

Linz, January 16, 2017

Last autumn, a discussion came up about the issue of the unequal distribution of women and men among the Prix Ars Electronica prizewinners, and some people participating in this discussion also voiced complaints whereby Ars Electronica was said to not pay adequate attention to this issue.

Although the fact of the much lower number of women among the winners of a Golden Nica cannot be denied and the importance of this subject cannot be overemphasized, it is nevertheless to be noted that this is by no means the result of lack of attention on the part of Ars Electronica, but instead ultimately reflects the general yet very unsatisfactory situation of a significantly smaller presence of females active in both areas—both art and technology.

But this situation has never been seen as an excuse for Ars Electronica, which is evident in the countless initiatives that we have already been conducting for so many years.

First of all, it might be good to keep in mind that both the Festival and the Prix are headed by a female/male duo: Christine Schöpf and Gerfried Stocker as Festival directorate, and Christine Schöpf and Hannes Leopoldseder in charge of the Prix Ars Electronica juries.

Since 1996, the Ars Electronica Center has been developing and offering programs to attract and support girls and young women doing creative work with new media and digital technologies. The Prix Ars Electronica's u19 category launched in 1998 was to a great extent developed by a woman, Sirikit Aman. This has been a particularly important aspect from the very beginning.

But not only have we initiated new projects in our educational programs; we have done so for professional artists as well. Since 2004, Ars Electronica, in cooperation with the Women's Office of the City of Linz, has organized the Marianne von Willemer Prize, an award that is bestowed on female media artists only. In addition, we could cite numerous program highlights at the annual Festivals that have particularly focused on the significance of female artists for the development of media art.

And it should also be mentioned that, as an organization, we have had an equal opportunity mandate among our employees for many years already.

Concerning the Prix Ars Electronica, we have been significantly raising the number of female jurors since 2004, the year we took over organizational responsibility.

Of course, these are all just steps and we fully agree that there is always more that can and has to be done, but these steps are already showing results. If you consider the last Prix Ars Electronica, you see that not only the prize for the Visionary Pioneer went to a woman, but also one of the prestigious new STARTS Prizes was awarded to Iris van Herpen and the second to a collective project in which artist Mika Satomi was one of the two project initiators, and more than half the participating artists were women.

It is also interesting to note that, in the last two years, our attractive artist-in-residence positions at CERN, ESO and now also the ESA went to Maria Ignacia Edwards, to the artists' duo Ruth Jarman and Joe Gerhardt, to the artists' collective, Jan Bernstein, Juliane Götz and Sebastian Neitsch, and the most recent one has once again selected two women, Aoife van Linden Tol and Sarah Petkus.

These results are encouraging but, of course, not reason enough to avoid further efforts. Therefore, last year, to spotlight all the female media artists who have garnered awards from Ars Electronica or been selected for our programs, we started the Women in Media Art database that is, with more than 1,800 entries, as far as we know, one of the largest collections of data about female media artists. This will certainly prove to be a very useful and valuable source of information for curators and festival organizers. The next step is now an extension that allows female artists to join and enter their own information.

In order to intensify the impact, we are also going to collaborate and join forces with the many other similar initiatives that already exist.

Christine Schöpf, Gerfried Stocker
Directorate of Ars Electronica Festival