

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester
The Whitworth

Ancient Textiles from the Andes

Whitworth Art Gallery | Manchester

29.03.2019 - 15.09.2019

Preview: Thursday 28 March, 6-8 pm

Opening March 29th 2019, the exhibition “Ancient Textiles from the Andes” at the Manchester Whitworth Gallery will present the Paul Hughes collection to compliment the Whitworth’s own collection of these splendid woven artworks. Spanning the period 300 BC - 1200 AD, the exhibition is the most comprehensive insight to the Andean textile world ever mounted within the UK, a journey to unlock these exceptional cultures and artists to reveal their technical virtuosity and aesthetic refinements, also their role of revolutionising art history from the Bauhaus to other seminal artists and styles of our own era. Both Josef and Anni Albers were avid collectors as well as their Bauhaus collaborator and mentor Paul Klee. “Dedicated to my great teachers, the weavers of ancient Peru”, Ann Albers prefaced to her book “On Weaving”.

In comparison to other medium such as ceramic, paintings and architectures, the textile arts of the Andes are widely regarded as the primal medium of artistic expression. A highly sophisticated system of textiles production that encompassed all known techniques and others such as interlocking tapestry, discontinuous weft, painted textiles, feather appliqué tie-dye and warped face weaving that emerged in cultures such as Paracas, Nazca, Wari, and Chancay will be displayed at the exhibition. Both in segments, wall hangings and in tunic forms, the exhibition narrates the complexities of their transition from local ritual to a wider shared universal culture.

From an aesthetic point of view, Pre-Columbian Andean textile artists were also proficient in bold abstract expressions of solid colour fields and sophisticated geometries, also in more figurative stylistic renderings of their world and spiritual views.

Paracas Culture 300 BC - 300 AD

The Paracas culture spanned the end of the Early Horizon and beginning of the Early Intermediate Period (circa. 600 - 175 BC). The Paracas artists took a high-intensity approach to the ceramics, textiles and goldwork they created: concentrated and time-consuming labour, insistent repetition and variation of motifs, great visual profusion, extreme colourism and attention to detail.

Paracas Painted Hands, Paracas, 100 BC, 71 x 50 cm, Collection Silvia Fiorucci Roman





The Ocucaje Object

Ocucaje Shirt with Figure, Paracas Culture, 300 BC, 70 x 60 cm
Paul Hughes Collection

The shamanic surrealistic figure of the Ocucaje Oculate Deity is an essential iconography of Pre-Columbian arts in the southern Ica Valley of Peru, characterised by its highly stylised frontal body and daring expression.

The arts of the Andes are renowned for its surreal and versatile rendering of earthly beings, which is connected to the Andes' ritual belief. In the Pre-Columbian cosmology, human and other zoomorphic beings are equally transformative and spiritual, who serve as mortal forms of the divine nature.

Most scholars view the “kneeling monkey” as the prototype for later further stylised developments. The Monkey is a revered icon from the Amazonian tropical lowlands and was later known by dwellers in the coastal area. As James Reid wrote: “these figures possess ‘quasi-human faces,’ as well as antics and social behaviour that ‘foster the projection of human qualities and personae upon them.’” With a sense of wonderment and awe, these images foreshadow how surrealists in the later centuries perceive the world as the manifestation of bewilderment, metamorphosis and mystery.

Wari / Tiwanaku 800 AD - 1200 AD

While the Early Period is predominated by the linear development of Paracas-Nazca and Moche, the following period—the Middle Horizon—witnessed the first Andean period to be dominated by two interconnected empires, the Tiwanaku and the Wari (300 – 1000 AD).



Tiwanaku-Wari art recalls the earlier iconography such as the staff-bearing warriors and the architectural principles of the Andes'. The piece presented here is composed of a variety of geometric elements such as the stepped fret, rectangular and stripe, resembling the architectural outlook of the Akapana pyramids. The arts of Tiwanaku-Wari excels to the level that its diversity of style could not be fully elaborated in one work, that both its figurative and abstract style are the epitome of the Tiwanaku-Wari artistic beauty.

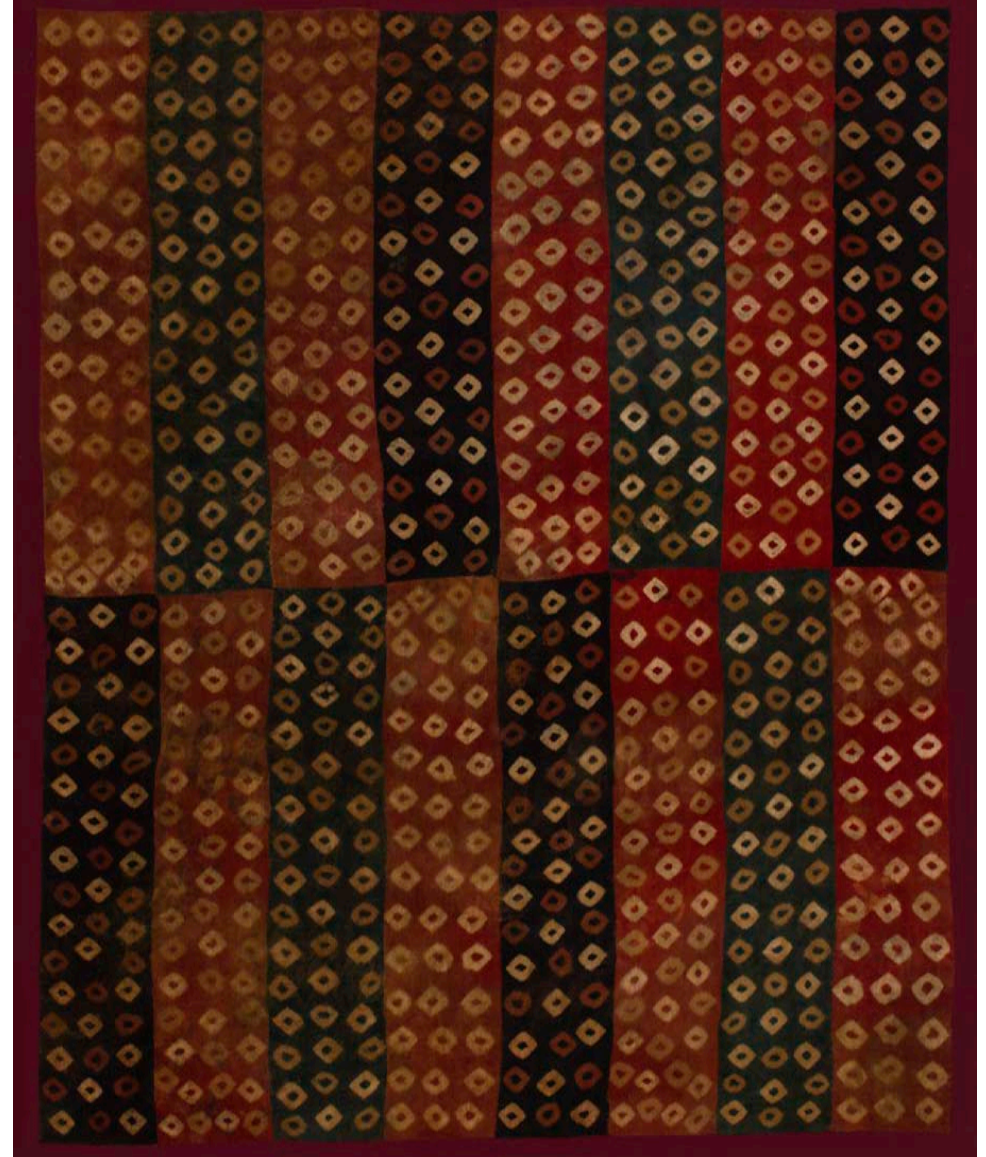
Wari Tunic (Stepped Motif), Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, 251 x 155 cm, Paul Hughes Collection



Tie Dye Tunic (detail)

Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, Southern Andes,
160x130 cm
Paul Hughes Collection

These tie-dyed ceremonial clothes were worn by Wari lords of the elite and the spread to different places in the Andes, many perhaps as diplomatic gifts that fostered alliances or as imports treasured for their prestige. The deeply saturated red/blue/green ground is punctuated by large white and yellow tie dye modules. The irregular arrangements confer upon these cloths a sense of movement and vibrating radiance.



Tunic Frontal

Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, 92 x 78 cm
Paul Hughes Collection

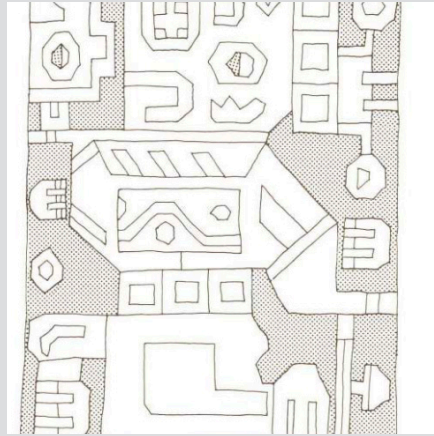
Any discussion about the iconography of Tiwanaku-Wari arts will be incomplete without tapping into the staff-bearing figure. The Ponce / Bennett monolith from Tiwanaku, and the Puma Shaman from the Sun Gate of Tiwanaku are the prototypes of the presented textile and its kind. In this textile, the images from stone carvings are repeated, abstracted, compressed, and expanded, emphasising the rectilinear and thus imperial power and its ability to order the world. The pattern on this tunic, a profile face with a vertical split eye and crossed fangs, and an inverted stepped fret motif, is a unique Wari design.



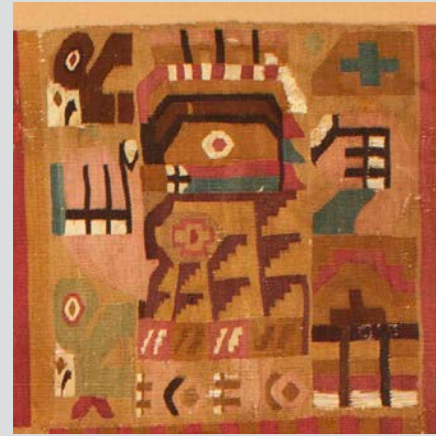
Illustration of Wari's stylisation of Icon



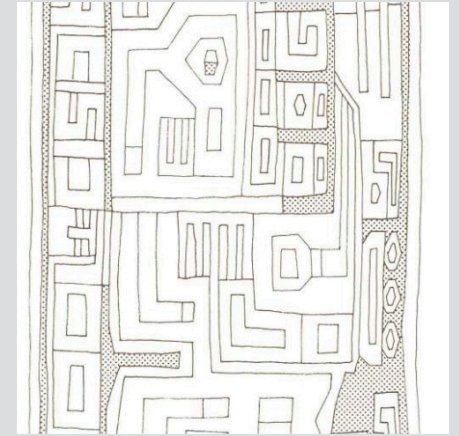
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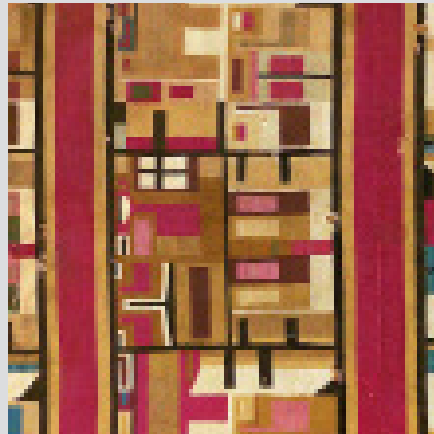
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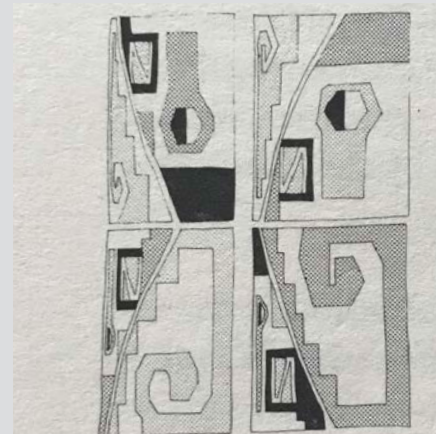
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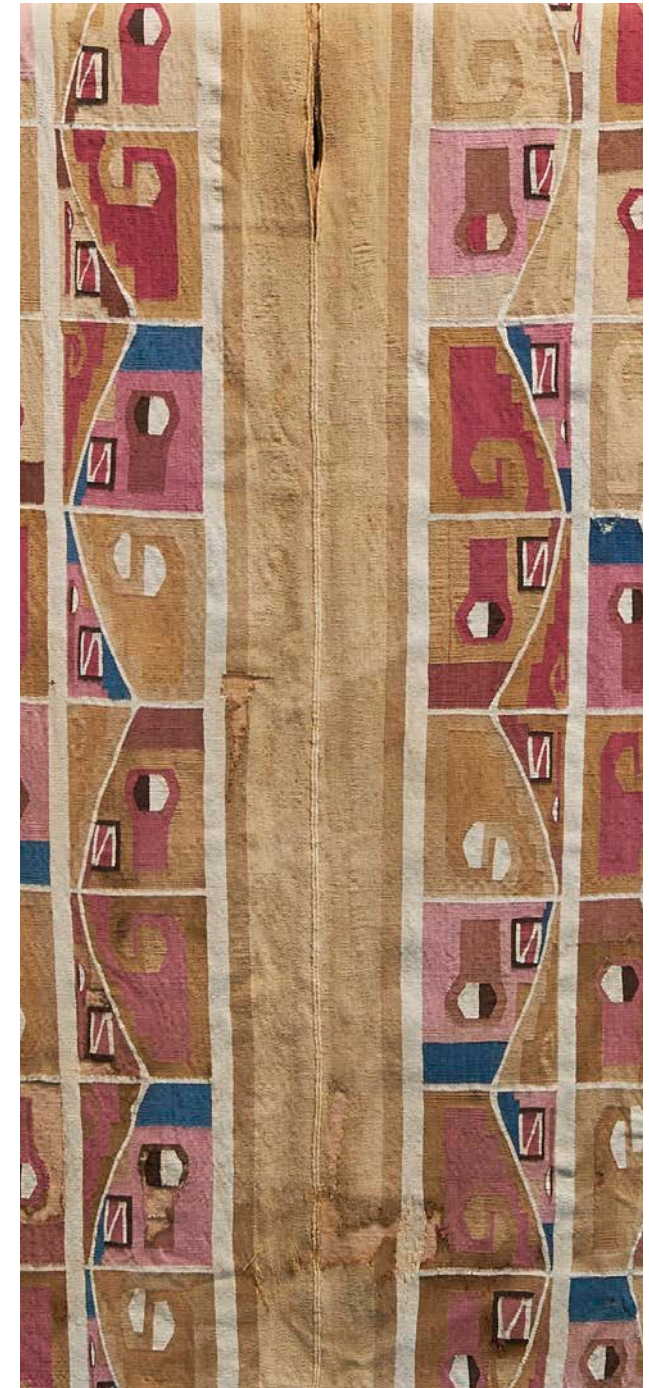
Image Info

1. the Falcon-headed staff bearing figure, from the “Gateway of the Sun” at Tiwanaku, Bolivia, Hughes, P. (1991). *Precolumbian andean textile art*. Carla Sozzani Ed, p42
2. a line drawing of the Falcon-headed staff bearing figure from a Wari textile, showing an intermediate stage of stylisation of the motif, Hughes, P., & Paul Kasmin Gallery. (1995). *Time warps: Ancient Andean textiles*. London: Fine Textile Art, p124
3. a stylised staff-bearing warrior motif on a wari tunic, Tunic Frontal (detail), Wari Culture, c800 AD, 92 x 78 cm, Paul Hughes Collection
4. a line drawing of the staff-bearing warrior motif from a Wari textile, Hughes, P., & Paul Kasmin Gallery. (1995). *Time warps: Ancient Andean textiles*. London: Fine Textile Art, p123
5. a stylised staff-bearing warrior motif on a wari tunic, showing a further stylisation of the same motif, Tunic Segment (detail), Wari Culture, c800 AD, size unclear, Private Collection
6. the famous “Lima Tapestry” in which the staff-bearing warrior motif is intensely abstracted in geometric form, c. 800AD, 100 x 92 cm. Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia, Lima, RT-1650.
7. a line drawing illustrating patterns on a Wari tunic that is derived from the original staff-bearing warrior motif, here shows only the wing (zig-zag motif) and the split-eyes motif in both contracted and expanded forms, Hughes, P. (1991). *Precolumbian andean textile art*. Carla Sozzani Ed, p43
8. a different variation of patterns derived from the same motif, Tunic (Unku, detail), Wari Culture, c. 800AD, 73 x 83cm, Paul Hughes Collection

Stylised Tunic with Split Eyes Motif (detail)

Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, 102 x 100 cm

Paul Hughes Collection



Chimu / Chancay / Inca (1000 - 1400 AD)

The dissolution of the Huari empire about A.D. 1150 brought about the fragmentation of both northern and southern Peru into many regional rural states. Except for the territorially expanding Chimu empire, the prevailing spirit in all of the Andes at this time seems to have become connected to a kind of provincial concerns that were constant on the Central Coast, an area never dominated by strong, pervasive religious or political movements. Chancay weavers were masters of the feather mosaic, and brilliantly exploited all of the previously developed Peruvian techniques. The lack of hierarchical dominance led to an individual freedom whose results are wild and uninhabited.

Textiles often feature matched sets of brocaded lightweight garments, including wide sleeves, loincloths and mantles. Chimu ground cloths can be differentiated from the other Late Intermediate Period styles by a telltale technical feature: pairs of warp threads travel together in the plain weave structure. Most Chimu textiles feature white and other natural colours of cotton that grow on the North Coast. Openwork, in which spaces are deliberately left between worked areas, is also characteristic here and for the Chancay, appropriating the coastal fishnet tradition of the elites.

In terms of imagery, relatively simple, bold versions of profile and frontal crescent-headaddresses are often repeated, depicting the upper class and royalty in living colour. The “staffgod” motif, with its dual Tiahuanaco and Chavin origins, had a significant impact on Chimu styles. Many Huari and Pachacamac motifs seem to continue into Chimu times also as in the instance of the staff god, the motifs are heavily modified from the original, and the ceremonial meanings seem to have been lost.

Another notable artistic expression in the Chancay period is its graffiti-like, playful renderings on textile, evoking a sense of surrealistic spiritualism. Artists used brushes of human hair to apply designs onto the raw cotton. The restrained colours used are typical of a limited range, black, red and shades of ochre, deriving from the ground mineral and organic pigments. While the iconography in such painted works is more limited than other Pre-Columbian weaving textiles, yet the form is generally freer, not being bound by the limitations of technique as with woven pieces.

The Incan aesthetic is as much about the skills employed in the making as it is about the finished article. Their finely worked and highly decorative textiles came to symbolise both wealth and status, and as fine cloth was used as both a tax and currency, the very best textiles were amongst the most prized of all possessions – more precious, even, than silver or gold.

Although it is often assumed that weavers are universally female, this type of tunic almost certainly was woven by male weavers known as *cumbicamayos* (“ones in charge of fine cloth”). The Inca Empire was based on redistribution of goods and labour, especially cloth and its production. Specialists’ creation of fine tapestry cloth, *cumbi*, was tightly controlled and delineated: men made garments for the state to redistribute, such as army uniforms and royal gifts for conquered leaders, while select women (*aclla*) made cloth for religious purposes and royal use, such as clothing for priests, sacred images, and the ruling lineages. Everyday fabric was woven primarily by nonspecialist women, and tread was spun by one and all. Thus, men and women participated at different levels of complex system of cloth production that connected all levels of Inca society.

Study Collection of Manchester Whitworth



Chimu Textile Sample, Brocade technique

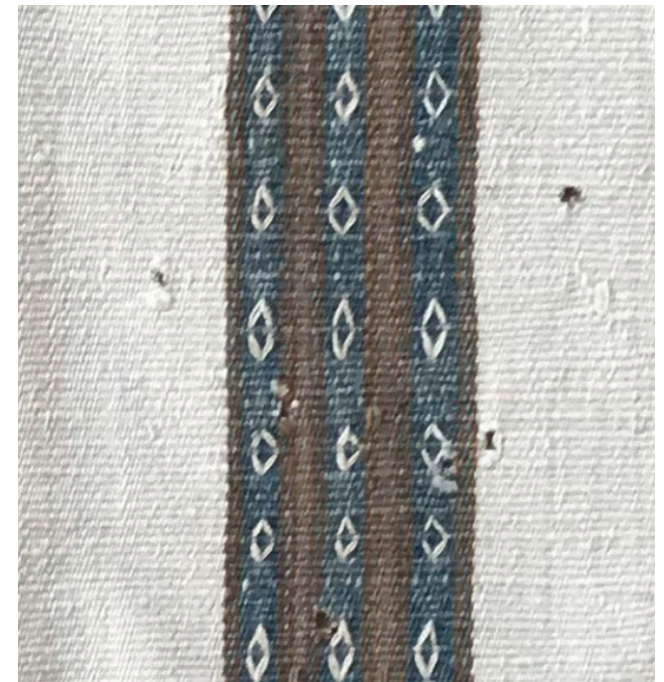


Chimu Textile Sample, Open work technique



Chimu Textile Sample, "telltale" technique

Common motifs featured in Chimu arts, such as the staff god, feline figures



Pre-Columbian Textiles and the Albers

Pre-Columbian textile arts are instrumental in the development of several modern art movements such as the Bauhaus and the Abstract Expressionism. The core members of Bauhaus Anni and Josef Albers first encountered Andean Pre-Columbian Textiles circa 1922 at the Volkerkunde Museum in Berlin. The study of Andean Pre-Columbian Textiles was then incorporated as part of the weaving curriculum at the Bauhaus school which Anni developed with her mentor Paul Klee.

The influence of Central and South America on the practice of this couple's work is tremendous: they have both emphatically expressed their gratitude in that their art would not have been conceivable without their encounter with the southern continent. Anni Albers's weavings and paintings demonstrate her appreciation and knowledge of Andean Pre-Columbian textiles, in particular, the geometric interplay of colours and shapes that are typical of the Wari arts. Similarly, the paintings and photographs by Josef Albers testify to the way he developed his sense of colour in Latin America, and how he continued to further inform his own independent concept of spatial photography.

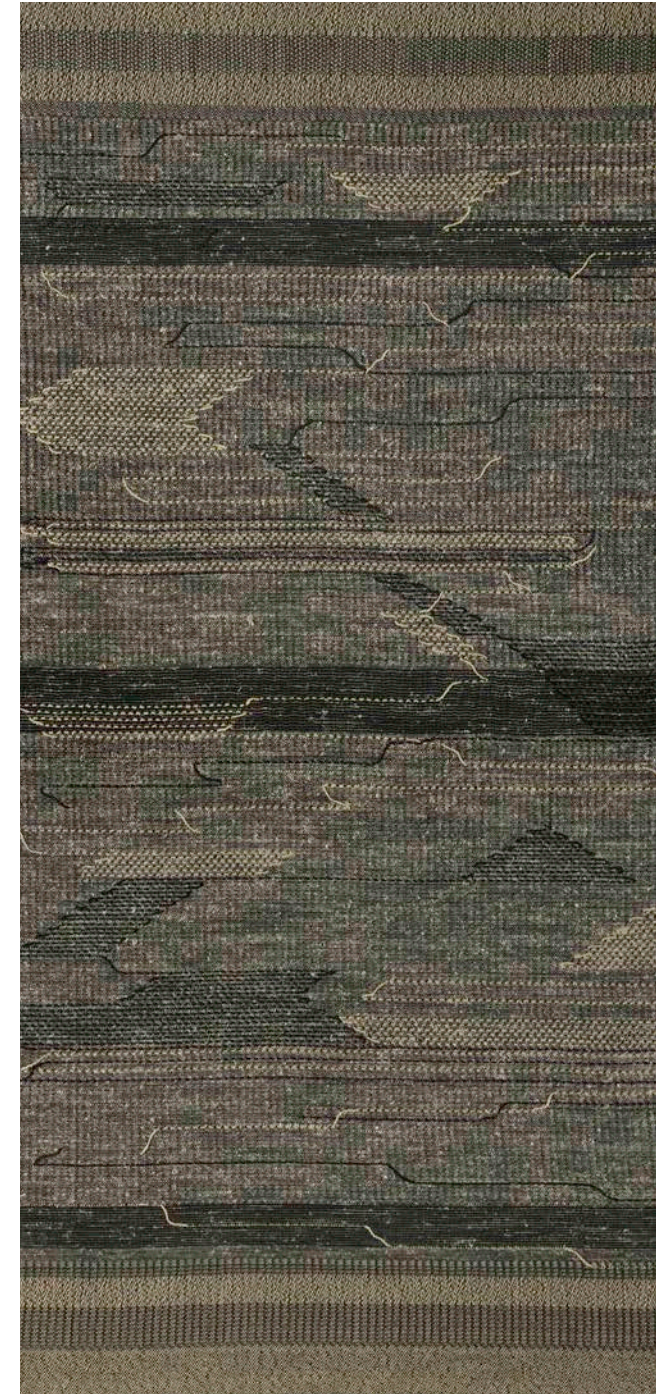
One of the revolutionary ideas that emerged from the Bauhaus weaving workshop was the view that the warp — the vertical, structuring threads — is just as important as the weft — the thread woven through, usually the carrier of colour and pattern. At the Bauhaus, Anni learnt to twist warp threads in order to create open leno weaves, where the fabric separates to expose its underlying structure⁽¹⁾. In this sense, Anni has opened up new grounds for the aesthetics of abstract paintings and sculptures, one that is firmly based on the perpendicular compositions of lines.

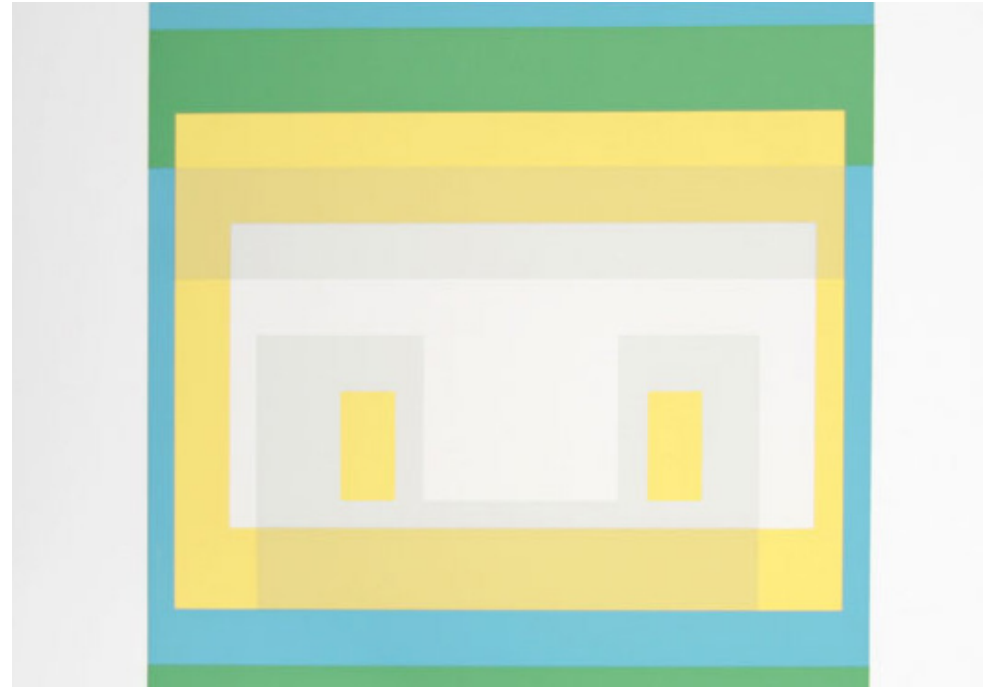
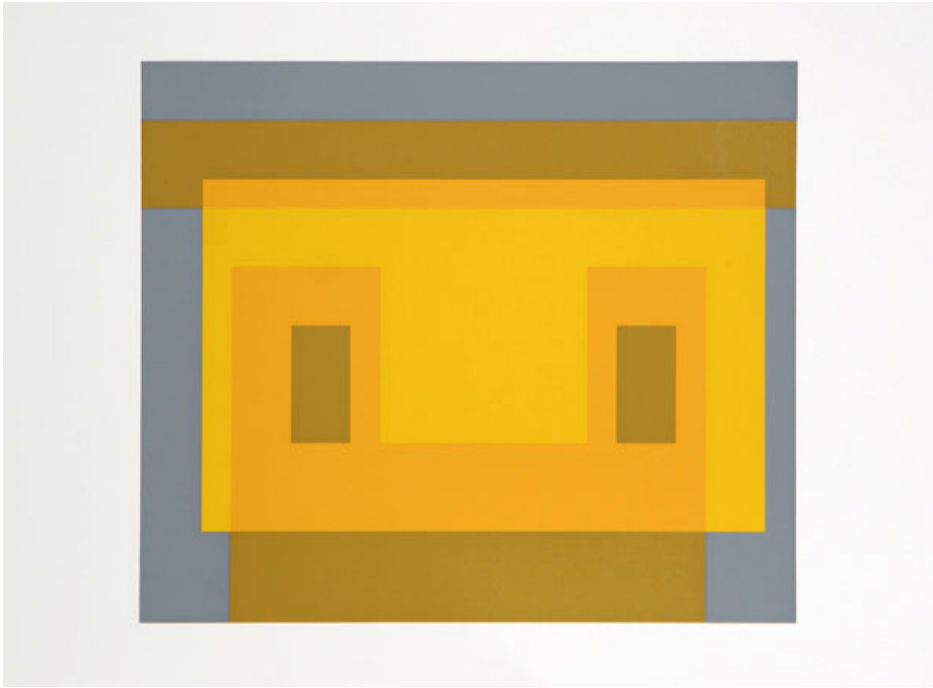
Both modern masters who were once mentored by Anni and Josef, such as Sheila Hicks and Eva Hesse, or those who were influenced by their artistic languages such as Olga de Amaral, Victor Vasarely & Frank Lloyd Wright, have attributed their practices to the arts of Pre-Columbian cultures.

(1). "Weaving Histories"- by Jonathan Griffin, 2016

Anni Albers, **Monte Alban**, 1936, 146 x 112 cm (57 1/2 x 44 1/8 in.), Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard G. Leahy

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Josef Albers, **selected prints from Portfolio: Formulation: Articulation (Double Portfolio)**, Paul Hughes Collection 1972, 38.1 x 50.8 cm
Two Feather Panels, Huari Culture, circa 800 AD, 20 x 38 cm, Private Collection





Tunic (Black & Red Stripe)

Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, Southern Andes, 100 x 115 cm
Paul Hughes Collection

This stunning and monumental example of bold Wari textile aesthetics exemplifies this culture's technical virtuosity in expressing abstractly the beliefs that man has the power to create order, transcend space and time in a nonrepresentative colour field of geometrics. For, surely accustomed as we are with our late XXth century modes of perception freed from representational conventions, the visual impact of this cloth and those of the following group cannot fail to resonate with the archetypal heritage of abstraction inherent within us all.



The sublime beauty of this minimal aesthetics resonates with numerous modern attempts in abstract arts, from the Bauhaus master weaver Anni Albers' "Wallhanging series" in the 1930s, the American Abstract Expressionist Newman's "Adam (1951-52)", to renowned painters in the far east such as the Dansaekua generation.



Wari Tunic (Stepped Motif)

Wari Culture, circa 800 AD, 251 x 155 cm

Paul Hughes Collection

Anni and Josef Albers greatly appreciated such textiles and incorporated the aesthetics of Pre-Columbian art into their works. In her book titled *On Weaving* she said “[her] great teachers, the weavers of ancient Peru”.

Anni Albers, **Camino Real**, Wallhanging, 1967

Photo: Armando Salas Portugal

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Photo © Armando Salas Portugal, Courtesy Fundación Armando Salas Portugal





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