

EDUCATION NOTES
INVESTIGATING ARTWORKS IN THE GALLERY
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ART
GALLERY
NSW

40 YEARS
KALDOR PUBLIC
ART PROJECTS

1976 CHARLOTTE MOORMAN AND NAM JUNE PAIK



1976 CHARLOTTE MOORMAN AND NAM JUNE PAIK

PROJECT

Moorman + Paik

Recitals (21 & 26 March 1976)

Performances

Exhibition

22–26 March 1976

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Recitals (1 & 7 April 1976)

Performances

Exhibition

1–7 April 1976

Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

Special events:

Ice music for Adelaide

22 March 1976

Adelaide Festival Theatre plaza, Adelaide

Flying cello

23 March 1976

Elder Park, Adelaide

Cello sonata

24 March 1976

Adelaide Festival Theatre rooftop, Adelaide

Candy (The ultimate Easter Bunny)

2 April 1976

Coventry Gallery, Sydney

Ice music for Sydney

Cello sonata

April 1976

Art Gallery of NSW

Sky kiss

11 April 1976

Sydney Opera House forecourt

Our life is half natural and half technological.
Half-and-half is good. You cannot deny that
high-tech is progress. We need it for jobs.
Yet if you make only high-tech, you make war.
So we must have a strong human element to
keep modesty and natural life.

Nam June Paik with Charlotte Moorman, 'Video, vidiot, videology' in
Gregory Battcock (ed), *New artists video: a critical anthology*, EP Dutton,
New York 1978

CHARLOTTE MOORMAN
AND NAM JUNE PAIK

Moorman performs **Sky kiss** 1968,
composition by Jim McWilliams, above the
Sydney Opera House forecourt in 1976

Courtesy Kaldor Public Art Projects



CHARLOTTE MOORMAN
AND NAM JUNE PAIK

Paik films Moorman during her
performance of **TV bra for living sculpture**
1969, composition and sculpture by Paik,
at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1976

Photo: Kerry Dundas
Courtesy the Art Gallery of New South Wales



1976 CHARLOTTE MOORMAN AND NAM JUNE PAIK

INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik became the dynamic duo of mixed media in the 1960s and '70s, performing throughout much of western Europe and the eastern US. Very different in background, they complemented each other to perfection. Moorman trained as a classical cellist and was a key figure in 'new music'. Korean-born Paik is considered the 'father of video art'. Combining high technical skills with a childlike sense of play and a relaxed sense of humour inspired by the Fluxus movement, his work questioned our idea and experience of 'television'. In 1964, when Paik moved to New York City, Moorman became his muse and foremost interpreter, while he created special pieces, combining video with performance, that served as her entrée to international celebrity. In 1976, the pair visited Australia for a Kaldor project.

ARTIST

Nam June Paik

born 1932 in Seoul, South Korea
died 2006 in Miami, Florida, USA

Nam June Paik helped transform our idea of the artistic potential of video and television. As a student of music history, art history and philosophy at the University of Tokyo, where he wrote his thesis on modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg, he met composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who inspired him to explore electronic art. He was also influenced by John Cage – whom he met in 1958 – and Cage's open ideas on composition and randomness, and by his own involvement with the Fluxus movement. From that time he treated video art as one long performance.

In 1963, Paik began buying second-hand television sets and adapting them as video sculptures, using magnets on the back of the monitor to displace the electron beams thereby distorting normal reception. In *Electronic blues*, for example, the faces of major political figures such as Richard Nixon underwent rubbery transformations as if revealing true feelings – anxiety, despair, hilarity – behind the solemn mask.

By 1969, the Paik–Abe video synthesiser was one of the first artist-made video image processors that produced abstract patterns on TV from speech a viewer made through a microphone. Paik believed that video art helped people talk back to the machines that otherwise were in the hands of big corporations.

For his first solo exhibition, in 1963, inspired by minimalist sculpture, Paik filled a German gallery with stacked altered television sets on their sides and upside down. This multiplying of screens displaced both the image and the viewer. Many years later, Paik used laser projections and clusters of over a thousand TV screens facing up from the floor as a visually saturating form of sculptural environment. The rapidly changing imagery made for vertigo-inducing displays.

Through films, performances and installations, Paik remodelled our ways of seeing the temporal image in contemporary art,

transforming museum architecture into dynamic audiovisual spaces, with such multiple-monitor installations as *Video fish* 1975, *TV garden* 1974, and *TV clock* 1963. While in works such as *Real fish/live fish* 1982, *TV chair* 1968 and *Video Buddha* 1976, Paik employed video-cameras and monitors to explore our perceptions of both external objects and ourselves and to create a profound sense of how we understand the world. His projects for television included collaborations with friends Laurie Anderson, Joseph Beuys, David Bowie, Cage and Merce Cunningham. He was married to fellow video artist Shigeeko Kubota.

Left partially paralysed by a stroke in 1996, Paik died on 29 January 2006.

Charlotte Moorman

born 1933 in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA
died 1991 in New York, USA

While Paik was trained as a classical pianist, Charlotte Moorman trained as a classical cellist, studying under Leonard Rose at Juilliard School in New York before becoming a member of the American Symphony Orchestra. Through her friendship with flatmate Yoko Ono, she became increasingly involved with the avant-garde scene in New York and emerged as a key figure in 'new music'.

In 1966, artist Joseph Beuys created his work *Infiltration Homogen für Cello*, a felt-covered violoncello, in Moorman's honour. In 1967, she achieved notoriety for her semi-nude performance of Paik's *Opera Sextronique*, which resulted in her arrest on charges of indecent exposure; she was given a suspended sentence. Both artists were taken from the stage to the station in a convoy of 16 police cars. The incident gave her nationwide fame as the 'topless cellist'. Moorman is also renowned for her performance of Paik's *TV bra for living sculpture* 1969 with two small television tubes encased in plexiglas boxes attached to her breasts.

As well as her role as a performer, Moorman acted as a spokes-person for art, earning a reputation as the 'Jeanne d'Arc of new music' and negotiating with city bureaucrats to support the staging of often controversial and challenging performances. In 1963, she established the New York Avant Garde Festival, which played annually in various locations including Central Park and the Staten Island Ferry until 1980. In the late 1970s, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She underwent a mastectomy and further treatment and continued performing through the 1980s in spite of pain and deteriorating health. Moorman died on 8 November 1991, aged 57.

PROJECT

For their Kaldor project in 1976, Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman presented a series of more than 40 performances along with an exhibition of some of Paik's video sculptures and drawings, and documentation from their past performance events. The exhibition was shown at the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide and the Art Gallery of NSW in Sydney, while

Skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality. Technology has become the body's new membrane of existence.

Nam June Paik with Charlotte Moorman, 'Video, vidiot, videology' in Gregory Battcock (ed), *New artists video: a critical anthology*, EP Dutton, New York 1978

the performances – written by Paik and their contemporaries including Joseph Beuys, John Cage and Yoko Ono – occurred at a range of venues in the two cities.

Among the performances that attracted the most public and media attention was Moorman floating above the Sydney Opera House forecourt and 2000 spectators, suspended by weather balloons, in Jim McWilliams' *Sky kiss*. In another vertiginous McWilliams' work, Moorman swung through the air above Adelaide's Elder Park on a trapeze, while on the roofs of the Adelaide Festival Theatre and the Art Gallery of NSW, she performed Mieko Shiomi's *Cello sonata*.

A highlight of that year's Adelaide Festival program (repeated in Sydney later) was Moorman performing naked with a cello carved from a block of ice, which slowly melted away. And she was naked again, but covered in chocolate fudge and surrounded by Easter eggs and fake grass, for an Easter performance at Coventry Gallery in Sydney.

Versions of Paik's famous video sculptures *TV cello*, *TV Buddha* and *TV bed* were constructed in Australia as part of the exhibition component of the project. In 1971, Paik had devised *TV cello*, enclosing three TV monitors in separate plexiglas boxes to create a cello-shaped instrument. *TV Buddha* – possibly Paik's most famous video work – was originally produced to fill a gap in a show. In it, the Buddha watches his videotaped image on the screen opposite – past and present gaze upon each other in an encounter between Oriental deity and Western media. For *TV bed*, Paik made a bed from monitors covered with a sheet of plexiglas. Moorman could play while reclining upon the bed with the screens playing either videotaped footage or television transmissions.

WORLD EVENTS: 1976

- _ Apple Computers founded by Steve Jobs and Stephen Wozniak
- _ Dolby Stereo systems introduced into cinemas
- _ Queen Elizabeth II sends an email message
- _ Release of US film *Taxi driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese
- _ ABC radio serial *Blue Hills* ends after 32 years
- _ Brett Whiteley wins the Archibald Prize with *Self portrait in the studio*
- _ Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Running Fence* installed in California
- _ Biennale of Sydney, *Recent international forms in art*, artistic director Thomas G McCullough
- _ **5th Kaldor project:** Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik present *Moorman + Paik* in various venues in Adelaide and Sydney, including the Art Gallery of NSW

THEME

Video art

The video format has had to clarify its autonomous nature: is it film or is it TV? The video monitor's physical resemblance to the household TV set, whether as a solo box or as part of an installation, tends to perplex the viewer, as if it were merely some educational tool, or even a domestic appliance suitable for low culture but antithetical to fine arts.

Derided by intellectuals as an idiot-box, television was remade into an artform by Nam June Paik, playing fast and loose with the temporal image. Paik's 'prepared' TVs altered the networks' transmissions – much as John Cage had done with pianos and radios – while his physical manipulations of the TV sets themselves made them into a new kind of sculptural object.

In his January 1981 essay 'The porcupine and the car' for *Image Forum*, Bill Viola maintained that the difference between film and video has to do with the technical evolution of the two mediums: film as motion pictures is a succession of film stills creating the illusion of movement; while the video camera ceaselessly scans lines and thus 'stillness' is the basic illusion. 'Looking at the technical development of both video and film, we immediately notice a profound difference: as film has evolved basically out of photography (a film is a succession of discrete photographs), video has emerged from audio technology. A video camera is closer to a microphone in operation than it is to a film camera; video images are recorded on magnetic tape in a tape recorder. Thus we find that video is closer in relationship to sound or music than it is to the visual media of film and photography.'

For Viola, the alliance of video to sound, and thus to the passage of time, makes the experience more existential, more real, and hence likely to connect to more emotion in what is otherwise today's highly visual objective culture.

Compared to the great moments in film, we don't often think of video as haunting the mind or leaving after-images in the same way. Perhaps it has to do with the flypaper attraction of the cinema rectangle – its scalelessness – that hypnotic enveloping plane in the big movie house. Video, with its original amoeboid shape, is like an object in the room that you can see past. Also the video image, unlike the incremental frame of film, tends to fall apart with nothing to see but raster lines. What's more, video art demands a shift in your usual viewing patterns; unlike the way we take in a painting or a sculpture, video is a time-based medium. The all-encompassing glance of a fixed image or object doesn't work for video art, which asks you to be stationary (though less so for multiple-monitor installations). Paik took those limitations as spurs to his creativity, and the frameless continuous nature of video – as with the Paik–Abe colour video synthesiser – allowed him to expand and contract the image like a concertina.

Since the 1990s, video projection has come to replace the monitor as the central means of display in public settings. In the early 1970s, its low-resolution and costliness made it a less-than-reliable medium. The electronic arts – video and TV – have

Moorman was graciously performing several tasks at once, serving as entrepreneur, ringmaster, stage director, booking agent, publicist, photographer's assistant, grievance adjudicator and so on. She had obtained a permit from the city's Parks Department, and the festival she organized would succeed in luring an audience of 15,000 passersby.

David Bourdon, 'A letter to Charlotte Moorman', *Art in America*, June 2000

long been regarded as film's poor relation, and despite the advances in technology that have rendered most of the negative comparisons invalid (lack of clarity in sound and image, for example), the condescending attitude persists. Yet in those early years (the 1960s and '70s), video was a part of conceptual art and the related practices of performance art and process art, and video used those limitations – black-and-white picture, crude editing and finish – as a badge of cutting-edge radicalism.

In the 1980s, Paik began using video projection with lasers and sculptural forms to push the medium forward. By the late 1980s, improvements in the technology gave it the edge over monitors, and a new generation of artists welcomed the high-production values of cinema, often using film and video in combination.

Shirin Neshat, Doug Aitken and William Kentridge, for example, shoot on 16mm film and then transfer to video; while Viola has used special high-speed 35mm film cameras to make his slow-motion video installations. They have broken out of the box of the monitor and effectively compete with other media for the attention of viewers and collectors.

So, why isn't video art today, with its time-based moving images and often darkened rooms, just cinema without seats? As it happens, distinct visual languages have grown up: not just formal and technical (how they record and display information, how they frame time and space) but historical. Just as early video artists such as Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman made a point of highlighting the viewer's identity, as opposed to the tranced complacency of the commercially-driven boob-tube, cinema has challenged the conditions of its spectatorship.

In the 21st century, we've witnessed a vast migration of images from movie-projection houses towards exhibition spaces, all made easier by the digital revolution. Cinema has been redefined within these new parameters: outside traditional film history and within the larger orbit of art history.

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

Relevant works in the Art Gallery of NSW collection
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

- **Nam June Paik** (Korea; USA, b1932, d2006)

Buddha game 1991

television set, pages from a printed book, 2 gold-leaf wooden Buddhas, neon, antennae, 5 television monitors, laser disc player and laser disc; 147.3 x 92.7 x 59.7 cm
Purchased 2002 10.2002

This sculpture includes many of Paik's themes. The TV screen contains Buddhas staring at a miniature video screen. Over two millennia have passed since Buddha Shakyamuni sat beneath the bodhi tree to meditate, linking consciousness to cosmos. This domestic cabinet – the object we stare at or 'meditate' regularly – is covered with pages from a printed Korean text and recalls the way the Fluxus artists attacked symbolic 'bourgeois' objects such as the piano.

Global groove 1973

colour single-channel video, sound; duration 28.5 min

Annette Dupree Bequest Fund 2004 10.2004

In collaboration with John Godfrey. Director: Merrily Mossman. Narrator: Russell Connor. Film footage: Jud Yalkut, Robert Breer. Produced by the TV Lab at WNET/Thirteen.

'This is a glimpse of the video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the earth, and *TV Guide* will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.' So begins this seminal work in the history of video art. This radical manifesto on global communications in a media-saturated world is rendered as a frenetic electronic collage that subverts the language of television.

- **Peter Callas** (Australia, b1952)

Kiru umi no yoni / cutting like the ocean 1986

X KCA 30 U-matic videotape, sound; duration 21 min 53 sec

Purchased 1988 508.1988

Callas is considered a pioneer of video art. Using early special effects systems and ever-newer software systems, he married TV to the computer, reflecting the contours of the information landscape of ceaseless image flow. Here images could be processed – cut, mixed, and edited – at even greater speed. Along the way, Callas re-made the image – stencilled free from this cascading flow – into something more iconic and hard-edged, more layered and saturated with colour. This arrest of the flow, or even hyperventilation of it, was a way to challenge our usual take on television, one that incubates either stupefaction or channel-hopping distraction.

- **Robert Filliou** (France, b1926, d1987)

From political to poetical economy 1977–79

3 videotapes

Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1994 618.1994

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- _ Michael Rush, *Video art*, Thames & Hudson, London 2007

Websites

- _ Kaldor Public Art Projects
www.kaldorartprojects.org.au
- _ Kaldor Public Art Projects Explorer, Art Gallery of NSW
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor_projects
- _ Nam June Paik
www.paikstudios.com

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

'Skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality. Technology has become the body's new membrane of existence.' Consider this quote from Paik. In the absence of personal contact, and with the advancement of technology, list the alternative ways in which one person now communicates with another. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these new technologies?

What is a muse? Describe the relationship between an artist and their muse. Outline several of these relationships from art history and explain how the relationship contributed to the development of the artist's body of work.

Investigate how television and video was generally used in society before the intervention of artists like Paik. Propose how his work instigated new ways of working with these media for artists.

What were the aims of the artists involved in the Fluxus movement? Assess the influence of Marcel Duchamp in the development of this group. Identify two artists who were involved in this movement and describe their practice. Analyse the way in which these artists' works relate to a work by Paik.

When looking at Paik's works *TV bra for living sculpture* (first created in 1969) and *TV cello* (first created in 1971), the audience is confronted with images that initially appear to contradict normal experiences of watching and/or listening to a music performance. What are our usual expectations in such a situation? Discuss how these traditional experiences are challenged. Consider the ways Paik confronts our concept of reality and sets up an exchange and confrontation between the audience and his installations.

Paik believed machines in the hands of big corporations were exerting influence and control over people. Discuss how Paik uses these machines, namely TVs and videos, to enable people to talk back thus redressing the power balance. Consider the use of site and how the installation is configured and composed.

Locate an example of how the architecture of a gallery was dramatically altered by Paik's installations. Outline how this occurred and suggest how it may have impacted on the audience's experience of these spaces.

Our educational and cultural backgrounds play a major role in our lives and influence how we interpret and engage with the world. Research the personal backgrounds of Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman. Suggest how this had an impact on their collaborative approach to art-making.

In the 1967 performance of *Opera Sextronique*, Paik and Moorman – who performed topless – were arrested. Investigate the social and cultural context of the 1960s. Consider how the mood of the times might justify the decision by the artists to perform semi-nude and the decision by the police to arrest them on charges of indecent exposure. Twelve years later, Moorman performed multiple times for the Kaldor project. She upped the ante by being not only naked at times – covered in chocolate or playing a melting ice cello – but also flying (clothed this time) above the Sydney Opera House, harnessed to weather balloons, all without incident or police intervention. Locate responses to Moorman and Paik's Kaldor project. Discuss why they were received differently in Australia as opposed to the US. What, if anything, had changed?

Joseph Beuys frequently used materials such as felt and fat as symbols in his installations. Investigate the symbolic significance of materials such as ice and chocolate fudge in Moorman's performances.

Investigate Moorman's proactive role as an ambassador for avant-garde art from the late 1960s. Outline her original training in the arts and her later achievements in the art world. Discuss why she was a perfect spokesperson for what was often considered the strange, confrontational or unexpected art practice of the time. How was she different to other champions of the times?

Research the ways in which 21st-century artists are responding to new technologies such as mobile phones and MP3 players capable of storing and delivering interactive multimedia. Locate some examples and identify how the technologies are being used and/or commented on. Discuss the interaction of artists with technology throughout history. What have been the connections between developments in the arts and developments in science?

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Art Gallery Road, The Domain
Sydney 2000 Australia
pp@nsw.gov.au

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