

# ARTIST PRESENTATION – NAM JUNE PAIK

Des Inv 23 – Summer 2020



# WHO IS NAM JUNE PAIK?

- Nam June Paik (1932–2006)
- the “Father of Video Art”
- Born in 1932 in Seoul, Korea, to a wealthy industrial family. He was trained as a pianist.
- Paik and his family fled Korea in 1950 at the outset of the Korean War, first to Hong Kong, then to Japan. Finally, he immigrated to and settled in the United States in 1964.
- the University of Tokyo – B.S. in Aesthetics – 1956; Munich University (West Germany) - study music history with composer Thrasybulos Georgiades



# UNTITLED (1993)

- “I think I understand time better than the video artists who came from painting-sculpture [...] music is the manipulation of time [...] As painters understand abstract space, I understand abstract time” – Paik
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opug8uW21eU>
- An piano is wired with 15 TV screens. Small closed-circuit cameras trained on the instrument's mechanism are wired to the set. As the piano plays unmanned, its workings appear on the screens
- The image of John Cage, an influential artist at the time whom Paik met in Germany, is displayed on one monitor at the sculpture's top and on another at its foot



# TV GARDEN (1974)

- A large-scale installation consisting of forty television sets lying on the floor amidst many tropical plants while a video of *Global Groove* plays on the screens of the TV sets.

- Global groove:  
<https://youtu.be/xnCF5smgXA>







# ELECTRONIC SUPERHIGHWAY: CONTINENTAL U.S., ALASKA, HAWAII (1995)

- Currently displayed in the Smithsonian American Art Museum
- Paik was the first to use the phrase “electronic superhighway”
- the interstate highway system <-> electronic super highway” -> see the U.S.A. in your Chevrolet.”
- Metaphors in this piece:
  - length of this installation - the enormous scale of the nation
  - Neon outlines the monitors - multicolored maps and glowing enticements of motels and restaurants that beckoned Americans to the open road.
  - Different colors - individual states still have distinct identities and cultures, even in today's information age
  - Flashing images - “seen as though from a passing car”; video clips are chosen based on relevance of it to each state = our picture of America has always been influenced by film and television.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QHrw9Nr0ic>

# UNTITLED (2005)

○plaster man with Sony  
Watchman head)





## MEGATRON/MATRIX (1995)

“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*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHGS42HI95U>

- Megatron Matrix is approximately the size of a giant billboard and holds 215 monitor screens, placed together side by side with no space between them.
- Video feed:
  - mixed images from the Seoul Olympics with Korean folk rituals and modern dance
  - smaller videos or images play simultaneously on multiple monitors and forming a big picture - crossing the boundaries of each screen.
  - Moving patterns, color effects and rhythm are created by timing the videos perfectly.
  - Audio: unrelated sound bites, including some from the Olympics, electronic sound effects and electronic music
- Meaning of the piece: a world without borders in the electronic age; excess of information can be uncomfortable