**JENS HARDER**

**THE STORY OF PLANET A**

**14 billion years of earth history in a comic**

**16 April – 26 November 2023**

**Ore Shed, Völklinger Hütte World Heritage Site**

**From the Big Bang to the distant future: Jens Harder tells the story of our planet in an impressive comic trilogy. His award-winning pictorial history can now be experienced, for the first time in Germany and Europe, as a complete exhibition at the Völklinger Hütte World Heritage Site, this unique monument to industrialisation and the man-made age.**

"I wanted to bundle everything that makes us and moves us as human beings in this stream of images, but also everything that I have been interested in since my early childhood, that can be so wonderfully drawn and condensed. Science in all its forms – astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, palaeontology, archaeology, art and cultural history – embedded in a narrative that spans a billion years. The most diverse temporal sequences unfold slowly but inexorably before our eyes, as if in a frozen animated film."

This is how Jens Harder describes his award-winning geological history in comics, the third volume of which was recently published by the Carlsen publishing company. With Jens Harder as well, everything began and begins about 14 billion years ago with the Big Bang, followed by the formation of planet Earth and the evolution of plants and the animal world. In the second volume, he continues with the history of mammals and prehistoric man to the beginning of our modern era. The latest and third book in his great story takes us to the period from year 1 in Antiquity to the atomic age – two thousand years in two thousand pictures.

The result is a veritable encyclopaedia of the Earth. None of the pictures is invented: Jens Harder found them over years of research, and then put them together in a gigantic picture mosaic. He combines myriads of images in this grand narrative – the very images that people have made of the world since time immemorial: from the earliest cave paintings to the imagery of modern and contemporary science, art and advertising. Again and again he concisely establishes associative cross-references between the times, provoking veritable leaps in knowledge. The result is an idiosyncratic and impressive panopticon of planetary history.

Jens Harder's pictorial history of our planet is now assembled for the first time as a complete panorama in an exhibition hall at the Völklinger Hütte World Heritage Site. On display are large-format prints of comic pages of every one of the Earth's ages as well as selected original drawings by the comic artist.

"As a unique testimony to industrialisation, the Völklingen Ironworks is also exemplary of the man-made age, the Anthropocene. However, the ores and coal that were mined and processed into iron and steel here in the industrial age are treasures of the Earth that were created billions of years ago. Jens Harder's imagery shows us these overall contexts when he leads us, in fast motion, through our planet's history. Not only is the light from the beginning of the universe still there ...," says Director General Dr. Ralf Beil.

And so here in the Ore Hall, where one of these ancient, valuable raw materials was once stored before being processed in the the blast furnace, we wander through all the earth ages: from the Big Bang, single-cell organisms, the first plants, the dinosaurs, the ice and warm ages, to ancient cultures, the Middle Ages, modern times with modern science and technologies, the present day and beyond. The exhibition simply demands physical and mental movement in a cosmos full of associations and connections. Just one example: in a few panels on a comic page, Jens Harder spans a bold arc from the first early humans' attempts to light a fire to the days when the television lights up instead of the fire and an atomic bomb explodes somewhere.

"Of course, none of these Stone Age sparks could possibly have imagined where all this experimenting with flint and wood chips would eventually lead, because evolution – and that includes the evolution of technology – is always blind when looking ahead. And yet these phenomena belong closely together, and I attempt to bundle them visually," Jens Harder explains the poetics of his "vertical storytelling" with temporal leaps and cross-references. Any development can only be understood in retrospect – and that is precisely what this exhibition does.

On more than 150 wall-filling prints of comic pages and some 70 original drawings, visitors to the 1,000 square metre Ore Hall encounter stars and galaxies, the first birds and mammals, Pangaea, Homo erectus and Homo sapiens, the first towns, writing systems, printing and gunpowder, revolutions and freedom movements, the machine and computer age, all the way through to the environmental destruction and global warming of today. At the end there is a first glimpse into the future: an entirely new chapter in the STORY OF PLANET A may well begin with Space Mining in Space.

**Jens Harder** was born in Weißwasser / GDR in 1970. He studied graphics at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, and today is a freelance graphic designer and illustrator in Berlin. In 1999 he and various fellow students founded the comic group Monogatari, in whose collective albums he subsequently published his own contributions. He published his first book in France in 2003 with the publisher Éditions de l'An. The approximately 150-page album entitled "Leviathan" is the dramatic story of a sperm whale, accompanied by quotes from Herman Melville and Thomas Hobbes printed in four languages. He received the Max and Moritz Prize for the "best German-language comic publication" at the Comic-Salon Erlangen in 2004.

Another award winner is the series "Alpha Beta Gamma" on the history of our planet. The first volume "Alpha ...directions" – first published by the French publisher Actes Sud and awarded the Prix de l’audace at the Festival de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême – was published by Carlsen in 2010, and also received the Max and Moritz Prize that same year. In 2011 Jens Harder also received the Hans Meid Prize for Book Illustration.

In the Neue Zürcher Zeitung in 2014, Christian Gasser wrote this of the sequel "Beta… civilisations I": "Jens Harder's 'Beta… civilisations' blasts all the established categories away. It's a comic, a picture book, a story book, a reference book, a fabulous trip, all in one. Harder combines natural and cultural sciences, the creation myths, anthropology, archaeology, history and the human imagination, our dreams and visions, in an extraordinary comic adventure on the greatest of all stories: the (his)story of our planet."

In 2017, Jens Harder published his adaptation of the oldest surviving epic in history, "Gilgamesh". The volume "Beta... civilisation II" was published in October 2022. Jens Harder is currently working on "Gamma", the final volume in this great story.

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16 April until 26 November 2023

Venue: Ore Hall

Exhibition space: 1,000 square metres

Exhibition course: Five large motifs on the glass front, a surrounding wall frieze of more than 150 large-format prints of comic pages on all three walls of the Ore Hall as well as around 70 framed original drawings, accompanied by found objects, tools and process testimonies by the artist in display cases  
  
Curator: Dr. Ralf Beil, General Director of the Völklinger Hütte World Heritage Site

Opening hours:  
Daily from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m.   
from 1 November: Daily from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.

Admission to the Völklinger Hütte World Heritage Site and all exhibitions:  
Standard: 17 euros | Concessions: 15 euros

Adolescents and schoolchildren to 18 years of age: Admission free  
(children up to the age of 14 must be accompanied by an authorised adult)  
Students, schoolchildren and trainees up to 27 years of age: admission free   
(with valid ID)  
Annual pass: 45 euros

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