

OHT | Office for a Human Theatre

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# JA

site-specific version of

**squares do not (normally) appear in nature**

performative installation inspired by

Josef Albers, the concept of abstractness and unicorns

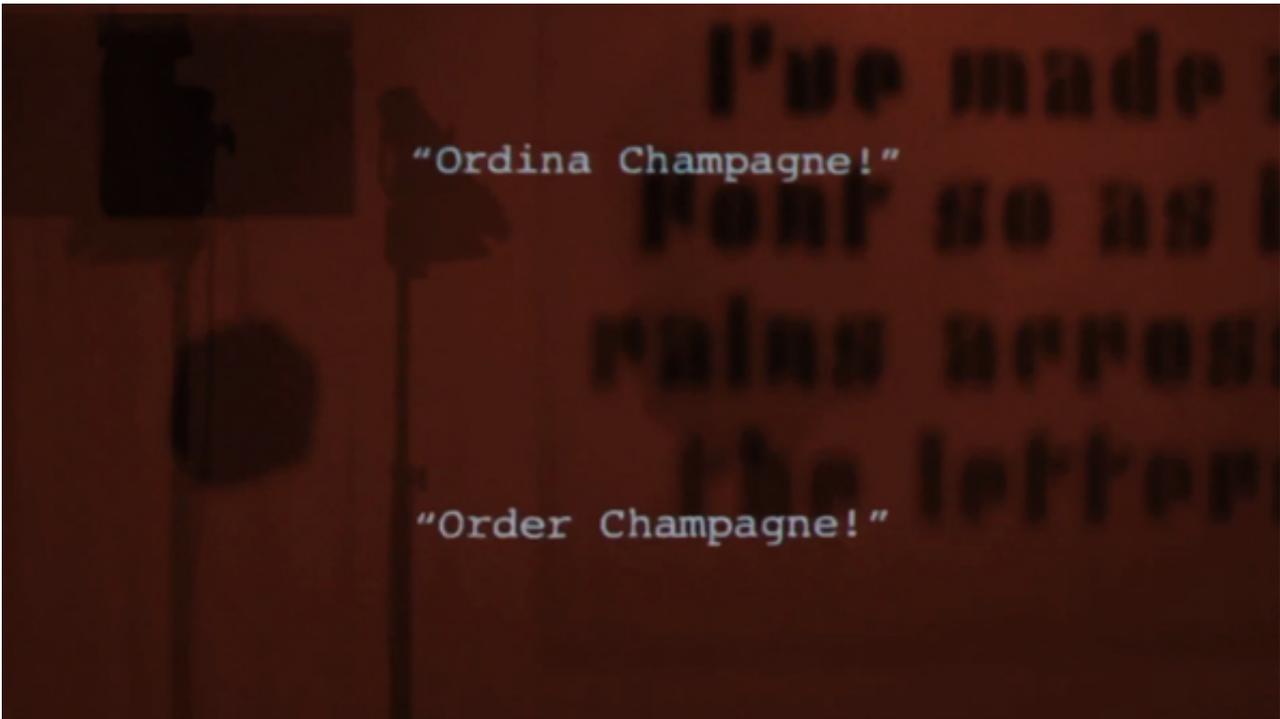




## CONCEPT

*JA* confronts the audience with an aural and visual space: 13 experiments of sound and vision without the use of performers. The work's basis is the awareness of colours via certain protagonists: light, mist, glass, font and image. This is akin to how apparently abstract themes are the actors of Josef Albers's research of reality.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, abstract has nine definitions, of which the most applicable is 4.a.: "Withdrawn or separated from matter, from material embodiment [...]. Opposite to concrete." From the Latin, *abstractus* means 'drawn away'. In visual arts, the sense of abstract painting is a composition with a certain or total degree of independence from the real world. This action of drawing away is the key aspect of this work, This action is further underscored when taken together with the questioning of how theatre redefines itself by apparently drawing away an action. What is left?



The piece builds on how Albers himself drew away when he left the Bauhaus for America. He was not only traveling across the Atlantic to a new life in the US, but also to a deeper kind of observation--one that brought him to the essence of how the world and objects are built and thus perceived.

Observation is connected to the physical action of seeing. Albers's words and criteria, as much as his materials--his palette and his objects--visually connect the audience to a renewed kind of narration. A slowed down narration, which brings the audience to terms with unfamiliar references and his/her own predisposition to open eyes. An attitude that Albers has already envisaged with his work. Perception, as Albers conceived it in his teaching, from the years of Bauhaus to Black Mountain College and Yale, is now on stage.

First of all, JA is an invitation to hear, see and spend time. This work also regards nature and what normally doesn't appear in it. In particular, the performance dramatizes abstract effects by staging natural phenomena like the northern lights. This specific choice deconstructs the misleading convention that abstract art is too impersonal or cold. No wonder that Elaine de Kooning noted "however impersonal his paintings might at first appear, not one of them could have been painted by any one but Josef Albers himself".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick Conway Morris, "Making of a Bauhaus Master" - NY Times, 21.10.2011

## BIOGRAPHY



### About Josef Albers

Josef Albers, who played a leading role in transmitting the modern design principles of the Bauhaus to the United States, was born in Germany in 1888. As a young man he was a teacher, but also spent much time visiting museums in Hagen and Munich, where he was first exposed to the paintings of Cézanne, Matisse, van Gogh, and Gauguin. In 1915 he earned a diploma from the Royal Art School in Berlin and later attended the School of Applied Arts in Essen. He moved to Munich in 1920 to study at the academy, and one year later enrolled at the Bauhaus in Weimar, where he met leaders of avant-garde art: Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe. He began to work in stained glass and printmaking and in 1923 became the first Bauhaus student promoted to the role of instructor, teaching the introductory course. When the Nazis closed the school in 1933, Albers and his wife Anni, a textile artist at the Bauhaus, were invited to Black Mountain College in North Carolina. This important school of art attracted leading artists and talented students, many of whom forged notable careers in later years like John Cage, Merce Cunningham and many more.

Albers is well known for his compositions that explore the relationships of color through a single, simple form, usually the square. His main interest, though, was in color and understanding the rules guiding visual experience, an interest that had been sparked at the Bauhaus by Paul Klee's introductory courses, where superimposed squares

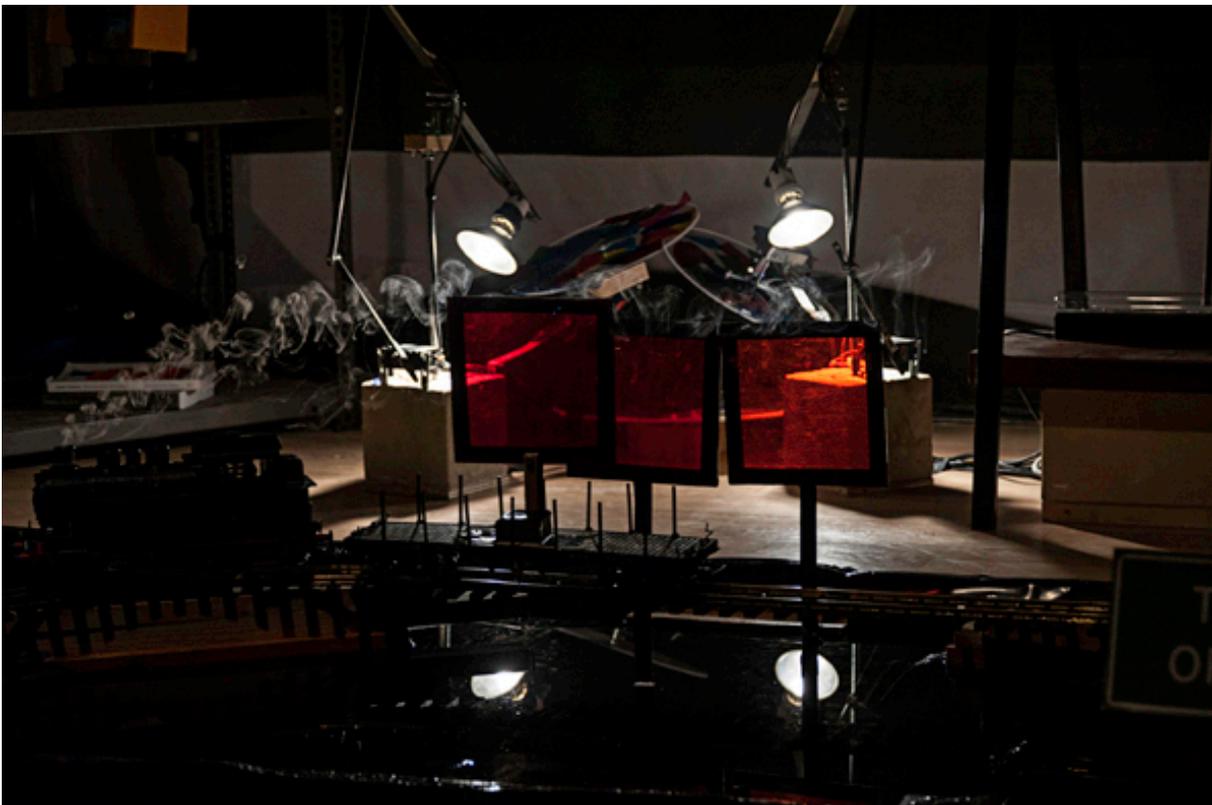
demonstrated compositional and spatial effects. Albers developed his own theories regarding spatial effects, contrasts, and harmonies of colors and in 1963 published an influential book *Interaction of Color*, which elucidated his theories. He was a key faculty member at Black Mountain College until 1949, though he also taught at times at Harvard University and lectured in Latin America. In 1950 Albers became the head of the Department of Design at Yale University. Albers died in New Haven in 1976.



In the wish that Google does not answer to all the questions, OHT investigates reality and its representations without limits of shape, genre and reality. Established in 2008 by Filippo Andreatta, OHT has quickly collaborated with prestigious institutions such as, among the others:

- Centro S.Chiera of Trento for the theatre piece "Weaknesses" (2016);
- Office National Diffusion Artistique francese for New York City Artists' Salon (2016);
- Triennale Teatro dell'Arte Milan (IT) for "a tiny retrospective" of OHT latest works (2015);
- Albers Foundation (USA) for a performative project on Josef Albers (2014);
- Whitechapel Gallery in London (UK) for the video installation "buzz" (2014);
- MAXXI museum in Rome (IT) for the theatre piece "Delirious New York" (2014);
- IIC of Vienna (AT) for "Self-Portrait with two friends" (2013);

Finally, OHT has been appointed associate-artist of Centrale Fies.



Filippo Andreatta BA in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano, and MA in Performing and Visual Arts at IUAV, University of Venice. In 2008, he has established OHT and decided against accepting the invitation of the CSSD, University of London, for attending an MA in Performance Practices and Research as he worked for two opera productions with the Berlin-based ensemble "Nico and the Navigators". For two years, Filippo Andreatta has been theatre-advisor of the City of Rovereto where he has launched a programme of Contemporary Theatre and Performance Art. At the same time, he has worked as set-designer for the opera productions in Trento (IT). In 2014, he is acting for the Belgian company Peeping Tom at the La Biennale di Venezia. Since 2016, he is associate artist and co-curator of Centrale Fies Art Work Space in Italy.

Chiara Spangaro Lives and works in Milan, Italy. She graduates cum laude at the University of Pavia with a thesis on contemporary artist Racheal Whiteread. Since 2005, she is associate curator of Germano Celant at Fondazione Aldo Rossi with responsibility for exhibitions and publications and associate curator of the exhibition "Arts & Foods" for EXPO 2015. She was associate curator (2008-2012) at Triennale di Milano, department of Arts and Architecture, and curator/editor of various exhibitions and catalogues like: "OMA / Rem Koolhaas" (24Ore Cultura and Espresso, Milano / Roma, 2013), "Arte Povera 2011" (Electa, Milano 2011), "Fausto Melotti. 1889-1986", MADRE Museum of Contemporary Art Donna Regina, Napoli, (Electa, Napoli 2011) and "Frank O. Gehry. Dal 1997", Triennale di Milano, (Skira, Milano 2008).

Paola Villani In 2007, together with Daniel Blanga Gubbay, she establishes "pathosformel" which works on the image of the body on stage and the possibility to represent it by abstract signs. Their work has been invited by leading festivals all over Europe such as Mime Festival London, Crec Festival Barcelona, Kaaitheatre Brussels and many more. Paola Villani collaborates with other artists on works that have been exhibited at La Biennale di Venezia 2013 – "Ossido Ferrico" by Francesca Grilli, Istanbul Design Biennale 2012 – "Mapping" with Antonio Ottomanelli, Sao Paulo Calling 2012 – "Subbendo" with Antonio Ottomanelli and MAMBO museum of contemporary art of Bologna 2011 – "the conversation" by Francesca Grilli.

## PRESS QUOTES

"OHT springs out of the will of making the abstract concrete"

Icon Design

"[...] opens your mind up to the deep meaning of democracy"

l'Adige

"[...] one of the [theatre companies] most interesting of the independent scene"

la Repubblica

"This isn't a theatre of cruelty, it's rather of tenderness and of losers; two realities that only apparently are incompatible. Yet, they are absolutely consequent to each other among carnival long johns, rockets that light pointlessly the darkness up, fortune cookies from the Chinese next-door dive and sidewalks where also the pod is smoked all alone. To everyone his/her own, to everyone his/her failure. In her tiny pride, the "Tiny Retrospective" brings theatre back to his deepest roots; the place designated for the existential resistance."

Il Fatto Quotidiano

"Dramaturgy of the space and of signs, high conceptual density (essential the programme note) tempered by disenchanted sense of humour: linear comprehension is not expected, however wit and cleverness are not in discussion."

la Repubblica

"Well thought and well-read, seeing these shows to support us and to get less paranoid or, at least, to get paranoid with irony."

Zero.eu

## CREDITS

### JA

site-specific version of  
squares do not (normally) appear in nature

by OHT | Office for a Human Theatre  
with the support by The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany (CT), USA

concept and directing by Filippo Andreatta  
scientific research Chiara Spangaro  
mechanical movements and wonder by Paola Villani  
set-design by Filippo Andreatta and Paola Villani  
music staging by Roberto Rettura  
song "ala" by Matteo Nasini

a production by OHT | Office for a Human Theatre, Provincia Autonoma di Trento

in collaboration with  
Regione Trentino Alto-Adige  
MART, museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto  
Punto Luse sas

artistic residency Centrale Fies (IT), Albers Foundation (USA)

running time 45''

[www.oht.tn.it](http://www.oht.tn.it)

premiere: Mart, Museum of modern and contemporary art of Trento and Rovereto, Italy

thanks to: Barbara Boninsegna, Annalisa Casagranda, Brenda Danilowitz, Fritz Horstman,  
Alessandra Klimciuk, Nick Murphy, Giacomo Raffaelli, Jeannette Redensek, Nicholas Fox  
Weber



# DIDASCALIE

p. 1

Josef Albers

*Homage to the Square*, 1950–1954, oil on Masonite, cm 30,5 x 30,5, The Anni and Josef Albers Foundaion, Bethany  
*Homage to the Square-Midsummer*, 1966, oil on Masonite, cm 101,6 x 101,6 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

*Homage to the Square-Soft Spoken*, 1969, oil on Masonite, cm 121,9 x 121,9, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New  
York

© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Set-design, work-in-progress © OHT / Filippo Andreatta, ph Filippo Andreatta, courtesy Centrale Fies

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“The closing of the Bauhaus” video still © OHT / Filippo Andreatta

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Otto Umbehr Josef Albers and students in a group critique at the Bauhaus Dessau, 1928-29. The Josef and Anni Albers  
Foundation. © Phyllis Umbehr/Galerie Kicken Berlin/ DACS 2012 © Otto Umbehr

p. 5

Henry Cartier-Bresson, Josef Albers at home in Connecticut, 1968. The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. © Magnum  
Photos

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“squares do not (normally) appear in nature” performance still © OHT, ph Fabio Cella, courtesy museo MART

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“squares do not (normally) appear in nature” performance still © OHT, ph Fabio Cella, courtesy museo MART