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Ars Electronica
2004

Press Release - Historical Overview
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ARS ELECTRONICA: A Brief Historical Overview

The first node in a network spanning technology, art and society was installed on September 18, 1979 in Linz. In a setting provided by the International Bruckner Festival, Ars Electronica premiered with the very first Linzer Klangwolke and the music of Bruckner's 8th Symphony. The festival inaugurated by the ORF – Austrian Broadcasting Company's Upper Austria Regional Studio and the Brucknerhaus was one of the world's first such events dedicated to elaborating the artistic possibilities and social consequences of digital technology. The public's response was overwhelming—100,000 guests filled Linz's Danube Park to witness this momentous performance.

The Future Makes its Entrance – The Ars Electronica Festival

The first cultural initiatives paving the way for Ars Electronica were the founding of the Linz University of Art in 1947 and the construction of the Brucknerhaus in the late '70s. A key precursor was the 1977 Forum Metall, an exhibition of metal sculpture that gave physical form to the field of tension and interplay where art and industry overlap. The musical group Eela Craig continued on this course in 1978 with a performance of the electronic opera "Missa Universalis." Ars Electronica was founded in 1979 as an effort to provide a setting for an annual symposium dealing with these developments. The Brucknerhaus was built that same year. The festival's premiere also meant that the iron-and-steel town's strivings to assert a high-profile, independent cultural identity had come to fruition, as Linz, the physical context of the unique festival format upon which Ars Electronica is based, set out on its way to become the internationally acknowledged centerpoint of digital media and technology. Initially dedicated to an encounter with global digitization and the ongoing process of coming to terms with the future, a course shift in the direction of art and confrontation with current developments subsequently set in. A thematic intensification of the festival was launched in 1987, and it has focused on a specific theme every year since.

Recognition of Outstanding Achievement – The Prix Ars Electronica

The inauguration of the Prix Ars Electronica in 1987 represented another important stage in the unfolding of Ars Electronica as well as of the proliferation of computer technology in the media. This annual event—the first international competition dedicated exclusively to the state-of-the-art in digital media—strengthened the festival's links to the art scene and positioned Linz as an international trend barometer in the field of computer art. With over 21,000 works having been submitted by 17,000 participants from 87 countries since 1987, the Prix Ars Electronica is now the most important and most successful international showcase of the best of the cyberarts. The coveted Golden Nica trophies and prize money totaling 130,000 euros will be awarded in seven categories in 2004.

The Museum of the Future

Another significant milestone in the history of Ars Electronica was reached in 1992, when the City of Linz gave the go-ahead to build the Ars Electronica Center. This permanent facility designed as a "house-in-progress" was given the mission of functioning as mediator at the interface of art, technology and society. The AEC that opened in 1996 has constituted a prototype of a "museum of the future" utilizing innovative methods and cutting-edge infrastructure to facilitate the general public's encounter with media art, new technologies and the social developments that are accompanying them.

Ars Electronica Futurelab

Set up in 1996, the Futurelab is a model of a new kind of media art laboratory in which artistic and technological innovations engender reciprocal inspiration. The lab's teams bring together a wide variety of specialized skills; their approach to an assignment is characterized by interdisciplinarity and international networking. The Futurelab's wide-ranging activities include designing and engineering exhibitions, creating artistic installations, as well as pursuing collaborative research with universities and joint ventures with private sector associates.

The opening of the Ars Electronica Center and the Ars Electronica Futurelab in 1996 set into place the last of the four columns—Ars Electronica Festival, Prix Ars Electronica, Ars Electronica Center and Ars Electronica Futurelab—that have borne the load of Ars Electronica's mission and thereby gone about redefining the concept of "Digital Revolution."

Founders and Organizers

The Brucknerhaus in Linz and the ORF Upper Austria jointly organized the Ars Electronica Festival from 1979 on. The "founding fathers" were Hannes Leopoldseder, Hubert Bognermayr, Herbert W. Franke and Ulrich Rützel. In 1986, the festival was uncoupled from the Brucknerfest and its program was given a makeover by Gottfried Hattinger and Peter Weibel (representing LIVA and Brucknerhaus), who introduced the yearly thematic focus. The opening of the Ars Electronica Center in 1996 was accompanied by the separation of the Brucknerhaus and Ars Electronica, though the two institutions remained linked by the Linzer Klangwolke. Since 1996, Gerfried Stocker, managing director of the Ars Electronica Center, and Christine Schöpf of the ORF Upper Austria have been responsible for the organization of the festival.

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Information on the Ars Electronica Festival: http://www.aec.at/timeshift
and the Ars Electronica Press Lounge: http://www.aec.at/press