

Stadt Ulm

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www.hfg-archiv.ulm.de



Otl Aicher, 1958
Fotograf Wolfgang Siol © HfG-Archiv / Museum Ulm

Open Call: Tools for Democracy Designer in Residence 2027

Designer/Artist-in-Residence Program 2027
Offered by the HfG Archiv / Museum Ulm and the Ulm School of Design (HfG) Foundation

The 2027 Designer-in-Residence Fellowship is being offered by the Ulm School of Design (HfG) Foundation and the HfG Archiv / Museum Ulm under the theme "Tools for Democracy." In 2027, an exhibition project titled "Otl Aicher: Shaping Democracy—Design Shapes the Future" will open at the HfG Archiv, dedicated to the work of Otl Aicher and his political impact.

The exhibition project is aimed at all generations. Using the designer's life and work as an example, it will demonstrate how a democratic society benefits from—and depends on—the political engagement of every individual. The outcome of the fellowship should tie in thematically with the planned exhibition and can be presented therein as a "tool for democracy."

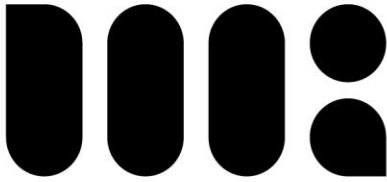
In August 1945, just a few weeks after the end of World War II in May 1945, Otl Aicher invited the philosopher of religion and priest Romano Guardini to deliver a lecture with the programmatic title "Truth and Lies." This topic is as relevant today as it was then.

Through his graphic designs—including the posters for the vth Ulm Adult Education Center and, above all, the visual identity for the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich—he developed a visual language that was universally understood and was also interpreted as an expression of a new democratic self-image.

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Otl Aicher and his wife, Inge Aicher-Scholl, were active in the Easter Marches in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as in the peace movement of the 1980s.

Aicher published his views in numerous books. Titles such as "The World as a Design" are more relevant today than ever, as they offer readers guidance. Aicher was uncompromising in his views and at times expressed a distinctly critical stance, for example toward the state or the established church. With some of his seemingly unassailable formulations, he occasionally overshoots the mark, yet readers find ample opportunities for reflection in his texts. The texts provide written tools that enable one to take a stand in socially and politically challenging situations. The scholarship being offered is intended to build on this stance.



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We welcome submissions from all design disciplines, particularly those taught at the HfG (product design, visual communication, information design, architecture, film), as well as from related fields. The outcome of the residency should be conceived in such a way that it fits seamlessly into the two-year exhibition project.

In terms of content, the fellow may explore topics such as democracy, civic engagement, elections, manipulation, information, and fake news, or focus directly on Otl Aicher's commitment to democracy and his political thought.

The HfG Archiv / Museum Ulm is announcing a fellowship for the year 2027—the fifth such opportunity as part of its “Designer or Artist in Residence” program. Through this series, the HfG Archive aims to combine its dual role as a museum and archive within the premises of the former educational institution with contemporary design research and outreach.

Otl Aicher - Biography

Otl Aicher (1922–1991) was a co-founder, interim rector, and one of the most influential professors at the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm). In his youth, he refused to join the Hitler Youth, which is why he was unable to earn his high school diploma. As head of the Visual Communication Department, he set decisive standards in the fields of graphic design and visual design. Together with the members of his “E5” development group, he created visual identities at the university for Braun and Deutsche Lufthansa. In 1968, he was appointed design director for the Olympic Games in Munich. After 1972, he carried out projects for Bayerische Rückversicherung, Bulthaup, Dresdner Bank, ERCO Lighting, Frankfurt Airport, FSB, Westdeutsche Landesbank, and ZDF. The pictograms he had been developing since 1968 quickly evolved into an international pictorial symbol system. Otl Aicher is also known as a photographer and the author of numerous works of cultural criticism.

Otl Aicher – About the Estate

Otl Aicher's estate was donated by the Aicher-Scholl family to the HfG Archiv / Museum Ulm in the summer of 1996. It includes correspondence related to approximately 350 projects, 4,000 posters, 27,000 design sheets, 30,000 slides, photo prints, and negatives, as well as numerous exhibition panels, manuscripts, typescripts, and much more. The collection is cataloged in a finding aid: https://hfg-archiv.museumulm.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/09_aicher-2024.pdf

This extensive collection is available for use during the fellowship.

Opportunities – What Is Expected?

Otl Aicher's work can serve as a starting point and focal point. We expressly do not expect designs in the “style of” Otl Aicher or the Ulm School of Design, but rather independent, contemporary approaches.

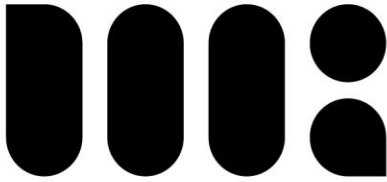
Who Can Apply?

The program is specifically aimed at emerging talent in design disciplines. For the 2027 residency, however, it is open not only to graduates with a background in design practice but also to individuals working in the fields of game and learning design, film, illustration (e.g., graphic novels), photography, and other visual media.

What does the fellowship include?

The recipient, selected by a jury, will receive the following benefits as part of a six-month fellowship from the HfG Archiv Ulm and the HfG Ulm Foundation:

- A monthly stipend of €1,350
- A budget for work materials (to be determined)
- A one-time reimbursement of travel expenses (travel to and from Ulm) equivalent to a second-class train ticket or, if the travel time exceeds 6 hours, the cost of a flight in the lowest class (economy or comparable class)
- Workspace in the HfG Archiv, access to workshops, research support
- Free guest apartment on campus directly adjacent to the former HfG Ulm, kindly provided by the HfG Ulm Foundation
- Support with public relations and, if applicable, contact with local partners, as well as opportunities for presentations and discussions



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- Inclusion and presentation of the residency results as part of the exhibition “Otl Aicher: Shaping Democracy! Design Shapes the Future” (starting in the fourth quarter of 2027)

What are the requirements for accepting the scholarship?

- Personal responsibility: valid health and liability insurance, if necessary, obtaining a visa for your stay in Ulm on your own, as well as covering your living expenses and meals
- Six-month period of presence in Ulm (March 1–September 30, 2027, or as agreed), with the project to be completed by December 2027 at the latest. Longer absences must be discussed with the scholarship provider and reported in a timely manner.
- Use of documents and planning materials from the HfG Archive’s holdings and the Otl Aicher estate
- Procurement of work materials (with support from the HfG Archive)
- Interim presentation within the institution (with members of the jury) approximately halfway through the project
- Documentation of one’s own work processes and results with the aim of presenting them publicly as part of the exhibition (beginning in the fourth quarter of 2027).
- German and/or English may be used as working languages. Proficiency in reading German is mandatory.

Process

How can I apply?

- CV and portfolio (selection of previous projects, documented samples of work)
- Letter of motivation and description of the proposed work or project outline (including a cost estimate and/or sketches) for the residency, relating to the theme “Tools for Democracy” and the HfG Archiv, max. 3 pages, in German or English.
- Applicants should have completed at least a bachelor’s degree (B.A.) by the start of the residency.

What is the application and selection process?

- Submit your application materials as a PDF (max. 15 MB) by October 15, 2026, exclusively via email to m.maentele@ulm.de

(Links via Dropbox and similar platforms are not permitted.)

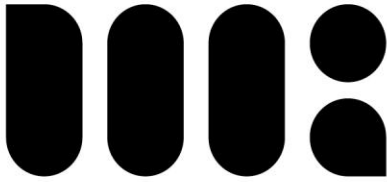
- After reviewing the submitted applications, a jury will convene in November 2026 to select a candidate
- Conclusion of the process: expected by the end of November 2026, with written notification to the candidates regarding the jury’s decision without providing reasons
- The jury consists of:
 - External juror 1 (to be invited)
 - External juror 2 (to be invited)
 - Viktoria Lea Heinrich, M.A., Curator, HfG Archive
 - Dr. Martin Mäntele, Director, HfG Archive Ulm
 - Alexander Wetzig, Dipl. Ing., HfG Foundation Ulm, or a representative of the foundation

Submitting an application for the scholarship does not guarantee that you will receive it.

Only applications submitted by email by October 15, 2026 (11:59 p.m.) will be considered. The scholarship will be awarded by the jury. The jury’s decision is final.

Contact: HfG Archive / Museum Ulm
Designer in Residence
Attn: Dr. Martin Mäntele
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Reading list (selection)

Zur HfG Ulm

Bernd Rübenach, Der rechte Winkel von Ulm. Ein Bericht über die Hochschule für Gestaltung 1958/59, Darmstadt 1957.

Ulmer Modelle - Modelle nach Ulm: Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm 1953–1968, Ulmer Museum, HfG-Archiv (Hg.), anlässlich der gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Stadthaus Ulm 2003, Ostfildern-Ruit 2003

Christiane Wachsmann, Vom Bauhaus beflügelt: Menschen und Ideen an der Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, Stuttgart 2018.

- HfG-Archiv Ulm: Die Hochschule für Gestaltung: Von der Stunde Null bis 1968. Hrsg. von HfG-Archiv / Museum Ulm. Höhenkirchen-Siegertsbrunn, Edition Logika, 2023. Band 23 (nicht im Handel, nur im Schriftentausch mit dem HfG-Archiv erhältlich).

Christopher Haaf, Von Ulm in die Welt: Ausstellungen und die internationale Öffentlichkeit der HfG Ulm, Leipzig 2024.

Linus Rapp, Wohltuende Sachlichkeit: Ausstellungsgestaltung an der HfG Ulm, Leipzig 2024.

Books by Otl Aicher (selection)

- die welt als entwurf, Berlin 1991.

analog und digital, mit einer Einführung von Wilhelm Vossenkuhl, Berlin 1991.

schreiben und widersprechen, Berlin 1993.

About Otl Aicher

Peter Schubert, Otl Aicher: Der Denker am Objekt. Film, 45 min. Deutschland, 1992.

Markus Rathgeb, Otl Aicher, London, New York 2006

Eva Moser, Otl Aicher: Gestalter, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2011

Wilhelm Nerdinger, Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (Hrsg.), Otl Aicher: Designer, Typograf, Denker, München 2022

Tilman Allert, „Otl Aicher und das Abenteuer der Oberfläche, in: Protest! gestalten: Von Otl Aicher bis heute. Ausst. Kat. Museum Ulm, Ulm 2022, S. 26-34.

Website Otl Aicher 100

<https://www.otlaicher.de/>