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“Father of video art” Nam June Paik gets American Art Museum exhibit (Photos)

By [Maura Judkis](#)



Nam June Paik, “Megatron/Matrix,” 1995, eightchannel (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

YouTube was founded in 2005, the year before [Nam June Paik](#), the Korean-born “father of video art” died. The prescient artist lived to see one of his many predictions begin to come true: He once speculated that everyone would have their own television channel. He probably would have loved [supercuts](#), [keyboard cat](#), and [the evolution of dance](#).

The Smithsonian American Art Museum received Paik’s archive in 2009, and an exhibition of his video works, sculptures, and other material goes on display Dec. 13 through Aug. 11, 2013. “Nam June Paik: Global Visionary” proffers Paik as the first man who truly grasped how profoundly television would change our world.

Paik manipulated the technology used to create television. In 1965’s “Magnet TV,” he found that a giant magnet placed atop the set could disrupt the pattern on the screen, creating a work of abstract art.



Nam June Paik, "Magnet TV," 1965, television set and magnet, black and white, silent, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from Dieter Rosenkranz, Copyright Nam June Paik Estate. (Robert E. Mates)

Paik was constantly thinking of the future of media. Some of his predictions are listed on this untitled work, below. Other papers in the exhibit outline the basis for online universities like [Udacity](#), and "bookless literature" and "moneyless society." In his video "Global Groove," he predicted that one day, "TV guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book."

(1944)

Do you know...?

How soon television will be in most homes?
How many small packages are lost annually?
The cruising range of small postwar planes?

18



Q. How soon after the war will television be available for the average home?

☐ 6 months ☐ 1 year ☐ 2 years

A. Experts estimate that television will be ready in about six months after civilian production resumes. And one of the important production techniques that will help speed delivery of

DO YOU KNOW...?

How soon TV-chair will be available in most museums ?

How soon artist will have their own TV channels ?

How soon wall to wall TV for video-art will be installed in most homes ?

A new design for TV-chair

(dedicated to the great
communication-artist Ray
Johnson)

Nam June Paik, "Untitled," from the portfolio "The New York Collection for Stockholm," 1973, serigraph on paper.

Paik's "TV Garden," which fills the main room of the SAAM's exhibit, celebrates the growth and spread of television.



Nam June Paik, "TV Garden" (detail), 1974/2000, single-channel video installation with color television monitors and live plants; color, sound, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. (Copyright Nam June Paik Estate)

Even the simple shape of the television fascinated Paik. He would often draw simplified televisions: A rectangle with rounded corners for the screen, surrounded by the rectangle of the outer box, and sometimes containing a smiley face. Paik created a series of drawings on newspaper after he suffered a stroke in 1996.

Paik also sought to personify television, and make human interaction with it less passive. He made a TV cello for his friend and collaborator, Charlotte Moorman, to play, while wearing TV glasses and a TV bra that, no doubt, make Lady Gaga swoon with envy today. He also constructed a whimsical family of robots from TVs,

using the most antiquated technology for the “grandparents,” and the newest technology for the “baby.” One of those robots is tweeting for the SAAM as [@Paikbot](#). The figure below is a tribute to Paik’s friend, dancer Merce Cunningham.



Nam June Paik, "Merce/Digital," 1988 single-channel video sculpture with vintage television cabinets and fifteen monitors; color, silent, collection of Roselyne Chroman Swig, Copyright Nam June Paik Estate. (Image courtesy Nam June Paik Estate)

Paik’s works are hypnotic in the “Turn on, tune in, zone out” sense of TV, but they’re also contemplative. “Zen for TV” asks us to consider the nothingness of a busted set — it has literally flatlined — while, in another work, Rodin’s “The Thinker” ponders the snow caused by electronic noise. The flickering light of analog TV feels different when viewed in person. So, even though some of Paik’s videos could have been YouTube viral hits in an alternate history, it’s better to view this

artist's vision of the future the old-fashioned way.



Nam June Paik, "Zen for TV," 1963/1982, manipulated television set; black and white, silent, Collection of Marcel Odenbach, Copyright Nam June Paik Estate. (Lothar Schnepf)

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