

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOSEF ALBERS:
A SELECTION FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE JOSEF ALBERS FOUNDATION

January 31 - April 19, 1988

The first exhibition of photographs by the German artist Josef Albers (1888-1976) begins its New York showing at The Museum of Modern Art on January 31, 1988. Organized by the American Federation of Arts and selected by John Szarkowski, director, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOSEF ALBERS: A SELECTION FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE JOSEF ALBERS FOUNDATION presents a virtually unknown aspect of the work of this influential twentieth-century painter and teacher. On view through April 19, the exhibition has been supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support for the catalog has been supplied by The J.M. Kaplan Fund, the DeWitt Wallace Fund, and the Henry Luce Foundation through the AFA's Revolving Fund for Publications.

Drawn from a cache of photographs that was discovered in the artist's estate shortly after his death, the selection includes thirty-eight black-and-white prints, mostly dating from 1928 to 1932. They encompass a variety of subjects ranging from landscape views to shop mannequins, with portraits of the artist's friends and Bauhaus colleagues comprising the largest group. Among the artists pictured are Amédée Ozenfant, El Lissitsky, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee.

In his photographs, Albers developed an original compositional format using cropped, paired, and composite images mounted on cardboard. Many of the

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works underscore the artist's interest in abstract and serial forms, such as the eery images of laundry blowing on a clothesline or a collage depicting a bullfight, traffic jam, church, and crowd of spectators. In several of his portraits, Albers integrated contact prints of candid shots and posed studies into strong geometric compositions that penetrate the sitters' moods.

Nicholas Fox Weber, executive director of the Josef Albers Foundation, writes, "In their discipline and in their embrace of visual nuance, the photographs are similar to the rest of Albers's work. In addition to their exploration of the chromatic possibilities of black, white, and gray, they reveal his lifelong preoccupation with taking different approaches to the same problem. In them we see some of Albers's characteristic visual gamesmanship, his exaltation in the play of parallel lines, and his desire to extract the greatest possible richness from deceptive simplicity. They have both the spareness and the vast formal complexity that mark all of his art."*

A native of Bottrop, West Germany, Albers was born in 1888. His long association with the Bauhaus began as a student in Weimar in 1920 and as a faculty member after 1923. During his tenure, he taught such disciplines as glass painting, furniture design, and drawing, and reorganized the Preliminary Course, the core pedagogical philosophy of the Bauhaus school. Along with Lázló Moholy-Nagy, who taught experimental photographic techniques, Albers and other artists became intrigued by the radical visual possibilities of the "New Photography." In 1933 he left the Bauhaus to come to the United States, where he taught at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, and later at Harvard and Yale Universities. He devoted much of the last twenty years of his life to investigating the relationship of light, color, and proportion in his well-known series of color abstractions, Homage to the Square.

The exhibition has been seen at the Mary and Leigh Block Gallery, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; the Des Moines Art Museum, Iowa; and the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio. Following its New York showing, the exhibition continues its tour at the Denver Art Museum, Colorado (July 24 - September 18, 1988), and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada (January 8 - March 5, 1989).

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.