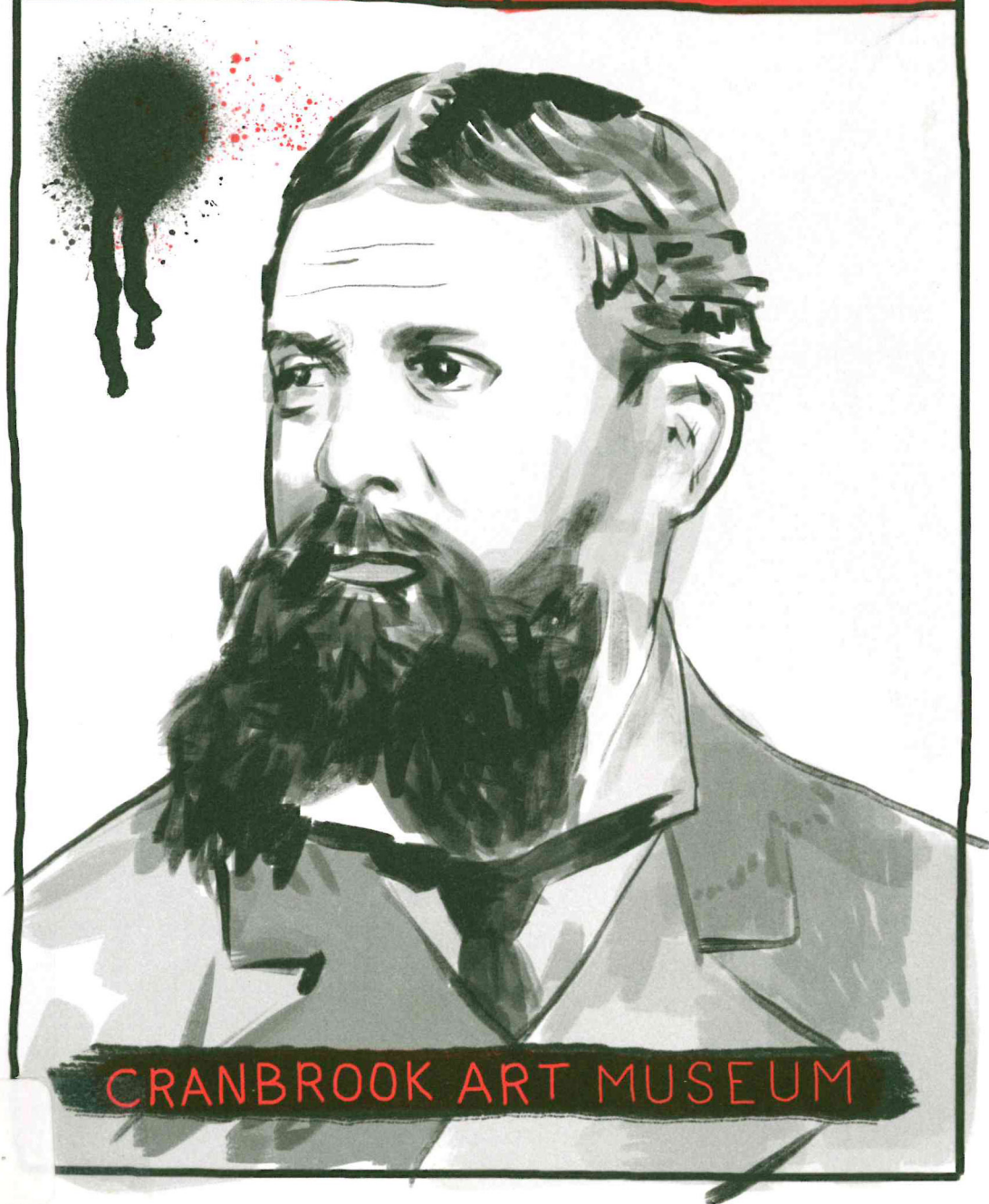


MY BRAIN IS
IN MY
INKSTAND-

DRAWING AS
THINKING
AND
PROCESS



CRANBROOK ART MUSEUM

Ruth Adler Schnee

Born 1923, Frankfurt, Germany. Lives and works in Southfield, Michigan.

EDUCATION

Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, MFA, 1946

Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, BFA, 1945

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Michigan Modern: Design that Shaped America*, Cranbrook

Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

2011 *Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color*, Museo di Palazzo

Mocenigo, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Venice, Italy

2001 *Women Designers in the USA, 1900–2000: Diversity and*

Difference, Bard Graduate Center, New York, New York

Designing Nature

In 1923, Bauhaus artist Paul Klee noted, “For the artist, communication with nature remains the most essential condition. The artist is human; himself nature; part of nature within natural space.”¹ For Klee, biology, chemistry, and physics were constant sources of inspiration, and nature itself became a metaphor for the creative process. Textile designer Ruth Adler Schnee also acknowledges the conscious parallel between methods of scientific research and artistic practice. She credits Klee, a family friend, with first igniting her fascination with organic forms, color, and whimsy. Klee, who had an extensive collection of natural curiosities, as well as colorful mobiles, spinning tops, and handmade toys, made all of these accessible for Schnee to investigate and play with as a fledgling artist. Like Klee, Schnee believes design is the visual response to an environment, and she finds inspiration in everything she sees around her—shells, birds, stones, driftwood, pine trees, and drifting snow.

Schnee was raised in a strict German household and received formal Beaux-Arts training, establishing a foundation of discipline that is evident in her work. She begins her design process with a deliberate examination of inspirational natural forms as exhibited in her pencil sketches. She then reworks her observations, a practice she acquired through her education at Cranbrook Academy of Art, where she learned to consider a problem by breaking it down into components and methodically

studying each element. Her artistic discipline allows her to execute the work repetitively until she is convinced of its validity: "I do things over and over until they sing to me."² She then enters the abstraction phase of her work, where thought-experiments lead her to expand upon the organic forms. *Pinwheels*, a textile pattern inspired by Schnee's love of seashells, illustrates her exploration of the connectivity of the shell-forms to one another and to the negative space around them. As shapes and sizes morph and rematerialize with fluctuating dominance, the relationship between the forms begin developing a rhythmic tension. In the final stage of pattern-making, Schnee subconsciously transmutes her artfully ordered expression into free-flowing whimsy, resulting in a visible manifestation of newly arranged material.

Leslie S. Edwards

- 1 Paul Klee, "Paths of the Study of Natura (Wage dar Natur studiums)," quoted in introduction to *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, trans. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1953).
- 2 Ruth Adler Schnee, conversation with the author, October 4, 2013.



Ruth Adler Schnee, Sketch for *Pinwheels*, 2013



Ruth Adler Schnee, Sketch for *Pinwheels*, 2013



Ruth Adler Schnee, *Nature Drawing*, 1942-1943