

Origin – How It All Begins

ARS ELECTRONICA 2011

Festival of Art, Technology and Society

Linz, Wednesday, August 31 – Tuesday, September 6, 2011

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Ars Electronica Festival 2011

Origin – How It All Begins

(Linz, May 5, 2011) “Origin – How It All Begins” is the theme of Ars Electronica 2011. It will run from August 31st to September 6th. In cooperation with CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, the festival will be dedicated to the fascinating world of leading-edge research on the basic principles of the cosmos. Leading experts at the world’s largest research facility in the field of particle physics will be attending the Ars Electronica symposium and reporting about their work on the Large Hadron Collider. And beyond that—the Festival of Art, Technology and Society will scrutinize the “CERN model” itself and its actual significance. This is a matter of a space conducive to exploration in which thousands of scientists from numerous countries collaboratively investigate, conceptualize and innovate. And this is a matter of latitude that we also urgently need beyond the realm of advanced physics for the development of other things—social utopias, for instance. So, what preconditions do we have to put in place for it all to begin here too?

Create Your World: Future Festival of the Next Generation

When we consider these various facets of the genesis of innovation—how, where and by whom—our attention inevitably turns to the younger generation. In this spirit, Ars Electronica is launching a “festival within the Festival” expressly for youngsters. “Create Your World” is the title of this future festival of the next generation that is meant to inspire young people, to get them interconnected, and simply to encourage them to give some thought to the world of tomorrow, to come up with new ways of configuring life on this part of the planet, and to experimentally implement their innovations. “Create Your World” is an endeavor to initiate a long-term process of design in a regional context—the local settings of everyday life, the technologies we need, our social fabric and our art—and to provide encouragement, advice, aid and infrastructure to youngsters as they go about creating their world.

Social Media and Open Society

The younger generation also occupies the focal point of a themed conference at this year’s festival. “Social Media and Open Society” will inquire into the sources of social and political renewal. In light of the very dramatic recent developments in Arabic countries, this conference will spotlight members of the young generation who are using Facebook and Twitter to get connected and exchange ideas—in times of rebellion as well as the times thereafter when it comes down to actually building a democratic society.

Since 1979: Ars Electronica Festival

Consistent interdisciplinarity and open encounters involving international experts and highly diverse audiences define the essence of the Ars Electronica Festival. Since 1979, this world-renowned annual event has been dedicated to staging intense confrontations with social and cultural phenomena that are the upshots of scientific and technological progress. Symposia, exhibitions, performances, concerts and interventions take these encounters out beyond the confines of classic conference spaces and cultural venues and get them out into the public sphere where they belong.

Ars Electronica 2011: www.aec.at/origin
Create Your World: www.aec.at/createyourworld

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Ars Electronica 2011 / Curatorial Statement

by Christine Schöpf and Gerfried Stocker (Artistic Directors of the Ars Electronica Festival)

The insatiable hunger for knowledge; the burning passion to blaze new trails and overturn old points of view; the wish to find out where we come from; the longing to endow our existence with meaning and to establish our place in a comprehensive model of the universe. The satisfaction we derive upon getting to the bottom of these things, explaining them, describing them, expressing them. These absolutely quintessential elements of what it means to be human constitute the shared source of art and science. They are the driving forces from which innovation emerges.

Origin – How It All Begins

In cooperation with CERN, an institution in which more than 8,000 scientists from many countries are at work expanding the boundaries of our knowledge of the laws of nature in an effort to understand the genesis of the universe and the origins of all matter, we are dedicating the 2011 Ars Electronica Festival to the fascinating world of leading-edge research on the basic principles of the cosmos. And in doing so we'll also be taking a fresh look at the true significance of places and facilities like CERN. It could very well be that they are not only models for spaces conducive to perception and invention that are indispensable for scientists, but also for the development of designs for a viable, sustainable society that humankind needs so urgently now.

Ars Electronica is in Search of the Point of Origination

Once you have taken a close-up look at CERN's facilities and perhaps even beheld the giant detectors situated a hundred meters below ground, there's no avoiding the conclusion that this is the technological and scientific wonder of the age. And maybe you really have to have seen it with your own eyes, to have been there in person, to truly feel the enthusiasm that arises in the face of its colossal dimensions and the countless technical components enlisted there in the search for particles that exist for only a few nanoseconds and form only under energy densities the likes of which prevailed for only a billionth of a second after the Big Bang. It turns out that the very dimensions of this infrastructure in contrast to one's own body are what impart at least a modicum of tangibility to these totally abstract terms.

Yet even more astounding than its awesome technical plant & equipment are the enthusiasm and dedication of the researchers you encounter throughout this facility. What makes CERN truly one of the wonders of the modern world are the more than 8,000 people who work here and the many countries that finance it all.

And isn't it also something of a miracle that a place like this even (still) exists in a world that is so fundamentally oriented on efficiency and a quick return on investment. A place in which construction has been underway for over 15 years on a measuring instrument (the largest of its kind in the world, by the way) that is now commencing a mission that will run for many years to come and perform research on things that cannot be expected to produce any tangible commercial benefits all that soon. A reasonable expectation is that they will "merely" lead to modest advances in humankind's knowledge of the basic principles of matter.

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And perhaps it's not even primarily a matter of whether CERN's staff finds the Higgs boson or not. Perhaps the real justification for CERN is to be found to a far greater extent in the extraordinary space conducive to free exploration that has been created there. Perhaps of greatest value to our society is its uncompromising dedication to basic research, and the motivation, exchange of ideas and inspiration that thousands of young scientists derive from their work there. Accordingly, one must also see CERN as a model, a prototype that shows the attributes a place must possess if innovation is to take place there. And, indeed, not just insights into physics. New thinking in general. New paradigms and new ideas.

Ultimately, such realms of free and wide-ranging experimentation are our only hope as sources of what is truly essential now—unexpected, radical renewal; the ideas and concepts we so urgently need to guide our path into a sustainable future. Of course, that does not only mean large research institutions like CERN; it also applies to the many small research facilities and many different areas of basic research—for example, quantum physics, a field that, even now, almost a century after its discovery, still takes us to our cognitive limits and, in quite a wonderful way, forces us to blaze new trails in our thinking.

Spaces Conducive to Exploration, Free Spirits, Latitude ... where it all begins

Our focus on CERN at Ars Electronica 2011 is meant to make a statement on behalf of the importance of advanced basic research. It is also an expression of the fascination inherent in expanding the boundaries of our knowledge and understanding.

But to a much greater extent, this is a matter of inquiring into the circumstances and framework conditions that are necessary for innovation to occur and for social dynamism to spin off from it. And this brings us to a point at which scientific research and art have a great deal in common—they are not only manifestations of human longing for insights, but also guarantors and indicators of a society's openness and its capacity for innovation and development.

Many of us have reacted to the ever-more-catastrophic consequences of ecological predation, reckless, unbridled economic exploitation, and our political representatives' abject impotence in the face of it all by bewailing the lack of viable, sustainable models and visions, of political and philosophical utopias. So, where exactly are the sources of those dynamics, of the courage and audacity that we need to proceed from a position of present prosperity, to call our society into question and to get started making the necessary changes?

This search for new social paradigms, new designs for ways of life and the social fabric, that could help us extricate ourselves from the crises of our age seems no less difficult than observing a billion proton collisions per second and the millions of measured values generated by them and finding somewhere in their midst the traces of a particular particle that cannot even be said to exist with absolute certainty. Thus, the hunt for the origins of matter that is going on at present at CERN is more than just a symbolic analogy for dealing with the daunting challenges we have to confront right now if we want to conserve this world for our progeny.

The caverns deep below the Jura Mountains housing their state-of-the-art technical infrastructure are not only the cathedrals of our time. CERN is also a refuge for that which, perhaps more than anything else, makes us human beings: our insatiable hunger for knowledge. After all, even if every one of us already knows that we will never reach the ultimate point of origination, the path leading to it—or, rather, the search for the path itself—

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is our destination, and every step along the way a manifestation of humanity, of our genius and our hubris alike.

Create your World - Future of the Next Generation

In addition to the endeavor to discover origins in modern physics, two additional venues will provide settings for encounters with this year's festival theme. First of all, there is the premiere of "Create Your World," the festival within a festival especially for young people. At this "future festival of the next generation," youngsters themselves will be the chief protagonists. This will also be an international platform for a discussion of new models and best-practice examples of contemporary educational strategies. Here, particular emphasis will be placed on cultural education, cooperation among educational and cultural institutions, as well as science education for young people.

Social Media and Open Society

The Social Media and Open Society conference will be seeking sources of social and political renewal. In light of the revolutions and rebellions being fomented by the young generation in North Africa, conference participants will be looking into the role that digital media and social networks can play both in the upheavals rocking old regimes and the construction of new democracies to take their place.

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