

## READ

In light of the long awaited retrospective on Anni Albers at the Tate Modern this year, the new edition of her seminal text *On Weaving* is a welcome reflection. The prominent Bauhaus textile artist begins the book with a thought 'traced back to the event of a thread' and this, in essence, is the journey we take with Albers through her writing and her practice. The 'thread' becomes an extended metaphor of weaving stripped back to the bare essentials of warp and weft as we examine the construction of cloth. We follow this thread through the early history of weaving to the present day where Albers offers an exploration of the relevance of weaving both as an essential craft and an art form.

The chapters themselves move from rigid technical explanations of looms, definitions and weave drafts to a broader approach to design and the role of textiles as a visual narrative. As a weaver, those bigger questions that Albers asks are crucial to understanding the practice. Albers does not differentiate between the designer, the craftsperson or the artist. She questions what makes textiles art; 'a fabric can be great art if it retains directness of communication in its specific medium.' She laments our loss of appreciation of the process involved in textiles, and the shift towards outcome, which diminishes the craft; '[the] potency of textile art has been lost during centuries of efforts to produce paintings.' The best tapestries, she argues, are not the great paintings transferred onto cloth, such as Renaissance tapestries, but rather the simpler pictorial weaves of Ancient Peru that have a 'vigor... often surpassing that of cultures that have other, additional methods of transmitting information.' As writing took precedence elsewhere, Peru developed a culture where 'threads were the earliest transmitters of meaning.' Albers' respect for the simpler, early weaves of ancient cultures reflects her argument that all designers must go back to the beginning in order to pursue a broader vision, and once again imbue meaning into our chosen craft.

Yet her most powerful argument is the plea for tactility. As a culture, we have forgotten this crucial tactile sense of material 'in the rough' and consequently have lost an elemental perception, we leave 'idle our sense of touch and with it those formative faculties that are stimulated by it.' She cites how we can toast bread without feeling the dough. As a maker, the exhilaration of touch, using hands to extract and reveal structure is a natural impulse. Her warning, written over 50 years ago, seems prescient in today's world. This is a beautifully illustrated book with writing that is clear, intuitive and forceful. The illustrations, many in colour, highlight intricate details and the hand drawn weave drafts exhibit a spontaneity and simplicity that is refreshing. This new edition includes writing by Nicholas Fox Weber, Manuel Cirauqui and T'ai Smith providing a context, both theoretical and personal to the hugely influential work of Anni Albers. \*\*\* **Majeda Clarke. *On Weaving: New Expanded Edition* by Anni Albers, Princeton University Press, 2017, £41.95, ISBN: 9781400889044**

