

# The WOLGEN Singer Photo STUDIO Through FOUR eyes

## PROGRAM In German

EXHIBITION TALK  
Thursday, July 17, 6.30pm  
*(Un)gleichgewicht? – Paare in der Gestaltung*  
With Bettina Richter, Curator of the Poster Collection,  
and Meret Ernst, Curator

GUIDED TOURS  
Sunday, 11am  
May 25, June 8/22/29, July 6/20,  
August 3/17/31, September 7

WORKSHOPS  
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES  
Sunday, June 22, 2–4.30pm  
*Ohne Licht keine Fotografie*  
With Leila Remstedt-Drews, Cultural mediator  
For children from 5 years old, accompanied

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS  
Saturday, June 21, 2–4.30pm  
*Licht & Komposition:*  
*Objekte fotografisch in Szene setzen*  
With Lukas Saxer, Photographer

Friday, June 6, 9–11am  
*Die Kraft der Bilder:*  
*Wie Fotografie unsere Wahrnehmung prägt*  
With Franziska Hess, Mediation employee, Museum für  
Gestaltung Zurich, and Manuela Hitz, Musée Visionnaire

Registration and further offers for children & families,  
schools, young people & adults, and accessible & inclusive:  
[museum.gestaltung.ch](http://museum.gestaltung.ch)

OPENING HOURS  
Tuesday to Sunday: 10am–5pm  
Thursday: 10am–8pm  
[museum-gestaltung.ch/visit](http://museum-gestaltung.ch/visit)  
Museum für Gestaltung Zürich  
Toni-Areal  
Pfingstweidstrasse 96  
8005 Zürich  
+41 43 446 67 67  
Tram 4, stop Toni-Areal

[museum-gestaltung.ch](http://museum-gestaltung.ch)

The Museum of the Zurich University of the Arts, [zhdk.ch](http://zhdk.ch)

Museum  
für Gestaltung  
Zürich



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI  
Bundesamt für Kultur BAK



Das Museum der  
Zürcher Hochschule der Künste  
[zhdk.ch](http://zhdk.ch)

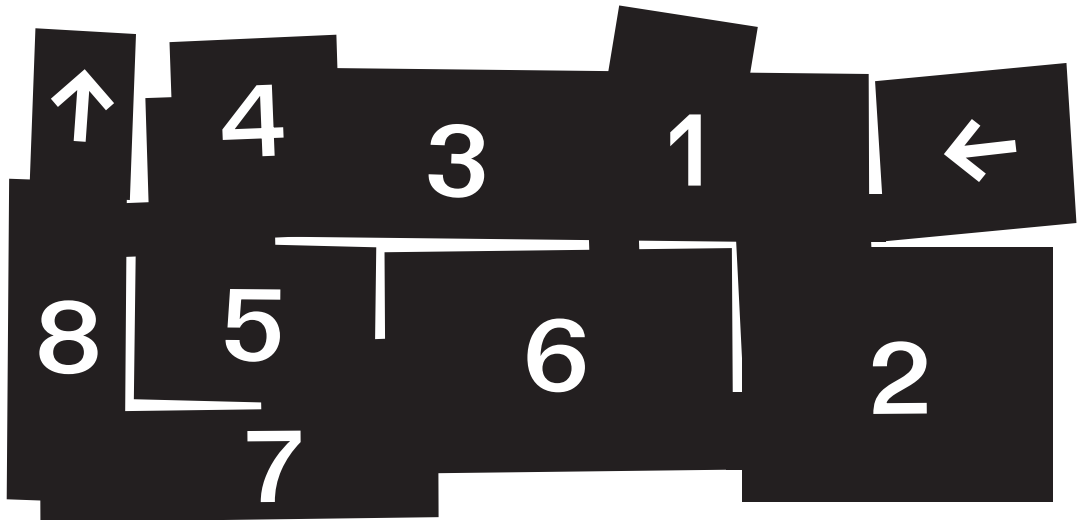


THE WOLGENSINGER PHOTO STUDIO—THROUGH FOUR EYES

The photo studio of Luzzi and Michael Wolgensinger, founded in 1936, was a Zurich institution for six decades. With a pictorial language in the tradition of New Objectivity, the studio exemplified the spirit of their time and quickly became the preferred partner of many designers and clients, as well as a vital meeting place for the international avant-garde.

The two found each other and their distinctive style at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich. After completing an apprenticeship as a photographer, in 1935 Michael Wolgensinger began auditing classes of Hans Finsler in the then newly established photography department. He afterwards worked in Finsler’s studio for object and architectural photography. Luzzi Herzog completed the photography class during these years, and she and Michael became a couple, both personally and professionally.

The Wolgensingers’ studio initially specialized in reportage and commercial photography, with a particular focus on object photography. Their work is characterized by sophisticated compositions, innovative perspectives in sharp focus, and clean lines. Yet the austerity of their modern style is frequently punctuated by the incorporation of elements of humor and human figures. They soon broadened their scope to include architectural, theatrical, and industrial photography as well as documentary, advertising, and experimental film. While traveling both near and far, Michael and Luzzi developed a unique approach to photography. In both freelance projects and commissioned work they practiced a form of social documentary photography, producing gripping images of the conditions in which people around the world lived and worked.



1 STUDIO

The Wolgensinger photo studio was a vibrant microcosm with up to ten employees and a clear division of labor. Luzzi managed the studio and image production, while Michael was behind the camera. Their employees included specialists for lighting, the darkroom, administration and bookkeeping, cleaning, along with apprentices. These last included such now well-known figures as Robert Frank, Friedrich Engesser, and Christian Herdeg. Convivial dinners and parties with international visitors from the fields of photography, film, art, theater, and literature were a vital part of studio life. Friendships often led to commissions, and vice versa.

2 TRAVEL

The couple traveled regularly, creating powerful social documentary images of the everyday living and working conditions of people around the world. Often riveting snapshots and carefully staged compositions function as either series or as singular works, and the images were primarily published in commissioned or self-initiated photobooks. After World War II, the couple began traveling around Europe. Their images from Spain and Italy, in particular, found broad audiences with large-edition photobooks. Beginning in the late 1950s, commissions from the renowned publisher Silva and foreign-aid organization Helvetas carried Michael and Luzzi further afield.

3 ADVERTISEMENTS

Throughout their careers, commercial photography was for the Wolgensingers an important source of income. People played a central role in the presentation of products, and the couple were equally skillful in capturing people as they were objects. In the 1960s, they focused on creating American-style advertising images, stimulating consumption via elaborate staging often with female models and unusual props. Corporate commissions for documentary work yielded lively series with people that offer unexpected insights into the working environments of the time—often with tongue firmly in cheek.

4 EXPERIMENTS

Innovation and experimentation was prevalent at the Wolgensinger studio. By employing such techniques as photomontage, multiple exposures, and unusual compositions, they created surrealist images with a playful flair. As early as the 1940s they started working with film, which soon became an integral part of their service. Their experimental film *Metamorphose* (1953) won the Silver Lion at the Venice International Film Festival. It showcased their unique use of the medium, as can also be seen in their advertising spots as for example for SIA Frauenfeld.

5 A GOOD THING

In the 1930s, photomontage became a favored medium for many graphic designers. The New Objectivity aesthetic Luzzi and Michael had learned from Hans Finsler was particularly in demand. The Wolgensinger photo studio thus quickly assumed a leading role in object photography in Zurich. Their images are characterized by sharp focus, meticulous lighting, and technical perfection. In addition to austere object photography and abstract visual compositions of line and form, staged scenes featuring people became another hallmark of their work. Their clients included graphic designers and companies as well as the Swiss Werkbund (SWB).

6 ZURICH BUILDINGS

Architectural photography was an important part of Michael and Luzzi’s work. Between 1933 and 1988, they documented the architecture of the city and canton of Zurich using a unique visual language of soberly framed and precisely lit images. Also characteristic of their work was the use of apparently chance urban elements that were in fact carefully chosen, such as a streetlamp in the foreground or people in motion. These elements helped to soften the severe lines while at the same time indicating the social function of the buildings.

7 INDUSTRY AND WORK

Factory workers appeared in the Wolgensingers’ photographs as early as the 1930s. And beginning in the 1950s, industrial concerns regularly commissioned the studio to document their businesses. With photographic series on Escher Wyss AG, the Swiss Brikett-Import-Gesellschaft, and the Zurich slaughterhouse, among others, they created a unique record of local industry. The focus was not solely on production but also on those actually working the machines. Thus the beauty of industrial products and majestic machines is contrasted with the hard work and hard-scrabble lives of the laborers.

8 SETTING THE STAGE

As early as the late 1930s, the Wolgensingers photographed performances of the legendary Cabaret Cornichon in Zurich—a political statement in a time of war. Many of the individuals involved in the theater were friends whom they had photographed for years. In order to capture the excitement and vibrancy of the performances, some of the scenes were staged in the studio and later edited using montage. They also had close ties to Fred Schneckenger’s Puppet Cabaret. In addition to taking pictures, Michael did sound and lighting for the performances, while Luzzi both co-wrote plays and served as a puppeteer.