

Anni Albers

ARTS philosophy of acts-in-action has been richly inspired by **ANNI ALBERS** and the **ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT** when her German 8 shaft countermarch loom from the **Bauhaus** was donated to **ARTS**.

The Albers Foundation suggested that we keep a photograph of Anni beside her loom, which we have been happy to do. The images of Anni below were modified using CorelDraw software for different artistic effects; the one to the right was handwoven by Sigrid as a 5-end satin on a TC-1 Loom.

See "*Inspired by the Bauhaus -- Silk Scarf in False Damask*", *Handwoven Magazine*, March/April 2004 issue, pp. 56-58.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT ANNI ALBERS' BAUHAUS LOOM

ABOUT ANNI: Anni Fleischmann [Albers] was born June 12th, 1899 in Berlin. She was a student at the Bauhaus from 1922, received her Diploma in 1930, then was Assistant Director of weaving. Having been at all three Bauhaus locations – Weimar, Dessau and Berlin – and having brought the philosophy to America, she is irrevocably associated with the *Arts and Crafts Movement*. There she investigated weaving materials and their properties systematically, something reflected in her teaching lifelong. Some saw her as using unorthodox

materials for weaving, a new idea then but in sync with the Bauhaus philosophy. For her Degree she produced drapery fabric for an auditorium in Bernau with qualities of both sound absorption by using chenille on the fabric back and of light reflection by using cellophane on the front. At the Bauhaus, industry and science and art were blended for functional and commercial use.





Anni married Bauhaus artist Josef Albers in 1925 and in 1933 when the Bauhaus closed they immigrated to the US, brought here by architect Philip Johnson. Anni became Assistant Professor of Art at *Black Mountain College* in North Carolina. She naturalized in 1937. In 1949 they moved to NYC where Anni was the first weaver to have a solo exhibition at the *Museum of Modern Art*. Next on to CT in 1950 when Josef was appointed Chair of the Dept. of Design at *Yale University*. Some feel that it is to Anni that we owe the recognition of textiles as art. She had many exhibitions and received many illustrious awards. Her books are classic references still today. Josef died in 1976 and Anni in 1994. *[This written documentation has come to us from research by previous owners, interviews with students and colleagues, references and more... all of which we wish to thank.]*



LOOM HISTORY: Papers with our loom indicated Dolores Dembus Bittleman [Mrs. Arnold Bittleman] of Cambridge NY bought or was given the loom by her teacher, Anni Albers, about 1961. Dolores said that Anni told her that when she came to the Bauhaus she worked on this loom. Later, after bringing it to America, Anni said she wove on it for years and produced some important pieces on it. This is said to include one of the pieces acquired by the *Busch-Reisinger Museum* at *Harvard University* as well as the *Renwich Gallery* at *The National Museum of American Art/Smithsonian* but, when Anni was asked about this in 1981 at the age of 82, she could not recall which works she wove on it. Anni is said to have liked this loom because it is "portable", folds up and travels well, which is why she [or perhaps her parents] brought it from Germany.

In 1981 Dolores sold the loom to the *Weavers Guild of Pittsburgh* for use at the *Pittsburgh Center for the Arts*, the acquisition funded with an endowment from the Heinz Foundation. At that time the *Busch-Reisinger Museum* had 20 of Anni's weavings and a large collection of

Bauhaus textiles including some weavings and over 1000 samples from Margaret Bittkow-Koehler, Gunda Stadler-Stolzl, Benita Otte and Otti Berger.

In 1993 I began developing my **ARTS** Studio. For 3 ½ years I worked closely with dozens of town, county, regional, state and national groups including granting bodies. In the Spring of 1996 a flyer announcing our Project and Mission Statement just happened to reach members of the *Weavers Guild of Pittsburgh*. They had just decided that Anni's loom, currently not being used and taking up critical space at the *Pittsburgh Center for the Arts*, needed a new home. They had agreed that it should go to an arts center where people would appreciate it and where it would be available to weave on often, rather than to a museum. Our information arrived at a critical moment in time... a cry went up with one voice that ARTS should have it! [We wasted no time in bringing her in.] We have, as mentioned, paper documentation as to its authenticity as well as the original German brochure describing it with illustrations.



LOOM DESCRIPTION: The original metal tag is still on the loom which reads: "*Harald Marquardsen Webstuhlbau G.m.b.H. vormals E.C.Thomsen FLENSBURG*". This German loom has not been made for many years, probably since WWII. When we received the loom in 1996 it set up as an 8 shaft counterbalance with a set of 2 horses with pulleys for each set of shafts. Who changed the loom over from an 8 shaft counterbalance to an 8 shaft counterbalance is unknown but, since Anni was trained to weave on the counterbalance, it is unlikely that she did. We know Dolores replaced the linen heddles with metal eyes with all-cotton string heddles. [Later we were fortunate to obtain the originals out of storage in Pittsburgh!]. By having converted it to an 8 shaft counterbalance, it would not weave for us at all. The scissors mechanism was missing and the second set of lamms was gone, though there were holes to indicate where these working parts had been at one time. With the loom we received a generous supply of notes and drawings which indicated to us that a number of people had attempted to rig this loom, without success, to weave in this manner. We set about adding screws, moving bolts and generally tightening up, adjusting and calibrating the loom but without further disturbing its original makeup. The loom is made of spruce and beech, the seat built in; 10 treadles are anchored at the base under the seat and an overhead beater has metal ratchet adjustments. A pulley releases the wood brake on the back beam and the front beam is tightened by pushing down on the ratchet – both are circular, of wood with spokes and metal fittings. The real question was whether we should continue to try to make the loom work as a counterbalance – with no encouraging expectations -- or restore it.

RESTORATION: The solution as to what to do next with the loom came the Summer of 1997 when I was in Victoria BC teaching at the *Northwest Conference*. On a previous teaching tour of BC I had met Gudrun Weisinger, a Master Weaver trained in Germany. Gudrun had woven a fabulous linen tablecloth in the show which I helped jury, bringing her back to mind. Before I left I was fortunate to meet up with her again – and we discussed this loom. Gudrun was familiar with it, her own loom being quite similar. To my amazement she agreed to come and assist me in restoring it! So in August she flew into Pittsburgh PA, I brought her up to **ARTS** and she – together with a carpenter – spent the next 8 days cutting boards and assembling pieces until the loom was once again a working counterbalance. Gudrun had hoped to hear back from her German friends with information on this loom in time for our visit but no information arrived. Yet, going only by her experience heightened by instinct, not even one piece had to be

recut. As we worked, we substituted texsolv for the shaft system. Then she put on a test warp... it wove beautifully! And that even in spite of white and green cotton heddles which were sorely stretched out at different lengths, not yet replaced. Drawings we inherited were of assistance in our getting the fly shuttle set up, once missing parts were recreated, an unusual method we wonder if Anni used or perhaps even invented. One wonders if Anni used this system as it is presented here. After the first warp, the heddles were replaced with texsolv and the new wooden pieces on the loom stained to match the old wood. Then new sticks replaced warped shafts. So far we have kept the metal eyes and rods which were added to the treadles sometime along in it's history but, as it's a bit tricky to set them up, we expect to move them back in time as well.

DEDICATION: In October of 1997 we officially opened **ARTS** with a formal dedication and engraved plaque on Anni's loom. We invited the *Weavers Guild of Pittsburgh* to celebrate, together with everyone who had worked to make it possible. All seemed delighted, even to one saying that she was sure Anni approved as the view from our **ARTS** bay window looked just like the countryside in Germany! Frankly I wonder if Anni had a hand in all this...

OTHER ANNI LOOMS? Is it possible that other Anni looms have survived? I was once told there is one in Hartford CT -- if so, I'd love to know more of it. Also, I once was asked if ours is RED! Is there a red Anni loom out there somewhere, or is this a bit of folklore? [*Ours was never painted red.*]

INVITATION: You are invited to come to ARTS, to visit and to view Anni's loom, to continue the tradition of throwing the shuttle and weaving a bit of your own history on her!

PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM: Two art images of Anni, the first handwoven by Sigrid as a 5-end satin on a TC-1 Loom; Anni's Countermarch Loom, Front and Rear.

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