

Co-Creation in Pandemic Times:

750 artists from 34 countries take part in dual Ars Electronica

(Linz, 13.9.2021) “It was fantastic to once again meet artists, researchers, designers and activists from all over the world here in Linz, to feel their enthusiasm and optimism,” says Gerfried Stocker, Artistic Director of Ars Electronica, looking back on the past five days. “I think it gave everyone — whether they were contributors or visitors — great pleasure to see each other again, to exchange ideas and to look forward together.” “Anyone who strolled through 'Kepler's Gardens' at the weekend, looked at the exhibitions and presentations and talked to the many artists and scientists, undoubtedly went home very inspired,” enthuses Meinhard Lukas, Rector of Johannes Kepler University Linz, about the unique atmosphere on the campus.” Once again, despite the pandemic, the festival for art, technology and society was a forum for intense debates, a stage for great performances, a workshop for artistic handicrafts and a playground for children whose eyes were shining with discovery.

As far as Covid is concerned, hosting this Ars Electronica once again posed a huge challenge for everyone involved. “It’s still incredibly difficult to bring artists from other parts of the world to Linz,” says Gerfried Stocker. “Different regulations apply everywhere and sometimes they’re very strict, and they are also constantly changing — there were artists here with us who now have to spend up to three weeks in quarantine after their trip home before they’re allowed to meet their families and friends again.” That made it all the more gratifying that 668 artists accepted the invitation to come to Linz and present their installations, projects and performances on site.

206 media representatives from 21 countries were accredited in advance, including journalists who work for Arte, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Central News Agency Taiwan, The Economist, Leonardo, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, RTV Slovenija, Agencia EFE, Heise Verlag, Nikkei and SWR2.

Linz celebrates the love affair between art and science

“In August, there were 14,208 visitors to the Ars Electronica Center — more than in any other August since the Capital of Culture year,” says Gerfried Stocker. “So we naturally hoped in advance that the festival would also meet with great interest.” On Sunday evening, this festival counted a total of 30.000 visits — exceeding expectations. Both the locations in the city center, which were open from Wednesday to Sunday (a total of 11.000 visits), and the “Kepler’s Gardens” on the JKU campus, which were open from Thursday to Sunday, were very well attended. “However, despite those great numbers, I’d like to say that the pandemic in particular has revealed that when it comes to art and culture, we shouldn’t just focus on numbers games and attendance statistics,” says Gerfried Stocker. “In light of the massive polarization of our society and the incalculable role that digital algorithms play in this, we see how important it is to promote artistic reflection. We need to maintain a broad societal dialogue and keep reinitiating it. The contribution that art is capable of making here cannot be overestimated.”

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186 Partners made 86 festival gardens bloom on all continents

86 Festival Gardens were created within the framework of Ars Electronica 2021 and all continents were represented. A total of 186 partners from 47 countries contributed to the exhibitions, conferences, concerts, performances and guided tours offered in these many gardens. “In times like these, it’s simply a great statement when so many artists and institutions around the world join forces and try, both on-site and online, to get people thinking and to engage them in a dialogue about our future,” says Gerfried Stocker, thanking everyone who was involved in this Ars Electronica.

An exciting field test for the online festival

This was the first Ars Electronica to offer an independent online festival. After last year’s experiment, we tried out a lot of new things this time as well. Even before the festival began, there was an 11-part “Home Delivery” series that provided insights into the theme, structure and program, along with many blog posts that introduced artists and their projects. During the festival, we used the event platform Swapcard for the first time, to bundle 466 individual program offerings. 3948 contributions were posted here in various chats and 3068 contacts were exchanged, plus more than 100 closed meetings on Zoom. “An initial evaluation of this online presence reveals two things: monetization has decreased reach and increased community effect,” says Gerfried Stocker. “In other words, the 9-euro ticket buys a community with above-average interest in some highly specific content, which also makes it a great networking opportunity.” With the streams offered free of charge, on the other hand, it was the other way around; the highlight and partner channels together recorded more than 25,000 hits, but there was far less interaction on those channels.

Festival University: Chain reaction of change on Friday, 17.9.2021

While Ars Electronica 2021 ended last night, the prototype “Festival University” is just now heating up. “During the course of the festival, the students met and exchanged ideas with a whole series of renowned artists, scientists and activists. In the next few days, the individual groups will now work on concrete projects. Their results will then form a ‘chain reaction of change’ and be presented on Friday at the Ars Electronica Center,” says Gerfried Stocker, who is already excited about what the 100 participants from 41 countries will come up with.

And 2022?

As we all know, when the festival is over it’s time to prepare for the next one. So it’s worth noting in closing that the next Ars Electronica will take place from September 7 to 11, 2022. We’re already looking forward to it!

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Media coverage of selected Ars Electronica Gardens

“Mega-Festival: Experience Ars Electronica online: It's crazy what you can see in the next few days for a 9-euro ticket in the online edition of Ars Electronica: If you've always wanted to go to Ars Electronica, arguably Europe's most important media art festival, but never (or at least not always) made it to Linz, you can be there online from September 8-12.” (page / 7.9.2021)

“Ars Electronica combines oxytocin, olive oil and wine. [...] The work is a project of Ars Electronica Garden Barcelona, one of the international venues of the most important art, technology and society festival in the world [...].” (9.9.2021 / El Pais / translated from Spanish)

“Ars Electronica arrives in Bologna. [...] The Data Tour D'Italie will take place at the Giardini Margherita in Bologna and online and will build an ideal bridge to the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz.” (9.9.2021 / Artribune / translated from Italian).

“Linz hosts the Ars Electronica Festival, one of the world's most important events related to new technologies [...]. [...] Thanks to coordinated programming and digital activities, it's also coming alive in Italy.” (9.9.2021 / Il Quotidiano Italiano / translated from Italian)

“Cuba participates in the Ars Electrónica Festival for the first time!” (radiocubitas / 10.9.2021 / translated from Spanish)

“Guatemalans are exhibiting two works dedicated to digital art and technology at New York's Ars Electronica Festival Garden.” (soy502 / 8.9.2021 / translated from Spanish)

“Ars Electronica has kicked off in Linz, with physical events and virtual ones going on around the world until September 12. And in so-called gardens, in which Slovenian partners are participating.” (RTV Slovenija / 8.9.2021 / translated from Slovenian)

“The Ars Electronica Festival is one of the largest media art events in the world and a festival for art, cutting-edge technology and culture. This year, under the motto ‘A New Digital Deal,’ a hybrid event will take place from September 8-12 with real venues in Linz, Austria and online projects in more than 80 cities worldwide. Each city's projects will be called Garden, and the Garden TOKYO launched to showcase the activities of Japanese artists.” (JapanDesign / 8.9.2021 / translated from Japanese)

“The largest festival of technological art, Ars Electronica, has begun. In St. Petersburg, the festival is presented by ITMO University's Grounding exhibition, which brings together famous and young scientific artists from eight countries.” (metronews / 9.9.2021 / translated from Russian).

“The Ars Electronica Festival 2021 in Austria is dedicated [...] to the motto ‘A New Digital Deal’ [...]. The Tapipei/Formosa Gardens [...] invites viewers from all over the world on a grand tour around the island.” (Central News Agency Taiwan / 9.9.2021 / translated from Taiwanese)

“As part of the Ars Electronica Festival 2021, the Ars Electronica Garden Athens will present the exhibition You and AI on the roof of the Onassis Foundation.” (Athina984 / 10.9.2021 / translated from Greek)

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