

Wolfsburg lies in the center of Germany, on the eastern edge of Lower Saxony, near the Berlin-Ruhr Autobahn. It was founded in 1938 as home to the Volkswagen factory. Shortly after the National Socialists came to power in 1933, Chancellor Adolf Hitler announced that he would “motorize” the people, and in 1934 the engineer Ferdinand Porsche, who had been working on a “people’s automobile” since 1932, agreed to develop a car that would sell for under a thousand marks. The Nazi regime undertook to produce the Volkswagen – the People’s Car, later known as “the Beetle” – as a low cost car available to everyone. Early in 1937, Dr. Robert Ley, leader of the German Labor Front (DAF), was given the task of realizing the project “Works and City.” The leisure arm of the DAF, “Kraft durch Freude” (“Strength through Joy”), gave the future city the noncommittal name of “Stadt des KdF-Wagens“ (“City of the KdF-Car”). In terms of social policy it was to be a model town, where workers would live under exemplary conditions. After some debate as to the location of the project, Albert Speer, Hitler’s architect, announced the present site in January 1938. The cornerstone of the Volkswagen works, designed by a team of experienced production planners, was laid on May 26, 1938 and Hitler commissioned the young architect Peter Koller to build the new city. Koller’s design was based on a clearly defined relationship between factory and city, which was to be situated along the Klieversberg to the south of the Ems-Elbe ship canal, the Mittellandkanal. Buildings were to be three to four stories high, and a system of straight axes and connecting ring roads was designed to promote the rapid flow of traffic. 3,000 construction tradesmen from Italy were recruited to build the Volkswagen city. In 1939, however, the Nazis started the Second World War, no cars were produced, and the city remained only partially built. The Volkswagen plant – run by Porsche with the aid of German-American engineers hired in Detroit – produced a wide range of war materials. It employed 6,000 permanent German workers, who mostly lived in the Wellekamp, Schillerteich and Steimker Berg districts where construction was relatively complete, and 13,000 forced laborers or concentration camp prisoners who lived in barracks around the city. Large parts of the Volkswagen plant were

destroyed in a succession of bombing raids, but the city remained almost untouched. At the end of the war the Americans initially occupied the city, which was then handed over to the British military authorities. The British set up a city council, and on June 22, 1945 it decided to rename the Volkswagen city “Wolfsburg,” after the sixteenth-century moated castle nearby. The population changed: the surviving concentration camp prisoners left Germany, the forced laborers returned to their own countries, and Wolfsburg was settled by refugees from the Central Europe and Eastern Germany. In the 1950’s the look of the town changed radically, although Koller’s original planning concept remained largely intact. Wolfsburg assumed its present shape between 1955 and 1975. Its districts constitute a record of successive fashions in urban planning in Germany. The result is close to the original conception of a decentralized, residential city with plenty of green spaces, separated from the factory by the Mittellandkanal. Major architects created important buildings in Wolfsburg, such as the cultural center by Alvar Aalto (completed 1962) and a theater by Hans Scharoun (completed 1973). The commercial success of the Volkswagen plant – which is one of the most modern industrial complexes in Europe, with more than 52,000 workers – increased the population from 14,000 in 1945 to 84,000 in 1965; Wolfsburg now has 129,000 inhabitants.

Uta Grosenick James Welling

**Im Mai 1993 lud mich Gijs van Tuyl ein, ein Projekt über Wolfsburg und das Volkswagenwerk für die erste Ausstellung im neuen Kunstmuseum zu machen. Als ich Wolfsburg im Oktober besuchte, entschied ich mich, die älteren Anlagen des Werks und die Wohnhäuser aus den 40er Jahren zu fotografieren. Im Januar 1994 erfuhr ich über die nationalsozialistische Gründung von Wolfsburg, die Aufgaben von VW während des Krieges und die ersten Entwürfe der Stadt. Ich beschloß, diese Kenntnisse in mein Projekt einzubeziehen. Es war nicht meine Absicht, die Geschichte direkt in den Fotografien aufzuzeigen (außer vielleicht in den Aufnahmen der frühen Architektur von Wolfsburg). Stattdessen stelle ich den Bildern einen einführenden Text voran, den ich zusammen mit Uta Grosenick geschrieben habe. Er ist eine verkürzte und vereinfachte Beschreibung der Entstehung von Wolfsburg und der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit.**

**Ich möchte mich bei Gijs van Tuyl, Uta Grosenick und Carmen Müller, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, bei Dr. Hans-Jörg Siegfried, Stadtarchiv Wolfsburg und bei Peter Schlelein und Lutz Ballentin, Unternehmenspresse Volkswagen bedanken, durch deren Interesse, Kenntnisse und Begeisterung diese Bilder erst möglich wurden.**

**James Welling**