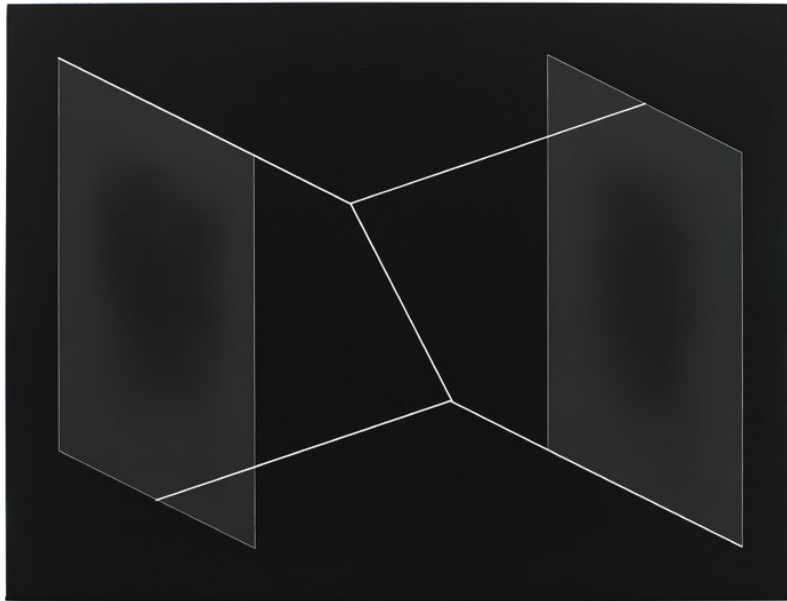


## Protecting Albers's legacy *Dario Jucker*



*Josef told Nick Weber that he thought of this Structural Constellation as "Pericles". This work represented, what was in the artist's eyes "the tablets of justice", held in balance. The balance looked precarious, but was fixed, so he said. He pointed out that the two parallelograms in the abstract image appear to move in different directions, and that one appears to be higher up than the other, but that in fact they are identical, in the same position, and in concord. To Josef, that balance, and the difficulty of seeing it, were embodied in these geometric forms.*

*Josef Albers, Structural Constellation F-32 Pericles, 1954. Machine-engraved black plastic laminate mounted on wood. 17 × 22½ in. (43.2 × 57.2 cm)*

Nicholas Fox Weber called me on the phone on a 2007 summer afternoon while I was driving from Milan to Switzerland, where I was moving. He claimed that the Albers Foundation had an issue with forgeries linked to Italy and that his mission was to protect the original works of Josef Albers.

I could not realize at the time that a precious and unique friendship was born: a relationship based on work and a mutual sharing of values, visions, and clarity of sight in protecting Albers's legacy. Our primary aim is to preserve the authenticity of Albers's works.

Being widely open to interpretation and subject to the authenticator's capacity to differentiate between a work made by the hands of the artist and an object conceived with the intent to imitate and deceive, authenticity is a complex matter for the law. The concept of authenticity is of vital importance for the art world. The Foundation, through Nick, is at its best in pursuing this mission.

To the layperson, it might seem easy to distinguish a fake from an original work. But, as someone is entering in the art world, the complexity in the idea of authenticity and the different subtle levels of mystification that the forgers are willing to create begin to emerge.

Each time I approach the legal work to prosecute a counterfeiting case, the words of Josef Albers come to my mind: the aim of the Foundation is "to foster, cultivate, develop and support the revelation and evocation of vision through art."

To reveal and evoke vision through art is possible only if you are seeing an original work.

This is the aim to follow, and it's important to have it clearly in mind, even when we are faced with the complexity of the different situations. The preservation of this value is the guiding light; it is as simple as that.

While we are approaching an art gallery to examine an *Homage*, Nick tells me about the different details in order to discern a forgery. It might be the technique of applying the color's layers, the size of the squares, the inscriptions on the back of the painting, or Josef's monogram. Above all, when Nick sees a painting, he needs to hold it; he approaches the painting with the instinct of the art historian who has connoisseurship. He then steps back to observe if the colors interact with each other and communicate to the viewer. And then he thinks and thinks again, and he eventually shakes his head or smiles. It's indeed fascinating to observe Nick examining a painting, because you have the impression of looking at someone who is charged by an enormous quantity of sensorial data and is filtering through his experience all the information received.

When we finally meet the owner of the painting, I have counseled Nick to release as little information as possible, since the rules of the art world are strict, and it's more convenient to communicate in a conventional manner.

I think that the strength and the coherence of the Foundation in handling forgery cases is rewarding. The art world does and will always reward the artists' foundations preserving with no compromise the value of authenticity, even if this work involves a significant amount of resources, time, and money.

The level of truth reached in court does not correspond with the real truth; Nick knows this issue, and many times we have together crossed this vast sea of uncertainty, which obliges us to accept also the judgments that are unpredictable, for better or for worse.

When I visited Bethany, Connecticut, I saw with my own eyes all the work that Nick and the other people at the Foundation

have physically done during the years. It's the concrete form of a vision. I have seen open and wide spaces, a window on the green and the infinity, the attention to the quality of every single detail.

In this space, the Alberses' artworks breathe and live because they are surrounded by beauty and silence. It's a very special place, a sanctuary in nature.

We have shared many different experiences; since Nick and I started working together, we have had many seizures of forgeries and obtained important judgments against the forgers.

A splendid friendship was born and is still alive. I am glad to recall the dinners together,

the skiing weekends during which we found ourselves observing the light of the sky, comparing it with the light of certain paintings, Nick's seventieth birthday celebration in London, the visit to Alberto Giacometti's grave in Stampa, Switzerland.

The Foundation's fiftieth-anniversary celebration is a joy, since we are together to give homage to the work and the commitment of many people who, under Nick's guidance, have brought forward the Alberses' message.

Fifty years entail also a new commitment and a responsibility to continue the work in the future, on a daily basis, in the direction of preserving the original works of Josef and Anni Albers.

*In 1997 Dario Jucker received his law degree from the University of Milan. After receiving his degree, he decided to devote himself to the art world. After having been admitted to the Milan Bar Association, he obtained a master of laws degree at Columbia University in New York, with a focus on intellectual property. When he returned to Italy, he worked for a major law firm in Milan specializing in intellectual property law, where he founded his own area dedicated to art law, offering specific assistance and legal advice to collectors, museums, artists' foundations, and dealers.*



*Monogram details from Homage to the Square paintings dated 1971*



## The Alberses illustrious and evolving story *David Zwirner*

I can still vividly remember my visit to meet Nicholas Fox Weber in Milan in February 2016. I had formally thrown the gallery's hat in the ring to represent the estates of both Josef and Anni Albers a few months earlier, and my colleague David Leiber, a longtime friend of Nick's, told me we were now among the finalists being considered. David and I more or less went straight from the airport to Milan's MUDEC, where Nick had curated an extraordinary exhibition called *A Beautiful Confluence*. What a wonderful way to get to know Nick—in the middle of his stunning presentation of Anni and Josef's work, with gems of pre-Columbian art from both their own collection and MUDEC's. Nick gave us a tour that was warm and human, but also formidable in the breadth of his expertise. Of course, we spoke about Anni and Josef's work but also about their commitment to each other and their respective visions of how a creative life should look. When the tour was over, we all left and checked into the Grand Hotel in Milan on Via Manzoni, the kind of old-world grand hotel they just don't make anymore.

In the evening we joined Nick and his daughter Lucy for dinner at a favorite restaurant of his, a trattoria called Trippa. It was local and authentic—no written menus. The waiter reeled off the various homemade dishes that were typical of the best Italian fine house cooking. It was at this particular dinner that I learned about Nick's passion for great food and Italian wine, something I have come to cherish in him. I also remember that the conversation felt like a dance in which I was trying to get a sign out of Nick that we had been selected, while he in turn shifted between giving assurances and demurring. He was feeling us out. It went on like this as we ate delicious home-cooked food, and I very much enjoyed getting to know Lucy as well as Nick. When the dinner

was over, we went back to the hotel, hoping we had made the right impression. The next morning we had a lovely breakfast all together, and then David Leiber and I went back to New York with great optimism but not quite the clarity we had anticipated.

Some weeks later, we got the call I had been hoping for in Milan. It turned out we had been the only gallery asked to make the trip to meet Nick there. As they say, the rest is history—or, rather, art history. The quality of the shows and catalogs Nick and his team have overseen in the years since—at our galleries and at museums around the globe—has categorically changed the way the world sees the Alberses. I cannot state enough what a thrill and honor it is to be part of this latest leg of the Alberses' illustrious and evolving story. I cannot wait for the next fifty years!

*David Zwirner is a German art dealer, who moved to New York and started his own gallery in 1993. He has become one of the most important gallerists in the world and now has eponymous galleries in London, Paris, and Hong Kong, as well as New York. Since 2016 David Zwirner has been the Albers Foundation's exclusive commercial gallery. In this role, it promotes the legacies of both Josef and Anni through curated exhibitions at its gallery spaces; the development of new scholarship on the artists; and the sale of artworks that the Foundation consigns to the gallery.*

*Following spread: Installation view of Josef Albers: Sunny Side Up, David Zwirner Gallery, London, 2017*