

Press Release

Title	Nam June Paik's 90 th Anniversary Exhibition <i>Archaeology of Avantgarde</i>		
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Nam June Paik's 90th Anniversary Exhibition *Archaeology of Avantgarde*



- *Archaeology of Avantgarde* is an exhibition looking back on 10 decisive scenes of Nam June Paik through his works and vivid photos.
- Inspired by what Nam June Paik called 'archeology of avantgarde,' the process of exploring his artistic roots in depth, the exhibition highlights Nam June Paik as an avantgarde artist pursuing new media and new arts.

■ Overview

- Title: *Archaeology of Avantgarde*
- Period: March 1 – September 18, 2022
- Venue: Nam June Paik Art Center, Gallery 1
- Curator: Lee Sooyoung (Curator, Nam June Paik Art Center)
- Artist: Nam June Paik
- Hosted and Organized by Nam June Paik Art Center, Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation
- Supported by Desker, Noroo Paint

■ Introduction

Archaeology of Avantgarde

Nam June Paik Art Center presents *Archaeology of Avantgarde* to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Nam June Paik's birth from March 3 to September 18, 2022. *Archaeology of Avantgarde*, the first exhibition of 2022, is centered around ten scenes that reflect on important moments in the life and works of Nam June Paik.

As if using the flashback technique in the movie, *Archaeology of Avantgarde* retraces the 10 most important moments in Paik's art world and suggests that the underlying reason for Paik's continued pursuit of new media and new arts was in the spirit of avantgarde. Starting with a scene that features Paik standing in front of a laser work in 2000, the exhibition present Paik's photos installing his work at the Venice Biennale in 1993, Paik conducting *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* in 1984, and Paik as a young man in the 1960s in reverse chronological order. Including Paik's 1977 album *My Jubilee ist Unverhemmet*, *Self-Portrait Dharma wheel* (Seoul Museum of Art collection), and *Cyberforum* (Korean Folk Village collection) presented at the US touring exhibitions *Electronic Superhighway* (1994-1997), works that have not been presented often to the public will be on display.

Paik looked back on the origins of his artistic characteristics and explored their roots in depth. He called this process 'the archeology of the avantgarde.' Paik once said that when at the age of 15 he heard the phrase "Schönberg is the most extreme avant-garde," he was immediately drawn to it. As soon as he heard the word 'avantgarde,' he set the direction of his life as if something echoed from the depth of his soul. Paik believed that his interest in avantgarde was a result of his genes, that is, it was engraved into his inherent personality. Paik also confessed that avant-gardism had always been the source of his life that would lead him to new arts, just as how the Ural-Altaic hunters never settled in any one place in constant pursuit of a new journey to see a new horizon. It allows us to understand why Paik was so drawn to the television, a machine that sees far distance, and why he was always looking for new media for his works.

Two weeks before he turned 45, Paik said, “Now is the time to create the archeology of the avantgarde.” We do not know what 90-year-old Paik would think, but we can look back and hear vividly the concerns of Paik before his 45th birthday. In 1978, the year he turned 45, Paik was not in an easy situation. He had to accept a professorship at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf to succeed his friend, Joseph Beuys, for a living and he could not hide how sorry he was. In 1977, a year prior to that, he had tried the possibility of video art using satellite through *Documenta 6, Satellite Telecast*, but it was hard for him to find an opportunity to advance it to the next level. However, Paik continued to work on it persistently both in Germany and New York, and after a retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1982, he presented *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* in 1984 that linked New York and Paris for satellite broadcast of the communication between artists in the two locations. The new horizon he wanted to see as he traveled far through the satellite was the universe.

The avantgarde that pursued novelty by integrating arts and life was also the modern art in youth. This exhibition is to return to avantgarde, celebrating Paik’s 90th birthday party without Paik. It seeks to see avantgarde not as a page of art history of the past, but as a fundamental force that sustains, revitalizes and propels contemporary art.

■ Sections

1. The Worlds of Nam June Paik



The title of Nam June Paik's retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2000 was "The Worlds of Nam June Paik." The exhibition presented Paik's artistic world, covering all the media he dealt with from those used in his works in the 1960s to laser. It was truly gratifying that John Hanhardt, who curated the exhibition, called the laser works "the victory of Nam June Paik." His works that used laser, including *Three Elements*, symbolize Paik's continuous artistic attempts from tape music to television and video, to broadcasting station and satellite, and to video installation and laser.

He anticipated that in the history of moving images, the notions of time and space had been fundamentally changed by video and television; and it was laser for him that could transform them once again.

Throughout his life, Paik proved that avantgarde is to keep challenging himself without being complacent with one medium or a small success. He was sitting in a wheelchair due to a physical illness, but he chose to shout with confidence rather than showing hesitation or hiding his face. Even physical limitation was used as a new medium for his art.

2. Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan



In the 1990s, Nam June Paik lived the life of a nomad traveling around the world. He was an avantgarde who exhibited and worked with new people in new places every time. At the Venice Biennale in 1993, where he received the Golden Lion prize as a representative of the German Pavilion, Paik explored the exchange and communication between the East and the West through an exhibition under the theme of “Electronic Superhighway: From Venice to Ulaanbaatar,” while planning a large-scale project for the memory and history of media from a view that ‘electronic superhighway,’ that is, the era of the internet that he had predicted 28 years ago, was being materialized. *Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan* is a sculpture that was exhibited in the German Pavilion, Venice Biennale in 1993. Television cases loaded on the bicycle carrier are filled with neon symbols and texts which bring up interesting imaginations. *Electronic Superhighway*, held across the United States as touring exhibitions from 1994 to 1997, was also an important exhibition that showed the concept of how the internet, represented by electronic media, would change the physical world in the future. *Cyberforum* depicts a robot standing in a small courtroom with satellite antennae as a roof, demonstrating the futuristic idea that even robots that are not humans can speak freely.

Since then, Paik has received numerous awards including the Kaiserring Award (1991), the UNESCO Picasso Medal (1992), the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize (1995), the Ho-Am Prize (1996), the Goethe Medal (1997), and the Kyoto Prize (1998). In particular, he co-curated the first Gwangju Biennale in 1995, influencing tremendously the globalization of Korean art.

3. Good Morning Mr. Orwell



Good Morning Mr. Orwell linked New York and Paris via satellite on January 1, 1984, and broadcast the live performances presented in each city. The point of Nam June Paik's plan was to create a meeting between pop-culture stars and avantgarde artists so that they could communicate with each other with their own voices. Paik wanted to present this meaningful meeting as a 'gift' for people around the world. Ordinary two-way broadcasting would have a control tower on one side to receive the video from the other side, edit it in real time, and transmit the same content to both sides. In *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, however, the broadcasting stations in Paris and New York transmitted their own content freely after exchanging broadcasting sources from each other. It was because Paik thought that live broadcasting should achieve TV communication through questions and answers just like in a phone call. As a result, the appropriate way of communication on television envisioned by Paik, that is, two-way communication on television, was realized. Paik's satellite broadcast was completed as artists of New York and Paris communicated with each other as if a romantic reunion of two love stars, Altair and Vega.

4. MS-Fluxussus (Symphony No. 7)



A violin with a small propeller is floating somewhere in the Rhine River that flows through Düsseldorf. Nam June Paik is standing by the river, holding a remote controller to move the violin. Can a small propeller resist the strong current of the river? For Paik, who sought to cause radical changes to art forms in the spirit of Fluxus, music in its broadest sense was no less than a source of significant materials. Subtitled “Symphony No. 7,” this work turns waves, the wind that causes the waves, and even the surrounding sounds into parts of a symphony besides the violin.

Paik’s work is a floating violin powered by a battery, functional within a 1km-radius from the controller. He used Robbe’s 40MHz economic AMS remote-control system that was equipped with two-channel transmission — Robbe is a company specializing in RC model vehicles. The violin was the one by handmade string-maker Pirastro, on whose back a square hole was made to install an engine in. The performance was premiered by the Rhine riverside in Hofgarten Park, Düsseldorf in 1981, in which Paik himself controlled the violin wirelessly. In 1986, four musicians joined “Aqua Quartet” at a small pond in Hombroich where they pulled out a violin from the water and played *MS-Fluxussus (Symphony No. 7)*.

5. My Jubilee ist Unverhemmet



The limited-edition LP released by Nam June Paik in 1977 is titled “My Jubilee ist Unverhemmet.” Paik recorded the sound of Arnold Schönberg’s *Transfigured Night* (1899) played four times slower. The original music of *Transfigured Night* is performed as a string sextette, but it is not very avantgarde or experimental as it was composed before the creation of atonal music. Rather, it shows the characteristics of program music from the late romantic period. Young Paik, who had been heard that Schönberg was the most extreme avantgarde, wanted to listen to this album so much because he was drawn to the word ‘avantgarde,’ but he could not find it in Seoul at the time. Still, Schönberg’s name alone served as a guide that led Paik on a path of art that no one ever took. Paik wrote his graduation thesis on Schönberg at the University of Tokyo, and he wanted to leave to Germany to study and compose new music. However, the music of Schönberg and his school, which he experienced firsthand in Germany, disappointed Paik greatly. Eventually, found novelty and shock in John Cage’s music, and soon set out on his own artistic path in search of a new medium that could attack classical music.

After listening to *Transfigured Night* later on, Paik decided that the music was Wagnerian nonsense and upgraded Schönberg in his own way. Paik immediately revealed that he was an avantgarde and declared that his bold festival would continue.

6. TV Buddha



What more can be said about this famous work, *TV Buddha*. Buddha, a religious truth-seeker and the symbol of Eastern wisdom, watches television that is the symbol of modern civilization and mass media. According to Nam June Paik, the television experience is neither religious nor narcissistic as in Greek mythology, but is “electronic Zen” based on the material and technological reality.

A Buddha is sitting calmly facing a CCTV camera that is commonly used in everyday life for surveillance. What should we read from the Buddha’s face that fills the monitor? Zen and transcendence? Serenity to accept surveillance as part of a daily life? Let’s forget for a moment that this camera is the same type of camera used for surveillance. What if it was the camera used by a film director? If this was a real-time movie, what kind of entertainment and visual aesthetics would you find? It would be boredom, of course. Boredom is another artistic strategy of Paik to allow us to escape from our daily lives.

7. Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer



Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer is actually Nam June Paik himself. At that time, we could not separate popular culture from high art, nor could we separate technicians from artists. The only thing that mattered was that everyone tried to create a new world by communicating with more people. *Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer* is the product of Paik's will to popularize video, like a piano, by adding an editing function akin to that of broadcasting stations to the medium of video, which was at the crossroads of popularization at the time. *Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer* has various functions to modify video images and to set up composition. These open up limitless possibilities, and since colors and shapes can be separated, combined, added and repeated; resolution can be adjusted; images can be divided and enlarged; lights can be blocked and exposed; and compression and feedback are enabled. Paik called *Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer* "a versatile color TV synthesizer" and did not conceal his expectation and confidence about it. He declared that this machine would enable us to shape the TV screen with broadcast contents as freely, colorfully and profoundly as many great painters did on canvas.

Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer mixes camera images in real time, just like a DJ mixing and releasing sound sources in real time. It modulates colors, shakes up shapes, and shuffles different images. In the (music) video, we find ourselves in a chaos (as if high on drugs).

8. Opera Sextronique



Two young avantgarde artists, who never went down the path of lovers, formed a strategic partnership for each other's arts. Charlotte Moorman needed Nam June Paik for her own performance *Originale* and the Annual Avant-Garde Festival she organizes, while Paik needed Moorman for the work that introduced the element of sex into music. The two trusted and used each other under their respective strategies. Paik created works exclusively for Moorman including *TV Cello*, *TV Bra*, *Opera Sextronique*, and *Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns*, and the two artists toured the world together for performances. But Moorman was always put to the test in front of Paik, sometimes as a cellist, other times as an avantgarde artist, as he demanded more than what she thought she could do. Nevertheless, Moorman prevailed every time, doing her best as a cellist with great concentration. Those moments brought her joy (to become one with the medium). Paik firmly believed that Moorman was the greatest video artist ever.

9. TV Crown (Archeology of Video)



Nam June Paik, a 23-year-old young artist who recklessly plunged into the world of television and electronics after dreaming of becoming a classical composer, dedicated himself to pioneering a new artistic path. It was not an easy path – the burden of engaging in new fields like electronic engineering and physics, the huge amount of money required to purchase high-tech TVs and equipment, the fear of pursuing an uncertain path, and the risk of a 15,000 volt electric shock. How was Paik able to continue on the path? Where did the conviction that led Paik to television come from? Paik said that the answer lies in the reckless avantgarde in his DNA. Paik was a man who could not follow the path that others took, the worn-out path of classics, the path accustomed to hypocrisy and familiarity, and the path that even deceives oneself. He was a man who set out on a new path every time to see the new horizon. In that sense, it is truly appropriate that John Lennon called Paik “avant-reguard.” Paik was not a one-off avantgarde, but a person who always set out on a longer journey.

10. Robot Opera



Robot Opera, premiered at the 2nd New York Avant-Garde Festival organized by Charlotte Moorman, is a performance in which Nam June Paik walks the streets while controlling *Robot K-456*, while Moorman moves around and plays the cello next to him. *Robot K-456*, a 20-channel remote-controlled robot, which Paik made in 1964 in Japan, was named after Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-flat major*, Köchel's number 456.

Paik's *Robot Opera* is presented in any street and square with the time, date, place and even the audience undecided. However, its origin is relatively clear. "KARAJAN IS TOO BUSY, CALLAS IS TOO NOISY, and WAGNER IS TOO LONG, MONEY IS TOO SHORT. MET-OPERA IS TOO DIRTY, while the SOAP-OPERA IS TOO CHEAP. DRUG IS TOO BORING and SEX IS TOO BANAL." It criticizes both the so-called high culture for being content with the tradition while rejecting novelty, and the pop culture represented by soap opera for turning art into commercial products. For these reasons, Paik, with Moorman, took *Robot K-456* to the street and met people who did not even know Pablo Picasso. Paik's style of communication is confident, and the results are always new.

■ Works

1. Nam June Paik, *Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan* (1993)



Nam June Paik, *Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan* (1993)

1 CRT TV set, 10 steel CRT TV cases, neon tube, bicycle, diving helmet, fuel dispenser, plastic pipes, cape, ropes, 1-channel video, color, silent, LD, 217×110×211cm

Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan was exhibited at the *Venice Biennale* 1993, which materialized the concept of a new Silk Road that connects East and West that had been substituted with a broadband electronic highway. This Genghis Khan of the 20th century is riding a bike instead of a horse, wearing a diving helmet. His body is made of a steel fuel dispenser, and his arms are made with plastic pipes. The back of his bike is loaded with television cases, filled with symbols and characters created by neon lights. The neon symbols suggest a possibility of condensed delivery of complicated information through an electronic highway. The video displayed on the screens presents a series of images that change, from a bottle to a pyramid, from a ceramic bowl to a kettle, while abstract geometrical patterns alternate. Through his robot sculptures such as *Marco Polo*, *Rehabilitation of Genghis Khan*, *Alexander the Great*, and *Tangun as a Scythian King*, Nam June Paik emphasizes the future with a new paradigm that is realized with software development through broadband communication, stepping forward from the old age when power and domination were achieved through transportation and movement.

2. Nam June Paik, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984)



Nam June Paik, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984) video still of the production
Nam June Paik Art Center Video Archives Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

In opposition to the forecast of a totalitarian society where Big Brother would centralize knowledge and authority by use of television in George Orwell's *1984*, Nam June Paik conducted a live broadcast of his satellite project, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* all over the world as he connected New York and Paris in real-time. This was edited in a way to transpose or juxtapose the performances of avantgarde artists such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Charlotte Moorman in New York and Joseph Beuys and Urban Sax at the Pompidou Centre in one frame. The satellite during the 1980s was the product of the Cold War and the fruit of high technology invested with exorbitant amount of national capital. As a result, this technology was only accessible to few major broadcasts and the NASA. However, Paik thought of the satellite broadcast system as an opportunity to bridge different continents and culture.

3. Nam June Paik, *TV Buddha* (1974)



Nam June Paik, *TV Buddha* (1974)
1 limestone Buddha statue, 1 CRT TV set, 1 CCTV camera, variable dimensions
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

Paik's *TV Buddha* is basically a Buddha statue watching television. A closed circuit television camera installed behind the monitor captures the statue, and its image is projected on the television screen in real time. The Buddha sculpture stares at its own image on the screen. Retaining the same structure, Paik made multiple versions of *TV Buddha*, using different sizes, shapes and settings of statues and monitors. The collection of Nam June Paik Art Center has a seated stone statue and a 14-inch monitor placed on a white pedestal. This work embodies a series of exploratory themes: the contrast between Buddha, a religious truth-seeker and a symbol of Eastern wisdom, watches television, a symbol of modern civilization and mass media; and also the electronic reinterpretation of Greek mythological narcissism and Zen Buddhist meditation. In the permanent feedback loop of an object and its real-time image, Paik investigated the capacity of television mediating the relationships between reality and representation, and between input time and output time which seem to be simultaneous but are in fact delicately discrepant. On the occasion of *Projekt '74* in Cologne, Paik wore a Buddhist robe and sat in place of Buddha and gazed at the monitor, in which he acted himself as a living statue.

4. Nam June Paik, *TV Cello* (2002)



Nam June Paik, *TV Cello* (2002)

3 TV sets, 1 video distributor, plexiglass, cello head, cello tailpiece, cello strings, 2-channel video, color, silent, DVD, 48×51×145cm

Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

TV Cello is a video sculpture of three stacked TV monitors—each encased in plexiglass—with the cello head, tail-piece, and strings attached to form the shape of a cello. Nam June Paik first created *TV Cello* in 1971 for a performance with Charlotte Moorman, and the early version of the work could be played by Moorman. The instrument was designed to make an electronic sound whenever the string was struck, which influenced the image displayed on the monitor. Moorman would sometimes play by plucking the string with her fingers or tapping on the plexiglass box. Paik produced several *TV Cellos*, and around ten pieces are left.

5. Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV* (1965)



Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV* (1965)
1 CRT TV set, 1 magnet, TV 32×43×40cm, magnet 4×14×4cm
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

Magnet TV was displayed in Nam June Paik's first solo exhibition in America, *Nam June Paik: Cybernetic Arts and Music* in 1965. The audience was able to alter the images on the TV screen by moving a magnet. The strong magnetic field interferes with and distorts the TV's electronic signals so that the audience can involve themselves in developing beautiful abstract patterns on the screen, as Paik intended. By exemplifying a process of simple manipulation of a screen to create wonderful images, this work predicts the future of video art.

6. Nam June Paik, *Nixon* (1965)



Nam June Paik, *Nixon* (1965)

2 CRT TV sets, 2 enamel coils, 1 audio generator, 1 McIntosh amplifier, 2 condensers, 1 video distributor, 1 switcher box, 1-channel video, color, silent, VHS tape, variable dimension

Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

Nixon is one of Nam June Paik's earliest experimental televisions. Signals created from the generator are amplified by the amp, and electric currents flow through the coils installed on the two monitors. The currents flow on each coil one after another through a switch, which distorts the electric signals of the screen, creating comical images of former American president Richard Nixon. Nixon was defeated by John F. Kennedy as he failed to utilize the media in the famous TV debate in 1960. Paik created this work by witnessing the turning point in the effects of media.

7. Nam June Paik, TV Crown (1965)



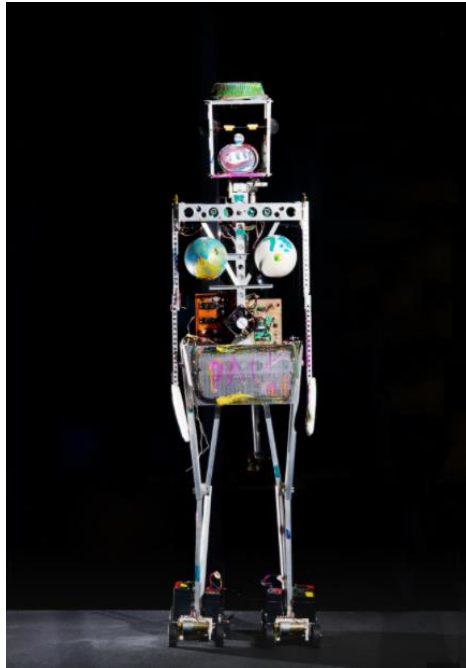
Nam June Paik, *TV Crown* (1965)

1 manipulated CRT TV set, 2 audio generators, 1 temperature controller, 2 amplifiers, variable dimension
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

TV Crown, one of Nam June Paik's experimental televisions, conveys generated and amplified signals to a TV to manipulate its internal circuits. A variety of oscillating patterns are made when the electric signals of the circuit-manipulated TV are distorted. Paik once said that these "dancing" patterns are the foundation of his works, along with *Magnet TV* (1965).

Manipulating the internal circuits of televisions by using audio signals is a technique that was later used in video synthesizers, which is a basic method of forming patterns that frequently appear in Paik's videos.

8. Nam June Paik, *Robot K-456* (1964)



Nam June Paik, *Robot K-456* (1964)
PCB, servomotor, sensor, amplifier, battery, remote controller, pan, steel structures, 185×70×55cm
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection © Nam June Paik Estate

First exhibited in the 2nd Annual Avant-Garde Festival of New York in 1964, *Robot K-456* is Nam June Paik's first work that took the shape of a robot. Produced in collaboration with Japanese engineers, this work was a 20-channel remote-controlled robot, and was named Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-flat Major*, Köchel's number 456. The robot could walk around the street. Its mouth played a recording of President John F. Kennedy's speech, and its bottom dropped peas as if defecating. *Robot K-456* participated in a number of performances with Paik. In 1982, as part of Paik's retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the robot appeared in an accident-performance where it was struck by a car while crossing a road. Paik called the performance as "the first catastrophe of the 21st century," trying to reveal the falsehood of mechanical rationality and propose a humanized machine that possesses human anxiety and emotion, which also experiences life and death.

■ Information

- Free Admission
- Opening Hours: 10am-6pm
- Last entry one hour before closing
- Closed on Mondays (excluding holidays), Chuseok

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