

Nam June Paik

Nam June Paik (Korean: 백남준, July 20, 1932 – January 29, 2006) was a Korean American artist. He worked with a variety of media and is considered to be the founder of video art.^{[1][2]} He is credited with an early usage (1974) of the term "electronic super highway" in application to telecommunications.^[3]

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Early life

Born in Seoul in 1932, the youngest of five siblings, Paik had two older brothers and two older sisters. His father (who in 2002 was revealed to be a Chinilpa) owned a major textile manufacturing firm. As he was growing up, he was trained as a classical pianist. In 1950, Paik and his family had to flee from their home in Korea, during the Korean War. His family first fled to Hong Kong, but later moved to Japan. Six years later, he graduated from the University of Tokyo where he wrote a thesis on the composer Arnold Schoenberg.

Paik then moved to West Germany to study music history with composer Thrasylbulos Georgiades at Munich University.^[4] While studying in Germany, Paik met the composers Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage and the conceptual artists George Maciunas, Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell and was from 1962 on, a member of Fluxus.^{[5][6]}

Works

Paik Nam June



Nam June Paik in New York City, 1983. Photo by Lim Young-kyun

Born	20 July 1932 <div>Seoul, South Korea</div>
Died	29 January 2006 (aged 73) <div>Miami, Florida, United States</div>
Nationality	Korean
Education	University of Tokyo, <div>Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich</div>
Known for	Video art, performance, installation art
Movement	Fluxus
Spouse(s)	Shigeko Kubota
<div> Korean name</div>	
Hangul	백남준
Hanja	白南準
Revised Romanization	<i>Baek Namjun</i>
McCune–Reischauer	<i>Paek Namjun</i>



Pre-Bell-Man, statue in front of the 'Museum für Kommunikation', Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Nam June Paik then began participating in the Neo-Dada art movement, known as Fluxus, which was inspired by the composer John Cage and his use of everyday sounds and noises in his music. He made his big debut in 1963 at an exhibition known as *Exposition of Music-Electronic Television*^[7] at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal in which he scattered televisions everywhere and used magnets to alter or distort their images. In a 1960 piano performance in Cologne, he played Chopin, threw himself on the piano and rushed into the audience, attacking Cage and pianist David Tudor by cutting their clothes with scissors and dumping shampoo on their heads.^{[8][9]}

Cage suggested Paik look into Oriental music and Oriental religion. During 1963 and 1964 the engineers Hideo Uchida and Shuya Abe showed Paik how to interfere with the flow of electrons in color TV sets, work that led to the Abe-Paik video synthesizer, a key element in his future TV work.^[10]

In 1964, Paik moved to New York, and began working with classical cellist Charlotte Moorman, to combine his video, music, and performance.^[11] In the work *TV Cello*, the pair stacked televisions on top of one another, so that they formed the shape of an actual cello. When Moorman drew her bow across the "cello," images of her and other cellists playing appeared on the screens.

In 1965, Sony introduced the Portapak. With this, Paik could both move and record things, for it was the first portable video and audio recorder.^{[12][13]} From there, Paik became an international celebrity, known for his creative and entertaining works.^[14]

In a notorious 1967 incident, Moorman was arrested for going topless while performing in Paik's *Opera Sextronique*. Two years later, in 1969, they performed *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, in which Moorman wore a bra with small TV screens over her breasts.^[15] Throughout this period it was his goal to bring music up to speed with art and literature, and make sex an acceptable theme. One of his Fluxus concept works ("Playable Pieces") instructs the performer to "climb inside the vagina of a live female whale." Of the "Playable Pieces," the only one actually to have been performed was by Fluxus composer Joseph Byrd ("Cut your left forearm a distance of ten centimeters.") in 1964 at UCLA's New Music Workshop.^[16]

In 1971, he made a cello out of three television sets stacked up on top of each other and some cello strings. He got a famous cellist to play the "cello" as well.^[17]

In 1974 Nam June Paik used the term "super highway" in application to telecommunications, which gave rise to the opinion that he may have been the author of the phrase "Information Superhighway".^[18] In fact, in his 1974 proposal "Media Planning for the Postindustrial Society – The 21st Century is now only 26 years away" to the Rockefeller Foundation he used a slightly different phrase, "electronic super highway":^[19]

"The building of new electronic super highways will become an even huger enterprise. Assuming we connect New York with Los Angeles by means of an electronic telecommunication network that operates in strong transmission ranges, as well as with continental satellites, wave guides, bundled coaxial cable, and later also via laser beam fiber optics: the expenditure would be about the same as for a Moon landing, except that the benefits in term of by-products would be greater.

Also in the 1970s, Paik imagined a global community of viewers for what he called a Video Common Market which would disseminate videos freely.^[20] In 1978, Paik collaborated with Dimitri Devyatkin to produce a light hearted comparison of life in two major cities, *Media Shuttle: New York-Moscow* on WNET.^[21] The video is held in museum collections around the world.

Possibly Paik's most famous work, *TV Buddha* is a video installation depicting a Buddha statue viewing its own live image on a closed circuit TV. Paik created numerous versions of this work using different statues, the first version is from 1974.^{[22][23][24]}

Another piece, *Positive Egg*, displays a white egg on a black background. In a series of video monitors, increasing in size, the image on the screen becomes larger and larger, until the egg itself becomes an abstract, unrecognizable shape.^[25] In *Video Fish*,^[26] from 1975, a series of aquariums arranged in a horizontal line contain live fish swimming in front of an equal number of monitors which show video images of other fish.

Paik completed an installation in 1993 in the NJN Building in Trenton, NJ. This work was commissioned under the public building arts inclusion act of 1978. The installation's media is neon lights incorporated around video screens. This particular piece is currently non-operational, though there are plans to make necessary upgrades/repairs to restore it to working order.

Paik's 1995 piece *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, on permanent display at the Lincoln Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.^[27]

Paik was known for making robots out of television sets. These were constructed using pieces of wire and metal, but later Paik used parts from radio and television sets.

During the New Year's Day celebration on January 1, 1984, he aired *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*, a live link between WNET New York, Centre Pompidou Paris, and South Korea. With the participation of John Cage, Salvador Dalí, Laurie Anderson, Joseph Beuys, Merce Cunningham, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, George Plimpton, and other artists, Paik showed that George Orwell's Big Brother had not arrived. In 1986, Paik created the work *Bye Bye Kipling*, a tape that mixed live events from Seoul, South Korea; Tokyo, Japan; and New York, USA. Two years later, in 1988 he further showed his love for his home with a piece called *The more the better*, a giant tower made entirely of 1003 monitors for the Olympic Games being held at Seoul. Despite his stroke, in 2000, he created a millennium satellite broadcast entitled *Tiger is Alive* and in 2004 designed the installation of monitors and video projections *Global Groove 2004*^[28] for the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin.^[4]

From 1979 to 1996 Paik was professor at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.

Exhibitions

Paik's first exhibition, entitled "Exposition of Music - Electronic Television", was held in 1963 at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. A retrospective of Paik's work was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the spring of 1982. Major retrospectives of Paik's work have been organized by Kölnischer Kunstverein (1976), Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1978), Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (1982), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1989), Kunsthalle Basel (1991) and National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul (1992). A final retrospective of his work was held in 2000 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, with the commissioned site-specific installation *Modulation in Sync* (2000)^[29] integrating the unique space of the museum into the exhibition itself.^[30] This coincided with a downtown gallery showing of video artworks by his wife Shigeo Kubota, mainly dealing with his recovery from a stroke he had in 1996.



1993 Video Sculpture. It is installed at the NJN Building in Trenton, NJ.



Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii 1995-96. It is exhibited at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

In 2011, an exhibition centered on Paik's video sculpture *One Candle, Candle Projection* (1988-2000) opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.^[31] Another retrospective was mounted at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., in 2012-2013.^{[32][33]} As a leading expert in Paik's work, art historian John G. Hanhardt was the curator for three landmark exhibitions devoted to the artist, the ones at the Whitney Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.^[34]

Paik's work also appeared in important group exhibitions such as São Paulo Biennale (1975), Whitney Biennial (1977, 1981, 1983, 1987, and 1989), Documenta 6 and 8 (1977 and 1987), and Venice Biennale (1984 and 1993).^[4]

From April 24, 2015 to September 7, 2015 Paik's works *T.V. Clock*, *9/23/69: Experiment with David Atwood*, and *ETUDE1* were displayed at "Watch This! Revelations in Media Art" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.^[35]

Collections



Ommah (2005) in the collection of the National Gallery of Art

Public collections that hold work by Nam June Paik include: the Detroit Institute of Arts, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in (Seoul, Korea),^[36] the Nam June Paik Art Center in (Gyeonggi, Korea),^[37] the Ackland Art Museum (University of North Carolina), the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo, New York), the Art Museum of the Americas (Washington D.C.), Daimler-Chrysler Collection (Berlin), Fukuoka Art Museum (Fukuoka, Japan), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington D.C.), the Honolulu Museum of Art, Kunsthalle zu Kiel (Germany), Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (Switzerland), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (Düsseldorf, Germany), Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst (Aachen, Germany), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Museum Wiesbaden (Germany), the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), the Berardo Collection Museum (Lisbon, Portugal), National Museum of Contemporary Art (Athens, Greece), Palazzo Cavour

(Turin, Italy), the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Schleswig-Holstein Museums (Germany), the Smart Museum of Art (University of Chicago), Smith College Museum of Art (Massachusetts), Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington D.C.), the Stuart Collection (University of California, San Diego), the Dayton Art Institute (<https://archive.is/20130414182448/http://www.daytonartinstitute.org/art/collection-highlights/asian/our-decades>) (Dayton, Ohio) and the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, Minnesota), the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art, Cornell University Library, (Ithaca, NY), The Worcester Art Museum (Worcester, Massachusetts), and Reynolda House Museum of American Art (Winston-Salem, NC).

Honours and awards

- 2007: Order of Cultural Merit.^[38]
- 2004: Edward MacDowell Medal in the Arts
- 2001: Lifetime Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award, International Sculpture Center.^[39]
- 2001: Wilhelm Lehmbruck Prize, awarded by the City of Duisburg
- 1998: Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy
- 1995: Ho-Am Prize in the Arts
- 1993: Golden Lion, Venice Biennale
- 1992: Picasso Medal
- 1991: Goslarer Kaiserring

Archive

Given its largely antiquated technology, Paik's oeuvre poses a unique conservation challenge.^[40] In 2006, Nam June Paik's estate asked a group of museums for proposals on how each would use the archive. Out of a group that included the Museum of Modern Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art, it chose the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The archive includes Paik's early writings on art history, history and technology; correspondence with other artists and collaborators like Charlotte Moorman, John Cage, George Maciunas and Wolf Vostell; and a complete collection of videotapes used in his work, as well as production notes, television work, sketches, notebooks, models and plans for videos. It also covers early-model televisions and video projectors, radios, record players, cameras and musical instruments, toys, games, folk sculptures and the desk where he painted in his SoHo studio.^[34]

Curator John Hanhardt, an old friend of Paik, says. "It came in great disorder, which made it all the more complicated. It is not like his space was perfectly organized. I think the archive is like a huge memory machine. A wunderkammer, a wonder cabinet of his life."^[41] Hanhardt describes the archives in the catalog for the 2012 Smithsonian show in *Nam June Paik: Global Visionary*.^[42]

Michael Mansfield, associate curator of film and media arts, supervised the complex installation of several hundred CRT TV sets, the wiring to connect them all, and the software and servers to drive them. He developed an app on his phone to operate every electronic artwork on display.^[43]

Many of Paik's early works and writings are collected in a volume edited by Judson Rosebush titled *Nam June Paik: Videa 'n' Videology 1959–1973*, published by the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, in 1974.

Influence

As a pioneer of Video art, the artwork and ideas of Nam June Paik were a major influence on late 20th-century art and continue to inspire a new generation of artists. Contemporary artists considered to be influenced by Paik include Christian Marclay, Jon Kessler, Cory Arcangel, Ryan Trecartin, Michael Bielický, and Haroon Mirza.^[32]

Art market

Christie's holds the auction record for Paik's work since it achieved \$646,896 in Hong Kong in 2007 for his *Wright Brothers*, a 1995 propeller-plane-like tableau comprising 14 TV monitors.^[40]

In 2015, Gagosian Gallery acquired the right to represent Paik's artistic estate.^[44]

Personal life and death

Paik moved to New York in 1964.^[45] In 1965, he married the video artist Shigeko Kubota.^[46]

Paik was a lifelong Buddhist who never smoked or drank alcoholic beverages, and never drove a car.^[47]

In 1996, Paik had a stroke, which paralyzed his left side. He used a wheelchair the last decade of his life, though he was able to walk with assistance. He died January 29, 2006, in Miami, Florida, due to complications from his stroke.^{[48][49]} At the time of his death, he was survived by his wife, as well as by a brother, Ken Paik, and a nephew, Ken Paik Hakuta, an inventor and television personality best known for creating the Wacky WallWalker toy, and who managed Paik's studio in New York.^{[46][50]}

One of his grandsons is Jinu, a South Korean rapper, singer, songwriter, and member of a hip-hop duo Jinusean.

See also

Video sculpture

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External links

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- Nam June Paik in (<http://www.ubu.com/sound/paik.html>) UbuWeb Sound

Listening

- UbuWeb: Nam June Paik (<http://www.ubu.com/sound/paik.html>) featuring *Abschiedssymphonie* and *In Memoriam George Maciunas* MP3s offline
- TV Cello*, Nam June Paik & Charlotte Moorman performance (MP3: part 1 (https://web.archive.org/web/20070704002831/http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_11_TV_Cello_Pt-1.mp3), part 2 (https://web.archive.org/web/20070704002959/http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_12_TV_Cello_Pt-2.mp3))
- Concert for TV Cello and Videotapes*, Nam June Paik with Charlotte Moorman and Paul Garrin, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 (MP3: part 1 (https://web.archive.org/web/20060212230533/http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_13_Tv-Cello-And-Videotapes_Pt-1.mp3), part 2 (http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_13_Tv-Cello-And-Videotapes_Pt-2.mp3), part 3 (http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_13_Tv-Cello-And-Videotapes_Pt-3.mp3))

- MP3 Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saens (https://web.archive.org/web/20060212223559/http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/moorman_charlotte/Moorman-Charlotte_19_Saint-Saens.mp3) Charlotte Moorman live at Mills College 03/08/1974

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