

Press Release 2310312022

# Otl Aicher

## 100 YEARS 100 POSTERS

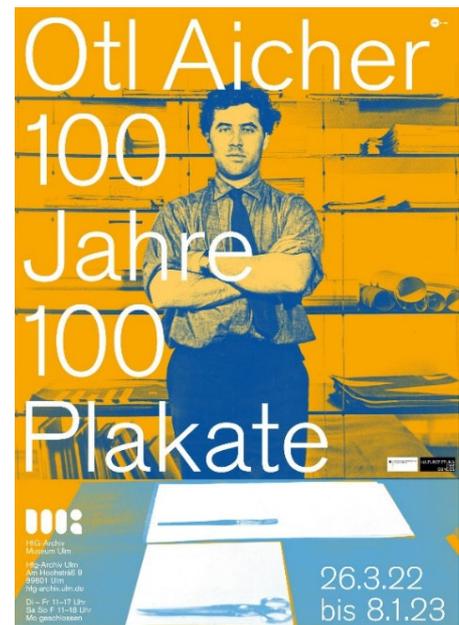
### 26 March 2022 until 08 January 2023

### Opening | Fri | 25 March 2022 | 7 pm

With the exhibition "**Otl Aicher 100 Years 100 Posters**", the **HfG-Archiv / Museum Ulm** honours this year's 100th birthday of this great designer, who was born in Ulm-Söflingen on 13 May 1922, and presents a selection of 100 posters as one of the central and most formative media in his extensive oeuvre.

The first posters were created as early as August 1945. They drew attention to the lectures that **Otl Aicher** organised to revitalise the intellectual and cultural life of Ulm. From this time until his death in 1991, the designer created countless posters. In 1954, he received the **Prix d'Honneur at the Milan Triennale**. In the same year, the **Museum of Modern Art, New York**, purchased one of his posters. In the summer of 1959, he exhibited posters and photographs at the **Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro**.

**Otl Aicher** did not only design in the field of graphics. He wrote, he taught, he philosophised. Above all, he was always a politically thinking and acting person. All these themes are reflected in posters that he designed for very different purposes. **Otl Aicher's** importance for the history of design in the 20th century is undisputed: he was one of the co-founders of the **Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm)**. **Olympic Games in Munich in 1972**, he presented groundbreaking designs. They have lost none of their fascination to this day. For **Otl Aicher**, the poster had a clear task: *"a poster is a communication object, not an art object, and its first function is to be understood, right across society"*.



The selection of posters provides a comprehensive view of **Otl Aicher's** work. It provides a view of the themes he designed and the world of his clients. The first focus is on the posters for the **Ulm Adult Education Centre (vh ulm)**. This is contrasted with the posters for the **XX. Olympic Games 1972 in Munich**. These two blocks complement a selection of projects created for public clients as well as for commercial enterprises. A final focus is on the posters that **Otl Aicher** designs out of his political commitment.

## : The creation of a poster design by Otl Aicher

Otl Aicher began each day with a completely empty desk. There lay a pile of paper and a pencil ready. Otl Aicher's particular strength lay in his ability to encompass, render and capture a figure or object with just a few strokes. For the vh posters, Otl Aicher often began with a line drawing that came easily to him. An appearance combines all the individual parts (posters, letterheads, business cards, product catalogues, etc.) into a larger system. The basis for this is a basic grid that is used in all products. In the case of the poster for Munich Airport, Otl Aicher used a grid as a basis in which he drew the so-called type area.

## : The appearance of the XX Olympic Games 1972

The XX. For West Germany, hosting the **XX Olympic Games in Munich in 1972** meant a great opportunity: for the first time since the end of the Second World War, the country could present itself as a peaceful democracy. The Munich Olympics were to help replace the negative memories of the Berlin Games of 1936 with new, positive impressions. **Otl Aicher**, the official design commissioner for the Games, and his team created a design concept that used the Berlin Olympics as a negative template. It deliberately avoided any pathos, gigantism or ostentation. All the designs of the 11th Division of the Olympic Committee aimed to create a very specific atmosphere, free of prejudices or national rivalries, but full of openness, tolerance and cheerfulness.

The three basic elements of the appearance are colour, font and symbol. **Otl Aicher** and his team first worked out a colour wheel that deliberately avoided red and gold, thus excluding the preferred colours of the Nazis. **Otl Aicher** also made sure to choose colours that did not have associations such as "*power*". Light blue, light green, yellow, orange, dark blue and dark green in combination with silver and white - these colours characterised the whole of Munich in the summer of 1972 and were to be found in changing combinations on all official Olympic articles. The clear and at the same time youthful-modern aesthetics of the Univers typeface by the Swiss graphic designer Adrian Frutiger fitted in well with the declared goals of the image. **Otl Aicher** and his staff therefore chose Univers as the official typography for all printed material for the Games.

To suit the international audience of the Games, **Otl Aicher** and his collaborators often used symbols. The official emblem of the Games was a halo, inspired by the shape of the sun, the flower and the star. It symbolised a radiant Munich as well as the light- and flower-filled landscape of the foothills of the Alps. Pictograms developed especially for the games allowed a non-verbal way of communication and helped to overcome language barriers. The starting point for this sign system were already existing pictograms. **Otl Aicher** and his colleagues checked these signs for their functionality and comprehensibility. With the help of a precisely defined grid and design rules, **Otl Aicher** standardised and simplified the pictograms and added

new symbols. The result was a system design à la **HfG Ulm**. The modular principle as a guarantee of varied uniformity. True to the motto "*sameness through kinship*", the elements of colour, lettering and symbol were found in ever new combinations in all the designs. As standardised, interchangeable building blocks, they helped to give the Munich Olympics a uniform but never stereotypical appearance and to create a relaxed, cheerful atmosphere.

## : Political posters

**Otl Aicher** had refused to join the Hitler Youth as a youth. For this reason, he was not admitted to the written Abitur. In 1943, his friends **Sophie and Hans Scholl** were murdered by the Nazi regime of injustice. In the last weeks of the war, he deserted, risking summary execution. He resisted throughout his life. Throughout his life, **Otl Aicher** was a political man who campaigned for political issues. He took part in Easter marches, demonstrated against rearmament and nuclear armament.

This commitment is reflected in posters he designed for demonstrations, rallies or other events with a political background. They are characterised by a reduced typography that could be realised with simple printing techniques. The poster "*Im schönsten Wiesengrunde*" (In the most beautiful meadow valley) quotes an old German folk song in its title and hides the rockets (Pershings, long-range...) in the figurative solution of the motif.

## : Posters for business and public clients

With the design for the corporate identity of Deutsche Lufthansa presented in 1962, **Otl Aicher** entered the big world of internationally active companies. Clients such as Deutsche Lufthansa, banks and savings banks, Münchner Rück, Bulthaup or Erco and other business enterprises embodied large and influential companies of the old Federal Republic. With their products and offers, they stood for solidity, German quality and comparable values. The selected posters offer an overview of such diverse clients. Similar to the vh posters, **Otl Aicher** starts with the product, which he uses as the basis for the design solution. For the luminaire manufacturer Erco, he develops a word mark (logo) that translates a stronger light into typography with increasing stroke widths of the individual letters E R C O. He reproduces the products with precise drawings that emphasise the technical character of the luminaires.

**Otl Aicher** is freer in his designs for cities. In his choice of motifs, he falls back on typical elements. In the case of Isny, these are elements of the rural Allgäu. In the case of Bad Gastein, the theme of alpine winter sports is in the foreground.

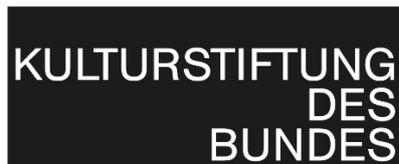
## : From the Otl Aicher Estate - Object(s) of the Month

On a monthly basis, objects from the **Otl Aicher** estate are presented as part of the exhibition. In 1997, **Inge Aicher-Scholl** donated the estate of her husband **Otl Aicher** to the city of Ulm. Since then, the **HfG-Archiv** has inventoried and conserved the collection. The finding aid comprises a total of 2000 pages. It contains handwritten notes, typewritten texts, letters, notes, drafts, extensive correspondence with clients, companies and private documents from the mid-1940s until the last year of his life in 1991. The estate is also open to the public for research.

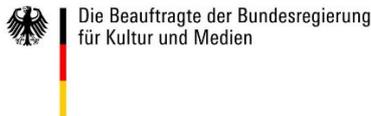
At the start of the exhibition, **Otl Aicher's** hand drawings will be presented as objects of the month. **Otl Aicher** attended the art academy in Munich in 1946/47. Nevertheless, **Otl Aicher** drew all his life. His special talent lay in capturing the motif, be it a person or an object, with a line drawing. Line drawing pervades his entire oeuvre. That is, he encompasses an object with only one line. These lines are of the same stroke width for each drawing. He rarely shades, just as he does not hatch to fill areas. In the drawings from the late 1940s he mainly uses pencil.

An extensive programme of events, which is constantly updated throughout the duration of the exhibition, illuminates further topics from the perspective of design history as well as design practice. For further information, please visit [www.hfg-archiv.museumulm.de](http://www.hfg-archiv.museumulm.de).

Funded by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation)



Funded by the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung Kultur und Medien (Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media)



The second part of the funded exhibition project will take place under the title "**Otl Aicher: Resistance and Protest: Symbols, Gestures, Signals**" from **12 November 2022 to 16 April 2023** in the **Museum Ulm**. The accompanying exhibition publication will also be published.

Fig.: Exhibition poster Otl Aicher 100 Years 100 Posters, HfG Archive / Museum Ulm, design MüllerHocke GrafikDesign

Further information on the exhibition can be found at [www.hfg-archiv.museumulm.de](http://www.hfg-archiv.museumulm.de). There you will also find **text and image material to download** in the **press section**.