SFMOMA PRESENTS U.S. EXCLUSIVE RETROSPECTIVE OF VISIONARY ARTIST NAM JUNE PAIK

Major Immersive Exhibition Brings Together over 200 Works from Five-Decade Career Combining Art and Technology

Nam June Paik
May–October 2021

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (October 29, 2020; updated December 8, 2020)—Nam June Paik has continued to electrify the art world ever since his 1963 debut of television experiments in *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*, his first solo exhibition. Paik challenged visitors to participate by activating modified TV sets and playing radically transformed instruments—blurring the distinction between performer and audience. Playful and interactive, Paik's immersive environment expanded the boundaries of art, music and technology, and laid the groundwork for his career as the founder of video art.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present the exclusive U.S. exhibition of *Nam June Paik,* a major retrospective of Paik's radical and experimental art, on view from May through October 2021. One of the first truly global artists, Paik (1932–2006) foresaw the importance of mass media and new technologies, coining the phrase 'electronic superhighway' in 1974 to predict the future of communication in an internet age. The exhibition will celebrate his multidisciplinary and collaborative practice that encompassed art, music, performance and technology, all in dialogue with philosophies and traditions from both Eastern and Western cultures.

Bringing together over 200 works across all media spanning a five-decade career, from early compositions and performances to large-scale video installations and global satellite projects, *Nam June Paik* offers an in-depth understanding of the artist's trailblazing practice. Paik's innovative, irreverent and entertaining works were informed by his musical background and his vision of an interconnected future. Organized by SFMOMA and Tate Modern, London, with additional presentations at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the National Gallery Singapore, the retrospective will be the first major Paik show in the U.S. in over 20 years and the first ever large-scale survey of his work on the West Coast.

"Nam June Paik is famous for being the historic father of video art, but his groundbreaking and contemporary influence is even more based on his crossover between all media," said Rudolf Frieling, curator of media arts at SFMOMA. "Paik's radical visual and musical aesthetic has a natural home here on the West Coast as a place for global connectivity."

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

Organized thematically, the exhibition will unite many of Paik's most iconic and provocative works from throughout his career. In *TV Buddha* (1974), an 18th-century wooden Buddha appears to watch itself on a modern television, typifying the influence of Zen Buddhist philosophies on Paik's approach to art and technology. Also on view will be *TV Garden* (1974–77/2002), an immersive installation featuring dozens of TV sets alongside lush foliage in a futuristic landscape where technology is an integral part of the natural world.

Nam June Paik will partially restage the artist's pivotal 1963 solo exhibition, *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television,* and his concept of "action music" (as Paik said, "Why is it music? Because it is not 'not music'") will be demonstrated via musical interfaces and some of Paik's earliest manipulated televisions.

Unique to SFMOMA's presentation will be two robots, one each dedicated to composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham, two of Paik's key collaborators along with artist Joseph Beuys and cellist Charlotte Moorman. *John Cage Robot II* (1995) and *Merce / Digital* (1988), among many other works, will highlight Paik's creative partnerships and collaborative artistic practice.

The retrospective will culminate in the dazzling installation *Sistine Chapel* (1993), a mesmerizing riot of sound and images from dozens of projectors, taken from the German pavilion which won the Golden Lion award at the Venice

Biennale in 1993. Presented in its largest scale of any venue at SFMOMA, and exceeding that of all other works in the exhibition, *Sistine Chapel* will envelop the audience in an audio-visual remix of Paik's past videos and collaborators seen throughout the exhibition.

ABOUT NAM JUNE PAIK

Born in Seoul during the Japanese occupation of Korea, Nam June Paik lived and worked in Japan, Germany and the U.S., reflecting a global connectedness that transcended borders and cultural differences. He studied music theory and trained as a musician before experimenting with performance and technology in the 1960s as a means of expanding his artistic production. He developed a multidisciplinary practice across media, and has become synonymous with the electronic image through a prodigious output of manipulated TV sets, live performances, global television broadcasts, single-channel videos and video installations.

Paik collaborated with a community of avant-garde artists and musicians, and played a pivotal role in Fluxus, an international network of artists, composers and poets who engaged in experimental art performances. His groundbreaking work has influenced art, media, music and popular culture for decades, including musicians such as David Bowie, Laurie Anderson and Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh, among many others.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue from Tate Publishing. Edited by Sook-Kyung Lee and Rudolf Frieling, it features essays by the editors and contributions from Leontine Coelewij, Grace Deveney, Rachel Jans, Susanne Neuburger, Andrea Nitsche-Krupp, Valentina Ravaglia and David Toop, as well as excerpts of Paik's own writings.

VENUES + DATES

Tate Modern: October 17, 2019–February 9, 2020
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam: March 14–October 4, 2020
SFMOMA: May–October 2021
National Gallery Singapore: Opening November 2021

ORGANIZATION + SUPPORT

Nam June Paik is curated by Rudolf Frieling, Curator of Media Arts, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Sook-Kyung Lee, Senior Research Curator, Tate, with Andrea Nitsche-Krupp, Assistant Curator, SFMOMA. The exhibition is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Tate Modern, London, in collaboration with Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and National Gallery Singapore.

Major support for *Nam June Paik* is provided by Dana and Bob Emery. Generous support is provided by Lionel F. Conacher and Joan T. Dea, and Debbie and Andy Rachleff. This exhibition is made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design and media arts is housed in an LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA offers 45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space open to all.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

** Follow us on Twitter for updates and announcements: @SFMOMA_Press

Media Contacts
Jill Lynch, jilynch@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4172
Clara Hatcher Baruth, chatcher@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4177
Emma LeHocky, elehocky@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4170

Image credits:
Nam June Paik, *Sistine Chapel,* 1993 (installation view, Tate); courtesy the Estate of Nam June Paik; © Estate of Nam June Paik; photo: Andrew Dunkley © Tate

Nam June Paik, *TV Garden,* 1974–77/2002 (installation view, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; © Estate of Nam June Paik; photo: Peter Tijhuis

Nam June Paik lying among televisions, Zürich, 1991; photo: Timm Rautert