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Latin-American Art Travels to Milan Courtesy of Josef and Anni Albers

BY PIA CAPELLI | NOVEMBER 19, 2015



Josef Albers, Familiar Front, 1948, oil on masonite
(Courtesy of Josef and Anni Albers Foundation)

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A new exhibition in Milan throws light on the extraordinary collecting habits of Josef and (/[artists/anni-albers-757923](#)) (/[artists/anni-albers-757923](#)) (/[artists/anni-albers-757923](#)) [Anni Albers](#) (/[artists/anni-albers-757923](#)).

The couple had a lifelong love affair with Pre-Columbian art, and that enthusiasm influenced their own works.



The artists first traveled to Mexico in December 1935. It was the first of 14 trips that would also take them to Peru, Chile, Cuba, and all around South America.

Mexican art became and remained one of the most intense visual references for the couple, who met at the Bauhaus in 1922, married and fled

Germany in 1933, finding a fertile artistic scene in the US.

Over a period of more than 30 years, they bought more than 1,400 pre-Columbian artifacts, in local marketplaces at first (for two or three pesos apiece), and later from American dealers and galleries (spending about \$12,000, the equivalent of \$95,000 in today's money).

Now the Albers Foundation brings this elective collecting to Mudec (Museo delle Culture) in Milan, with an exhibition titled "A Beautiful Confluence."

Nicholas Fox Weber, curator of the exhibition and director of the Foundation, said he discovered the Albers collection almost by chance in 1971, in the basement of their "plain, ordinary" Connecticut house.

"A cupboard where people would keep cleaning products, filled with a thousand clay figures," is how he remembers it.

Many of Anni's collected textiles were not found until after her death in 1994.

The little clay figures and geometric pre-Hispanic Andean textiles are now put side by side at Mudec with Josef's paintings, his "Homage to the Square" series and Anni's weaved patterns - one of which will remain in Milan as a permanent loan, along with the museum's collection of Non-European Art.

In two wide rooms, little Aztec goddesses are shown alongside feather bags from 900 AD, ceramic masks (AD 200-600), and hundreds of photographs taken by the artists at Machu Picchu, Cuzco, Oaxaca, and Teotihuacan. (Between 1937 and 1947 Josef built displays for his gelatin silver prints of sculptures and temples, which often portray the same object from different angles).

Fragments of Nazca's cotton (100BC - AD 800) and Inca wool sit next to Josef's watercolors on silkscreens and layered paintings, some of which recall walls and architecture. Triangles and zigzags on bowls and fabrics influence Anni's knot drawings, and pictorial weavings.

The result is not just a striking show but a very refined one. (/artists/3218-josef-albers) (/artists/3218-josef-albers) (/artists/3218-josef-albers) [Josef Albers](#) (/artists/3218-josef-albers), whose motto was "minimal means for maximum effect," would have loved it.

A BEAUTIFUL CONFLUENCE is at Mudec, Milan, Italy, until February 1, 2016. Information: www.mudec.it (<http://www.mudec.it/>), www.abeautifulconfluence.com (<http://www.abeautifulconfluence.com/>)

An advertisement for a Christie's auction. At the top, the text reads "IN THE FLESH" in large bold letters, followed by "THE NUDE IN LATIN AMERICAN ART" and "NOVEMBER 16 - DECEMBER 2". Below this is a photograph of a dark bronze sculpture of a nude figure sitting on a wooden surface. At the bottom of the ad, there is a "BID NOW" button and the Christie's logo.

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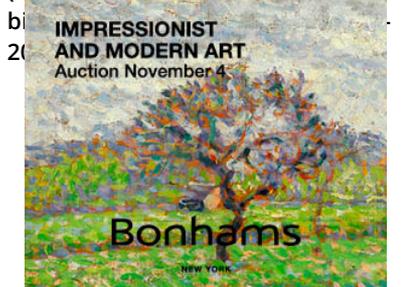


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