

Ars Electronica Festival 2019 – ARS and the CITY

LENTOS Art Museum Linz, September 5-9, 2019

Press conference with

Klaus Luger, Mayor of the City of Linz

Doris Lang-Mayerhofer, City Councilor for Culture and Chairman of the Ars Electronica
Advisory Board

Hemma Schmutz, Artistic Director for the Museums of the City of Linz

Gerfried Stocker, Artistic Director, Ars Electronica

Retrospective at the LENTOS Art Museum Linz

ARS and the CITY

(Linz, 4.9.2019) Wind-propelled beach creatures, four thousand enthusiastic Pong players on Linz's main square, and radios in every window creating a huge cloud of sound over Linz: The exhibition ARS and the CITY at the LENTOS Art Museum Linz looks back on forty years of Ars Electronica, recalling legendary, groundbreaking, internationally recognized art projects carried out since 1979 in public spaces in Linz.

A City in Transition

While Linz's image was shaped for decades by large-scale industry, at the end of the 20th century a change took place—art began to take the lead as an important source of inspiration and ideas. The role of Ars Electronica, being a festival for art, technology, and society, in initiating and furthering this change has long been part of the founding mythology of this unique project. From the very beginning, its focus was on social and cultural aspects of the future; the work done with the city and in its spaces was executed with equal amounts of optimism and effort. And it soon became clear that media art was perfectly suited to depart the traditional spaces of art presentation and mediation, blazing new paths into public awareness in its inimitable fashion. The exhibition at the LENTOS Art Museum Linz looks back on a number of these projects and initiatives, organized into four thematic groups—Donaupark, Hauptplatz, voestalpine, and Stadtwerkstatt.

Green space and recreation area: the Donaupark

Not by chance, this exciting journey begins with the Donaupark, an inner-city green space and recreation area. Here in 1979, the first Linz “Klangwolke” (sound cloud), a spectacular open-air concert, was celebrated as part of the opening of the first Ars Electronica Festival. Weeks before, the ORF OÖ (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) had asked the public to place their radios in their windows during the course of this event and thus turn the transmission of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony into a real cloud of sound, extending beyond Donaupark to cover the entire city. Thus does a medium become a social space—and the first sound cloud became a prototype project anticipating the social media era. 33 years later, Donaupark once again plays host to a premiere that will travel around the world—50 quadcopters from the Ars Electronica Futurelab will form into an autonomous swarm and take to the heights for a unique show in the night sky. Thanks to the Linz sound cloud, over the past four decades Donaupark has served again and again as a stage for sensational art projects from around the world—from sound and light installations to remarkable performances.

City center: the Hauptplatz

Encompassing 13,140 square meters and with its baroque architecture, Linz's main square frequently serves as backdrop to large-scale projects attracting thousands of visitors. Many people in Linz still remember Loren Carpenter's 1994 piece "Audience Participation," in which 4,000 people at once played the video game "Pong" on the Hauptplatz. Audience

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participation was already a major theme here back in 1980, when the "Mitmachkonzert" took place, a "participation concert" where everyone was asked to bring their own homemade musical instrument and perform a big communal concert on the main square. In 1986, the "Aurora Elettronica" caused a sensation with its colorfully illuminated steel frame erected around the Trinity Column and the many moving projections on the buildings of the main square, to the accompaniment of swirling electronic sounds. In 2002, Rafael Lozano Hemmer transformed the architecture of Linz's main square with the gigantic shadow plays of "Body Movies"; in 2003 an oversized computer keyboard appeared on the art university's façade that could be climbed on and, by pressing its giant keys, programming commands executed. In 2004 huge, wind-propelled beach creatures made of wood and plastic pipes populated Linz's main square. The following year saw hundreds of cyclists using muscle power to light up an artificial moon in the night sky, and in 2015 the Mercedes-Benz F 015, at the time the world's most advanced research vehicle, sped around in front of the Old Town Hall. Re: the Town Hall: At the main square, the exhibition's focus rests not least on the important role of the Linz city administration, without whose strong and continuing support countless projects would have been impossible to realize. And so it makes sense that, year after year, so many visitors come to the lobby of the Old Town Hall on the main square to gaze in wonder at the huge aerial photograph of Linz, taken in 2007 as part of an Ars Electronica participation project: "Ganz Linz" ("All of Linz") called on the people of Linz to place objects on roofs, balconies, gardens, and parks that would then be visible to a photo flyover.

Economic engine – voestalpine

With the firm's reconstruction work following the Second World War, voestalpine's huge headquarters grew to become the economic engine of the city, which for years has emphasized Linz's identity as a steel city. For this reason, voestalpine has made regular appearances since the beginnings of the Ars Electronica Festival, both thematically and as a host to extraordinary projects. Both the Linz Steel Symphony of 1980 and the Linz Steel Opera of 1982 explored the integration of the worlds of art and work, where steel workers, musicians, and machines became the protagonists. The musical train tours through the factory grounds at night, organized by Fadi Dorninger between 1996 and 2000, have also attained legendary status. Further examples of how the city's industrial infrastructure has been put to good use include various events held in the factory halls of Linz harbor and an opening fête on the assembly floor of the ÖBB in Unionstraße.

Independent scene: the Stadtwerkstatt

Another portion of the exhibition is given over to the independent scene, a.k.a. the Stadtwerkstatt, whose actions and initiatives have had a major influence on Linz's urban development. By turning its back on the institutional framework of the city's cultural establishments, the independent scene gained and maintains a large degree of creative autonomy. Also worthy of note is the great latitude granted to the independent scene at the time by the ORF. For example, as part of Van Gogh TV, live programs were broadcast throughout Europe on 3sat for three days via satellite uplink, during which viewers were able

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to help shape the program. In 1991, a collaboration between Stadtwerkstatt and ORF OÖ caused a big sensation: “Hundesprengung” (“blowing up the dog”). In this campaign, viewers sitting at home in front of the television were encouraged to decide whether a dog would live or die by dialing a telephone number—with the proviso that the choice they made would be on the viewer’s own conscience: The final decision was not a positive one for the poor dog. The following day, the news program "Oberösterreich Heute" explained that the alleged blowing up of the dog had only been a video trick, and that the animal remained in the best of health. In addition to the Stadtwerkstatt, the artists' collective Time's Up has repeatedly proven itself to be an important representative of the independent scene; it’s therefore no coincidence that, with their "Turnton Docklands," the collective was featured artist of the 2017 Ars Electronica Festival.

ARS on the WIRE

Along with "Ars and the City," a second festival exhibition takes a look back on 40 years of Ars Electronica: "ARS on the WIRE" at POSTCITY concentrates on the development of the Internet, from the beginnings of the World Wide Web through to 2019. The exhibition shows how the Internet developed from a purely technical infrastructure to a social, public space and eventually became the focal point of our society. The show reminds us that young "net artists" were already exploring the structures and potential of this new medium at the end of the 1970s. Even back then, Ars Electronica in Linz served as one of the venues for this groundbreaking artistic exploration.

Andreas J. Hirsch: Creating the Future – A Brief History of Ars Electronica 1979-2019

Andreas J. Hirsch's richly illustrated commemorative work "Creating the Future - A Brief History of Ars Electronica" also offers a look back on 40 years of Ars Electronica. The book traces the history of Ars Electronica, from the pioneering days of its founding through the turbulent times as the digital revolution began to the challenges of a rapidly growing international organization with a need to constantly reinvent itself. It tells the story of how technology affects society and our lives in constantly new and challenging ways, how collaboration between art and science can lead to remarkable innovations, and how Ars Electronica prepares people for the future.

LightWing II / Uwe Rieger (GER/NZ), Yinan Liu (NZ), arc/sec Lab (NZ)

During the Ars Electronica festival, the auditorium of the LENTOS Art Museum Linz will also feature the interactive installation LightWing II, which creates mysterious experiences using tactile data and augments a kinetic construction with stereoscopic 3D projections and surround sound. In LightWing II, flexible carbon rods stretch tight a large transparent membrane. Even a light touch makes the structure vibrate, presenting visitors with a vision of holographic spaces and virtual-world happenings.

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Ars Electronica Festival 2019: <https://ars.electronica.art/outofthebox/>

LENTOS Art Museum Linz: <https://www.lentos.at/>

Stadtwerkstatt: <https://stwst.at/>

Time's Up: <https://timesup.org/>

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