AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Otl Aicher

German graphic designer and typographer, 1922 to 1991

Otl Aicher co-founded the Ulm School of Design and led visual design for the 1972 Munich Olympics, including its pictogram system and mascot Waldi. He also shaped corporate programs such as Lufthansa and designed the Rotis typeface. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.

PORTRAIT NOT REPRODUCED

See photographs of Otl Aicher in his biography at otl aicher 100 →

FURTHER LOOKING

otl aicher 100 Vita: Dated biography timeline. otlaicher.de
piktogramm.de: Pictogram licensing site. piktogramm.de
MoMA artist page: Collection link from the original deck. moma.org
Reference: Otl Aicher
Video: "The Man Who Created a Universal Visual Language"

01 Fact Sheet

1922	Born Otto Aicher on May 13 in Ulm, Germany.
1945	Deserts the Wehrmacht (Vita). Close to the Scholl family and White Rose circle.
1946 to 1947	Studies sculpture in Munich, then opens a studio in Ulm.
1953	Co-founds HfG Ulm with Inge Aicher-Scholl and Max Bill.
1967 to 1972	Design commissioner for the Munich Olympic Games.
1972	Pictogram system and Waldi, the first official Olympic mascot.
1988	Develops the Rotis typeface family.
1991	Dies September 1 in Günzburg after a traffic accident at Rotis.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

FIVE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1962 Lufthansa crane system	**1972** Munich Olympic pictograms	**1972** Olympic Park signs	**1972** Waldi	**1988** Rotis

02 Five Key Works

1962: Lufthansa crane system

Circular crane in the airline redesign

A deck timeline places the circular crane in the 1962 redesign era. Later circle weights change, yet the bird remains a clear mark.

LOOK FOR Crane inside a circle | Year labels under each revision

IMAGE NOT REPRODUCED
View this work at otl aicher 100 →

1972: Munich Olympic pictograms

Signs in the Munich landscape

Aicher's pictograms still hang at the Olympic sites in Munich, like this pair for athletics and soccer. The same grid figures that appear on paper also guide people outdoors.

LOOK FOR White figures on solid green panels | Sport actions reduced to angle and posture

See the full pictogram system at piktogramm.de →



Munich Olympic pictograms, 1972. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 1.0.

1972: Olympic Park signs

Finding your way in one visual language

The same pictograms guide people across the whole Olympic Park, not just inside the sports halls. This sign at the Olympiastadion pairs two sport figures with the stadium name. It was still in place when this photo was taken in 2017.

LOOK FOR Pictograms paired with a place name | Plain type set on the same green panel

Read about the Munich design team at otl aicher 100 →



Olympic Park signs, 1972. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

1972: Waldi

First official Olympic mascot

Wikipedia describes Waldi, a striped dachshund, as the first official Olympic mascot. The stripes pick up the bright Munich Games palette.

LOOK FOR Diagonal color bands on the body | A friendly animal built from simple shapes

IMAGE NOT REPRODUCED
View this work at otl aicher 100 →

1988: Rotis

A typeface named for his home

Aicher named this typeface family after Rotis, the hamlet in southern Germany where he lived and worked. Rotis comes in four styles, from a full serif to a plain sans serif. The idea was one family that stays easy to read in every style.

LOOK FOR Small, hinted serifs in the Semi Serif style | The same shapes shared across all four styles

Read about Rotis on Wikipedia →



Rotis, 1988. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

TRY THIS

When you invent a pictogram, draw it on a 45-degree grid first. If it fails at small size, the idea is not clear yet.

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REFLECT
Think About It

Trace one pictogram on a 45-degree grid. What body part can you remove and still read the sport? Why does that matter in a crowd?

03 Sources

WORKS CITED

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