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www.hfg-archiv.ulm.de



image: Katharina Sussek, Jens Müller / Studio Vista, Düsseldorf © HfG-Archiv / Museum Ulm

Identity Systems Germany: Visual Identities of the Federal Republic of Germany

Exhibition Dates: October 23, 2026 – March 29, 2027

Press conference on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at the HfG Archiv in Ulm, Am Hochsträß 8, 89081 Ulm

Please RSVP to Katharina Faller by Oct. 19, 2026: k.faller@ulm.de

Press downloads: <https://museumulm.de/presse-downloads/>

Press release dated Oct. 6, 2026

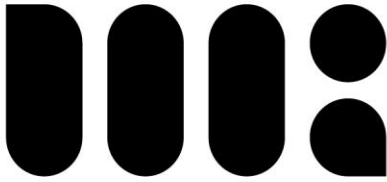
About the Exhibition

With the exhibition "Identity Systems Germany: Visual Identities of the Federal Republic," the HfG Archiv in Ulm, Germany is focusing for the first time on the brand identities of West German companies and institutions after 1945. At the same time, it also looks back at the prewar period and highlights continuities.

From AEG and Braun to Lufthansa, Sparkasse, and ZDF: After 1945, the Federal Republic of Germany was established, and with it numerous companies and organizations that shaped the country's post-World War II reconstruction in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres for decades—in some cases, right up to the present day. To this end, designers developed a new graphic language that sought to be democratic, forward-looking, and as far removed as possible from Nazi aesthetics. Clear lines, sans-serif typefaces, minimalist silhouettes, geometric shapes, and often vibrant colors dominated posters in urban spaces, book covers, and every printable surface.

To this day, these iconic designs remain a valuable source of inspiration for new generations of graphic designers, and it is precisely this consistently democratic design approach that serves as an important reminder in the face of current fascist tendencies and their visual imagery.

Historical examples, such as Peter Behrens' designs for AEG (1907–1914), illustrate the early stages of this development in Germany. The "E5" development group at the Ulm School of Design set new standards for graphic design when, in 1961–62 under the direction of Otl Aicher (1922–1991), it conceived the first systematic corporate identity for Lufthansa AG. Other examples come from designers such as Anton Stankowski (1906–1998), who, among other things, created the logo for Deutsche Bank AG, and Celestino Piatti (1922–2007), who designed book covers for Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag publishing house.



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The exhibition highlights the formative influence of the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm) on the development of graphic design in the young Federal Republic of Germany. On display are posters, manuals, logos, printed materials, and much more.

This is the first time the exhibition has been shown in Germany. In 2024–2025, it was on view in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan, under the title “Identity Systems Germany,” as a collaborative project between the A5 Collection in Düsseldorf and the DNP Foundation for Cultural Promotion in Tokyo.

Deep dives to selected contents of the exhibition

• **Before 1945: The World’s First Corporate Design—Henry van de Velde and Peter Behrens**

The history of systematic visual identities in Germany began shortly before the turn of the century when the Belgian designer Henry van de Velde (1863–1957) was commissioned by the Cologne-based food manufacturer Tropon. Van de Velde designed graphically coordinated packaging, posters, advertisements, and storefront displays. This work from 1896 is considered the world’s first example of corporate design as we understand it today. Peter Behrens (1868–1940) took this a step further between 1907 and 1914 as “artistic advisor” to AEG. In addition to printed materials, product design and architecture also became part of an integrated design solution. He was the first to use custom-designed typefaces to create a unified visual identity. The 1910s and 1920s saw many innovations in brand design, both large and small, some of which are only now being rediscovered.

• **Anton Stankowski (1906–1998)**

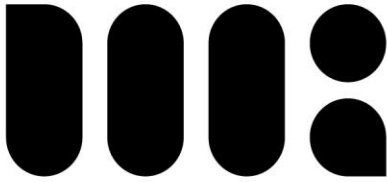
“The simpler and more adaptable the basic visual elements are, the greater their chances of withstanding changes in style. This requires an understanding of how these elements relate to one another and a sense of visual proportions. (...) Every piece of advertising material can be compared to a component. Even if a detail seems insignificant, it must be developed with the utmost care—both on its own and as part of the whole. This is the only way to ensure that, ultimately, the corporate image makes a cohesive impression in the market.”
Anton Stankowski, Ottmar S. Rechenauer, Firmen-Image, 1969

Born in 1906, Stankowski began studying at the Folkwang School in Essen in 1927. Influenced by his teacher Max Burchartz, he soon began creating his first corporate design solutions and “functional graphics.” From 1929 to 1934, Stankowski lived in Zurich, where he established contacts with the leading figures of Swiss constructive graphic design. After serving in the war and being held as a prisoner of war, he returned to Germany in 1948. In the 1950s, he founded his own studio in Stuttgart and became one of the most successful graphic designers of the postwar era. As a specialist in logos and systematic corporate design, he worked for many well-known companies in the young Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time, he was always active as a painter and was one of the few figures to gain recognition in both the commercial and artistic worlds. In 1972, he began collaborating with designer Karl Duschek, who became a partner in the design studio in 1981. Stankowski died in 1998. The Stankowski+Duschek design studio continued to operate until 2012.

Otl Aicher (1922–1991)

“The high degree of variation resulting from systematization is both manageable and controllable. Decisions are predetermined by the system and are no longer subject to highly subjective judgments. Once the aesthetic standard of the entire system has been accepted, subsequent decisions no longer involve complex interpretations of taste. They are largely matters of common sense.”

Otl Aicher, E 5. Entwicklung 5 an der Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, 1964



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“people are as they show themselves and as they show themselves so are they. the visual image is not just external, although it is seen as such by many according to classical philosophy. it is the actual thing. one cannot exist without showing oneself and as one shows oneself so one is. this makes the question of the visual image first and foremost a philosophical and moral problem. it does not lead first to the problem of clothing, of fashion, of manner. it leads to the question of existence. who am i?”

Otl Aicher, *die welt als entwurf/the world as design*, 1991

Born in 1922, Aicher spent his youth in Nazi Germany. He was one of the few who openly opposed the Nazi regime. He later married Inge Scholl, the older sister of the executed resistance fighters Hans and Sophie Scholl. After the war, he briefly studied sculpture in Munich but soon afterward began a career as a self-taught graphic designer in his hometown of Ulm. Building on the foundation of the Ulm Adult Education Center, he and his wife, together with the Swiss Bauhaus artist Max Bill, founded the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm). As a pioneer of modern visual identities, he created systematic visual identities for numerous companies and institutions in West Germany. From the early 1970s onward, Aicher and his team worked in a converted farmhouse in the Allgäu region of southern Germany. In addition to his work on visual identities, he designed a large number of books as well as the rotis typeface family. He died in 1991 as a result of a traffic accident.

The Ulm School of Design and Visual Identities

The Ulm School of Design (1953–1968) was an internationally recognized institution for industrial design education. Its founders—Inge Scholl, the sister of Hans and Sophie Scholl; graphic designer Otl Aicher; and architect and artist Max Bill—had set themselves the goal of rethinking and reorganizing life in Germany after the end of fascism. They drew inspiration from the ideas of Modernism. Well-designed industrial products were intended to help everyone achieve prosperity and a good life in a democratically organized, free society.

The curriculum initially drew on the teachings and experiences of the Bauhaus. After completing their basic course, students enrolled in the departments of Product Design, Visual Communication, Architecture, Information (until 1964), and Film (beginning in 1962).

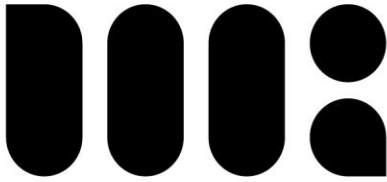
In the 1956–57 academic year, the Visual Design Department was renamed Visual Communication, modeled after the Department for Visual Communication at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. The renaming reflected a shift in focus: graphic design was to be understood as a medium of communication serving a wide variety of purposes.

This aspect is of interest when working on visual identities, since the focus is not merely on individual designs for letterheads or business cards, but on translating a company's identity into a memorable visual language.

The E5 development group, led by Otl Aicher, created the Lufthansa corporate identity as a practical project, setting global standards. Building on this, the semester projects on corporate identity developed in the following years were increasingly characterized by a systematic approach.

Notable visiting and guest lecturers included: Otl Aicher, Gui Bonsiepe, Anthony Frøshaug, Herbert W. Kapitzki, Tomás Gonda, Tomás Maldonado, Josef Müller-Brockmann, Fritz Querengässer, Wolfgang Schmidt, Anton Stankowski, Kohei Sugiura, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, and others.

The department was the third-largest at the Ulm School of Design, with a total of 158 students, 32 of whom were women—representing 23 percent—and had the highest proportion of women among all departments.



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Visitor information

Accompanying Program

Public Guided Tours

Sun, Oct. 25, Nov. 22, Dec. 27, 26, Jan. 24, Feb. 7, Feb. 28, Mar. 28, 27, at 3:00 p.m. each day

Sun, Nov. 8, Dec. 13, 26, Jan. 10, Feb. 14, Mar. 14, 27, 11:15 a.m. each day

€3 participation fee plus admission

Private tours for groups of up to 25 people: 70 € (80 € on weekends) per group,
plus admission

Tours for schoolchildren and college students available upon request

Information and booking form available at

www.museumulm.de/vermittlungsangebote or by email at: vermittlung.museum@ulm.de

New Guided Tour Format: "Open the Box"

To complement the exhibition, we'll open boxes and cabinets and showcase items from our collection that tie in with the exhibition's theme.

€3 participation fee plus admission

Friday, Nov. 13, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

Otl Aicher, Visual Identities

In the remote village of Rotis in the Allgäu region, where Otl Aicher settled with his family after 1972, he created designs for industrial companies and public institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany. Our selection offers insights into the diversity of Otl Aicher's clients.

Friday, January 15, 27, 3:00 p.m.

Hans (Nick) Roericht, Brand Identity for Heinle, Wischer & Partner

In 1978, Hans (Nick) Roericht's private design studio created a comprehensive brand identity for the Stuttgart-based architecture firm. Since the research and working materials have been preserved in their entirety, it is possible to trace both the underlying concepts and the design process itself.

Friday, March 12, 2027, 3:00 p.m.

Designs by Graduates of the HfG Ulm

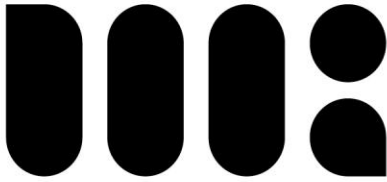
Students trained in the Department of Visual Communication have created brand identities, posters, logos, and other graphic designs throughout their professional careers. Much of this work has been deposited or donated to the HfG archive. We present a cross-section of these works.

New Event Format: At the Wellentresen (wave-shaped bar at the Ulm School of Design building)

Sunday, Nov. 29, 2026, 11:00 a.m.

In 2025, HfG graduate Ursula Wenzel published a collection of texts by design historian Jörg Stürzebecher (1961–2020). Together with Ms. Helge Aszmoneit of the German Design Council, the editor will present the book and the author, who frequently wrote about the HfG Ulm.

Admission fee: €3



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Opening hours

Tue–Sun and public holidays, 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Closed on Dec. 24, 25, and 31, as well as Carnival Tuesday (Mar. 9) and Good Friday (Mar. 26)

Admission Prices

Permanent and special exhibitions: €5 (regular), €4 (reduced)

Admission is free on the first Friday of every month at the Museum Ulm, the HfG Archive, and the kunsthalle weishaupt. Free admission for, among others, children and young people up to and including age 18 (with the exception of school groups: €1 per student).

- ### Exhibition Venue

HfG Archive Ulm (3rd floor)
Am Hochsträß 8
89081 Ulm

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Information on directions, access, and accessibility is available at hfg-archiv.museumulm.de

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