

Manhattan Arts

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INTERNATIONAL

MoMA 2000

Making Choices: Home Movies



“Moment of Impact” (Julia Loktev, 1998). Pictured: Leonid Loktev. Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art

RELENTLESS TURNOVER: FILM STEPS IN... BY DONNA CAMERON

**INTERVIEW: JOHN G. HANHARDT, SENIOR CURATOR, FILM & VIDEO
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM... BY DONNA CAMERON**

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THE ARTFUL TRAVELER: IMAGES FROM 20 MANHATTAN ARTS SUBSCRIBERS

John G. Hanhardt

Senior Curator of Film and Video at the Guggenheim Museum

The Worlds of Nam June Paik", the Guggenheim Museum's first exhibition in the year 2000, made a point: The invention of cinema and the development of the moving image into the new multi-media and internet technologies of today reveal the transformative story and process of how that medium has changed our visual culture. The moving image, entering the discourse of the museum, is a powerful medium.

The Nam June Paik exhibition transformed the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum, at 1071 Fifth Avenue at 89th Street. The show will travel internationally, according to its organizer, **John G. Hanhardt**, Senior Curator of Film and Video at the Guggenheim.

"We're planning for the show to travel to Seoul, Korea, and, possibly the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, and other European spaces have shown interest. When it tours it will definitely be a different show, but the principals will be there, to focus on early and middle work, to have new pieces, to play them out in powerful relationships to each other," he said.

In case you missed the exhibition it was a wondrous spectacle. Site-specific laser projections (new for Paik) illuminated a seven-story waterfall cascading from the top of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed rotunda into a pool of 100 pulsing TV monitors and television sets facing upward, toward the oculus. Along the ascending ramps, strategically aligned cubicles offered a retrospective of seminal works by the prolific, ingenious and often subversive pioneer video artist.

Hanhardt, formerly the curator of film & video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974-1996, and Senior Curator of Film and Media Arts at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum from 1996-present, became intrigued by Paik's career while designing a 1982 retrospective of the Paik video art for the Whitney. As a pioneer curator of video art, he is something of a visionary himself, and has earned a reputation as a respected media arts historian.

DC: Nam June Paik, to me, is both humorist and visionary. His earliest video art is an oracle of today's "information highway" technology.

JH: Right from the beginning (early 1960s) he saw the developments in electronics as the idea of an electronic information highway. The idea of linking global television to film and to media. Paik explored communication and media in his writings and in 1984, he realized his live global television performance with "Good morning, Mr. Orwell." There is enormous range to his work as there is enormous range to his thinking...

DC: There's always a human touch, even in an overwhelming installation of machinery. One steps into the intense metallic blaze of Paik's electronic world and feels a sensation as delicate as if a snowflake fell from somewhere, somehow, to soothe one's skin...

JH: That's a wonderful point that you're making – this artist's idea of the human touch... (the idea) of the humanizing technology is very important to his work. Paik believes that technology is something that should serve the artists – that television should empower the individual. It should be interactive. It should be hands on. He made tools and he remade the television as something that you could directly engage with...

All of his work celebrates the idea that technology is not simply something removed, corporately constructed... For example, participation TV where you could speak into a microphone and create your own abstract images; his family of robots – human forms made out of old TVs and radios – or his Robot K-456, the wonderful robot that he would have walking in his performances or down the street in the early-mid 1960s.

DC: So, as one engages Paik's art, tapping memory and personal history in the present time, one reinvents oneself.

JH: The recurrence of an image in a particular piece places you, the viewer, in a dialogue with time – the time that you are there, the memories that the work brings up as it recalls itself and plays itself. Also, in his work that uses the closed-circuit video camera, what the camera sees – the present – is the image in the piece. And it's a real time presence which Paik's articulated through a very serious commitment to the idea of play.



Nam June Paik's "Modulation in Sync," 2000. Installation at the Guggenheim Museum. Photo credit: David Heald © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

There's a lot of humor in the work....The subversive play with the technology that makes you see things in ways that you maybe hadn't thought of seeing them before. For example, "TV Clock", "TV Moon", "TV Garden" – all pieces which use a variety of rhetorical strategies – metaphors to see video as a plastic medium that emits a moving image, giving viewers a visual, auditory, temporal experience unlike any other...with the employment of natural elements – from the fish tanks to the new laser work (waterfall) it becomes a very interesting dialogue between the video art and the building itself.

Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture was very much about the man-made environment and it's relationship to nature... In his early drawings for the space Wright included plants hanging over the sides...In the millennium show, "TV Garden" was hung over the edge of the rotunda ramp and echoes the geometric forms of Wright...there's a powerful dialogue circulating again, this idea of yours of memory and time that return to the body of his work.

DC: Paik's visual poetry begins and ends with human being.

JH: ...in terms of it's expression. Paik's a true global presence...born in Korea, studied in Japan. He's lived in Europe and has had a great presence in the United States. Paik believes in innovation. He made a real effort to break down technology and make it something human and poetic and expressive.

DC: How did your own interest in video art develop?

JH: It began with an interest in film and the idea that both film and video should be a part of the larger history of the moving image.

DC: What about the influence of others on Paik's work?

JH: One of the interesting central issues of the exhibit and the exhibit catalogue was a history of film, performance, music, interactivity relative to Paik's early work. We restored some of his early audio and video compositions, from the early 1960s. We also did a film series that placed his films and videotapes in relationship to other films and videotapes in the 1960s & 1970s...to restore his work to the history of the moving image...

Donna Cameron is the 1998-1999 Elodie Osborne Fellow of Film & Video, the recipient of three MacDowell Fellowships and two Jerome Fellowships for her work in painting and film. Her work is distributed by the MoMA Circulating Film & Video Library and is included in the MoMA's permanent collection of Film. She is represented in the landmark 20th century retrospective, "MoMA 2000, Making Choices, Part 2". Her fourth Cineprobe of new work will be on June 19, 6:30 pm, Roy & Niuta Titus Theater 2, at the MoMA and her video "Shirley Clarke in Our Time" will screen June 17 at 2 pm and June 23 at 7:30 pm, also in the Roy & Niuta Titus Theater 2, as part of the "MoMA 2000..." exhibit.



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