

A Paperfolding Trove Hidden in the New England Woodlands

The exploratory studies of Josef Albers' students in Germany and the United States have long been of interest to paperfolders, especially the 3D curve-creased forms, fans and paraboloids. Many are carefully stored at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Connecticut. During a recent visit to the Foundation, I had a rare opportunity to see them all.



FAR LEFT. Various corrugations and tessellations made and presented by Fritz Hortsman during his workshop at MoMA in June, 2017.

LEFT. Mantel designed by Josef Albers inspired by his research on paper corrugation.

NEXT PAGE. Works on paper made by students of Josef Albers at Yale University in the 1970's. Students were challenged to fold a piece of paper so that the final model would stand on its own. They also practiced tessellations and corrugation.

by *Laura Rozenberg*
(text and photos)

Fritz Hortsman, artist residency and education coordinator at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation of the United States, delivered a workshop on the teachings of Josef Albers last year at MoMA. The course was aimed at the general public who worked, played and tested the effects of folding paper based on Albers' teaching method.

Unfortunately I was not in New York at that time, as I would have loved to participate. But in November, during a brief trip to the United States, I contacted Hortsman and he kindly invited me to

visit the Albers Foundation to talk about his workshop experience.

Not only was the conversation interesting, but he opened before my eyes a small collection of paper constructions that Albers' students created during the courses he taught at Yale University in the 1970's. There were about 16 pieces stored in archival boxes. Their state of conservation is good with some models showing signs of foxing (brown stains). Some photos I took accompany this note.

There were fanlike foldings and curved-creased constructions of various types. I did not see the paraboloid which has been documented as the earliest known

reference of curved-crease sculpture, made by a student at the Bauhaus during Albers' preliminary course in paper study in 1927. (Probably it does not exist anymore, although there is a picture in a book by Hans Wingler. See references.)

When the Bauhaus, the first school of design in the world and a modernist beacon of the 20th century, was forced to shut down with the advance of Nazism, Albers emigrated to the United States with his wife Anni. He continued teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and later at Yale University. One way to introduce students to construction and aesthetic thinking was through paper. Albers proposed exercises that were both



simple and thoughtful; the student had to discover, based on a few guidelines –for example, "make a single fold and make the paper stand on the table," "find the most interesting shadows" or the "most aesthetically pleasing." These restrictions (as any paperfolder would know well today), instead of limiting, seemed to stimulate their creativity.

"While seemingly limiting, Albers's control over the circumstances of his classes actually led to increased experimentation and creativity among his students. As one scholar has pointed out, ". . . the works created in Albers's preliminary course reveal a variety that demonstrate . . . namely, that for creative people, despite external restrictions – which are, of course

primarily pedagogically motivated here . . . the number of possible solutions is almost unlimited," wrote Ester Adler in her thesis "A New Unity! The Art and Pedagogy of Josef Albers."

Albers went down in history as an artist (he excelled in painting, wood and glass) but he was also an innate teacher. "I think he really loved being among students. In all of his art and in all of his teaching it is evident the two are inextricable," Hortsman said.

The Albers Foundation, located in Bethany, Connecticut, almost hidden down a road and into the woods, is devoted to preserving the memory and work of Anni and Josef. I am very grateful to Fritz Hortsman for the wonderful opportunity he gave me to visit the foundation and take these photographs. For me it was an experience that will always live in my memories. 🏠

- To learn more:*
- a) *Josef and Anni Albers Foundation: www.albersfoundation.org*
 - b) "A New Unity!" *The Art and Pedagogy of Josef Albers, by Ester Adler (thesis): drum.lib.umd.edu*
 - c) *History of Curved Origami Sculpture, by Erik and Martin Demaine: erikdemaine.org/curved/history*
 - d) "Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago" by Hans M. Wingler. MIT Press, 1969 and 1978.

