

About Ars Electronica Festival

Ars Electronica made its debut on September 18, 1979. This festival of art, technology and society spotlighted the emerging Digital Revolution. In his preface to what was going on then, Mayor Franz Hillinger wrote (with specific reference to music): “Ars Electronica is giving rise to a new tonal coloration in which state-of-the-art technology is dovetailing with the intellectual spirit of the age to open up undreamt-of expressive possibilities. [...] I am absolutely convinced that this new melodic parlance will ultimately be widely understood. After all, with the help of electronic music, it can even be made visible, be implemented in color, contour, line and rhythm that can be followed onscreen.” He would be proven correct.

Within a few years, Ars Electronica developed into one of the world’s foremost media art festivals. And its growing success was paralleled by the expansion of its annual lineup of events. The 1979 festival proudly presented 20 artists and scientists; in 2008, no fewer than 484 speakers and artists from 25 countries were in attendance. For more than three decades now, this world-renowned event has provided an annual setting for artistic and scientific encounters with social and cultural phenomena that are the upshot of technological change. Symposia, exhibitions, performances and interventions carry these inquiries beyond the confines of conventional conference spaces and cultural venues and take them out into the public sphere and throughout the cityscape.

In this process of pervading public spaces and staging festival activities in interesting and appropriate physical settings, Ars Electronica has consistently displayed extraordinary imaginativeness. From the harbor to the mines, from factories to outlying monasteries, unusual locations have repeatedly served as sites of performances and interventions, and have, in turn, been reinterpreted by them.

But the attractiveness of Ars Electronica isn’t attributable solely to participation by renowned scientists and artists from all over the world. Or to remarkable venues. Above all, it’s the international audience that makes the biggest contribution to the festival spirit: the colorful mix of old friends and new faces who conjure up extraordinary circumstances - a “fruitful state of emergency” - every September in Linz.

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