

Anton Zensus

Short Biography

Anton Zensus is an astrophysicist and Director Emeritus at the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy in Bonn. Over four decades at the frontier of high-resolution radio astronomy, his research, leadership of large-scale international collaborations, and commitment to the formation of the next generation have fundamentally shaped the field.

After completing his doctorate in Münster, he joined the California Institute of Technology and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, where appointment to the NRAO Basic Research Staff placed him among a small community of scientists with full independence to advance their field. In 1997, at the age of 38, he was called to the Max Planck Society as a Scientific Member and Director at MPIfR — one of the most selective appointments in international science and among the youngest of his generation to receive it.

Over the following three decades, he led one of the world's foremost research groups in AGN astrophysics and high-resolution imaging, advanced global Very Long Baseline Interferometry networks including space-based radio astronomy, and played a central role in shaping the infrastructure of European and global radio astronomy — through his long-standing leadership of RadioNet, his contributions to LOFAR, and his leadership roles within the Square Kilometre Array initiative.

As Founding Chair of the Event Horizon Telescope Board, he brought a fragmented and highly competitive international community into coherent collaboration — earning the trust of leading scientists across five continents and sustaining the alliance through a decade of scientific and institutional challenges. This work enabled two historic achievements: the first image of a black hole in the galaxy M87 (2019) and the first image of Sagittarius A* at the centre of our own galaxy (2022), transforming how we see the universe.

More than twenty years ago, he founded the International Max Planck Research School for Astronomy and Astrophysics, widely recognised as a model for international doctoral education. Over three decades, he trained generations of PhD students within his research department and as Honorary Professor at the University of Cologne, many of whom now hold leading positions worldwide. As emeritus, he continues to mentor emerging and established leaders in science.

He now pursues astrophysical research through the ERC-funded M2FINDERS project and, having stepped back from operational leadership, accepts a select number of advisory engagements with research institutions, international collaborations, and funding organisations.

His honours include the Karl Schwarzschild Medal (2024), the Tycho Brahe Medal (2023), the Breakthrough Prize for Fundamental Physics (2019, with the Event Horizon Telescope Collaboration), the Max Planck Research Prize for International Cooperation (1999), and the Alexander von Humboldt Research Prize (1994).
