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NAM JUNE PAIK ART CENTER

Press Release

Title	***Open Codes. Networked Commons***	
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Nam June Paik Art Center

Open Codes. Networked Commons

NAM JUNE PAIK ART CENTER zkm karlsruhe GOETHE INSTITUT vitra. XIOM WOORAN FOUNDATION

■ Exhibition Overview

◦ Title: *Open Codes. Networked Commons*
◦ Period: July 1 — October 24, 2021
◦ Venue: Nam June Paik Art Center Gallery2
◦Curators: Lívia Nolasco-Rózsás, Christian Lölkes, and Kim Yoonseo
◦Artists: Insook Bae, Bleeptrack, BNAG, SeungBum Kim, Bernd Lintermann, Christian Lölkes, Martin Nadal & César Escudero Andaluz, Nam June Paik, MeeNa Park, Sebastian Schmieg & Silvio Lorusso, Seoul Express, Cornelia Sollfrank, Unmakelab, Peter Weibel
◦Hosted and Organized by Nam June Paik Art Center, Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation
◦In collaboration with ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe
◦ Cooperation Partner: Goethe-Institut Korea
◦Supported by rooming, Vitra, XIOM, WOORAN FOUNDATION, Sandoll Cloud

Nam June Paik Art Center presents *Open Codes. Networked Commons* from July 1 to October 24, 2021. This exhibition provides a new way to look at the world we live in today; a world that is shaped by codes. It analyzes the digital infrastructure built and maintained by digital codes. Communication with computers is essential part of our life and we are confronted daily with computer screens and user interfaces. This exhibition, though, is designed to engage with the inherent nature and the creative potentials of computer codes, beneath the surface of the everyday user experience.

Scenes created by artists, who pay attention to programming language and go beyond the smooth display of computers are the focus of the exhibition. The artists use code in various ways according to the respective contexts of their work to explore the interaction between computer codes and languages with new perspectives. It is still commonly believed that humanities scholars and linguists represent one form of culture and computer programmers and engineers another. Moreover, they are thought to be mutually incomprehensible. However, computer codes and languages interact with each other constantly in every aspect of our daily lives. The fact that texts, images, sounds, films, etc., are converted into digital codes and exist as data is a clear representation of these conditions. Nowadays, researchers regard the mediation and negotiation between languages and digital codes as a characteristic of today's technological society. Their analyses prove that it is necessary to think about languages and digital codes simultaneously and to ceaselessly revise their relational errors.

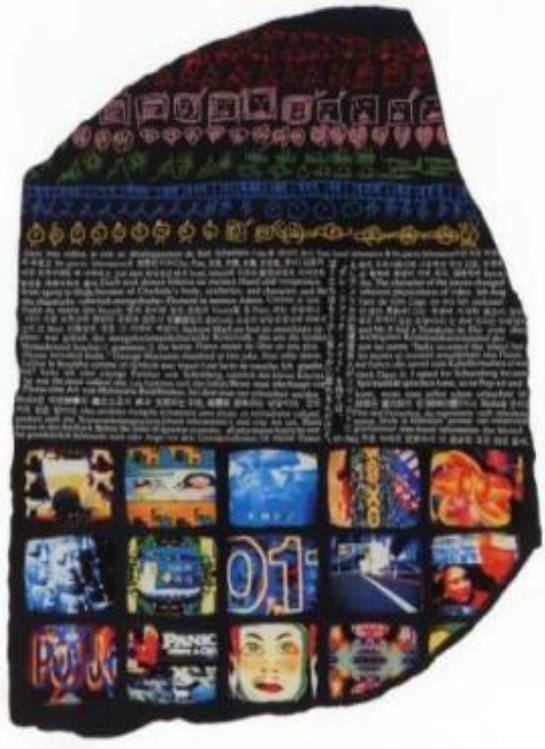
Furthermore, the pandemic has revealed hidden problems beneath the world's surface, like digital alienation, social polarization, platform labor, etc. Social distancing has also changed the way of mediating art and sharing knowledge. In this context, *Open Codes. Networked Commons* is an exhibitionary and also educational experiment towards the possibility of a networked digital commons. At the present moment, when foundations of art and life have moved online to a great extent, this exhibition notes the power of the Internet and manifests its identity as the commons, while evoking a new meaning of movement and meeting. For this purpose, the exhibition space is intended to bring art-making, learning, and discussion together. The audience's participation here becomes a significant network of the exhibition.

Open Codes was initiated by ZKM | Karlsruhe, and since then adaptations have been organized in India, Spain, and China, which have evolved and expanded with local artists. Nam June Paik Art Center is pleased to join in these worldwide undertakings. The consistent exploration of the commons, carried out over the past few years, now moving into a museum as part of its ecology, continues its close relation with social changes. *Open Codes. Networked Commons* is a continuation of this effort.

■ Works

Bernd Lintermann, Peter Weibel
YOU:R:CODE
2017
interactive installation with multi-channel projection
ZKM | Collection

YOU:R:CODE opens the Open Codes exhibition. The title can be read in two ways: the interpretation "your code" indicates that in the installation visitors experience different kinds of digital transformations of themselves. Whereupon entering, a visitor still sees their familiar reflection in a mirror – the most real virtual depiction that we can imagine – the mirror image gradually transforms into a digital data-body until finally, the visitor is reduced to an industrially readable code. The second way of reading the piece's title, "you are code," emphasizes that we ourselves consist of code, which amongst other things is manifested in genetic code. Genetic code constitutes the algorithm of life, and from birth it determines what we are. In current research projects synthetic DNA strands serve as long-term storage for digital data. And for the data analysts and artificial intelligences operating in cloud computing, too, which via smartphones give us our daily instructions for acting, we are only perceived in a mediated way in the form of sensor data and via our electronic traces and expressions – to them we are codes.



Nam June Paik
Key to the Highway (Rosetta Stone)
1995
etching and aquatint, 86 x 71 cm
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

Nam June Paik took the form of the Rosetta Stone, and applied his idea of the "electronic superhighway" to it. The Rosetta Stone is a granite stone inscribed in 196 BC with a decree of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in three languages: ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic and demotic scripts, and ancient Greek. From this historical relic, which played a decisive role in decoding ancient languages, Paik noted that language, the oldest medium for storing and transmitting information, is a code to decipher. In the upper part of *Key to the Highway* are Paik's own drawings of automobile, Buddha, television, satellite, etc., like pictograms while the lower part contains a series of still images excerpted from Paik's video works, a contemporary manifestation of pictograms. In the middle part, Paik describes his artistic developments, mentioning video, Fluxus, time-based art, meanings of media and some of his fellow artists. As if encoding his artistic career, Paik wrote these down in Korean, English, French, German, and Japanese in a mixed and rather cryptic way. It seems he was alluding to the ways in which languages are coded digitally, once again to be communicated along the Internet-like global information network.

Bleeptrack
Wikidata Card Game Generator
2019
Software-based online project

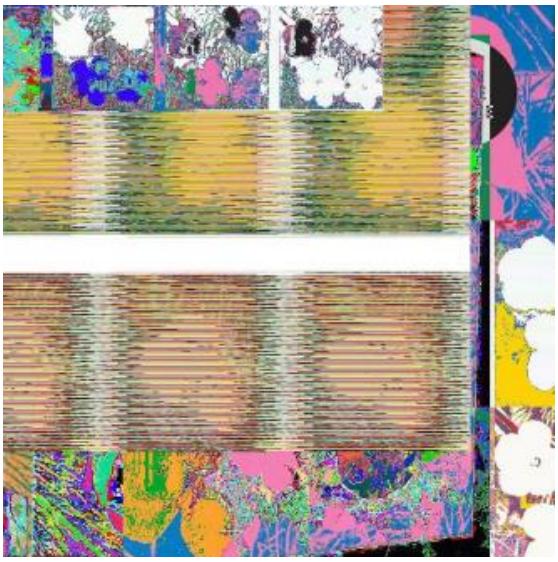
Wikipedia, an attempt at democratizing knowledge in the age of networked computation, is an online open-source encyclopedia in an era when it is a real challenge to distill knowledge from the increasing number of data and information points that surround us and are generated constantly. Wikipedia and its sister projects, Wikidata, Wikivoyage, Wiktionary, are immense resources and multiple sets of data that serve as a basis for statistics, data visualizations, or games. Wikidata acts as central storage for the structured data that can be read and edited by both humans and machines. With the *Wikidata Card Game Generator* one can generate a custom card game suitable for playing Top Trumps. One just has to think of a topic and type it into the search box. Then, choose one of the suggestions and click "Generate." The authors fetch items from Wikidata, which are instances of arbitrary subclasses of provided topics.

Peter Weibel, Christian Lölkes
The World as a Field of Data
2018
data installation
ZKM | Collection

The vast number of electronic interfaces, like smartphones, computers, and screens, which accompany people every day into doctors' surgeries, at home, in offices, at the stock exchange, airports, or railway stations, is overwhelming proof that navigating by the sun, moon, and stars has been replaced by satellites and other technological instruments. People living in the digital age don't navigate by the position of the stars and sun; they follow where digital devices lead them, which receive information from the cell tower on the horizon and orbiting satellites in space. The installation *The World as a Field of Data* confronts us with this field of data that accompanies us around the clock in a deliberately exaggerated way. Data fields are omnipresent. All the information that is generated as a result of our interaction on the Net and in the real world is assembled on around 25 screens, which hang in the air as a data cloud.

BNAG
PLAY
2016/2021
lacquered MDF, wood beams, plexiglas,
table tennis net, 274 × 152 × 76 cm

PLAY is simply a table tennis table. Its colors and surfaces, however, personify the framework of table tennis as a sociocultural phenomenon: two sides competing against one another in a game. The abstraction of the traditional table markings through colored surfaces expands the game's possibilities to include improvisation. The table demands that the familiar game be conceived differently, that players act creatively and react spontaneously. At the same time, *PLAY* complies with the requirements of DIN EN 14468, making it possible to play at a competitive level. It is already an established trend among software developer companies to offer perks to their employs. Various leisure activities are offered in the office environments, often decorated with plants and gaudy furniture. One of these perks is table tennis. The aim of these investments is to blur the boundaries between private life and working hours.

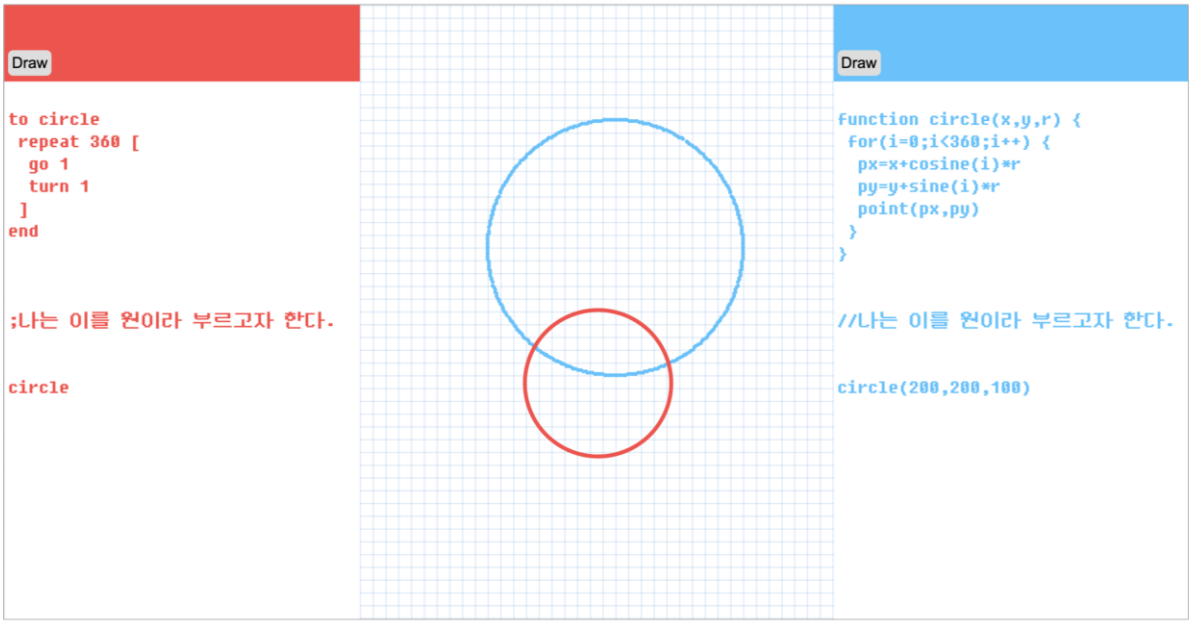


Cornelia Sollfrank
net.art generator
1997-
Browser and software based interactive work

The *net.art generator* is a computer program which collects and recombines material from the Internet to create a new website or image. The WWW-interface of the easy-to-use program requires the user to enter a title, which then functions as the search term, and then enter a name as author. The resulting images and websites are stored online in an archive, from where recent results can be downloaded. Since 1997, five different versions of the *net.art generator*, nag_01 to nag_05, have been realized, in collaboration with seven programmers. A predecessor of the net.art generator was developed for the project Female Extension. Although it would be possible to solve the type of problem, which the net.art generator addresses, by using other programming languages, all the programmers have chosen PERL, a scripting language. One reason for this might be that it has been quite popular within the hacker scene as it is free software and compatible with other free software. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Perl Archive Network (CPAN) contains a huge number of modules, which can be used as basic elements for the net.art generator. Since 2003 the code of all *net. art generator* is available under GPL (GNU General Public License) on the project's homepage: http://net.art-generator.com

ZKM × Nam June Paik Art Center × SeungBum Kim
Genealogy of the Digital Code
2017/2021

Genealogy of the Digital Code displays the history of digital code and computer technology in the form of an interactive wall chart. The history of digital code, i.e., the developments of binary code, early computers, the first neural network, modern computers, artificial intelligence, etc., stretches along the entire wall. Visitors can move along the timeline and watch short videos embedded within it. *Genealogy of the Digital Code* realized the concept of Peter Weibel through the participation of staff at ZKM, 2017, and showed it in the way of Jeffrey Shaw's Linear Navigator (2019).
Nam June Paik Art Center commissioned SeungBum Kim to add Korean events to the *Genealogy of the Digital Code*, in 2021. It contains the introduction of computers in South Korea, artistic endeavor with digital code, language for users, communication tools like emails and word processors, the change in the coding curriculum for students. The artist focuses on the related major events and impacts of digital code on users who tried to express and create something by computing. The Korean genealogy focuses on the code-mediated transition rather than the developments of new technologies.

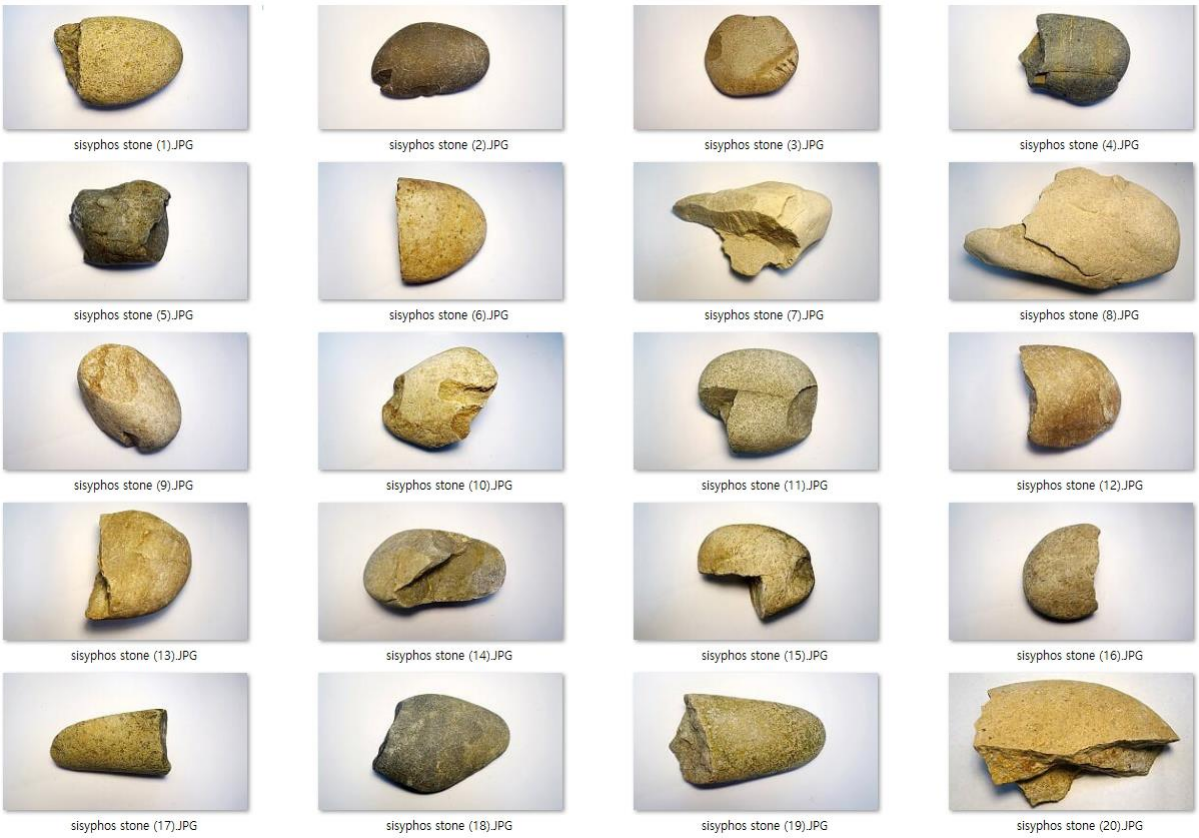


SeungBum Kim
How to Draw a Perfect Circle
2021
single-channel video, 7:30

How to Draw a Perfect Circle started from the question: "Can a computer draw a perfect circle?" This is based on the fact that the word "ellipse," for non-developers, was provided to draw a circle in a graphical coding environment. Users called a circle an "ellipse" while imagining a circle, without questioning this terminology, because there has been a consistent belief that rules established in computer must be kept, and computing results were accurate above all. SeungBum Kim pays attention to the process of vocabulary change so that the "circle( )" command, which was generated in the processing language, was covered with the "ellipse( )" command for efficiency. Therefore, computers cannot draw a perfect circle and that might be the reason why the programming language does not provide the word "circle." If there is not a perfect circle, drawing (coding) a perfect circle means talking about the possibility of coding from a different perspective. SeungBum Kim worked on *I Coded the Conditions of Newlyweds*, which started from a question about the conditional statement for newlywed households released by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport in 2020. *How to Draw a Perfect Circle* is his new work that deals with definitions based on social consensus and changes of user's language by coding. He captures the shift in worldview through the characteristics of a coding language executed by logic and a rewriting process based on sensitivity. He suggests an opportunity to read and think differently about the society filled with technological media.

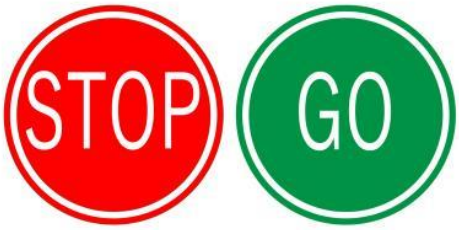
César Escudero Andaluz & Martin Nadal
BITTERCOIN. The Worst Miner Ever
2016
installation with a calculator, single-channel video, 3:14

Bitcoin was originally conceived as an electronic decentralized system for financial transactions. Each node (user) in the peer-to-peer network has the same opportunities to get a reward when validating a transaction. In recent years this system has triggered a competitive struggle in which computing power is the most important variable for earning Bitcoins. This involves the use of powerful equipment, and server farms spending physical and environmental resources. A struggle that only benefits the owner of the most powerful and efficient technology. *BITTERCOIN*, an old calculator machine hacked for use as a miner to validate the pending Bitcoin transactions in the blockchain, takes up this discourse in a rhetorical way: it works like the most basic computer, increasing the time needed to produce Bitcoins almost to infinity.



Unmake Lab
Utopian Extraction
2020
three-channel video, stones, webcam, computer, real-time object detection AI system
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

Utopian Extraction consists of four works: a video with the same title, *Ecosystem, Sisyphus Dataset*, and installation work, *Fresh Stone*. *Utopian Extraction* is a 32-min documentary containing the field images of the vast sandy mountains created by the Four Major Rivers Project and the Saemangeum Haechangseoksan dug up to supply soil and stones for the land reclamation. Unmake Lab wandered around the sites, which took on similar shapes due to extraction and transformation processes, according to industrial needs where they collected broken stones. Unmake Lab viewed the stones as media storing the history, journeys, and human desires from the "stone's point of view" and constructed a dataset of the stone images. In order to increase the accuracy of AI learning, 25 stone images were amplified into 10,000 pieces of data through the preprocessing and data augmentation, which the artists call Sisyphus Dataset. Stones in the video *Sisyphus Dataset* and in Fresh Stone, which reflects in real-time the vision of artificial intelligence, are a metaphor that recognizes an anthropocentric narrative and technology designed to make human life more convenient, from a nonhuman point of view. In another video, *Ecosystem,* the artists appear as performers. As they change their gestures in various poses, the artificial intelligence perceives them as different objects, such as zebras or cushions. Unmake Lab pays attention to artificial intelligence's "novel" potential to create completely new stories outside human cognitive systems.

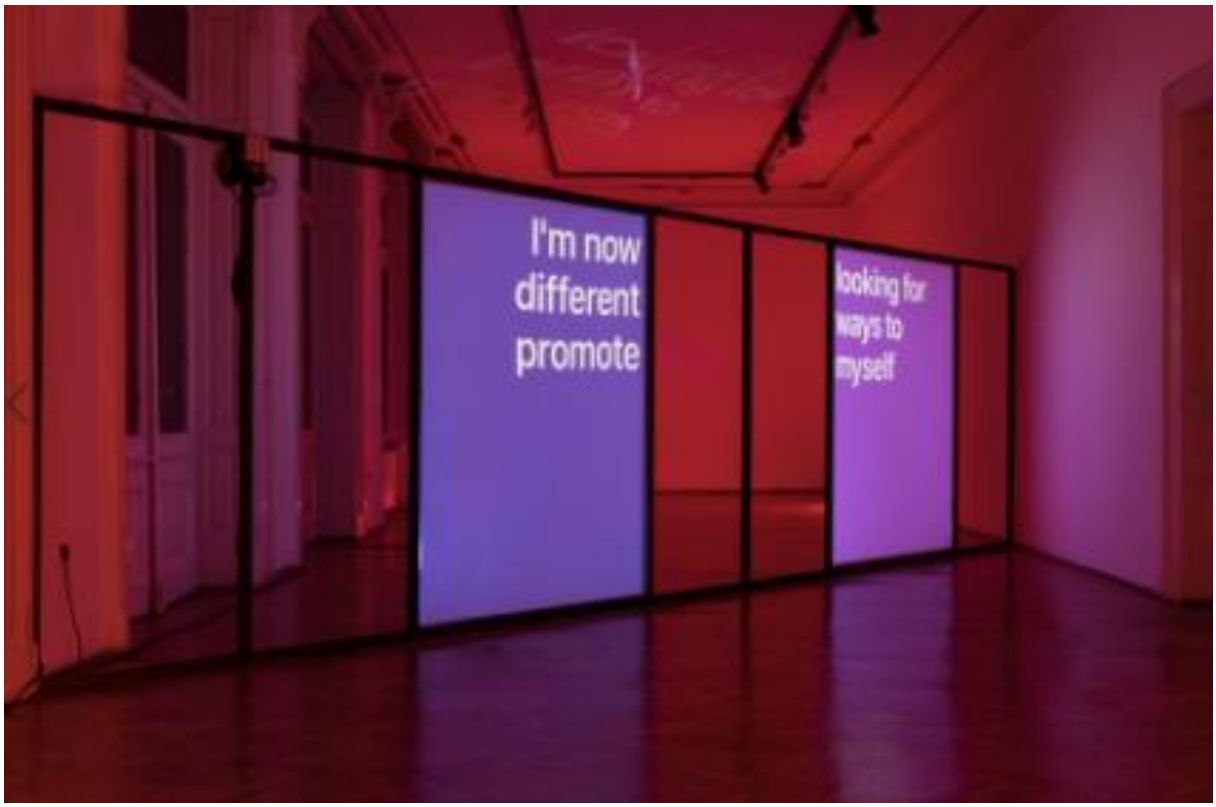


Insook Bae
Beat Steps
2021
sensor, computer, 90 x 400 cm

Beat Steps is completed with the steps of people visiting the museum. This work is a measuring instrument that the artist, who was having a hard time in the pandemic, realized by observing people's movements and steps. The audiences participate with the action of walking, and each person's walking pace is substituted for BPM, musical data, in the system that the artist designed. In *Beat Steps*, which is enabled by people who allow using their steps' data, the more the audience walks, the more numerical information can be accumulated. After the measurement, the music information, which corresponds to a BPM value similar to each participant's step speed, is presented on the monitor. Through her work that gains step data of no economic value, the artist hints at daily leakage of personal information in the environment of omnipresent data metaphorically. At the same time, she evokes a new meaning in movement by asking the audience directly for the act of walking at the reopened museum that had to be closed for a long time throughout the pandemic.

MeeNa Park
11111222222233333333333333333334444445556666667778888899999000
2015
acrylic on canvas, 150 x 600 cm

"Dingbat," a font that substitutes images for text, is the main element in MeeNa Park's paintings. Dingbat as Unicode, can represent all the characters in the world with consistency on a computer, and is compatible with a multilingual interface. MeeNa Park's "Dingbat Painting" focuses on two overlapping matrices: a QWERTY keyboard and Dingbat. QWERTY draws the Dingbat images that come out when the numbers in the title are entered on a keyboard. The meaning of the title seems impossible to decipher because it is very different from the painting. However, one can imagine the work process in which the artist summons various pictorial symbols, beating a numerical keypad.



Sebastian Schmieg & Silvio Lorusso
Platform Ghosts
2020/2021
a metal frame, smart glass, controller,
2 projectors, computer, custom software, 4 speakers, neon tubes

In their installation *Platform Ghosts*, Sebastian Schmieg and Silvio Lorusso present a hollow wall structure that, akin to digital platforms, modulates various degrees of opacity and transparency. The artwork highlights the emotional dimension of private and working relationships managed through and by digital platforms, with a particular focus to what the artists call platform ghosting. Serving as an interface for a one-way communication between a ghosted user and platforms, the installation enacts a soliloquy that combines several voices into a single melancholic lamentation paired with a soundtrack composed by artificial intelligence. Platforms have developed more or less sophisticated techniques to ghost their users, which seamlessly combine with algorithmic management. Among these, there are temporary bans, sudden terminations of accounts, removal from the top of search results or the disappearance of the content of a user from other users' timelines without the former realizing it (a technique generally called "shadow ban"). Platform Ghosts anticipates a near future in which smart cities produce swarms of people (workers, citizens, etc.) who in certain contexts only exist as ghosts.

Seoul Express
Hello ( ) World!
2021
computer, display, custom software and metal enclosure, physical interface, prints, variable dimensions

"Hello World!" is a phrase that you first produce when learning a programming language. This code is a kind of a welcome message and is the experience of the process that the subject is transferred from user into programming language. Entering the room, you can make a programming code by choosing images at each stage and print "Hello World!" to which metadata of the selected images and related search results are applied as a parameter. You organize "World" of "Hello World!" with fragmentary images and scenes by coding through images, not text. This is a work that focuses on the fact that the meaning changes depending on the order, combination, and arrangement of digital images, which are groups of pixels. In this context, it presents the process of forming a new graphic world into a printout of "Hello World!" by the operation of the representation and arrangement of images provided in real-time through various APIs such as news, social media, and CCTV and the data hidden behind them. The text, which is a final result of the work, can be interpreted as a metaphor for a series of processes and actions called "coding" that encounters, constitutes, and expands a world. In this way, a programming code is resolved into the construction of a story, a narrative.

■ Talk: Open Codes. A Conversation with Curators

Date	July 1, 2021. 14:00 ~ 15:00
Venue	Zoom Webinar *Simultaneous interpretations is provided. Sign-up is required.
	Live Streaming on Nam June Paik Art Center YouTube *youtube.com/namjunepaikartcenter
Opening remarks	Kim Seong Eun (Director, Nam June Paik Art Center)
	Melanie Bono (Director of Cultural Programs East Asia, Goethe-Institut Korea)
Talks	Kim Yoonseo (Curator, Nam June Paik Art Center)
	Lívia Nolasco-Rózsás, Christian Lölkes (Curator, ZKM | Karlsruhe)
Roundtable	Oh Youngjin (Professor, ERICA Campus, Hanyang University)

■ Accompanying Programs

#OverflowingLove	Seoul Express's performance in collaboration with choreographer Cho Hyeong-jun
#MonthlyPingpong	A table-tennis tournament at BNAG's *PLAY*
#Meet-UpCafe	Nam June Paik Art Center's cafeteria open to self-organized activities
#Sound Pictograms@*OpenCodes*	Insook Bae's web project to draw pictograms of sounds collected around Nam June Paik Art Center
#WikidataCardGame	Playing Top Trumps with cards generated through Bleeptrack's work
#OpenBookmark	Reading books shelved in the exhibition and sharing bookmarks

* Details about each program will be announced in due course. Please check the website of Nam June Paik Art Center for more information.

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