

Remarks on the Arts program for ELO 2021 opening
Scott Rettberg, Conference co-chair

Hello everyone and welcome to ELO 2021, in Bergen and Aarhus and Vancouver and New Delhi and everywhere in between. I was reflecting the other night that this is actually the third ELO conference and festival that I've been part of organizing, including the 2002 State of the Arts symposium at UCLA, and the 2015 End(s) of Electronic Literature conference and now for one last time the 2021 Platform (Post?) Pandemic. Although this has in some ways been the most challenging of those experiences, it has also in many ways been the most rewarding. This year I took on the organization of the arts program and Søren has earned his angel's wings in directing the planning and execution of the research program. So I'll restrict myself to a few words about the arts program.

There are many people to thank in this endeavor. I have seen Søren's notes, so I know that he is thanking many of the other folks who have worked most closely with us, and it is a long list. In terms of the arts program, I'll single out Jason Nelson for his masterful production of the web exhibitions, which I think are both the most visually striking online conference exhibitions the ELO has ever had and the most valuable from a documentary perspective. Jason has produced wonderful interfaces for the majority of the 8 exhibition sites we are featuring in the program. Here at Bergen, the production of these exhibitions, with two of them manifesting both online and in physical gallery and library exhibitions, has been a team effort involving everyone in our Electronic Literature Research group. Hannah Ackermans organizing the poster sessions and workshops, Joseph Tabbi and Eamon O'Kane working on the Posthuman exhibition, Astrid Ensslin co-curating the performance program led by Ian Hatcher--our incoming 2021-22 Digital Culture Fulbright--along with Claire Donato and Kat Mustatea, Carlota Salvador Megias pulling all the logistical pieces together, Irene Fabbri working on the sites, and Ashleigh Steele producing a documentary film, Aud Gjersdal and Ronnie Nordvik at the University of Bergen Library, and many others have contributed to making this an extraordinary arts program that has been unfolding since March. And the ELO community and board have also been tremendous contributors. Finally, I want to thank the University of Bergen Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic studies and the Bergen University Fund for their substantial material support of ELO 2021.

Something other-than-usual that we tried out this year, and something that I think has been successful, is that The Posthuman exhibition, the Covid E-Lit exhibition, and the Platforming Utopias (and Platformed Dystopias) exhibitions all opened well in advance of the conference itself with dedicated virtual openings featuring the majority of the artists in each exhibition presenting their work, and the online exhibitions already include the video documentation of those events. This year we really wanted to give dedicated space and attention to each exhibition, and to each artist.

When we wrote the call for works for these exhibitions, Søren and I talked about the fact that we wanted to organize focused and curated exhibitions that cohered with the themes of the conference as a whole, featuring works that could function as critical digital media in reflecting

our current situation in the pandemic, and in platform culture, and provide frameworks for thinking about what comes after. In a way we were challenging ELO's community of authors and artists – not just to deliver whatever they happened to be working on, but to respond very specifically to the call, and to this moment. And we are enormously grateful for the work you all have produced.

There is still a great deal of the arts program to come. Last night we saw the first reveal of the fantastic Kid E-Lit exhibition so wonderfully curated by Mark Marino and Maria Goicochea. The diverse performance program begins momentarily and will continue the three following nights. Dene Grigar is presenting us with a tremendous collection of preserved Flash works in the new NEXT online museum of electronic literature, and on Friday the dra.ft team, led by Nandhiti Khlinani, Ambika Joshi and Agat Sharma, is presenting freeFall future.text, the first-ever exhibition of Indian and Asian e-lit to be featured at an ELO conference.

Before I drop the mic and head off into the sunset, or more accurately the Zoom in the spare room, I want to say that the thing I've always valued most about the ELO community is that it has always been a generous community, intellectually generous, artistically generous, tolerant, and welcoming to new thinkers and authors and artists and ideas of what electronic literature is and yet might become. I hope that even as this community grows, we can keep that spirit of openness and generosity alive. So be generous to each other and have a great conference.

And with that I would like to turn it over to one of the most generous people I know, who has for months been pouring his blood, sweat and tears into this conference, my dear friend and collaborator, Søren Pold.