

At the Bauhaus: Glass pictures by Josef Albers

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This is one of the most interesting and beautiful exhibitions that the Bauhaus has yet offered. After Klee, Feininger, and Kandinsky, now Josef Albers joins the ranks of exhibiting teachers with a presentation of his creative work. And what a singular presentation it is! Old and new are united. And this is not to be understood strictly as a matter of time, in that works from the Weimar era (1920/23) are presented alongside newer works from 1931/32. Rather it is to be understood also in a factual sense. *Glasbild-Fensterbild*, glass pictures and window pictures are works whose compositions are realized in the transparency of colors, an ancient art form that was known in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. We do not speak of an extending legacy. The delightful and beautiful chromatic powers of medieval glass painting have not been surpassed. At most, in formal and compositional terms, something new can be created, as happens in the most recent tendencies in art. This is the case with the *Fensterbilder*, the window pictures, created at the Weimar Bauhaus (1920/23). During a time of terrible material scarcity, artists were reaching out toward new, heretofore scorned kinds of materials. Albers used shards of bottles and who knows what else, and made things according to their own laws of color and form. And so we have before us today these ecstatic and somewhat strange pictures. But what we recognize is their will toward a colorful unity of form. The necessity was there at the beginning for Albers—as it is for every artistic endeavor—and through his evident efforts we can see how soon the artist found his path out of the disorder of shards into the systematic organization of color and form.

The decisive tone of this exhibition does not lie, however, in the *Fensterbilder* which come to life when the daylight passes through them, but rather in the *Glasbilder*, which like paintings are solidly framed on the wall. It is characteristic for our time that these pictures have a strong sense of tectonic contemporaneity about them. Indeed they possess the strongest sense of materiality. Alongside the age-old, hallowed media of oil, watercolor, and printmaking techniques, we have found new materials for pictures. And glass has huge developmental possibilities—it would be impact- and fire-resistant, it could be a building material—all self-evident now that we have a glass picture before us. As the painter paints, so Albers creates forms with glass. Not however in a mosaic-like technique of setting together pieces of glass as in the *Fensterbilder*, but rather through over-laying a wafer-thin coating of colored glass on to the ground. This requires marvelous ingenuity. Albers prefers to work in black and white, thereby creating an absolutely masterful sense of the dimensional form of things (for example, in the delightful *Klaviatur*), so that these glass pictures leave a very strong impression on the viewer.

*Translation from the original German by Jeannette Redensek*