



Kraftwerk

by Heinrich Heidersberger – An Iconic Image Turns 50

#4148_5 Kraftwerk der
Volkswagen AG,
Wolfsburg 1971
© Heinrich Heidersberger

Heinrich Heidersberger's iconic 1971 photograph *Kraftwerk der Volkswagen AG* is turning fifty. This anniversary presents an opportunity to (re)discover the photographic work of one of the most fascinating German photographers, who developed his own photographic language defined by an elegant, high-contrast style. Heidersberger made a name for himself with his architectural photography, worked for Stern and other magazines, and incorporated surrealistic influences into his images throughout his career. Notably, there is also an enigmatic humor to the carefully composed and expressive black-and-white photographs. Heidersberger's work, in its thematic and stylistic diversity, reflects the most important developments in twentieth-century German history.

A series of events held at partner institutions from September to November 2021 will consider the photograph from a variety of perspectives. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg will present an exhibition on the iconic image *Kraftwerk der Volkswagen AG* (September 16–November 14, 2021); the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg will examine the factors that define his imagery; and the Heidersberger Institute will offer guided tours of its archive

located in the photographer's former studio in Schloss Wolfsburg, offering visitors a glimpse behind the scenes and introducing them to his body of work. The highlight event will be a panel discussion on November 4 at Autostadt Wolfsburg.

When Heinrich Heidersberger (1906–2006) photographed the Volkswagen AG power plant in November 1971 for an exhibition at Haus Wolfsburg on the 1972 Olympics in Munich, he created an image that became the crowning achievement of his career as an architectural photographer. “This image is a culmination of the various influences he was exposed to throughout his artistic life,” explains Bernd Rodrian, director of the Heidersberger Institute.

A leading modernist photographer, Heidersberger is considered one of the central figures of abstract photography in the 1950s. He is linked to New Objectivity and made a name for himself as an outstanding experimental photographer. A perfectionist, Heidersberger also achieved renown for his experiments with light, which had a significant impact on his work. As a representative of “generative photography,” which employs technical means external to the camera to influence the image, he expanded the boundaries of the medium.



#1029_16 Privathaus,
Wolfsburg 1967
© Heinrich Heidersberger

Kraftwerk, the Iconic Image

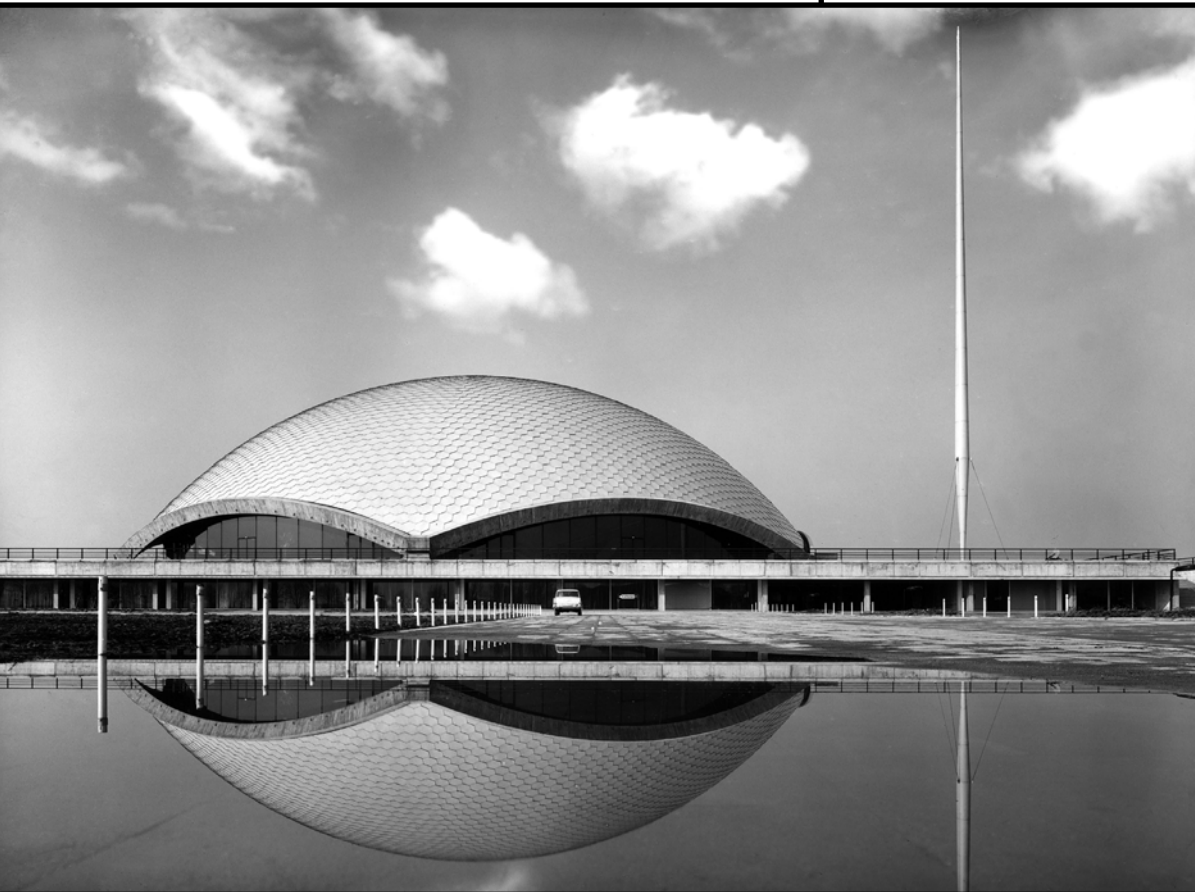
A rare wind from the east, a crisp, clear autumn morning, the vanishing point shifted to the left half of the image, the opposite bank paralleling the horizon — the technique, timing, and weather conditions for the photo were skillfully chosen. The view from underneath the bridge magically draws the viewer into the depopulated scene. Color filters produce a deep, dark sky and snow-white vapor, the long exposure time literally freezes the water. In this otherworldly yet arresting image, Andreas Beitin, director of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, sees the ostensible merging of utopia and dystopia. And Benjamin Heidersberger, managing director of the Institute elucidates: “At the time of its creation,

this image stood for new beginnings, the economic miracle, and pride in what had been achieved; added to this in subsequent years are the crises in oil prices, the environment, and 'Limits to Growth'. As such, it also reveals how Germany has been transformed."

Heidersberger was a *European* par excellence. Born in Ingolstadt in 1906, he grew up in Linz, Austria, and spent part of his childhood in Denmark. He studied architecture in Graz and eventually turned to painting. At the end of the 1920s, he was drawn to the bohemian scene of Paris. Inspired by the surrealism of the Parisian avant-garde around Giorgio de Chirico and Fernand Léger, he enrolled at the latter's Académie Moderne, where he embraced the medium of photography. From surrealism he retained a mischievous interplay of image details and distinctive choice of perspective. After World War II, he became one of the most sought-after architectural photographers in Germany.



#9013_41 MS Atlantic,
1954
© Heinrich Heidersberger



#940_8 Jahrhunderthalle,
Hoechst 1963
© Heinrich Heidersberger

He traveled around the globe for *Stern* and as a journalist also took color photographs. After stints in Salzgitter and Braunschweig, he was drawn to the city of Wolfsburg in 1961, where he lived and worked until his death in 2006. In 1963, his images for the publication *Wolfsburg—Bilder einer jungen Stadt* (Wolfsburg — Images of a Young City), defined the self-image of the only twenty-five-year-old city and its residents. He remained engaged to the end of his life and was involved in confronting Wolfsburg's history and its legacy of forced labor.



Heidersberger's overall body of work comprises around 130,000 images from the fields of architecture, reportage, industry, and advertising, as well as algorithmic experiments. Since 2002, the work has been archived, organized, and published by the Heidersberger Institute, housed in the photographer's former studio in Schloss Wolfsburg.

The project is supported by the city of Wolfsburg, the Volkswagen Group and the Freunde Heidersberger e.V. association.

Please find further information on
kraftwerk.heidersberger-digital.de

#9013_42 MS Atlantic,
 1954
 © Heinrich Heidersberger

#1016_11 Osram,
 München 1966
 © Heinrich Heidersberger



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