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Source *NJP Reader #13 Nam June Paik's Transmission: journey over two centuries*, pp.150-157

Publisher Nam June Paik Art Center, Yongin

Transmission Tower: Communicating with Nam June Paik and Incorporating the Environment

Colophon

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Published on Apr. 30, 2024

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YUN JEHO

전자음악 작곡가이자 오디오 비주얼 아티스트인 윤제호는 전시와 공연 분야를 넘나드는 활동을 하고 있다. 그는 자신이 상상하는 디지털 공간을 컴퓨터로 디자인한 소리와 광학 장치의 빛으로 현실 공간에 채운다. 관객은 작품 안에서 빛과 소리를 촉각적으로 느끼며 거닐고 쉬면서 현실과 가상이 혼재된 시대를 살아가는 자신의 정체성에 대해 고민을 하게 된다. 그의 작품은 파라다이스 아트랩 페스티벌, 오픈 미디어아트 페스티벌, 광주 미디어아트 페스티벌, 제주도립미술관, 수원시립 아이파크 미술관 등의 주요 전시에 소개되었다. 또한 한국, 캐나다 수교 60주년 기념 전시와 청주 직지 코리아 국제 페스티벌에서 오프닝 퍼포먼스 등을 하였고 더 현대 서울 1주년 퍼포먼스와 제네시스 X 로드쇼 등 다양한 기업과 협업을 하였다.

Yun Jeho is an audio visual artist and electronic music composer whose activities extend beyond the boundaries of exhibitions and performances. He designs digital spaces using computers and fills physical spaces with the sound and light of optical devices based on his imagination. Audiences experiencing his works sensually perceive light and sound as they walk through and rest within the artwork, leading them to contemplate their own identity in a contemporary era where reality and the virtual world coexist. His works have been featured in major exhibitions such as **Paradise Art Lab Festival**, **Open Media Art Festival**, **Gwangju Media Art Festival**, Jeju Museum of Art, Suwon Museum of Art, and more. He has also been involved in various collaborations, including the **Korea-Canada 60th Anniversary Exhibition**, the **Jikji Korea International Festival's** opening performance, **The Hyundai's First Anniversary** performance, and the **Genesis X Roadshow**, among others.

In the summer of 2023, at the request of Nam June Paik Art Center, I participated in the installation of Nam June Paik's **Transmission Tower**. In order to pay homage to Nam June Paik's original work, I deeply contemplated the design and programming for the lasers, neon lights, and sounds of this installation. At the initial meeting, NJP Art Center proposed a direction for reinterpreting the work in a way that honored Paik's original intentions and expressed respect for him as the creator. As an artist, I began the project by discussing the requests from NJP Art Center and the considerations for the original piece.

My initial theme for the project was communication with Nam June Paik. The project unfolded and ultimately expanded through the mutual communication between Paik's original contents and my own work, which he had inspired. First, by analyzing the archival video provided by NJP Art Center, I confirmed the positions of the laser projectors on the original installation, as well as the direction and types of laser beams projected. I decided to use the same type of projection system and to keep the projectors in the same locations, thus allowing the lasers to be projected in all four directions. The content of the 2002 laser program had primarily consisted of straight lines, so I also sought directions for effectively utilizing lines. Since Paik had designed the lasers to reflect off mirrors, I too programmed the lasers to reflect off mirrors mounted atop the mini towers, as well as off the exterior glass walls of NJP Art Center itself (Fig. 1). In 2002, the neon lights showed some movement, as they sometimes appeared to ascend from the ground. Drawing inspiration from Paik's performance art, I programmed the lasers and neon lights to move in response to sound and music in a synchronized performance.

In this process of communication, I first focused on effectively capturing Nam June Paik's original intentions, and then contemplated how to pay homage through new interpretations. When I initially encountered **Transmission Tower**, I got the impression that Paik wanted to convey

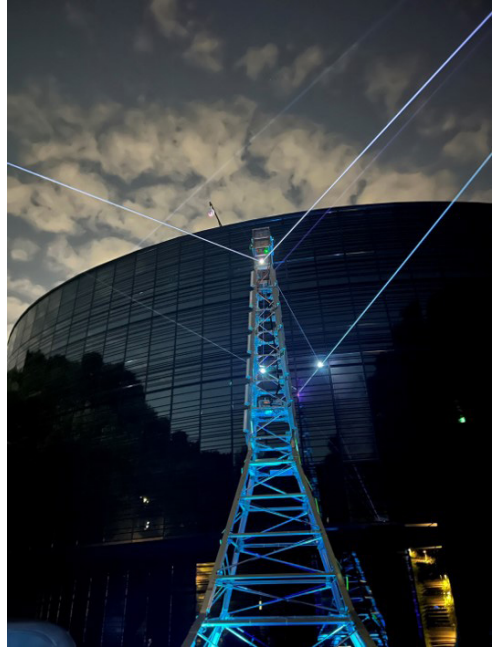


Fig. 1. Laser performance

a message through this artwork.

So I wondered, when the work was newly erected at NJP Art Center, how could it offer a reply to the messages that Paik had dispatched? If Paik's **Transmission Tower** had sent signals into space, then maybe we could send vibrations of sound and waves of laser light back to **Transmission Tower**, as if communicating between the past and present. During the exhibition period, I presented the performance **Resonating Frequencies** as a two-part series, trying to use audiovisual means to enact a form of communication that transcends space and time. Through **Resonating Frequencies**, I tried to send a type of invitation to Nam June Paik, attempting to summon him into our physical space. In the performance, Paik appears through manipulated recordings of his voice, which then cause the lasers to react accordingly, symbolizing an exchange of messages (Figs. 2 and 3). The performance visualized the feeling of conversing with lasers, which make waves visible, much like a shaman preparing food, singing,

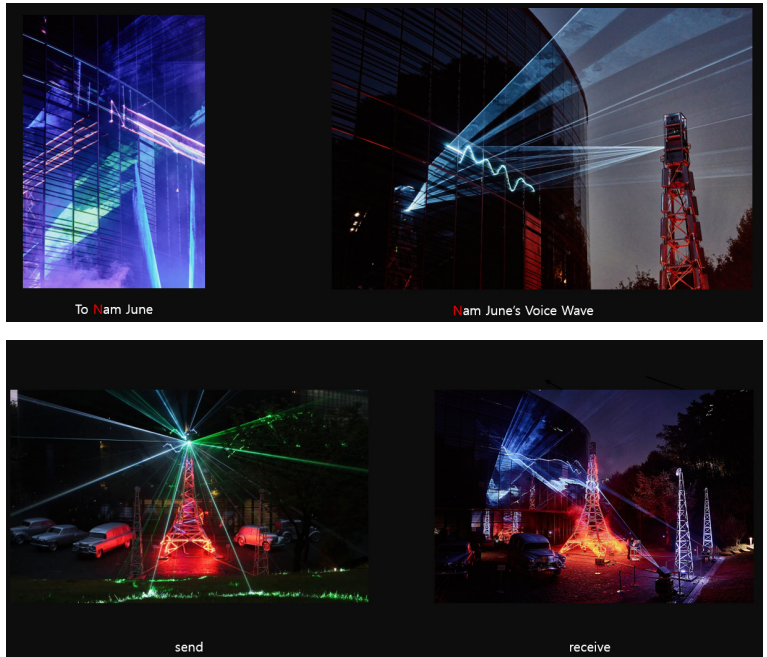


Fig. 2, 3. Communication with lasers

and dancing to summon souls for a feast. Thus, in response to the messages dispatched by Nam June Paik, various frequencies of light and sound were used to convey our greetings and pay our respects.

For the 2002 installation of **Transmission Tower**, the audio consisted of Mozart's **Requiem**, which was part of the accompanying artwork **32 Cars for the 20th Century: Play Mozart's Requiem Quietly**. For the 2023 project, to achieve a

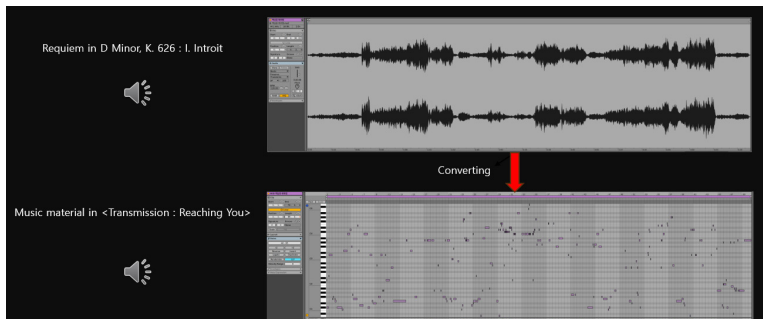


Fig. 4. Communication with music

different communication and homage, separate sounds and music were played. At first, the sound seemed to be the same, as Mozart's **Requiem** was played, but it was then modulated. Like turning a radio dial to try to find the right frequency, the sound expressed the process of trying to discover Nam June Paik's hidden message. In turn, this process symbolized our immersion into the space of the new **Transmission Tower** in 2023. Subsequently, several notes from the original **Requiem** were sampled to create the new sound of **Transmission Tower**. The original music and collected notes were rearranged to give birth to new music. Listening to the new piece independently, it's barely recognizable as the **Requiem**, because only the melody was sampled with no harmony. But when the new music is played along with the original, we can detect that it was extracted from **Requiem**, even if the overall atmosphere is somewhat different (Fig. 4). Also, during the installation, the loud noises of the trucks and other equipment sometimes caused the tower to resonate, creating its own sound. I thus sampled these sounds and added them to the mix as ambient pad sounds. Laser sounds from some of my other works were added to the mix as audio homages to the artwork. By blending the original notes and sounds of the **Requiem** with sounds from my own previous works, I tried to communicate with **Transmission Tower**.

During the summer that I prepared for the exhibition, I studied various materials with the staff at NJP Art Center. Looking at videos and photos of the 2002 installation, I was struck not only by the tower, but also by the square at Rockefeller Center, which merged with the tower to become part of the artwork. Two of the aspects from the original installation that I definitely wanted to reflect in my homage were the surrounding lights and lasers, and the lasers that were projected onto café awnings around the square. Thinking about how to achieve this, I thought of the media facade technique. Based on my own recent works using laser mapping and projection, I envisioned the exterior of NJP Art Center as a single screen that might be used for projection mapping.

Projection mapping is a technique that utilizes a given structure as a canvas, allowing us to project light onto that service according to its specific form. Using this technique, I designed a laser projection map for the exterior wall of NJP Art Center, orchestrating the display to harmonize with the different natural landscapes around the building. I also conducted other environmental experiments with the laser, combining concepts of projection mapping and media facade. By creating a design that harmonizes with the surroundings, I hoped that the environment would also become part of the work.

This experiment originated from the unique relationship between the artwork and the surrounding landscape. Unlike the 2002 installation of **Transmission Tower** at Rockefeller Center in New York, the 2023 installation had a completely different setting, being surrounded by the beautiful natural landscape around NJP Art Center in Yongin, including many trees. Since the surrounding colors naturally change with the seasons and the lasers are projected onto those colors, the visual experience continuously changes and evolves. This is most striking on humid nights, when the fantastical laser lights are enhanced by fog effects, creating a more immersive experience. Just as Nam June Paik accounted for various aspects of the surrounding environment, intensifying the spatiality of the work for a fully integrated experience, this project also emphasized spatial integration and communication with the natural environment through the lasers. In particular, the new **Transmission Tower** directly interacted with the environment by projecting lasers onto the space, creating new textures. The 2002 New York exhibition involved similar experiments, enhancing the spatiality of the work by using lasers to project new textures onto the surrounding buildings or trees. Those experiments greatly contributed to the new implementation of **Transmission Tower**, in which lasers were projected onto the surrounding trees and grass, transforming the atmosphere (Fig. 5). These efforts to interact with the environment

continued in the performances, when the projected lasers added new textures to NJP Art Center building, grass, and forest, thus opening up new avenues of interaction with the audience.

In my experience with media art and audiovisual works, I have been continually inspired by Nam June Paik. Therefore, in this project, I thought deeply about how to maintain the essence of Paik's original work, and then sought innovative ways to reinterpret and communicate with the original in order to express my reverence for it. Our current media ecosystem is marked by a balance between technology and information, precisely as Paik once hoped and imagined. With this in mind, I thought about the people who would feel and experience the new **Transmission Tower** in nature, envisioning children playing in sync with the movement of the lasers (Fig. 6). These are all different ways to experience and empathize with Nam June Paik's **Transmission Tower**



Fig. 5. Lasers projected onto the surroundings

across nature, humanity, and time. As we respond to the messages conveyed by Nam June Paik, I hope we can coexist and resonate together.



Fig. 6. Audience experiencing the work within the environment