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No Legacy || Literatura electrónica

The exhibition No Legacy || Literatura electrónica (NL||LE) presents a collection of works of digital literature in Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, and English alongside print works of the 20th-century avant-garde. It gathers an unprecedented team of collaborators from across the UC Berkeley campus (the University Library, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Institute of European Studies, and the Berkeley Center for New Media) as well as national and international partners to showcase the impact of technology on literary production in the 21st-century networked world.

Electronic literature, or e-lit, refers to works that utilize computers and other digital media in creative literary ways. Examples include hypertext or interactive fiction, digital poetry, narrative generators, Twitter bots, augmented reality texts, iPad applications, etc. Meant to be read on computers and other devices, electronic literary works reveal new ideas about literary and media developments while inviting interaction with readers. The characteristics of e-lit pose challenges for writers, scholars, and curators when issues like software and hardware obsolescence and preservation come to the forefront. Exhibits like NL||LE have become an ideal medium of projection for this kind of literary expression.

NL||LE brings forth the historical dimension of e-lit works. Reading a work online with a shiny new computer or tablet makes it easy to forget that what one is seeing might be a legacy work from the early 1990s. Only two decades ago, computation and devices were drastically different. Their affordances in terms of graphics, speed, memory as well as the fact that the Internet did not exist yet have influenced the way these pieces were created and read. By incorporating vintage computers in the exhibit, the NL||LE team highlights the historical grounding of the works. Claude Potts, Romance Languages Librarian at UC Berkeley, has furthered the temporality of the project by assembling more than fifty print works that inform the creation and reading of the digital pieces. Exhibit cases and tables were designed by students in a Berkeley Center for New Media seminar taught by Stephanie Lie.

Although e-lit exhibits have proliferated in the US and around the Spanish speaking world, in NL||LE co-curators Alexandra Saum-Pascual and Élika Ortega propose to recover the previously unseen relationships of English language e-lit with Spanish and Portuguese language works, both print and digital. NL||LE launches a speculative exploration of literary history: an alternative to making connections between movements and authors. Instead, it asks questions that highlight less common kinds of literary relationships like the look or the handling of the work as objects.

No Legacy || Literatura electrónica opens on March 11, 2016 and runs through September 2, 2016 in the Bernice Layne Brown Gallery of UC Berkeley’s Doe Library. Opening day includes an academic symposium in the morning and a reception at 5:30 pm with digital poetry readings in the Morrison Library.

For visiting hours please check lib.berkeley.edu/hours
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