

## ABOUT THE ARTWORK

**Artist:** Nam June Paik (pronounced *Nem June Peck*)

**Title:** *TV cello*

**Date:** 2000

**Medium:** Sculptural assemblage with six TV monitors and video

**Dimensions:** 232.2 x 75 x 55cm (overall)

*TV Cello* 2000 reflects Paik's ability to transform something familiar — television and electronic imagery — into an extraordinary new hybrid form of sculptural assemblage. He achieves this by exposing the (normally concealed) interior of television monitors and using them as components to construct a sculpture that vaguely suggests a cello. The transparent televisions transmit a rapid-edit video montage of flickering images including archival footage of one of Paik's collaborators, Charlotte Moorman, 'playing' a 'practice bomb' with a cello bow. The work is also characteristic of Paik's fusion of old and new technologies. The cello has long been associated with 'high' culture while television and video are technologies of twentieth-century 'popular' culture. As early as the late 1960s and early 1970s, Paik's art anticipated the current multimedia climate where the ideas of 'surfing' and 'sampling' this ocean of electronic information are commonplace.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in South Korea in 1932, Nam June Paik currently resides in the USA, after living in Germany from 1956 to 1964. He is an artist who has played a pioneering role in the development of video, new media and multimedia art. Paik has radically developed and altered the understanding and perception of sound, performance and multimedia as artforms over the past 50 years, and continues to make a major contribution to these media. His interest in sound began early, when he studied music, art history and aesthetics at university. His contact with the American composer John Cage in 1958 was a turning point for both their careers. Paik revels in the modern and current developments in information technology and new media. He has elaborated and celebrated this potential through a continuing and expanding body of work. Notably, Paik utilises electronic and mass-media networks, such as television, which he refers to as the 'electronic super highway'.

## SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Consider and discuss how Paik combines human elements with technology in this work. Why does he do this?
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of today's multimedia environment.
- Discuss the following statement, made by Paik in 1969: 'The real issue implied in "Art and Technology" is not to make another scientific toy, but how to humanise the technology and the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly — too rapidly.'

## References:

- Goodman, Jonathan. 'TV Buddha, video fish: the worlds of Nam June Paik'. *Art AsiaPacific*, no.29, 2001, pp.22–4.
- Hanhardt, John G. *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* [exhibition catalogue]. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 2000.
- Kirker, Anne. 'Nam June Paik: Whimsical encounters, without end'. In *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002* [exhibition catalogue]. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2002, pp.78–81.
- Morgan, Robert. 'Global grooving: Nam June Paik at the Guggenheim'. *Sculpture Magazine*, vol.19, no.3, April 2000. <[www.sculpture.org](http://www.sculpture.org)>
- Paik, Nam June. *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space*. Eds Toni Stoss and Thomas Kellein. Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1993.
- Silver, Kenneth E. 'Nam June Paik: video's body', *Art in America*, vol.81, no.11, November 1993, pp.100–07.

## Art and technology

Popper, Frank. *Art of the Electronic Age*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1993.

## Video art

- Hall, Doug and Fifer, Sally Jo (eds). *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*. Aperture in association with the Bay Area Video Coalition, New York, NY, 1990.
- Hodges, Nicola. *World Wide Video*. Academy Editions, London, 1993.
- Video Data Bank: Video Art and Video Artists. <[www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org)>

Over: Nam June Paik South Korea/United States b.1932 *TV cello* 2000 2 DVDs, 6 video monitors, perspex, wooden cello neck with coloured plastic strings and wooden tail piece, marble base 232.2 x 75 x 55cm (overall) The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art Purchased 2002 with funds from The Myer Foundation A project of the Sidney Myer Centenary Celebration 1899–1999 Gift through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

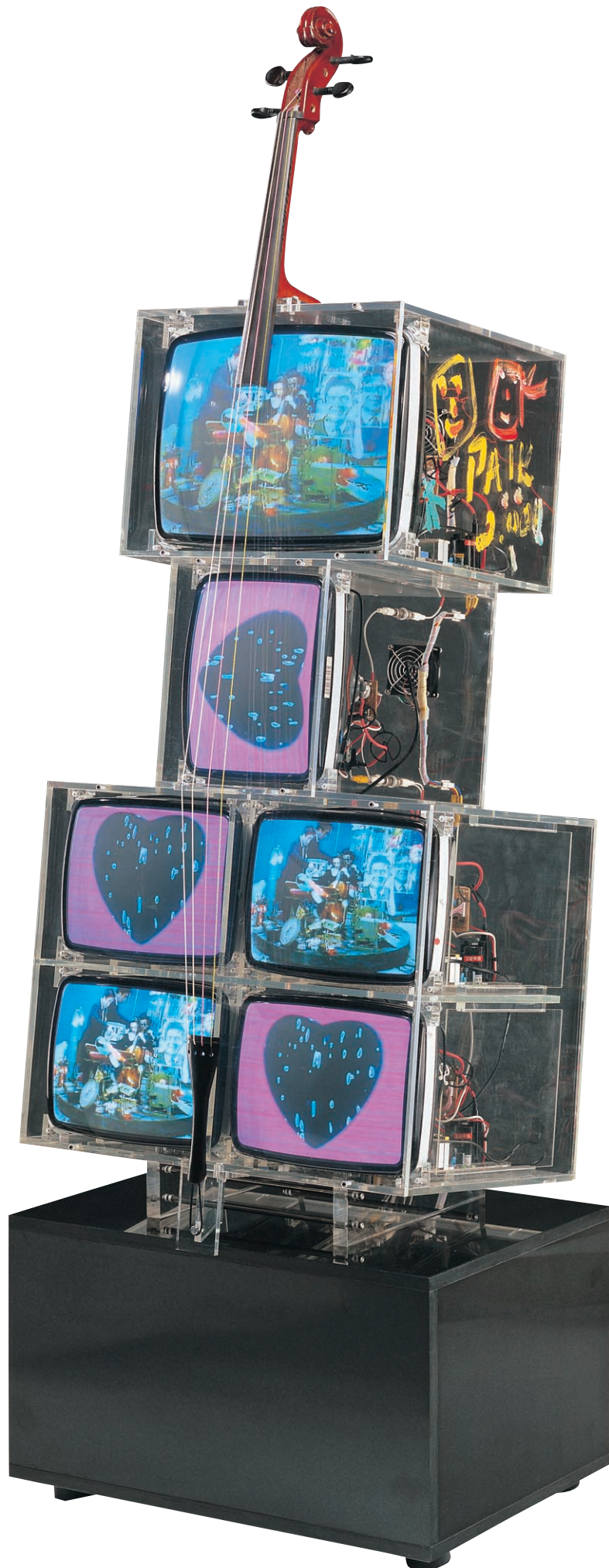
## ARTIST'S WORDS

'The nature of environment is much more on TV than on film or painting. In fact, TV (its random movement of tiny electrons) is the environment of today.'

Nam June Paik, 1971, quoted in Hanhardt 2000, p.107



ASIA-PACIFIC TRIENNIAL  
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Nam June Paik was born in Korea, but left there when he was young. He has since lived in a number of countries of the world. Paik uses information technology and new media in his artworks. One of the important aspects of his work is the way he borrows imagery from a range of sources.

## ACTIVITY

What techniques and iconography does Nam June Paik borrow from a range of different cultures? How has he embraced popular culture and the influence of mass media in his work?

Paik blurs the distinctions between ancient and electronic forms, folk art and high art, East and West and the objective and subjective. For example, he will combine traditional Chinese characters, inscribed in gold with technicolour, TV screens and bright neon lights.

His work frequently depicts a combination of traditional symbolism and contemporary icons. The works combine natural elements with computer screens displaying fast-moving images, almost impossible to capture in a single glance, that flick with icons of modern life. His works often contain an anthology of noise and electronically generated music. In this way, Paik's work crosses the traditional boundaries between sound and image and presents these in a sculptural way.

## ACTIVITY

Were you born in another country? Have you lived in another part of Australia or the world? Did your parents come from another country? Discuss the impact this has had on your identity and how you see yourself.

Create artworks that capture the iconography and images of your background, particularly the way this has changed over time.

## ACTIVITY

How is travel and global electronic communication affecting cultural identity? How does art reflect ideas of interculturalism and multiculturalism?

## ACTIVITY

Nam June Paik was part of the Fluxus movement <<http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/f/fluxus.html>>. 'Fluxus' comes from Latin, meaning 'to flow'. The group was active in the 60s and 70s and their interest was in a whole range of creative activities, such as concerts, publishing and events, in addition to their interest in art.

Research the Fluxus movement. Try creating a Fluxus-type event as a class or group activity.

## Websites

[http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/paik\\_nam\\_june.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/paik_nam_june.html)

<http://www.geocities.com/namjunepaik/>

<http://www.solwaygallery.com/Pages/paik.html>

<http://images.google.com/> (search for 'Nam June Paik')