

NAM JUNE PAIK

American, born Korea, 1932

**Eagle Eye**, 1996

Antique slide projector and eye chart, transparency of the artist, aluminum, nine computer keyboards, neon, nine Sony 5-inch televisions model FDT-5BX5, two KEC 9-inch televisions model 9BND, DVD  
Ackland Fund, 99.8

Nam June Paik, long considered the pioneer of video art, uses the medium to express the complexities of contemporary culture. Inspired by both the spirit of Zen and the ever-changing dynamics of American society, the artist has created a unique and expressive style of art that creatively fuses new technologies. *Eagle Eye's* composition is influenced by the Native American thunderbird. Included are references to obsolescent technologies -- the old slide projector and eye chart -- and the artist's self-portrait. Paik is the eagle, who has symbolically endowed the sculpture itself with vision. The video contains a kaleidoscope of pulsating images programmed and edited with the aid of a computer. Sublime satellite photographs of Earth and a solar eclipse intermingle with images of American missiles launched and targeted for destruction. Paik juxtaposes these two opposing aspects of technology that continue to haunt humanity. With *Eagle Eye* the artist not only provides a prescription for seeing but also a richer understanding of both art and life



Nam June Paik Korean, born 1932

*Piano Piece*, 1993

Closed-circuit video sculpture, 120 x 84 x 48"

Sarah Norton Goodyear Fund, 1993

The unusual arrangement of objects in Nam June Paik's *Piano Piece*—thirteen monitors, video cameras mounted on tripods, videotape players, a stool, and an exposed upright piano—appears somewhat haphazard at first. However, the work is, in fact, a carefully orchestrated composition, created as a tribute to the artist's close friend and mentor, avant-garde composer John Cage, who died in 1992. Paik had met Cage in 1958 in Germany, and that meeting would be a crucial event for Paik's future role as the "father of video art." John Cage was also important in the history of Buffalo, which was an international center of new music from 1965 until the early 1990s. This was due to a group of musicians known as the Creative Associates, who performed a series called Evenings for New Music at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. They were able to attract many of the world's greatest composers, one of the most important of whom was Cage, who came to Buffalo almost annually.

In Paik's homage to his friend, a computer program by Richard Titlebaum plays music by Cage on the upright piano, and the composer's image appears in the four central monitors at the top. The hands and head seen playing the piano in the left and right monitors on the top row and the central monitor at the bottom belong to Paik, who is an accomplished pianist. Alternating with Paik's hands or head are images of another Cage friend, avant-garde dancer Merce Cunningham, and seemingly unrelated images of babies. The other six monitors show live video of the piano, recorded by the two video cameras. These unusual uses of a piano are appropriate as a tribute to Cage, whose experiments with altered and prepared pianos have become legendary.

In the pretaped videos, Paik has manipulated the imagery using a variety of techniques, some of which he developed himself. These visual effects give the entire composition a feeling of energy and movement. Monitors have been placed with certain overall effects in mind as well. For example, the sequencing of the images on the four central monitors at the top create a kind of pinwheel effect.

Paik's role as a pioneer in video art comes out of lifelong interests. As a child, he had been fascinated by electronics, especially the radio, wondering "Why do people hide in the box?" When television was introduced in the early 1950s, his interest shifted to that technology. The artist grew up in Seoul, Korea. When the Korean War began, his family fled to Tokyo, Japan. There he attended the University of Tokyo, studying philosophy, aesthetics, art history, and music. After graduation in 1956, he went to Germany, where he acquired training as a pianist, musicologist, and composer. While in Germany, the center of the electronic music scene at the time, he combined his interests in music, electronics, and art, deciding to "move from electronic music into electronic music with the TV..." to create "something new—the moving painting, with sound." In works such as *Piano Piece*, Paik has achieved—and moved beyond—that goal.

— Nancy Spector

## SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDS-ON AND DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

- Have the children create a video from three points of view. The subject matter is limitless. Maybe you would like them to act out a story they are studying, or do a documentary on their school. The three points of view could be: three characters' points of view or from up high, straight on, and very low.
- Using small pieces of mirror or flaps cut out of cardboard with messages underneath, have the children make a piece of art in which the spectator participates. The artwork could instruct the viewer on which flaps to open, or things to do while viewing the artwork. For the subject matter of the artwork (content!), you assign a theme or use a more random approach, such as drawing topics out of a hat. For instance, if a child is assigned the subject cat, there could be a rule that he/she cannot use the word cator a picture of a cat. Instead, the artist must instruct the viewer on what to do (i.e. make the sound of a mother of a kitten, where to look (i.e. under a cardboard flap, hide a bit of fur or whiskers), etc., to help the viewer guess the subject of the work, Cat.
- Discuss the place of video in artmaking. Is video the same as TV? Is TV art? Are some kinds of TV art and others not? Again, there are not right or wrong answers. This could be a good place for a discussion about popular culture. Is TV our culture?



**Nam June Paik**  
**WAIS Station Tower**

**Exhibition at the World Bank and Organization Of American States**  
**May 9 - August 9, 1999**

The new millennium, globalization and cybernetics are changing the facade of our world. A recent newspaper advertisement expressed it numerically: 1729 languages, 196 cultures, 143 religions all converging in cyberspace.

Cybernetics is the instrument for this new age where everything happens with electronic velocity. While *Amazon.com* is one of the fastest growing companies today, the lungs of the Amazon jungle are becoming asphyxiated. We have discovered a new solar system 44 light years and 264 million miles away, yet we have little understanding of the planetary system in which we live. Distances and spaces are being altered. Man's journeys have other frontiers and national, social and human territories are being contextualized through the new technologies of communication



No artist has had a greater influence in imagining and realizing the artistic potential of video and television than Korean-born Nam June Paik. Through a vast array of installations, videotapes, global television productions, films, and performances, Paik has reshaped our perceptions of the temporal image in contemporary art. *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* transforms the Guggenheim Museum into a celebration of the moving image and an appreciation of Paik's impact on the art of the late-twentieth century.

[Video Commune](#), a Web site created for the occasion by Electronic Arts Intermix and the Guggenheim Museum, draws from EAI's extensive documentation of Paik's single-channel videotapes to present an interactive view of his collaborations with other artists, dancers, and musicians.

This exhibition is sponsored by  Museum of Modern Art

The commissioning and production of the site-specific works in the rotunda, *Sweet and Sublime* and *Jacob's Ladder*, are made possible by The Bohen Foundation. Additional support is provided by The Rockefeller Foundation and  National Endowment for the Arts

Top: Nam June Paik in collaboration with Norman Ballard, Paul Garrin, David Hartnett, and Stephen Vitiello, *Modulation in Sync*, 2000. Three-channel video and stereo sound installation with 100 monitors, seven projectors, two lasers, water, mirrors, projection screens, and metal structure, variable dimensions. Installation view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1999; test for *The Worlds of Nam June Paik*. Commissioning and production of the fully realized works *Sweet and Sublime* and *Jacob's Ladder* made possible by The Bohen Foundation. Photo by David Heald.

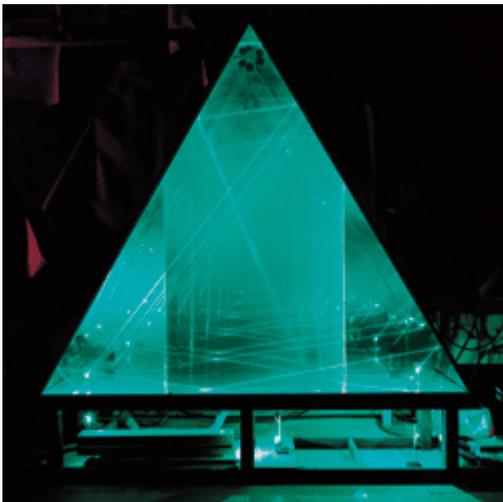
Paik studied music composition first in Korea, then at the University of Tokyo, where he wrote his thesis on Modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg. In 1956 Paik traveled to Europe and settled in Germany to pursue his interest in avant-garde music and performance. During studies at the Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt in 1958, he met composer John Cage. Cage's ideas on composition and performance were a great influence on Paik, as were those of George Maciunas, the founder of the radical art movement Fluxus, which Paik was invited to join.

Paik's initial artistic explorations of the mass media of television were presented in his first solo exhibition in 1963, *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television*, at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. This milestone exhibition featured Paik's prepared televisions. Paik altered the sets to distort their reception of broadcast transmissions and scattered them about the room, on their sides and upside down. He also created interactive video works that transformed the viewers' relationship to the medium. With these first steps began an astonishing effusion of ideas and invention that over the next 30 years would play a profound role in the introduction and acceptance of the electronic moving image into the realm of art.



Nam June Paik, 1986. Photo by Rainer Rosenow.

In 1964 Paik moved to New York and continued his explorations of television and video, and, by the late 1960s, was at the forefront of a new generation of artists creating an aesthetic discourse out of television and the moving image. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Paik also worked as a teacher and an activist, supporting other artists and working to realize the potential of the emerging medium. Along with his remarkable sequence of videotapes and projects for television—featuring collaborations with friends Laurie Anderson, Joseph Beuys, David Bowie, Cage, and Merce Cunningham—he created a series of installations that fundamentally changed video and redefined artistic practice.



*Pyramid II*, 1997. Laser, prisms, motors, and mirrored chamber. 325.1 x 375.9 x 121.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by David Heald.

The presentation of the works in the High Gallery is made possible by the generous support of Samsung Electronics



At the center of *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* is *Modulation in Sync* (2000), which includes two laser installations created with Norman Ballard for the museum rotunda that transform Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture into a dynamic audiovisual space. Projected onto the rotunda oculus, *Sweet and Sublime* is a rapidly changing display of geometric shapes that echo Wright's innovative design. In *Jacob's Ladder*, laser projections pass through a seven-story waterfall that cascades from the top of the museum. On the rotunda floor, a cluster of television monitors, with their screens facing up, project a pulsing display of rapidly changing imagery. Video projections along the ramp edges aimed towards the center of the rotunda provide a visual link between the images on the ground and those on the oculus, symbolizing the connections between Paik's historical remaking of video into an artist's medium and his latest transformation of laser into a dramatic "postvideo" treatment of energy and light.

The museum's High Gallery hosts Paik's recently completed three-dimensional laser sculptures, while the ramps feature Paik's landmark installations and sculptural pieces. In works such as *Real Fish/Live Fish* (1982), *TV Chair* (1968), and *Video Buddha* (1976), the artist employs videocameras and monitors to explore our perceptions of both external objects and ourselves and to create a profound sense of how we understand the world. These works are arranged together with the multiple-monitor installations *Video Fish* (1975), *TV Garden* (1974), and *TV Clock* (1963), in which Paik arrays rhetorical and aesthetic strategies to dismantle customary ways of seeing. Specially installed for this exhibition, such pioneering works take on particular relevance to the prevalent use of video by younger contemporary artists.

The museum's Tower Gallery houses a selection of Paik's early works, including audio and video recordings and key sculptural and interactive works from the 1960s and early '70s. These early prepared television and interactive video pieces, including *Magnet TV* (1965) and *Participation TV* (1963), offer a sophisticated, radical treatment of the ways in which interactions with technology can yield new visual experiences.



*TV Garden*, 1982 version. Single-channel video installation with live plants and monitors; color, sound; variable dimensions. Collection of the artist. © The Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, NYC.



*Magnet TV*, 1965. Television and magnet; black-and-white, silent; variable dimensions. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase, with funds from Dieter Rosenkranz 86.60a-b. © The Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, NYC.

The Tower Gallery also features video and photo documentation of Paik's early Fluxus performance work, showing the connections between his performance art and his later transformation of the medium of video. A tribute to Charlotte Moorman, Paik's great collaborator in performance, is also on view, including *TV Cello* (1971), a transformation of the instrument through video created especially for Moorman by Paik, along with videos and photographs that celebrate their unique artistic relationship. In addition, the Paik/Abe Video Synthesizer (1969), one of the first artist-made video image processors, is installed with a selection of videotapes the artist produced with this innovative technology. Adjacent to the gallery, a single-channel screening room presents continuous showings of a selection of Paik's videos and television productions from the '60s to the present.



Charlotte Moorman performing Paik's *Concerto for TV Cello and Videotapes* (1971) at Galeria Bonino, New York, November 23, 1971. © The Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, NYC. Collection of Barbara Wise, New York

Nam June Paik's art and career embody the virtues of change and recognize art's powerful role in helping us understand the world as it changes around us. *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* reflects the scope of Paik's remarkable career—from his transformation of broadcast television and video to his reconfiguration of laser into a new form of sculptural and installation art. His unique achievements, the precedents set by his creative accomplishments, and the wide range of his work attest to the key role Paik has played in expanding our understanding and definition of the arts through media. By inaugurating the millennium with *The Worlds of Nam June Paik*, the Guggenheim Museum not only acknowledges his importance but also testifies to the extraordinary impact the moving image will have on the art of the 21st century.

—John G. Hanhardt, Senior Curator of Film and Media Arts

*The Worlds of Nam June Paik* has received additional funds from Korean Cultural Service, Metropolis DVD, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Swatch, the Barbara and Howard Wise Endowment for the Arts, and NASA



*TV Clock*, 1989 version. Twenty-four manipulated color televisions; silent; variable dimensions. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Grace Jones Richardson Trust, Wendy and Elliot Friedman, Lillian and Jon B. Lovelace, Leatrice and Eli Luria, Zora and Les Charles, and Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree.



**NAM JUNE PAIK** | *Egg Grows* | 1984 - 89

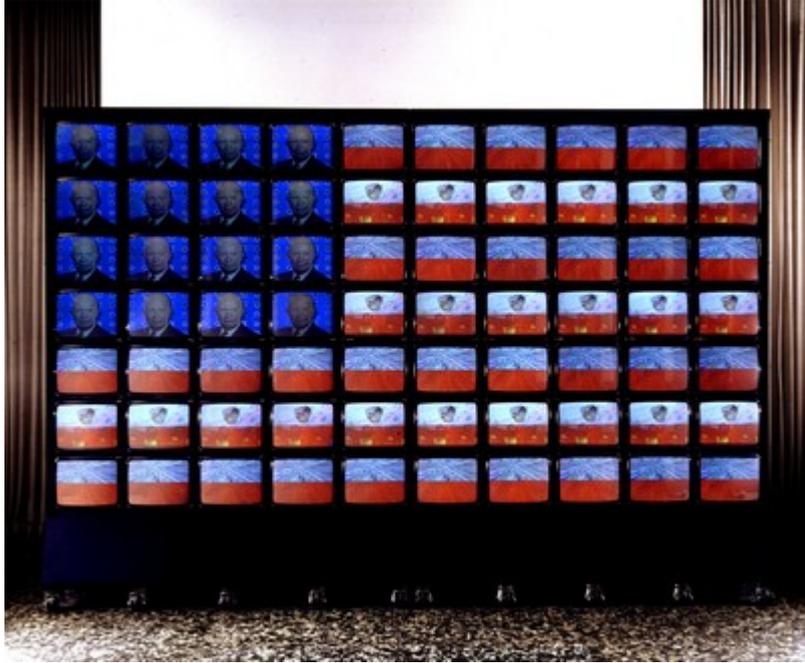
Since the early 1960s, Nam June Paik has helped to shape the cultural icon of television into an artist's medium and, in the process, has contributed greatly to the expanding definition of video art, the only medium new to twentieth-century art.

Paik considers video to be not unlike the painter's palette, a malleable material for the artist interested in establishing new expressive forms from analog or digital sources and in controlling time-based phenomena. Such technical innovations—forms of electronic synthesis that generate video effects of the artist's own creation—have enabled Paik to subject the image field of TV to his original vision.

*Installation: eight video monitors, video camera, egg, and plan*

*36 x 108 x 216 in. (91.4 x 274.3 x 548.6 cm)*

*Accessions Committee Fund: gift of Elaine McKeon, Byron Meyer, Madeleine Haas Russell, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Swanson 89.125*



**Nam June Paik**

American, born Seoul, Korea, 1932

***Video Flag***, (1985-1996)

70 video monitors, 4 laser disc players, computer, timers, electrical devices, wood and metal housing on rubber wheels  
94 3/8 x 139 3/4 x 47 3/4 in. (239.6 x 354.8 x 119.9 cm.)

HOLENIA PURCHASE FUND, IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH H. HIRSHHORN, 1996 (96.4)

In 1950, Nam June Paik and his family left his native Korea during that country's civil war. After studying aesthetics, art, music, and philosophy in Hong Kong and Japan, he moved to Germany. There he trained in music theory, history, and composition, piano, and electronic music. In the early 1960s Paik became associated with the Fluxus group, and moved from avant-garde music to happenings/performance art. He also began making "altered TVs" in which he manipulated television signals with magnets and used video feedback, synthesizers, and other technology to produce kaleidoscopic shapes and luminous colors. Paik housed these images in the bodies of cheap, secondhand TV sets. From *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* with cellist Charlotte Mooreman (1969) to his collaborative global telecast *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), Paik has long reigned as the father of video art.

*Video Flag* is an important example of Paik's more recent work composed of a series of sculptural television constructions or walls of TVs. In 1982 Paik created *Tricolor Vidéo* for the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, using television images to form a configuration of the French flag. In 1985-86 he used the American flag as the basis for three sculptures: *Video Flag X* (Chase Manhattan Bank collection), *Video Flag Y* (The Detroit Institute of Arts), and *Video Flag Z* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

The Hirshhorn's *Video Flag* incorporates the latest advances in technology, such as laser disks, automatic switchers, thirteen-inch monitors (rather than the ten-inch monitors used in previous versions), and other devices. A flag is instantly recognizable on this 7-by-12-foot bank of 70 monitors, in which stars and stripes share air time with split-second news stills, rotating statues of Liberty, endless runs of ones and zeros (the binary language of computers), and a face that morphs through every U.S. president from Harry S. Truman to Bill Clinton. Paik's video is his paean to America and the power of learning from a youth oriented culture.

ALM 2001



**Technology**

1991

Nam June Paik

25 video monitors, 3 laser disc players with unique 3 discs in a cabinet of...

overall: 127 x 51 7/8 x 75 5/8 in. (322.6 x 131.7 x 192.1 cm.)

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment

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