

*"Everyone will have his own pocket telephone that will enable him to get in touch with anyone he wishes. People living in the Wireless Age will be able to go everywhere with their transceivers, which they will be able to affix wherever they like—to their hat, for instance..."*

*Robert Sloss: The Wireless Century in "The World in 100 Years," Berlin 1910*

## The World in 100 Years

### A Journey through the History of the Future

June 16-September 19, 2010

Ars Electronica Center Linz

(Linz, June 16, 2010) Our longing to know the future is timeless. Just like our burning desire to co-determine and change the course of events transpiring in this world. The exhibition "The World in 100 Years - A Journey through the History of the Future" pays tribute to some great thinkers and activists who were ahead of their times, men and women who have displayed creativity, courage and resourcefulness in their commitment to a vision of the future. We begin by presenting Albert Robida (FR) and Paul Otlet (BE), two prominent visionaries of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then we shift the spotlight to contemporary artists and scientists and their NEXT IDEAS. "The World in 100 Years" will run from June 16 to September 19, 2010 at the Ars Electronica Center Linz.

*"Conquer interplanetary space; free humankind from the earthly bonds that have kept aerial navigation within our own atmosphere; colonize the Moon and then communicate with the other planets, our sisters in this cosmic void ... This will be humanity's next quest, bequeathed to our descendents of the twenty-first century!"*

*Albert Robida: "Le Vingtième Siècle," Paris 1883*

### Albert Robida and Paul Otlet, or: The Future in Now

Buildings that rotate to follow the sun, weather machines, artificial islands in the oceans, venturing into outer space, the universal library—amazingly, all of these up-to-the-minute ideas were elements of futuristic visions by Albert Robida (FR) and Paul Otlet (BE). These two men—the former an author, illustrator and caricaturist; the latter an attorney and businessman—developed concepts that anticipated some of the key advances of our modern times. Via photographs, videos and interactive animated sequences, "The World in 100 Years" takes you on an amazing excursion through Albert Robida and Paul Otlet's world of ideas.

#### Albert Robida (FR) and "La vie électrique"

Albert Robida (1848-1926) was an author, graphic artist and caricaturist. He wrote and illustrated many books including "Le Vingtième Siècle" (1883) and "Le Vingtième Siècle. La vie

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*électrique*" (1891), and crated futuristic scenarios in which everyone has his/her own flying vehicle, communicates with anyone else via "telephonoscope," and receives live reportage from the world's warzones right in his/her own living room. Furthermore, Robida never failed to deal with the downside of all these high-tech achievements. He gave accounts of digital surveillance, traffic accidents and the chaos resulting from them, overpopulation, permanent sensory overload and annoying spam e-mails. In addition to elaborating on how people would be linked up in global networks, Robida gave extensive consideration to the use and design of the physical spaces in which human beings would live.

#### Paul Otlet (BE) and the Mundaneum

Paul Otlet (1868-1944) was first and foremost a practitioner. He is considered the father of modern information theory. In 1895, he and Nobel laureate Henri La Fontaine (BE) established the *Office International de Bibliographie*, the aim of which was nothing less than the creation of a universal library that would gather together all of humankind's knowledge in order to make it available to everyone. In his view, this was the way to establish peace among all the peoples of the world.

Following the 1910 International Exposition, the Belgian government placed a large building in Brussels at their disposal, which Otlet named the *Palais du Monde* or Mundaneum. Between 1900 and 1914, Otlet and Fontaine attempted to propagate their project worldwide by establishing additional "data centers" in Paris, Washington and Rio de Janeiro, but their efforts failed, the victim of, among other factors, exploding costs. By 1934, the original Mundaneum had a collection of more than 15 million books, magazines, photos, and even early sound recordings and films—as well as the world's first analog search engine. The Universal Decimal Classification system Otlet developed was used to assign keywords to and classify not only every publication in the library's collection but also every query the facility received. In going about handling up to 1,500 queries per year, staffers ascertained what sort of information the user was interested in to thus establish the relevance of various documents and thereby optimize their response. In light of this highly sophisticated system of categorization or "linking" and the idea of storing data in a central network, Paul Otlet is now considered the father of hypertext and a mastermind of what became the internet. His futuristic ideas anticipated developments such as Web 2.0, social media, and user recommender systems. Nevertheless, his life work was crowned with scant success. The depression in the 1930s made it increasingly difficult to line up support for this ambitious project. First, Otlet had to move the facility to smaller quarters; shortly thereafter, the Mundaneum closed entirely. When Germany occupied Belgium in 1940, the former Mundaneum in the Palais du Cinquantenaire in Brussels was cleared to make room for a Nazi art exhibition. In the process, 67 tons of documents were destroyed. Thus, the space in which peace activists Otlet and La Fontaine had established their universal library as a bastion of peace and understanding among the peoples of the world was used to showcase gaudy propaganda for National Socialism's inhuman ideology and war machine.

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## NEXT IDEAS

Inspiring approaches, unusual ways of seeing things, new developments. Since 2004, voestalpine and Ars Electronica have annually awarded a grant designed to nurture artistic as well as technological and scientific innovation. The aim is to take conceptualization, R&D and enhancement/upgrading to the next level. These exciting ideas that have been developed by the Robidas and Otlets of our time and singled out for recognition by [the next idea] voestalpine Art and Technology Grant are now being showcased by “The World in 100 Years.” They include Cesar Harada’s Open Sailing, the vision of an autarchic floating community on the high seas, and Bruce Baikie’s wireless, solar-powered mode of internet access for pupils in developing countries. These unconventional and promising strategies are grouped as Architecture & New Living Spaces, Transportation & Mobility, Nutrition, and Networks.

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Paul Otlet: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Otlet](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Otlet)

Albert Robida: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Robida](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Robida)

Ars Electronica Center: [http://www.aec.at/index\\_de.php](http://www.aec.at/index_de.php)

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