

A joint project of the Ludwig Boltzmann Society with Ars Electronica, the University of Art and Industrial Design and the Lentos Museum of Modern Art

Austria's Ludwig Boltzmann Society has decided to establish a Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Digital Culture and Media Science in Linz. The central focus of the Institute's research will be on one of the world's most comprehensive collections of digital and media art: the Ars Electronica Archive.

The project is based above all on active collaboration with three primary partner institutions in Linz: Ars Electronica, the University of Art and the recently opened Lentos Art Museum Linz.

As the repository of approximately 30,000 works, the Ars Electronica Archive documents the development of media art since the founding of the Festival in 1979 and the launch of the Prix Ars Electronica in 1987. It includes descriptions of projects submitted to the Prix for prize consideration and contributions to the Festival, graphic material and artists' biographies, as well as information about and statements by the Prix jurors. The digitizing of all Festival catalogs and Prix publications, a process begun a few years ago, has also made this material available for display online; moreover, the website provides documentation about projects developed by the Ars Electronica Futurelab for the exhibitions in the Ars Electronica Center and portraits of the artists who worked on them. And the Archive is growing rapidly—for instance, there were more than 3,000 submissions to the Prix Ars Electronica in the year 2005 alone.

The whole of it offers not only a representative cross section of the wide-ranging field of media and digital art but also a historical outline of the media and formats in which these artworks have been produced and that, in numerous instances, have had a powerful impact on how they manifest themselves. Thematically organized entries dealing with computer graphics, animation, computerized and digital music, interactive art, Web-based art and net-art, software, mixed realities, virtual reality applications, media performance, biological, cybernetic and genetic art, robotics and video art explicitly document these artworks' aesthetic strategies and, implicitly, the technical preconditions on which they are based. This, in turn—and particularly the short "half-lives" of the artworks' storage media—attests to the great current relevance and urgency of the undertaking that is being pursued with the establishment of this new Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, especially in light of the necessarily adaptive way in which these documents function in time.

In the video area alone, there is a profusion of different formats—U-matic (Low, High, SP), full track, CCIR (stereo), CCIR full track, S-VHS, Beta-SP, digital video, video film, recordable

CD, Betacam, DVD and mini-DV-whose availability is steadily diminishing in the face of the proliferation of state-of-the-art alternatives. The same holds true for the programming languages in which art projects have been developed and their diverse storage media ranging from diskettes and CDs to websites and their addresses. In the case of material from the earliest years of the Festival and the Prix, there exists the acute danger of irrecoverable loss of these specimens if they are not transferred to another data storage medium in the very near future.

Thus, the agenda that Ars Electronica has been advancing in setting up this Archive—making this material available to scholars, artists and interested members of the general public—is proving to be less of a methodological-strategic problem and more of a technological one. It could thus be anticipated that such a development would ultimately have consequences for the very concept of media art itself, and especially for its culture that is unfolding to an equal extent in scholarly-theoretical discourse and in performative practice.

Accordingly, the most important elements of the mission of the Institute for Digital Culture and Media Science are:

- Localization of current artistic approaches within an overall art historical context that is conceived in a much broader way than has been the case up to now;
- Development of new strategies for documenting, describing and conserving non-traditional, inter-medial, “instable” forms of media art and digital art (including working out descriptive standards that are applicable to traditional artforms as well);
- Development of technological standards for institutions wishing to pursue networked collaboration and with respect to current and future Internet-based collections of digital art and media art;
- Invention of innovative tools for an integrated computer and network environment that makes available a unified operating system for the purposes of study, research, presentation and documentation;
- Dissemination of art historians’, theorists’ and artists’ positions on media art through the development of a multidimensional online publication program;
- Furthering information exchange, dialog and communication by means of a worldwide network of artists, scientists and technicians as well as institutions involved in these areas of interest and fields of activity in order to share experience, know-how and means of production.

To successfully carry out these tasks, the Institute plans to work together with a number of other facilities that are currently active in the field of archiving media art: the Daniel Langlois Foundation, Center for Research and Documentation, Canada; the Medien Kunst Netz at the ZKM, Germany; the Databank for Virtual Art at the Humboldt University in Berlin; the *netzspannung.org* research platform; the Creative Archive Group (UK), et al.