

Dekadrage. Neue Perspektiven auf Anni und Josef Albers

Decadrage: New Perspectives on Anni and Josef Albers

Nachwuchskolloquium
Freitag, 22. März 2024

Bibliothek von Situation Kunst (für Max Imdahl)
Nevelstr. 29 c
44795 Bochum-Weitmar

13:30 Uhr | SARA SANDFORT (Essen/Bottrop)

Approaches to alternative teaching and learning methods in art education: Josef Albers and Max Imdahl. A class-critical perspective

The lecture takes up the speaker's position as teacher at the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Essen and mediator at the Museumszentrum Quadrat Bottrop and Josef Albers Museum for a class-critical perspective. Her own preoccupation with teaching and learning methods in art education is closely linked to Josef Albers as a teacher and artist who pursued alternative didactic approaches at the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Yale University.

Using the example of Socratic Maieutics, the connection between today's teaching and learning methods and the reform pedagogy at the beginning of the 20th century is shown in a historical way. Josef Albers learnt about alternative didactic approaches during his own training as an art teacher and continued to pursue them, first in Germany and then in the United States. He rejected the frontal transfer of knowledge as well as learning art by copying older works of art. At the same time, recent research has also highlighted the difficulties Josef Albers had as the son of a family of craftsmen when he was accepted at the Bauhaus. Today, this is critically reflected upon under the heading of 'artistic talent' as an admission criterion at art academies and has institutional significance for the lecturer as an employee at an art academy.

Not only the admission criteria at art colleges, but also the entire educational policy and ideological background of alternative teaching and learning methods is now under scrutiny. In the 20th century, formats have repeatedly been established that reject the teaching of facts and specialised knowledge and place the real-life experiences of learners at the centre. However, the question arises as to whether these didactic approaches, which are characterised as progressive and new, do not ultimately reinforce inequalities, and establish the understanding of (modern) art as a distinguishing feature of privileged classes.

While Josef Albers, in his role as a teacher and artist, created open teaching-learning situations based on the material and own visual experiences, Max Imdahl favoured theoretical mediation in the framework of university teaching. His seminars "Arbeiter diskutieren moderne Kunst" from 1979 to 1982 at Bayerwerk Leverkusen also show how Imdahl was influenced by alternative approaches such as Socratic Maieutics. Unlike Josef Albers, however, these are not fundamentally open teaching-learning situations: Imdahl's aim is to teach the concept of modern art - and at the same time he does not work with people from the actual working class, as they are

selected confidants. Historically, the concepts of meritocracy and the “Wissensgesellschaft” came to a head in the 1970s and 1980s.

Using the selected didactic method of Socratic Maieutics in historical reference to Josef Albers, Max Imdahl and contemporary teaching-learning formats, the lecture shows how class discrimination must be reflected upon, especially in today’s art and cultural education, and presents this approach for discussion.

14 Uhr | DAVOR EREŠ (Belgrad)

Josef Albers’ Methodology “Learning through Conscious Practice” As a Teaching Form for Education in Architecture

The presentation will discuss the methodological turn that was brought by the pedagogical practice of Josef Albers at the Bauhaus from 1923 to 1933. This period is observed as the formative platform of Albers’ teaching model, which generated all his later artistic and pedagogical engagements. Although Albers’ courses were part of the training in a design-art school that changed its curricula several times over ten years, the emphasis here is placed on the intention of the Bauhaus to conceive design education as an (interdisciplinary) collaboration and as an anticipation of a new form of creativity directed toward the building “that would embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity.” Albers taught the preliminary course (Vorkurs) that preceded the craft-studies workshops and was intended to prepare students for the “conscious” treatment of materials. The written reflections on learning methods, which Albers developed while teaching in Vorkurs, expose the key notions of his forward-thinking pedagogical approach that is situated between material form, design education and architecture.

Drawing on Albers’ motto: optimal performance with a minimum input of material, energy and time, his pedagogical strategy will be observed through his process-oriented, material-based mode of instruction as a specific approach to (experimental) form. Albers aimed to create an open experience for the students through different material exercises driven to produce spatial structures, insisting on the experiment without aiming at making a product. The paper argues that Albers’ learning structure, in a comprehensive sense, does not relate exclusively to architecture (or any other art form in particular). Rather, it prioritizes the general ability of form-making as “constructional thinking” that is based not on a methodology of fabrication but on education as a process emphasizing the capacity of learning through practice. In contrast to the conventional methods of learning (*about*) architecture, I will consider Albers’ pedagogical approach “learn from and with one another” (learning by experience) within the historical context of efforts to include the “exchange of experience” as a crucial creative model of learning *through* architecture.

The paper also argues that Albers’ perspective on the learning process as an unmediated experience stands in strong correlation to the particular sense of time. This is articulated in Albers’ insistence on the necessity to follow the present (*jetzig*) as an urge to be contemporary, along with his call for collective creativity as opposed to a “forced” and imposed “ideology of individualism”, as well as in his belief in the spirit of constant transformation and “life as change”, considering all these notions “as a way to develop a visual consciousness”. Albers’ comprehensive and philosophical worldview is therefore understood as an integrative artistic-pedagogical method that is experienced, observed, studied and applied through a specific set of teaching forms. His

insistence on practice over theory and his prioritization of experience as a method in the educational process will be shown in parallel with his reflective essays, the work of his students and his artworks – considered as an integral form. Concerning this, the following reflective texts by Albers will be discussed: “Historisch oder jetztig” (Historical or the Present, 1924), “Werklicher Formunterricht” (Teaching Form through Practice, 1928), and “Concerning Art Instruction” (1934).

14:30 Uhr | MONJA DROßMANN (Bottrop)

Josef Albers, (West) Germany and the US: Relations of a Transcontinental Career After 1945

In 1970, Josef Albers, honored as a citizen of Bottrop, donated six works from his series *Hommage to the Square* (1950-1976) to his birth city. There, the founding of the Museumszentrum Quadrat in 1976 was made possible by local actors, multi-layered circumstances, and an international network. Understanding these circumstances requires an analysis of Josef Albers’ evolving reception after World War II, influenced by various cultural, political and art-historical discourses on both sides of the Atlantic. This project, part of the *Forschungsvolontariat Kunstmuseen NRW*-program at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, is scheduled to run for two years with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. On the occasion of the colloquium, my presentation will focus on key aspects of this transatlantic network, using Albers’ reception as a focal point.

Although Josef Albers gained international acclaim for his educational contributions after relocating to the US, it was not until the 1950s that his artistic work received proper recognition. Despite being in the US, the artist maintained connections to Germany and sought to deepen them post-war, exerting significant influence on the developing European and German networks from the early 1950s onwards. One important centre was Ulm, where Max Bill and Eugen Gomringer worked at the Hochschule für Gestaltung. In Westphalia, the Westfälischer Kunstverein Münster, with its directors Peter Leo, Dieter Honisch and Jürgen Wissmann, and the still young Ruhr-University Bochum, where Gottfried Boehm and Max Imdahl worked, were instrumental in raising awareness of his work. Werner Schmalenbach as director of the Kunstsammlung NRW and the gallerist Hans Meyer, who opened his gallery in Düsseldorf in 1965 with an exhibition on Josef Albers, furthered his recognition. These relationships marked significant milestones in Albers’ career, including the award of the Konrad-von-Soest Prize in 1958, the appointment of an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Humanities at the Ruhr University in Bochum and finally the appointment as an honorary citizen of his home town Bottrop.

This extensive network, briefly outlined here, can be exemplified through the efforts of Eugen Gomringer and Peter Leo. Before collaborating with the gallerist Denise René in 1957, Albers relied on them to distribute his works and organize exhibitions in Germany. Gomringer and Leo, being emerging figures in the art world, served as vital nodes connecting various aspects such as art, criticism, exhibitions and the art market. A re-reading of significant German texts on Josef Albers’ art post-1945 shall further enable a categorisation of Albers within the artistic and art historical discourses of the time. Albers’ journey back to Bottrop was multifaceted and intersected with major developments in the art (history) of the twentieth century in the USA and Europe.