

Ars Electronica Research and Residence

Gerfried Stocker/ Wolfgang Modera

One year ago with the commencement of the Ars Electronica Festival Memesis — The Future of Evolution, the Ars Electronica Center — Museum of the Future was officially launched and sent on its mission. Our objective was to set a trajectory appropriate to this enterprise and its new start. A program on the basis of architecture serving solely a showcase function would have reduced the Center's task to one of merely establishing the institutional preconditions for its having become a museum. It is incumbent upon a Museum of the Future, however, to assume a creative as well as dynamic posture in confronting the challenges before it. Merely moving into a new building, administering its facilities and looking after its visitors is not sufficient to completely fulfill this responsibility. A fundamental consideration in formulating the Center's program had to do with its positioning within the environment to which it owes its existence — the nearly 20-year history of the Festival and the Prix Ars Electronica. On one hand, a commitment was made to nurture and support art's leading edge, helping it to discover a new conception of itself through ventures undertaken in the wake of the Digital Revolution and to establish its rightful place as a leading cultural force. On the other hand, in light of the ongoing process of "media-morphosis," our overall culture called for the creation of a center of technological expertise which would be in a position to function as a mediator among artists, scientists and the general public.

At present, the Center is pursuing this goal through the operation of three exemplary departments: Education, Living Space & City Planning/CyberCity, and Virtual Reality. The capabilities and know-how of artists, both in dealing with new media as well as in communicating with the public, have taken on increased significance here, precisely in conjunction with new, interactive technology-based strategies for the dissemination of learning. These qualities have been implemented and placed directly into service in the form of Future Lab, Austria's best-equipped "laboratory/

studio" for the development of VR, Web, and visualization/simulation applications in areas ranging from city planning to neurology. Our staff currently includes as many as 35 individuals working on more than 40 projects, and linked to a network including various university departments, private firms and research institutions. And we have opened up another new path with the establishment of the Ars Electronica Research & Residence Program in context with Future Lab.

Within this framework, our guests are able to stay abreast of research efforts as well as to experience the production of projects in an aesthetic context. In this respect, we have enjoyed tangible success in making available artistic skills and promoting understanding for technical and theoretical matters. Thus, we continue to approach our goal — namely, to transform interdisciplinarity from a conceptual ideal to a functional on-the-job reality, and, as a result, to become a decisive factor in the emergence of a fruitful field of endeavor. With the personnel, hardware and infrastructure it has assembled, and the double role as a place for production and presentation it has assumed, positioned between the "fronts" of art, science and society, the Ars Electronica Center has already established itself as a model.