In Kepler's Gardens:

Digital && Life - the major theme exhibition of Ars Electronica 2021

(Linz, 8.9.2021) The (digital) world is out of joint, and Ars Electronica 2021 wants to crack it into shape. Together with artists, scientists, developers, activists and entrepreneurs from all over the world, the festival puts its finger on the pain points and tackles topics like seamless surveillance, the boom in conspiracy theories, digital feudalism and the gigantic ecological footprint of the WWW. But alarmism and pessimism aren't Ars Electronica's style. Quite the opposite: the countless artistic projects, technological prototypes, scientific experiments and civil-society initiatives at this year's festival show that we can avoid the impending digital dystopia — and how. In the third decade of this 21st century, it's up to us to reshuffle the cards and launch a NEW DIGITAL DEAL.

"Transform your World" — the Festival University

They're between 16 and 24 years old and come from 41 countries. They're passionate about new developments and making our future better than our present. That's precisely why they applied for the "Festival University" offered by Ars Electronica and Johannes Kepler University Linz (JKU), which debuts this year thanks to support from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the province of Upper Austria. What is this field test all about? It's about the great challenges of our time and how ideas from the arts, science and technology can help us tackle them here and now. It's also about the question of what learning should look like in the 21st century.

This prototype of a summer university kicked off on August 30. In the meantime, the 100 students have gotten to know each other online and divided into six groups, which are now focusing on different topics. One group will continue to work online on "Investigative Journalism," while the other five groups will focus on the topics "Autonomous Vehicles," "Circular Economy," "Creative Robotics," "Drones & Swarm Behavior" and "Transforming the Body" on site in Linz.

Over the next few days, the students will learn from inspiring top international scientists, managers, artists and activists such as Josef Penninger, Francesca Bria, Jōichi Itō, Leanne Kemp, Kilian Kleinschmidt, Cristina Olaverri-Monreal and Georg Steinbichler. Guided tours through the festival as well as excursions to voestalpine, the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial and St. Florian Abbey are also part of the program.

In the last week, the think tank becomes a "do tank." With the active support of artists and activists, the individual groups develop their projects and prototypes. Whether it's a Friday demo for climate protection and sustainability, a "Guide to the Galaxy of Digital Humanists," a dance performance on the theme of trust, a painting of the brave new world, a poem against digital feudalism or a protest song against the privatization of the digital agora — we can't wait to see what form the results of the first Festival University of JKU and Ars Electronica will take! In addition, the students will develop a concept for the university of the 21st century. What should be taught there? Who should teach? And how important are interdisciplinary fields of study? This "chain reaction of change" will be presented at a closing event on Friday, September 17, 2021 at the Ars Electronica Center and on Linz's Hauptplatz.

The Digital and Life — the themed exhibition of Ars Electronica 2021

This year's themed exhibition "Digital && Life" examines how much our lives have been digitalized and what complex relationships have emerged in that process. The "&&" refers to the logical AND operator, which is used in the programming language C when two values or statements — the operands — are correct. The title of the exhibition expresses how the digital is inextricably linked with our lives. Some of the projects on display emerged in response to a call by the Linz Institute of Technology and some come from the multi-year EU programs "STARTS," "EMAP" and "European ARTificial Intelligence Lab," in which Ars Electronica plays a leading role. The "Digital && Life" exhibition will be on display in the Learning Center and the Mensa building on the JKU campus starting Thursday, September 9, 2021.

Creative Convergences between Art and Science — the Exhibition of the Linz Institute of Technology (LIT)

Albert Einstein didn't just say that problems can't be solved with the same way of thinking that created them — he proved it, too. In other words: walking along familiar paths faster and with more finesse is not what gets us to our goal. What we need are detours into rocky terrain with no established paths, where unexpected vistas and insights open up. That's exactly what the Linz Institute of Technology, or LIT for short, exists to seek out and find.

"Responsible Technology" is a short description of what the JKU's all-university institute is about. It focuses not only on technical innovation itself, but also on its social, economic, health and legal consequences. The LIT is showing seven projects selected as part of a call for entries for the themed exhibition at Ars Electronica 2021. What these "**Creative**

Convergences between Art and Science" have in common is that they open up unusual insights into scientific findings and their potential applications, whether it's using living chromogenic bacterial cultures obtained directly on campus to dye textiles ("**Growing Colors: Patterning with living pigments**"), multiphase flows and their significance for water treatment, exhaust gas purification, or vaccine production ("**Do You Feel Stressed**"), the constitutional implications of virtualizing court proceedings ("**The Virtual Court. Reality.**"), the use of Synthetic Aperture Radar for autonomous robots ("**Magic Eye**"), and interactive scenarios around the possibilities and limits of machine learning — in the sense of demystifying AI ("**Serum 13**," "**Faces of AI**," and "**AI Forest**").

The STARTS Prize '21 Exhibition

The European Commission's **STARTS** initiative makes it clear that the technological advancement and artistic practice can be combined in the best possible way to become an asset for European innovation policy and the art world. An annual competition organized by Ars Electronica brings best-practice projects to the forefront for presentation and discussion at the festival. In 2021, this STARTS exhibition is not conceived as a separate category; instead it forms a central narrative strand of the themed exhibition. It's an impressive display of art's ability to visualize and convey scientific data in order to contribute to change ("**Oceans in Transformation**" received the STARTS Prize 2021 for "Artistic Exploration"). It shows how an economically, ecologically and socially sustainable circular economy can work anywhere if we use supposed waste as raw materials for manufacturing new products ("**Remix el Barrio, Food Waste Biomaterial Makers**" was awarded the STARTS Prize 2021 for "Innovative Collaboration").

The AI Lab Exhibition

No matter how we think about and implement a "New Digital Deal," our visions, expectations and fears about technologies such as artificial intelligence play an important role. That's why they are the main focus of the **European ARTificial Intelligence Lab** initiated by Ars Electronica in 2018. The European network supports artists who work with AI applications and reflect on their use and impact on our society. This year, it's contributing a whole series of projects to the themed exhibition. In their extraordinary data experiment "**Made to Measure**," the artist group "Laokoon" asks who actually defines identities in a digital society, how they are changed and by what means, and how far tech companies go to profit from our weaknesses, insecurities, illnesses and potential for addiction. "**The Museum of Edible Earth**," on the other hand, pleads for us to stop placing ourselves above nature, and instead to (re)understand ourselves as a part of it and to rethink our relationship with the world we live in.

The European Media Art Platform (EMAP)

Since 2018, the **European Media Art Platform** (EMAP) has awarded annual production grants to European media artists and supported the production, presentation and distribution of media art in Europe and beyond. The network, which is headed by the Werkleitz Center for Media Art (Halle, Germany), includes Ars Electronica, Bandits-Mages (Bourges, France), FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool, Great Britain), IMPAKT (Utrecht, Netherlands), Kontejner (Zagreb, Croatia), LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial (Gijón, Spain), m-cult (Helsinki, Finland), Onassis Cultural Centre (Athens, Greece), RIXC (Riga, Latvia) and WRO Art Center (Wroclaw, Poland). As part of the thematic exhibition of the Ars Electronica Festival 2021, the EMAP-funded project "**How to make an Ocean**" by Kasia Molga (PL/UK) will be shown. This extraordinary work is a very personal journey that began in sorrow: In autumn 2019 Kasia Molga had to cope with the loss of several people very close to her at the same time. At some point, she started collecting her tears and storing them in tiny vials, wondering if living beings could survive in these micro-oceans. In "**How to make an Ocean**" she shows a whole series of these small "seas of tears," which communicate the deeply human feeling to which they owe their creation, and also act as a habitat for living creatures, specifically algae.

The Circus of Knowledge

There will be smoke, hissing, whistles and smells. Clowns, artists, acrobats, actors, musicians and scientists will share their view of the world with all the enthusiasm and passion they feel for their profession and vocation. Their audience will be children, who will see, learn and understand in this "Circus of Knowledge" in a completely different way from what they are used to. The inauguration of this new playground of wonder and discovery will take place during the official opening of Ars Electronica 2021 on Wednesday, September 8, 2021.

During the festival, the new "Circus of Knowledge" will be the venue for a whole series of conferences that can be followed both on site and via streaming.