



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Josef Albers, 1968
June 22-July 5**

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Josef Albers
Conducted by Sevim Fesci
In New Haven, Connecticut
June 22, 1968**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Josef Albers on June 22, 1968. The interview took place in New Haven, Connecticut and was conducted by Sevim Fesci for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

SEVIM FESCI: Before we start to talk about your experiences in the United States and the creative process involved in your work, I would like to ask you a few questions about your childhood.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes,

SEVIM FESCI: I think your parents were artists themselves? Or --

JOSEF ALBERS: I started once also at the request of some writer to write about my youth. And I started with this: I have not painted at all my childhood. In fact, I never painted. But I helped my father who was a house painter and decorative painter. He made stage sets, he made glass paintings, he made everything. I was in the workshop and watched him. So as a child so-called art was not my view. That was, in my opinion, my father's job. But I liked to watch him; he comes, as my mother also, from a very craftsman's background. My father's parents were carpenters. They were also builders partly. They were painters. And several of them were very, active in the theatre and all such nonsense, you know. On my mother's side there was much more heavy craft. They were blacksmiths. They made a specialty horse shoes and nails for them. So, as a child, my main fun was to watch others working. I loved to walk to the neighboring carpenter's place and up to the neighboring shoemaker in my home town.

SEVIM FESCI: Your home town is Bottrop?

JOSEF ALBERS: Bottrop, yes. That is in the Ruhr district. Do you know what the Ruhr is?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Very industrial.

JOSEF ALBERS: That is the Pittsburgh of Westphalia, of Germany. But a hundred times bigger; a hundred Pittsburghs all together. One never sees a boundary between the cities. And everywhere there are mines and furnaces and metal melting there. It was loud and very dirty, and unpleasantly ugly. The whole region is. Except at night when you go on the train through that country the fireworks are just incredible. So that's where I came from.

SEVIM FESCI: And you didn't feel at all the urge to draw or to paint as a child?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, not to produce, as I said, so-called art. That was not my idea. My father painted all those stage sets, you see. I found in the woods little mushrooms. And I learned very early how to make imitation of wood grain. This is something I have in common with Braque. Braque also learned very early from his father how to imitate marble or wood grain. So I could easily make the appearance of oak or walnut on pine. That is very easy; a very simple technique. And I learned how to imitate marble. I never made such a good joke as Braque did. When he was in the Mediterranean he fooled his friends. He painted a rowboat that had wood on one side and marble on the other side. You see, when he'd row out of the city it looked as if he were in a boat of a different material than when he came back, you see, one side was imitation wood and the other side was imitation marble.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. So would you say that the family tradition of craftsmen in a way influenced you in what you wanted to do?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, it didn't. No, I wasn't producing things which I could say "That's my work." No. I was very pleased to help others and to see the trick of using a handsaw. And I had quite an interest in mechanics and technical things. How to hammer a nail properly and such things was very interesting for me. And at the Bauhaus, Gropius and others saw that I had an eye for using materials. And so after I had been there three years he asked me to teach handicrafts. And I tried. But again I saw that that was retrospection, and, you see, I do not consider retrospection as a creative attitude.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But before you went to the Bauhaus I think you started to study at Berlin at the Academy of Fine Arts.

JOSEF ALBERS: No, that is always stated incorrectly. I never was at the Academy. I was at the Royal Art School. That was a preparatory school specially for art teachers. You see, it was not so much for the development of artists. But we had there terribly stiff training. We really had to learn to draw. Boy. You see like Menzel, you know who Menzel is?

SEVIM FESCI: No.

JOSEF ALBERS: He was the famous friend of the old Kaiser. And we learned really to paint. And we really learned art history, too. And every Sunday we had to go to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and to the Stoa Gallery so that we would know what had happened in Greece and Egypt. So when the two years were over I had, as I said, a very stiff training, I got a diploma that qualified me to teach art in higher institutions.

SEVIM FESCI: You yourself wanted to become a teacher? Or was it that your family wanted it?

JOSEF ALBERS: It was my family that wanted me to be a teacher. That was safe, you see. To be a painter was terrible. I wanted to stop really when I was in a teachers' seminary, a teachers' college as it's called now, it's called there now a pedagogical academy. I was there. And I would like to stop, you see. Oh, boy, my parents just got mad, you see, I finished and became a public school teacher.

SEVIM FESCI: In Bottrop?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, it was in Westphalia also; also in the Ruhr. I had six years to study for that affair. And then I was in Bottrop. I taught at the public school.

SEVIM FESCI: You taught art?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, everything. Reading, writing, arithmetic; you see, everything. No, you see I was really trained as a teacher for all the things. And this training again was also quite Prussian; you know what that is - Prussian?

SEVIM FESCI: I know, yes,

JOSEF ALBERS: You have to fulfill all the demands and obey. I liked very much to teach drawing. But I had to teach gymnastics, too, and everything. When we were in the seminary we got a stipend direct from the government and for that stipend we had an obligation to stick to our teaching job for five years. So in those five years I collected a little money so that after I could afford to go to Berlin and study.

SEVIM FESCI: And then you wanted to study drawing?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, then I finally had the opportunity to have real art school training in a very old conservative sense; I was able to go to a gymnasium. But I didn't. I went back to my much lower task of teaching in public school. Because there I had much more free time. I had to teach only two afternoons -there were four afternoons. So I could go to the very good Applied Art School in Essen. On the tram it was half an hour to get there. I went there to study, but not really under somebody. I did figure drawing. I made woodcuts, those little ones that you see.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: All this is in this book, (looking through a book) that I did in Essen.

SEVIM FESCI: I see. Portraits.

JOSEF ALBERS: Portraits, animals, landscapes.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Representational.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. Portraits, sand mines, open pit mines, you know, the specialty of my home country. And lots of animals, horses and chickens. I love very much to draw animals. So I continued there in Essen.

JOSEF ALBERS: I made my examination in Berlin in 1915. And I must say also that Berlin was for me in another way very important. At the time there were all these new movements - Die Brucke. Do you know what that is?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, Die Brucke. Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: And the Blaue Reiter.

SEVIM FESCI: Oh, the Blue Rider, yes,

JOSEF ALBERS: And all that, that was in Berlin all so open.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: Walden of the "Storm" Gallery. Then Kassierer who bought the Chagalls, the first Chagalls that were ever seen in Europe were there. And there was Die Brucke. Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, and Kirchner. You know we saw all that. Which was good. You see, Kassierer was then the man who bought the modern French painters. He had particularly Degas who I consider still today a

very good painter, one of the best. But, anyway, in spite of my teaching my art was my concern. On the little money I had collected I lived in Berlin very cheaply, ate very cheaply. And already in 1920 I saved the first salaries I received to go to Munich. For us here that's nothing, it's overnight on a train. But then -

SEVIM FESCI: It was a big adventure to have at that time.

JOSEF ALBERS: Terrific. So for the first time I saw the old masters, Rubens and all at the Alte Pinakothek. And Munich was the center for that at that time.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Did you get to know a few artists in Munich?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, I didn't care to. I went to the Academy and studied with Stuck who was then a big man. But didn't interest me. I didn't know that before me there was Kandinsky and Klee who had also studied with Stuck. He had a good name at that time.

SEVIM FESCI: But you didn't like it there.

JOSEF ALBERS: No, he really didn't say anything to me. But what was more interesting for me was I studied painting technique with Max Doerner.

SEVIM FESCI: Where? In --

JOSEF ALBERS: Munich Academy. He was very famous. He wrote that famous book on Painting Materials. He was really competent. And then I also went to the Hofmann School in the evenings - Hans Hofmann. He was there too. But I purposely chose to go to his school in the evenings because then he didn't criticize. I didn't want him to talk into my stuff. Now, you see the atmosphere of Munich at that time was very sympathetic to me. But then came the propaganda from the Bauhaus. And that seemed to me more challenging, more modern, more new.

SEVIM FESCI: How did you know about the Bauhaus?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, it became known. It was started in 1919. This was 1920 when I was in Munich. And I said I'll go there. I had no money and my parents couldn't help me. They had to help my brothers and sisters. They had supported me to become a teacher. So I went to Weimar with very little money. But that didn't disturb me. I made what you see in this new book here - these collages. My glass paintings. That was my aim. I had to go to the Bauhaus to the basic course that was given by Itten. And I submitted to that although I was a little older than Itten. But I have not the best memories of my studies there. So when that course was over everyone had to exhibit his work and then it was decided whether or not one could continue. I was accepted to continue. But I wanted to go into a workshop and I wanted to make stained glass. That was my old dream. Glass pictures. But Itten thought I was not ready for that. Certainly to delay my study in glass, Itten said, "Glass painting is a branch of wall painting and you should go first to our wall painting workshop," And I said, "That's nonsense. Wall painting has to do with reflected light and glass painting with direct light." So I said, "Sorry, I'll do my own stuff on my own." I had no money. Just a Rucksack and a hammer. And I started these assemblages. That was in 1921, But in all books on assemblages these things are not mentioned. They are here quite big in a big book.

SEVIM FESCI: Mr. Albers, did you agree with all the ideas of the Bauhaus - with the ideas of Gropius about architecture?

JOSEF ALBERS: I've indicated already, you see, when he saw that I was practical-minded, that I

could handle material he asked me - and that was this way: Later I was very much against Itten. And then Gropius was also particularly against Itten. Have you seen the catalogue on Fifty Years of the Bauhaus?

SEVIM FESCI: No, I haven't seen it.

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, now it comes out in this catalogue that Gropius didn't agree with Itten and Itten left, you see. I was very much against him also.

SEVIM FESCI: In which way? Why were you?

JOSEF ALBERS: He was an expressionist and dictated all evaluation. Anyway, he was in the way of my going into glass. So I did it on my own. And Gropius took me by the shoulder and said, "Albers, if you don't submit to our rules then we must send you home." The rule was that after the basic course, you have to go into the workshop and try to become a designer journeyman. Do you know what that is?

SEVIM FESCI: No.

JOSEF ALBERS: Apprentice is the beginner - the first years you work in a craft in the European sense you are an apprentice. That takes 3 or 4 years. Then you are a journeyman. You can go from one master to another and learn other tricks and other secrets. So Gropius said it was not possible for me to behave this way - not to go to a workshop. I did; I worked for myself in the carpentry. I liked that. Just for my own desires, but not to submit. So I made these things, (Indicating in a book) in glass. And I exhibited them at the end of the semester. And I thought, as I've said before, this is my swan song. But I was accepted for further study. That was my first letter from the council of the masters. I was accepted. And then I was shown a letter that I could reopen the glass workshop - which had been closed at the time because the former members had all left for Italy - so I was suddenly ahead of myself. Now, you see, my work seemed so convincing that they said, let him work like he wants to. And I had the biggest atelier in Weimar. You should see the wonderful stuff. I collected glass for nothing. I went around to makers of glass for stained windows. And then I had some orders right away for glass paintings for Gropius's buildings. I learned to lead the things, learned to cut them. And then I made something absolutely different independent of lead and of assemblage. Here you see... for instance one piece of glass not subdivided. And I took the glasses that are either opaque or transparent. You see this is an opaque and this is a transparent one. Then I learned to remove the front coat what is hair thin. That is done usually in glass painting with acid like in etching of prints; you know how that's done? You sketch them in asphalt and then the acid eats it in the metal. So it's also in glass painting an etching process. But I found out that all fluids make round corners, of course. When I want to have a round corner I could do it with sandblasting. So I learned to sandblast that glass. Covered it airtight and cut it this way, and this way, this way, this way, and this way. And where I want to remove that red I just took the paper out and exposed it to sandblasting. It's eaten away. And at the same time makes frosted glass. So that was of great interest to me. And I made all this nonsense independent of anyone's style, you see.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. That's very different.

JOSEF ALBERS: I called it the Thermometer style. That's my name for it. I have invented the Thermometer style.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. It's a very expressive word for what you're doing there.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes, it's what it is. Now there you see quite a number of these things (Turning over pages in a book). Here you see a matte gray. That is of course not in the glass because it's black, the gray is only frosted black. Where the gloss is taken away it becomes gray. You see here grays between the white and the black that is just the result of soft treatment, not as a thorough treatment of sandblasting when you go really fast then it eats away the black and produces real whites. But the grays are just softly, softly dulled down.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, I see.

JOSEF ALBERS: Then I made much more complicated things. And I came to curves. And again grays with the blacks. And then I came to spatial effects within absolutely flat means, you see, transparencies and such stuff.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But did you teach at the Bauhaus at the same time?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. I went there in 1920. Then in 1921 I was supposed to go into a workshop. And I was a free lance man on the dump places. And then I was permitted to open up the glassworks again; that was in 1922, And in the summer of 1923 Itten left. He had started the entrance reception room to the office of the Director of the Bauhaus. He left that and Gropius said he would like me to continue it. I said, "Yes, okay. I'll make a glass window. I'll make some vitrines." "Okay," he said. And then in that summer he held a student meeting and he announced that "We have now an additional house in the park" that was formerly the "Reithaus" house for the horses of the family of the Grand Duke Reithaus - "refit" means riding. That was the Refit House. "And in that we will have all the lower floors, for additional space. And we will have a new basic course and Albers will teach there." I said, "What, Me?" He had never told me a word of this. "Yes, I want you to teach handicraft." [Gropius said] I said I had left school and wanted never to go back to teaching. But he said, "Do me the favor and start." And so I did. But I discovered soon that teaching has the handicap of retrospection. And that I don't believe in. So I started instead a method of handling material with the material itself. So that was my main change. Whereas Itten before had only spoken about the appearance, "matiere" - (the French word) and I said I would turn from matiere, the outside, to the inside, to the capacity of the material, before the appearance. And that changed the attitude basically I think. And as I said, I'm quoted in that catalogue, I have gone from collage, what was in Itten's days of the main studies, collage (but not under that word) - I said, "I have gone from collage to montage." That is for me a basic change in attitude. And from that time on I have introduced construction in paper. What later also others have claimed to have done; it is not so.

SEVIM FESCI: You started it?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. Then came cardboard and then tin, the first flat stuff, you see. That indicates that I was interested in sculpture, in montage.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But did you used to talk a lot to the other artists, Kandinsky and Klee?

JOSEF ALBERS: You see, in that catalogue also it looks as if I have studied with Klee and Kandinsky. I never did. I have respected them most highly, and later as my colleagues and neighbors. But I have not taken their classes. That's a fact. So I have very soon at the Bauhaus just made my own nonsense, you see, as I have tried all my life.

SEVIM FESCI: Did you used to talk with them? Did you have relationships with them?

JOSEF ALBERS: I think Kandinsky and I were very near friends. I'll give you later an article I have

written on Kandinsky's 100th birthday last year in the Vintieme Siecle. They have an article that I wrote at the suggestion of Will Grohmann. He had suggested that they should invite me to write about Kandinsky. Because with him I had a "sympathetic" relationship. Klee was a man on his own. One couldn't easily speak with him. He was a very nice man.

SEVIM FESCI: He wasn't communicative?

JOSEF ALBERS: He was quiet, you see. In the meetings he could sit there and not say a word.

SEVIM FESCI: Did you used to have meetings very often?

JOSEF ALBERS: We had faculty meetings there, yes.

SEVIM FESCI: And talked about what was going on in the Bauhaus?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. I do not remember much. You see, I said in another statement, "What the Bauhaus meant to do was to influence industry." We spoke about that. But how to teach was rarely talked about and this is what I oppose so much in the incorrect historical reports on the Bauhaus, that there was a program agreed upon that was an organized teaching. It was nothing of that type. That was the greatest thing Gropius did -- he never told anyone what to do. Except me when he said I should teach handicraft. And I did. But after a while I did just the opposite, and I didn't tell him, you see, what has made the Bauhaus famous is the teaching method of enveloping the youngsters to free them. This is what has made the Bauhaus famous. Not its lamps or its furniture. They are all out of fashion already. But the way of approaching formal problems or material as such, that has made it famous. And the emphasis on material, especially its capacity is my contribution. That was never cleared between us teachers. Kandinsky did what he thought should be done. Klee developed an absolutely different method. Schlemmer developed absolutely something else. Klee was my so-called form master. In the workshops there they had a crafts master and a form master. The crafts master had to direct the practical work, the mechanics of the workshop. And the form master had to develop the, formal qualities. Klee was my form master in the glass workshop. He came to me and never criticized anything. He talked about something else. Never asked about any form problem with the windows I was working on. Never a word. He was too respectful. He was the nicest master I could ask for. He talked about exhibitions. He thought I should exhibit. That's another story. We had a good relationship because we never dealt with the same problems. He didn't attack our problems. He never brought up a problem. I think I explained somewhat how I did arrive at the thermometer style? Another question could be, how did I come to woodcuts in which the grains are handled as nobody else ever did it. Why do I have to have hundreds of studies of my "C-clefs" and select finally 30 of them? And why do I paint squares since 1959, in the same design, in the same arrangement; Because I do not see that there is, in any visual articulation, one final solution. In science they think sometimes they have found a solution. Already the next year the whole thing may look upside down, and its not the truth any more. An example I have quoted repeatedly: in 1848 I think it was, (it was at that time when flying was considered an insoluble problem) that was a time when the chemists at an international congress agreed that we are not able to develop an organic compound from inorganic constituents. And in the next year, in 1849, Boettcher was able to develop an organic compound urea, you see. So, in science what seems true today may not be true tomorrow. There science is dealing with physical facts, in art we are dealing with psychic effects. With this I come to my first statement: The source of art - that is, where it comes from - is the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect. That's what I'm talking about. When I want to speak about why I am doing the same thing now, which is squares, for - how long? - 19 years. Because there is no final solution in any visual formulation. Although this may be just a belief on my part, I have some assurances that that is not the most stupid thing to do,

through Cezanne, whom I consider as one of the greatest painters. From Cezanne we have, so the historians tell us - 250 paintings of Mont St. Victoire. But we know that Cezanne has left in the fields often more than he took home because he was disappointed with his work. So we may conclude he did many more than 250 of the same problem. Yes?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: How see Van Gogh. You know his Sunflowers?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, of course.

JOSEF ALBERS: He has traced them on tracing paper and then has transferred the tracings on new canvases, precisely the same shape. Every flower and leaf form is repeated precisely. This mad man undertook a method to save time and traced and transferred it on another canvas again and again, and filled out the contours with other colors. So we have multiplied sunflowers - I have photographed them, I have slides on it that prove that he made the same contour of sunflowers in other colors. We have two l'Arlesiennes. Why two? Because he was not satisfied with the first one. He said there is another possibility, you see. And that is what Picasso has said this way, I quote now, "When we are honest we have to admit that we never get what we want." So I am excused when I make now several hundred squares. Yes? Or when you go downstairs and see - I am now in my red period. I was for years in the yellow period, you know. But now I am with the reds, it was hard for me to get into the reds. Very hard, how I am tickled to death to make more reds. Which one is the best I don't know. But this is to show why I am promoting serial image. Because like Cezanne has demonstrated it, like Picasso has said it, "We don't get what we want." And therefore we continue, and therefore my saying is, "A painter paints because he has no time not to paint." And I am a teacher because I teach all the time - now you are my victim - I teach and I have no time not to teach. And I'm a little bit disturbed when I have to play retrospective, as I did before. You see that I've changed my viewpoint.

SEVIM FESCI: You mean you don't like to look at the past?

JOSEF ALBERS: That's not my big inclination. You see I'm not a historian.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, I understand.

JOSEF ALBERS: So here you can see the variants, But the principle underlying is "How can I have the same amount of this color compared with that color, with that color, and with that color." And there I want to try to get them as close in amount as possible. And to have them all built on a graph. You know how that came? You see this little one is the unit. I can count how many there are. And I have found out in most cases if that is 90, the first color, then my aim is that the second color is also 90 units, and the third is 90, or 180, - equal or multiple. And then I found out that most of the time it is 90, the next one is 88 (2 less), the next one is 92 for that reason (2 more). And the next one is again 87, and the next 93. And then I found better order, that was during the war doing it in America. A colleague of mine was a chemist and physicist who worked in an atomic laboratory in Washington. And when she came back and asked me what I was doing, I said, "Well, I'm now concerned with quantities this time, one quantity towards another quantity, and the next, and this is double any of these." But I said it never works out that way - 80 and 80 and 80 and 80, it's always a little bit minus, a little bit plus and minus. She said, "Isn't that exciting; That's what we just found out in science, that is the principle of all atomic structure. The subdivisions are never equal. It's always off a plus, and less, and a more with the components we are dealing with." She said, "And it's most exciting that there is that discovery in art as it is in science." I said "This is a wonderful

duplicity in events." That's a philosophical term, isn't it? Duplicity in events: What happens here as new, happens somewhere else just the same way. That's so exciting. That is one of the secrets of life. Why did I sometimes build a lamp in the Bauhaus and somebody comes from Holland and says, "Oh, somebody in Holland makes just the same lamp." Such duplicity shows that the time is ripe for a problem and thus it is in the air, and will be solved here - and there. With this we are finding the "creative process", for which somebody is coming to ask me about. I would say, "I paint because I have no time not to paint." That's my creative process.

SEVIM FESCI: Mr. Albers, would you say - because you were just talking about physics and mathematics - would you say that a great mathematician or physicist is an artist?

JOSEF ALBERS: Ah, the creative process is the same secret in science as it is in art. They are all the same absolutely.

SEVIM FESCI: That's what I was thinking of.

JOSEF ALBERS: Particularly when we think, let's say, of the Latin cultures. In Italy the artist is a god. Now if the artist is a god, the scientist is likewise a god. They have the same drive and the same -

SEVIM FESCI: Drive, yes. But do they have the same concerns?

JOSEF ALBERS: It is not so for art in appreciation because art is concerned with human behavior. And science is concerned with the behavior of metal or energy. It depends on what the fashion is. Now today it's energy. It's the same soul behind it. The same soul, you see.

SEVIM FESCI: You said it's human concerns. But I read somewhere that you - maybe "despised" is too strong a word - but you said that you despised self-expression in art.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes.

SEVIM FESCI: What did you mean?

JOSEF ALBERS: I do not consider self-expression as important. It's not important as a method of teaching. And it's not important as an aim of any art branch. When we are honest - that's my saying - if we are honest then we will reveal ourselves. But we do not have to make an effort to be individualistic, different from others. You see that is the nonsense of the last 15, 20 years, the two decades, the great famous American decades. What is wrong there is that everyone wants to be different from the already different ones. And then they ended up all alike. And we are tired of that. And the youngsters feel that now.

SEVIM FESCI: And so they turn their back to it.

JOSEF ALBERS: And they don't continue, you see. They see this will not last. These exaggerated performers always speak in the highest dramatic voice. And in order to achieve it get always drunk before you come to action. Sick.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, sickness.

JOSEF ALBERS: It's over. So I'm quite critical against many of my colleagues. It is not their self-expression. What makes me to be more than my neighbor only when I think I have to say something more than he can. That is self-disclosure. I once gave a talk in Chicago and right in the beginning I said - a lady came to me and said, "You are against self-expression. And I am mad against you

now."

SEVIM FESCI: She said?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes, "And I'll stand upside down to demonstrate that," I said, "Stop the sentence. You are self-disclosing; you are not self-expressing." Therefore I give you a statement about self-expression. May I?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: I'll get it right away. You see, I have in my teaching - I always say I've done it for a hundred years and have had thousands of students - I have always spoken against just falling onto your knees for so-called accidents, I mean a result you are not responsible for. I have received a question I have expected, "Don't you deal with accidents?" Yes, I deal with accidents, just as Arp admits it all the time. And I admit it, too. But I like to have them under my command and not sign them because they are accidents. If it remains only accident then sign it "accident" or "fate" or "the Lord", whatever you prefer. It's not you because you have not visioned it. You see visual formulation deals with vision, visual information and visual reaction. So I speak differently from all those who deliver themselves to uncontrolled accidents. The gyre accidental the more it is self-expression. It's a joke. Just a joke.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. And how would you define emotion? Because from what you say it might mean.

JOSEF ALBERS: Oh, my things are very emotional. You see I am an emotional type.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, I agree. Is it more like, in French the word "resonance"?

JOSEF ALBERS: Resonance. I count all the time on resonance. I call on this, you see.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. More than most New Yorkers altogether. (looking through book) Now let's see what there is here. You see now the next one has to do with our emotions. This is a very loose line.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Very dramatic for me.

JOSEF ALBERS: When I came from horizontal vertical straight all old stuff then suddenly I go also again in curved lines. And there I submit to changes in the intensity of my hand leading a tool, you see.

SEVIM FESCI: You mean you follow your hand?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes, To some extent I follow my hand. Though I have a general idea where it may lead to. But I don't get senseless drunk and let just a brush and my elbow do it. There we have a terrific misunderstanding is also called movement. From this time of the last 15 years most are inclined to believe that when I let my elbow go the elbow grease produces movement. The movement of the arm was movement but the form that results as a result is after the arm is down is a fixed form, which is a stabile, static, you see, just as wrong as the name for Calder's sculpture are not mobiles. Mobile is a furniture. We are mobiles. Because they never change their place. They use their elbows in the beginning in great surprise. And I don't tell you who gave that name. Purposely not. They are moving stables. Let's be precise with our words, with our verbal -

SEVIM FESCI: Expression.

JOSEF ALBERS: Verbal formulations. You see I avoid that word "expression." Verbal formulations. Let us be precise in calling it what it is and not just take that word over from a man who has for 14 years not done a work by itself but feels competent to condemn everyone else. In this book you see this is here related by the writer of the book who knows me quite well, relatively well.

SEVIM FESCI: Is he an art historian?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, not really. I don't think he has studied much history. He comes from South America and has studied somewhat free lance in Italy and in Switzerland and has felt an interest in art and sort of knows art. What I want to say is that this is related to certain exercises by Paul Klee. But I must say that that is a relationship that does not exist for me. I have made a great effort all my life not to fall into anyone else's verbal formulations or visual formulations. In the beginning you can see I come from Cezanne.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: Very, very much so, as you can see.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: And I knew it. But the further you go into this book the further you see an Albers. This I'll show you downstairs. This square has 4 straight lines and four 90-degree angles. I'll bring it to you now.

SEVIM FESCI: Thank you. (looking at picture) Yes. This is entirely new. I agree.

JOSEF ALBERS: It's me.

SEVIM FESCI: It's through the spectator that your paintings become lively.

JOSEF ALBERS: Because art is not an object. I think I'm lonesome this time - we're saying that nobody else says it. Read it in English.

SEVIM FESCI: (reading) "Art is not to be looked at. Art is looking at us. What is art to others is not necessarily art to me. Nor for the same reason and vice versa. What was art to me or was not some time ago might have lost that value or gained it in the meantime and maybe again though art is not an object but experience. To be able to perceive it we need to be receptive. Therefore art is there where art meets us now." To be able to perceive it we need to be receptive. So how would you define art? Is it experiencing the -

JOSEF ALBERS: It is not just thought out in five minutes.

SEVIM FESCI: Of course not. It's a result of all the years, yes, (reading) "The content of art is visual formulation of our relation to life. The measure of art, the ratio of effort to effect, the aim of art revelation and evocation of vision." Yes. I was just thinking, in an interview you did - I don't know, it might be for a French paper I think for Realites - I can show you, I have it here if you want to -

JOSEF ALBERS: Have you the article in Realites on me?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. I have it here if you want to look at it.

JOSEF ALBERS: Is that the March issue?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: I know precisely.

SEVIM FESCI: Oh, you know which one?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes.

SEVIM FESCI: I wanted just to ask you a few questions. Here you said that --

JOSEF ALBERS: That's not all precise. He's a magazine writer.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: He is making it gloomy, or what you call it, and therefore it's often not precise. But show me where you have troubles.

SEVIM FESCI: I have some troubles where you said, "What I want to create is meditative icons, What I want to do really is meditative icons of the twentieth century."

JOSEF ALBERS: You see, that is his formulation. I would say, "My things have the look of icons." Unconsciously they look at you not as my face is now - you see me in profile - icons are only this way. And so are my paintings. And he says in a gloomy French way maybe "That I want to make the icons of the 20th century." I'm not insulted by it. When he sees it that way I say okay, that's your way of verbal formulation. It's not wrong. But I wouldn't say it that way.

SEVIM FESCI: Which way would you say it?

JOSEF ALBERS: I couldn't say it now. I do not know. You see, what way I would say it would take me again a few months to make a poem for you. You see my things are ...

SEVIM FESCI: I understand very, very well, yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: I'm not a talker. I'm a formulator. For me it makes a difference whether I see a word has one "l" or two "l's". I'm just crazy. Now let's see what more we have here. I would like to go downstairs.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: Do you know these? (looking at book,) The white lines?

SEVIM FESCI: No, I never did see them.

JOSEF ALBERS: I will show you a typical one. There I discovered that when I put a white line in the right way and made the surroundings for the white line right, then the white line makes out of 1, 2, 3 colors 1, 2, 3, 4 colors. Can you see it?

SEVIM FESCI: Now I understand very much. Because of the sharing done by the white.

JOSEF ALBERS: I say all the time if I sell that to you you pay me for 3 colors. And I sell you 4, I betray you. Not to cheat you, but to pet you. You see I betray you in a positive way.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. In a positive way because I see 4 colors instead of the 3 you said.

JOSEF ALBERS: I make you see more than there is. And that's in all my art that way. Absolutely something else. And that's what my book is about. You never see what you see. I lead you to see something else. And therefore I direct you. That's help.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But do you think there are 2 persons who see reality the same way?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, I don't believe --

SEVIM FESCI: Here, for instance, I'm sure I see differently than you see. And who is right and who is wrong?

JOSEF ALBERS: Gentlemen prefer blondes. And who knows why?

SEVIM FESCI: And who will bring the answer?

JOSEF ALBERS: Ah, we are victims of prejudices and preferences. And there is my book. When somebody says "When you take these two colors they will have that effect," I will tell him, or somebody else, he has no idea. Color is fooling us all the time. All the time, like women do, you see, life is interesting.

SEVIM FESCI: It is.

JOSEF ALBERS: But get rid of the dates. Get rid of the dates. Then it will get exciting.

SEVIM FESCI: Get rid of the dates?

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. You see, what is it worthwhile to know that Durer was born in 1472? What is it worth?

SEVIM FESCI: Do you think we can escape from it?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, maybe not. Maybe not. I know it so well because I am interested in that man. He is a terrific guy. When the Responsive Eye show was here - you have seen that show?

SEVIM FESCI: No, I haven't.

JOSEF ALBERS: You were not in New York at the time? It was 2 or 3 years ago only. How long have you been in New York?

SEVIM FESCI: Two years now.

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, anyway you know what it is called. You know the catalogue?

SEVIM FESCI: No, I didn't see the catalogue but I know who you are talking about.

JOSEF ALBERS: There was a gallery director there. She took my hand, "Albers, come." I said, "Okay." She led me to the aisle on the side and when we got around we went the other way. I said, "For what reason are you showing me that? I knew that long before you because I am so many years older than you. That's the only reason." I said, "Now come with me." I took her hand. And I had in that exhibition a little chapel of my own, you know, the Albers Chapel it was called. In that exhibition there were exclusively 4 or 5 or 6 of my paintings and 2 of these were hanging at the entrance. And I said, "Now come stay here. Don't move. Don't move that way and don't move that way. But you will see that here you look upwards and here you look downwards. Here you look to

the right and there you look to the left. You see, you don't need to be led by the hand to have that experience. You can stand in one point and I move you inside, period" You see, I don't need physical movement because I can move you psychologically. You see here that way again. You see here that way. You see here underneath. You see here above. And have not to move a bit.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: Just follow my "deceiving" you, seducing you visually. Yes?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: Who does that in the world, or in history? And I will show you a statement which makes that clear, "Let us sit on our own behinds and walk on our own legs." And this is more satisfying than anything else for me. These are drawings. You have not seen these?

SEVIM FESCI: No, I didn't see them. No.

JOSEF ALBERS: Hundreds. See, they are all in the same contour, all in the same contour, but they have a hundred different actions because they seduce you again visually.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, I agree.

JOSEF ALBERS: (closes book) Now we go downstairs. Come. (Machine turned off)

JOSEF ALBERS: I would like to add a little bit on my teaching. And I would like to say what I have somewhat already said before, in my teaching what I did for about 40 years - and here again I had the biggest classes there were - I have not taught art. Instead of art I have taught philosophy. Though technique for me is a big word, I never have taught how to paint. All my doing was to make people to see, as it says in that little thing -

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: When they called me right after the closing of the Bauhaus in Berlin, 1933, to teach in U.S. A., first I didn't speak English. And the students asked me what I was going to do. I said, and stuttered, "To open eyes." And this became the rule for my life. I have taught to learn to see. In my color book there is no new theory of color. But in it there is a way how to learn to see. That is what I want to say.

[SIDE 2]

SEVIM FESCI: Maybe we can talk, Mr. Albers, a little bit more about your ideas on teaching art in universities. At the end of our last interview I remember you said that what you want to teach is to teach how to look, how to see.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes. I remember quite well that I ended last time by saying that my teaching was not teaching in the normal understanding of art teaching. As I said, my teaching was not teaching art directly. It was a kind of philosophy to train a thinking in art. And when it comes to painting I should say I never did teach painting as such, how to do it; but to learn to read what oneself does, in making art, or what others do. And that means to learn to see. Instead of teaching art and teaching painting I have tried to develop thinking, observation, and seeing - and to articulate what we see not only visually but also verbally. So I was somewhat surprised when I left the school that my successor needed to say as his first statement that he was against repetition. So I was very glad

when I was invited to make a sculptural affair over the entrance of the new Building for Arts and Architecture of Yale University. I was glad that I could present a construction which I called Repeat and Reverse. Because this is for me the maxim, the leading idea about learning and teaching. Why? Because through repeating you are compelled to compare. And only by comparison do we come to an evaluation, as everything is relative, because nothing is large next to something larger. Only by repeating your work do you see whether you have improved or not improved. And this is what the sense is of learning. And, similarly, also "Reverse" leads us to make a comparison from the opposite side, and to develop besides observation, also self-criticism. That is the basis, in my opinion, for articulation. And that is what any visual creator is after: to make visible what he tries to demonstrate, in form or in color, which we consider our means to say something with.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. And what is your attitude towards tradition in art? Because you were just talking about repetition.

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, you see, tradition in art, when you ask me that then I have to quote again myself because I have printed it several times, "Tradition in art is to create, not to revive." You see, that was the good thing there where I was a late student, namely at the Bauhaus. We had masters like Klee and Kandinsky and Schlemmer - I consider these the most important ones - they were the kind of masters who had studied first themselves; instead of looking at their teachers and continuing their work. No. As son and father are opponents in their attitude and in their aims - what is today very obvious - so it is in learning. We had good masters because they did not repeat what others told them to do but they had developed themselves first. And recognizing that was for me an important experience. I must say once more - I think I've said it before - that I did not study with Klee or Kandinsky. I never took their courses, though we were colleagues and good neighbors and good friends. I did not study with them. And I respect them particularly for their attitude of not trying to make disciples. And with this I say some criticism against art history. Which is dominated by a backward-looking attitude. And in my opinion it's really not right that historians should direct art schools or art museums. It is good to remember that this whole business only dates from the 19th century in which retrospection was more or less invented, and with that museums came up. And therefore today there is a great opposition against over-estimating what is old, it is the same, wrongness as to over-estimate the hand-made compared with the machine-made. But from this we are already cured today more or less.

SEVIM FESCI: To what point do you think an artist is influenced by the general thinking of his society? I mean what is for you the role of the artist in our society now?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, I could answer this with a counter question: What is the role of a poet? What is the role of a musician?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, but don't you think it's changed in our century? I mean don't you think that today the role of the artist is quite different from what it was in the last century, for instance?

JOSEF ALBERS: I do not know. I do not see it yet. I haven't thought too much about it. But I don't see right away why the role of the artist has changed. Because the role of art for me is the visualization of attitude, of the human attitude towards life, towards the world. And I think I've said before that there is no difference between science and art when it comes to creativeness, productiveness, to come to conclusions and to formulations. That's the same I think. And scientists can be just as creative as an artist. Though many people don't think so today. But I would say when art is art that means presenting a mentality of a certain time that will remain art because that mentality will be read by a recurrence of that attitude or mentality. So what is art will remain art. Whereas science does not remain in its content what it was before. A hundred years ago, more

than a hundred years ago, scientists believed that flying was not possible because we could not overcome gravity. But since then we learned that speed can overcome gravity and therefore man has learned that flying is possible. I remember as a youngster when the first airplanes were flown. And this was a terrific experience that man could suddenly fly. You see, that is not any excitement for a child today - it's a matter of course, it's "swallowed" as you drink water, you see, as a matter of course. There's nothing to wonder about anymore. But at that time it was breathless to see this wonder, this great wonder. And then when they made that loop the loop. People went by train to go where that could be seen, that somebody in the air could move better than a bird is able to do.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. Why don't we talk a little bit about the creative process involved.

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, you see, that question will come up this month. Somebody who is writing a book on the creative process wants to see me. At first I said I was not inclined to have that meeting. And then I said, "Let's have him." Not that I have an answer to what the creative process is. I'm not a psychologist. I couldn't say it. But I'm interested not in clarification, what it is, with the result of a definition.

SEVIM FESCI: No, I didn't want to ask this question --

JOSEF ALBERS: I understand. But, you see, I am more interested to stimulate the creative process. In my basic courses I have always tried to develop discovery and invention which, in my opinion, are the criteria of creativeness. I have tried to make people aware and ready to recognize - that's again observation, the word I used before, and in articulation what is then the reaction to it. The creative process as such I have tried to lead back to the most basic attitude, and that is by presenting, and there I feel very instrumental, by presenting to my students material as such without telling them what to do, how to handle it, but ask them to find a new --

SEVIM FESCI: Way of expressing.

JOSEF ALBERS: No, not the word "expression" - I have told you already that's not --

SEVIM FESCI: Of presenting them?

JOSEF ALBERS: -- to find out what it is able to do, by presenting it with a new function. Therefore, I came furthermore to the conclusion just at the end of my formal teaching - I usually say I taught for a hundred years - that all art studies are in the end basic and that at art schools there are no graduate studies. The graduate studies come when they leave the school and are working their whole life and demonstrate that also in other fields. Graduate students don't want to be led by professors. They want to find their own "nonsense". So I have come to the conclusion that the graduate art school is an error. And I have experienced that in another way, also, When I was called to Yale Art School here I was expected to teach mainly the older - graduate students. But I made a point that I took first and mostly the beginners because the babies need more education than the grownups. And so the students out of the graduate class came into my basic courses without being asked to do that. Therefore I had such large classes in the basic courses in color and in drawing and later also when I gave basic design again. I'm very rough in the treating of my students. And in saying it now, I have said to my students "I am putting you into a vacuum and ask you to breathe." But at the school we came to new discoveries, to new formulations, and that, I think, has been followed up more or less everywhere in the world.

SEVIM FESCI: I didn't quite understand what you said now about the formulations.

JOSEF ALBERS: Referring to the Bauhaus, you see, I submitted to the obligatory course with Itten who spoke most of the time about matiere, that is the appearance of materials, the surface, the epidermis.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: And that was what I tried to change after he left: that I was not mainly concerned with the appearance but essentially with the capacity, with the inner qualities of the material. What is the difference between a flat material like paper and a flat material like tin, what is the real difference in using it. Not the look. The look was also for us a concern but not the most important concern.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But do you have any conscious aim, or sense of what is happening while actually working on a work of art, a new piece of painting? Do you follow your inspiration while working? Or do you already know what you are going to do?

JOSEF ALBERS: No, you cannot predict. You expose yourself to experiences which may lead you further. It is in a trial and error way. Right away paper was one of my main materials. What can you do with paper more than just wrapping it around something else? The results were not right away something exciting: until we put all the tryings of the class down on the floor and compared and found out that he - that boy - has discovered something that the rest of us had not discovered. And we came to the conclusion what had we done and indirectly we saw then what we hadn't done - this doing, and having overlooked to do. Well, this was one important lead in our amateurish, dilettantish approach. Not application, you see. I tried to avoid mere application, That was the reason why I changed my job to introduce to handicraft, as Gropius asked me to do, by submitted material that made my students open their mouths and eyes wondering what I was after. Do I make myself clear?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes, I understand.

JOSEF ALBERS: They were making great eyes and open mouths. What: This is an art school and we just have to deal with paper; you see now it was a bridge to have new insights. And then we worked with corrugated paper after that. Corrugated paper, which can be bent one way but not the other way. You see, normally paper can be bent in all directions. But corrugated paper is so constructed that it only bends in one direction and refuses to bend in other directions. Now what is this limitation? What does that then make me to do more? So we learn out of limitations which we discovered or arrived at again by comparison, always comparison, comparison.

SEVIM FESCI: I remember that during the last interview you said that what is very important in your case when you paint a new piece of work is the self-control.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes, And that is also --

SEVIM FESCI: Your approach is very much intellectual but I wanted to --

JOSEF ALBERS: It is unavoidable, you see, when the whole class does the same task. Did I speak already about that English professor that came to my class?

SEVIM FESCI: No, you didn't.

JOSEF ALBERS: He came into the class - I was not present - I was told this later. He said he was wondering "They are all doing the same thing?" "Yes." "They don't have gramophones?" "No."

"They don't talk to each other?" "At no time." "That is slavery," he said. "All will be disciples of a teacher or a school." And when you read and see in my book on color at the end I say: "They have gone through one semester doing all the same job, that little specified job, but doing this next to another you always compare yourself with your neighbor." All the time comparison, you see. And then you see the end result in our free studies independent of all possible rules or possible experiences. Then you will be amazed to see how different they all are, the students, and their work, because they all have done the same. You see the logic is just opposite. When they all do the same they are not disciples and slaves. They are concerned with themselves. And therefore I was right to say to one interviewer when he asked about my bandwagon, I said, "I have no bandwagon." What is it? - how do you present it? - how do you prove that you are... My teaching is that following me is following yourself. Period. That's all.

SEVIM FESCI: Why don't we talk a little bit about the technical approach to your work? About the interrelations of colors, about the theory of colors? I mean if you want to, of course,

JOSEF ALBERS: Again, you see, I have to criticize that word "theory". I have not built any theory. I have only tried to build up sensitive eyes, as my book says. And I have tried to achieve that by aiming at very distinct color relationships again - like how do they influence each other? Change each other in light and in intensity, in transparency, opacity? How do they change each other in all different directions? That we make all the students aware, through experience, that color is the most relative medium in art, and that we never really see what we see. All neighboring means which occur every minute different, not only in changing light but also by our changing moods. And in the end, the study of color again is a study of ourselves. And to anyone today who tries to predict to me what two colors will do, I will say, "Please stop. I do not trust you. Because anyone who predicts the effect of colors proves that he has no experience with color." Color is fooling us, cheating us, deceiving us - you can call it if you want - all the time.

SEVIM FESCI: Seducing us, too. Enchanting us, too.

JOSEF ALBERS: You mean the enjoyment of it? Yes.

SEVIM FESCI: But what about the relationship between colors and the source of light?

JOSEF ALBERS: That question is so big that there is no end. You see, they have just you cannot participate with it if you have not lubricated your eyes very thoroughly to see the little changes produced in our eye that has another action than any optical apparatus like photography. We must know that we have two ways of seeing. For instance, when we are indoors another part of the retina is engaged compared with when we are outdoors. If we are in warm light or cool light, in higher light or lower light. Our eye is such a wonderful machine we cannot conceive that greatness that this little retina of our eye which is less than a square inch big has 157 million little particles, as an English scientist found out; and that they are working in different conditions differently. And recently, to learn that the only part of the human organism which has no blood pressure, blood increase and decrease, is the eye. Because the eye has no pulse. It would disturb the finesse of perception, it's amazing, so incredibly a great wonder, that we just have to shut up!

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. That's fine.

JOSEF ALBERS: You have to know that two colors behave together as two human beings can behave together or not behave together. Is there a common action or not a common action?

SEVIM FESCI: They attract each other, they repulse each other. Is that it?

JOSEF ALBERS: That's it.

SEVIM FESCI: Yes. But how did you come to the development of the squares? I think you started in 1949.

JOSEF ALBERS: Yes it was 1949. How I came to that?

SEVIM FESCI: Yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: That's like how one gets to know a human being. It so happens that I've always had a preference - as everyone has prejudices and preferences - for the square as a shape in preference to the circle as a shape. And I have known for a long time that a circle always fools me by not telling me whether it's standing still or not. And if a circle circulates you don't see it. The outer curve looks the same whether it moves or does not move. So the square is much more honest and tells me that it is sitting on one line of the four, usually a horizontal one, as a basis. And I have also come to the conclusion that the square is a human invention, which makes it sympathetic to me. Because you don't see it in nature. As we do not see squares in nature, I thought that it is man-made. But I have corrected myself. Because squares exist in salt crystals, our daily salt. We know this because we can see it in the microscope. On the other hand, we believe we see circles in nature. But rarely precise ones. Mature, it seems, is not a mathematician. Probably there are no straight lines either. Particularly not since Einstein says in his theory of relativity that there is no straight line, rod knows whether there are or not, I don't. I still like to believe that the square is a human invention. And that tickles me. So when I have a preference for it then I can only say excuse me.

SEVIM FESCI: Through the repetitions do you think that one tries to find what is constant? You know, through the many changes? For instance, you have been doing squares since 1949. What is your reason? Is it that you try to find out what is constant through, the many changes and through the many repetitions?

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, I would say the aim of art is a constant, and a continuous job to reveal visually the attitude of our mentality. And the less we disturb the influence of our mentality the more I believe we come close to the truth. And therefore the last 15-20 years in which everyone tried to be different from everyone else with the result that in their work, they all look alike, there is an artificial and not true relationship because honesty and modesty are forgotten. The more eccentric one behaved the more he was considered a personality. On the other hand, the, more you obey your constitutional inclinations, your constitutional preferences and prejudices, the more you are yourself. You have not to force so-called individuality. You have to avoid everything that makes you a Wagnerian blowing up your gestures, blowing up your verbal formulations. Therefore I recommend simplicity because it is honest against all over-dramatization.

SEVIM FESCI: That's right. Mr. Albers, you have often been referred to as the father of optical art. I know you don't like this title, but I would like to know how you feel about this?

JOSEF ALBERS: I think it's true, as many say, I have dealt for many years with the problems that Op art, so-called, is dealing with. For many years I have studied the logic and magic of color. And so I know what's involved when it comes to the interaction of colors, more than many who refuse to study it. But I found a way to study it, I think, that's all. And besides I refuse to be the father of a new bandwagon

SEVIM FESCI: I would like to know what you think of the general direction that painting is taking

now in the second half of this century.

JOSEF ALBERS: Well, I do not like to be a prophet. I like better to paint than to predict what the next painters will do. Though I have a feeling that consideration of order is very much in the air.

SEVIM FESCI: Consideration of order, yes.

JOSEF ALBERS: And that youth today is tired of so-called self-expression. They want finally now again to know why one does this and not this, and just not only get drunk. The following is my statement on articulation: (Reprinted from "The Yale Literary Magazine," copyright Yale Literary Society, New Haven, Connecticut. 1960,) ON ARTICULATION See and say "ex," and write and spell it. And hear and listen, and feel how it feels, this word, or prefix, or name of a letter. Also spell and write, and say and see "press". Say it also without voice, and feel the mouth performing it. Then we will recognize each of the two words showing an outspoken, firm face. And we can not overhear, overlook their double strength and double impact in their combination, the verb "to express". We feel that it means something forceful --of an act of will, and with purpose and aim, something meant, and of necessity and character. All of which signifies its generators, communication and articulation, which still remain active for instance in the saying "this is an expression". But where do those features remain in the liaison of "expression" and "self," in today's too frequent art term "self-expression"? Let us remain aware of how often it happens, the formulation of an "expression". And see how many, today, practice self-expression --all the time--and have nothing to say--

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *September 30, 2003*