A., Art History; Fellowship in American Art). He is the author of fourteen books including *The Bauhaus Group*, *Le Corbusier*, *The Clarks of Cooperstown*, *Balthus A Biography*, *Patron Saints*, *The Art of Babar*, and *The Drawings of Josef Albers*. Weber is at work on a full-scale biography of Piet Mondrian to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.*

July 31, 1964

Dear Ruth,

it case

it is beautiful and wonderful
it is hanging in a fine place nobody can overlook it
it makes us happy and very proud
and it is already being much admired. and loved
(and we hope you will hear
from some of them)

We thank you

and we send you much love.

Love soon.

yours,

anni a,
and josef.

January 5, 1965

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Albers:

This painting is magical. It vibrates,
merges, reappears, changes each hour of
the day. Only a magician could do it.

You have given me more than my
share of your love. I cherish it,
as I still cherish the memory of those
years as your student.

Big hug Love
Ruth