

Author Sang Ae Park

Source *NJP Reader #2 Ecological Thinking*, pp.202-209

Publisher Nam June Paik Art Center, Yongin

Art Archiving: Nam June Paik Art Center Archives

Colophon

Editor Seong Eun Kim

Translation Seong Eun Kim, Sang Ae Park,
Jaeun Gwag, Insoo Lee

Designer Jiyoung Lee

Published on 23 December 2011

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Sangae Park

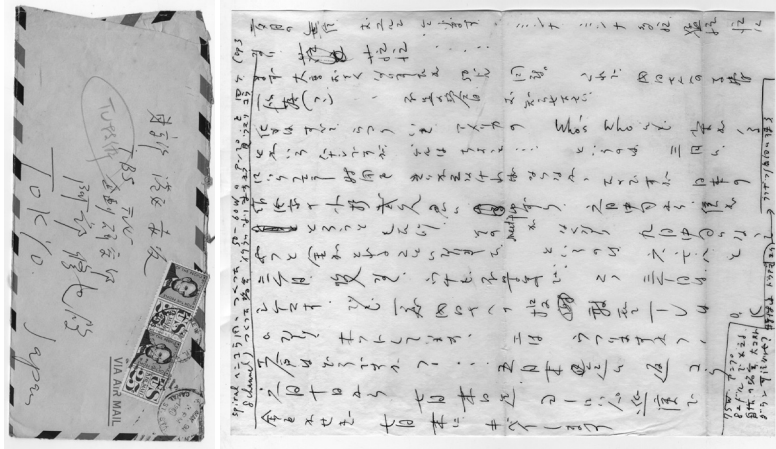
Archivist, Nam June Paik Art Center

Nam June Paik Art Center which Nam June Paik himself gave the title “the house where Nam June Paik dwells for long” opened in 2008 with the mission to develop creative and critical study of Paik’s thoughts and artistic works and to acquaint the public with his artistic practices and heritage. As Nam June Paik Art Center, unlike traditional art museums, plans and runs various programs with the spirit of challenge and experiment, it began even before its opening to establish an archive to preserve Paik’s records for the benefit of our next generations. In fact, Paik, while alive, never took interest in keeping and organizing records of his works and ideas to the extent that he called himself “a loose guy.” He is known to have been genius, humorous, generous, intuitive and crazy about reading books. He never took the trouble to elaborate his ideas. His speech was metaphoric, implicit, and full of humor. Thus, for a thorough study of Paik, who cannot be defined within a few words, an archive is a prerequisite. What Nam June Paik Archives do is to objectively collect and preserve the traces he left behind him, without adding or subtracting, and to support the public to have access to them.

We started to collect and put together Nam June Paik Art Center Archives even before the year 2008 when Nam June Paik Art Center opened. Two archive collections we bought from Nam June Paik Studios in 2004 were the starting point of

the Art Center Archives. The first collection is the whole sum of furniture, objects, miscellaneous documents found in his studio located in Broome Street, one of his four studios in New York. We named it Memorabilia. The second collection consists of video tapes Paik used for his video works, which becomes the representative collection of the Art Center Archives. Later in the process of preparing the opening of the Art Center, the donations from Paik's acquaintances of the primary materials related to Paik were added to the archive collections, completing the present constitution of the Art Center Archives. We collected items for the archives either through purchase or by accepting donations. As to the transference of the rights to the records, it is our principle to acquire all rights to use them for our purposes.

Nam June Paik Art Center Archives can be categorized into three types. The first is the studio collections comprised of the reproduction of the studio and the miscellany that came with it. This collection is quite different from the traditional document or manuscript collections, but nonetheless it is an archive collection with distinction as an art museum archives named after an established artist. Memorabilia and Grand Street Studio Collection, which are grouped as the first type, include various objects and documents found in two of Paik's studios in New York. Especially, Memorabilia is a reproduction of Broome Street Studio: the walls and window panes are all truthful reproduction of the studio, and all objects and documents in the studio have been moved to this new space. It is now a part of the permanent exhibition at the Art Center. The second type is more of a traditional art archives: a collection of primary materials related to Paik. It consists of the records which were produced and reserved by Nam June Paik's acquaintances during the time they co-worked and built friendship with him. The representative collections of this second type are: Shuya Abe Collection, Mary Bauermeister Collection, Gallery Won Collection, Erik Andersch Collection, and Curt Shulz Collection. The second type archive collection includes letters, photographs, drawings, information on exhibitions and performances, objects, notes and plans. Each collection is classified according to its creator. The last type is the video archives collection, which well shows Paik's uniqueness. It is comprised of visual materials Paik used for his video works, including 2,285 analogue tapes and films. While many other institutions



Correspondence from Nam June Paik to Shuya Abe, 9th May 1966, Shuya Abe Collection, Nam June Paik Art Center Archives

possess Paik's final versions of single channel works, the Art Center is the only place in the world that possesses extensive visual materials which Paik himself edited and kept for himself. The Art Center's institutional documents could be added as the fourth type material but, since the Art Center is only three years old, we believe that we should introduce it later as a part of the Art Center Archives after some time has passed.

The keywords of Nam June Paik Art Center Archives are Nam June Paik and video. Like all art museum archives built to honor a specific artist, the Art Center Archives holds it as our mission to collect, preserve and provide access to historical records and research materials related to Paik. In this context, the primary keyword of the Art Center Archives is Nam June Paik. And video, the symbol of Paik, is another keyword of the Art Center Archives. Nam June Paik Art Center Video Archives is an important mediator through which to experience Paik and, at the same time, it is what distinguishes the archives from other museum archives.

Shuya Abe Collection, one of the representative collections of Nam June Paik Art Center Archives, was donated by Shuya Abe, Japanese engineer who helped Paik with his early experiments with television and was a co-producer of <Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer>. Shuya Abe Collection consists of letters, photographs, drawings

and publications of exhibition materials pertaining to <Robot K-456>, <Nixon TV>, and <Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer> for which he and Paik collaborated from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s. Mary Bauermeister, German artist and a life-long friend of Paik, donated to the Art Center the letters she had exchanged with Paik, which became Mary Bauermeister Collection. Bauermeister was a great help to Paik from the late 1950s to the early 60s when he was working in Germany as a Fluxus member. The letters in Mary Bauermeister Collection were sent to Bauermeister by Paik from the 1960s to the 70s. It is a precious record of Paik's path after he moved to New York. Eric Andersch, another German friend of Paik and collector, donated documents and photographs produced during Paik's residence in Germany in the 1980s. He also donated photographs and posters of Paik's performances in Germany in the early 1960s. They make Eric Andersch Collection. Curt Shulz Collection, comprised of graphic materials related to Paik's performances and exhibitions, was purchased by the Art Center in 2008 before the opening of the Art Center. It includes the poster of «Exposition of Music – Electronic Television» which is Paik's first exhibition in 1963 and posters, program books, brochures, flyers and catalogues related to Paik from the 1960s to the 80s. This collection also includes various records related to his performance with Charlotte Moorman, his artistic partner. The materials donated by Kiyong Jung, president of Gallery Won, who supported Paik in Korea, were grouped into two collections: Gallery Won Collection and Kiyong Jung Collection. Kiyong Jung actively assisted Paik in every way possible when he returned to Korea in 1984 thirty-five after he had first left Korea, not only with his exhibitions in Korea but also in his foreign projects. Jung donated drawings drawn by Paik himself, and notes, photographs, exhibition catalogues and research documents, which constitute the two collections.

The contents of the Video Archives which is comprised of 2,285 pieces of visual materials in analogue format are as follows: various editions of Paik's video works which can be classified as single channel videos, including <Hand and Face> (1961), <The Medium is the Medium> (1969), <9/23 Experiment> (1969), <Video Commune> (1970), <Global Groove> (1973), <Suite 212> (1975), <Guadalcanal Requiem> (1977), <Merce by Merce by Paik> (1978) among others; the edited versions

of satellite projects in three parts, which are <Good Morning Mr. Orwell> (1984), <Bye Bye Kipling> (1986), <Wrap Around the World> (1988). Besides the single channel videos, the visual sources used in the monitors which are major components in Paik's numerous video sculptures are preserved in the archives. These sources for video sculptures include visual materials which Paik and his studio assistants attempted to edit in diverse ways. Other than video works, interviews or landscapes which Paik filmed in Germany, Japan, Korea and the U.S.A during the 1980s with the purpose to use in his video works are kept in the archives. A number of Japanese commercial films and television programs Paik recorded in order to use them for his single channel videos and satellite projects are included. Lastly, Paik's colleagues' video works which he had in his possession are also included in the archives. Items held in the archives are mostly tapes rather than films. Reel tapes are either 1/2 inch or 1 inch, and cassette tapes are in U-matic, Betacam SP, BetaMax, and VHS format. A small number of 16mm and 8mm films are kept in the archives as well. Most of the visual materials are in NTSC, but some of them are in PAL. Items preserved in the archives are mostly in color and with sounds. Only a small number is in black and white and without sound.

The classification system of Nam June Paik Art Center Archives is based on the principles of traditional archives: provenance and original order. Each collection is named after the creator, and items are arranged with respect to its original order. This process is accompanied by the production of metadata in order to maximize the accessibility of each collection. The basic metadata field uses the options suggested by the archival standards, but creating the content of the metadata that specifically describes the Nam June Paik archives will be the task which professional researchers and scholars studying Paik and archival professionals should work together for. The metadata which describes Paik's works should be composed as a combination of various elements such as visual art, technology, philosophy, history and sociology. The creation of metadata should be progressed as objective description not as subjective interpretation. The metadata constructed thus will increase the accessibility and at the same time effectively provide descriptive information on Paik. Each metadata is linked and formed into groups by the reciprocal referential



Nam June Paik Art Center Video Archives 2009

functions. The linked groups in this way will be extended and connected to metadata from other areas, which will allow us to locate descriptions of Paik in other areas. Hence, the extended metadata will be the starting point for us to carry out multi-directional research of Paik.

How we preserve, restore, and manage the Video Archives, which is the representative collection of the Art Center is the major task that requires our effort. Since the Video Archives includes a number of Paik's single channel works, we have but to resolve the problem of copyright in order to make use of the Video Archives. As the Art Center has acquired the comprehensive rights to use all items held in the Video Archives, it can freely use them. The users of the Video Archives, however, will individually go through the traditional process to gain the permission to use them from the copyright holders. Another problem in maintaining the archives is how we verify the content of the visual records. Generally, we can play tapes on the proper player and confirm the contents recorded on them. Or when we transform the visual resources recorded on the physical matters into a new format, that is, digital files, we can watch the video without being limited by the player. In this context, two

practical solutions can be considered in order to use and preserve Paik's analogue tapes: one is to secure the proper kinds of players and the other is to transform the formats of the visual sources. Presently, the Art Center does both ways to utilize and preserve the Video Archives. When we alter the formats of items, we keep the present state of what is filmed on the tapes. To restore the damaged part of films requires detailed study of the original film, and the precise understanding of the artist's intention. The restoration of the damaged films can be approached in two ways: one is to reconstruct the content of the film with the purpose to present it to an audience; the other is to fix the physically damaged parts of the tape, in other words, the physical restoration of the recording medium. The tapes housed in the Video Archives are mostly in good condition, and we have the environment fit for preserving analogue format tapes in the best condition. Though we believe that they are free from any damaging elements for a considerable time, since the life of the tapes is limited, it is necessary to generate archive masters in digital format for permanent preservation, and simultaneously, to professionally restore the damaged items through historical investigations.

An archive is a collection of distinctive documents and materials worthwhile to preserve permanently. Therefore, it has to be differentiated from other materials for its originality and uniqueness. An archive is also a conglomeration of objective records of facts, without subjective perspectives influencing it. The materials related to Paik which satisfies all these qualities constitute the Art Center Archives collections, and these collections are used for various purposes such as education, scholarly projects, developments of exhibition programs and the outside scholars' research projects. Nam June Paik Art Center Archives will continuously collect and provide access to primary sources related to Paik, and suggest new possibility for the forms of an archive named after an artist, by utilizing the studio reproduction collection and the video archives, which clearly exemplify the characteristics of Nam June Paik Art Center. Nam June Paik Art Center Archives, by carrying out the traditional mission of an archive, that is, permanently preserving and effectively utilizing the records, in suitable ways for Korean reality, will serve

as the foundation for the study of Nam June Paik and for the development of experimental and challenging modern art programs. ▲