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# Keeping Artworks Alive in Museums: Presentation 1

## Colophon

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김환주

발표 1

Presentation 1

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김환주는 한국전통문화대학교에서 문화재수리복원을 전공하고, 국립현대미술관 유화보존실을 거쳐 현재 대전시립미술관 소장품 보존관리 학예연구사로 재직 중이다. 대전시립미술관 열린수장고 건립 사업과 백남준 <프랙탈 거북선> 복원 프로젝트를 총괄했다. 주요 논문으로 「국·공립미술관의 작품수집 과정 및 보존평가 현황 분석」(2022), 「대전시립미술관 작품 보존·관리 현황 분석 및 개선방안 연구」(2021), 「백남준 作 <프랙탈 거북선>의 관리이력 및 보존현황」(2020), 「톰 새넌 <광선구>의 작품 설치와 보존방안 연구」(2019) 등이 있다. 현대미술작품의 보존관리, 미술관의 보존정책과 소장품 통합관리에 관심을 두고 연구하고 있다.

Kim Hwanju studied cultural heritage restoration and conservation at the Korea National University of Cultural Heritage. He has worked in the Conservation Department of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, specializing in oil painting conservation. Currently Kim works as a conservator at the Daejeon Museum of Art. He managed the **Open Storage Project** at the Daejeon Museum of Art and Nam June Paik's **Fractal Turtle Ship** restoration project. He published research papers including **Analysis on the current status of conservation evaluation of Korean national and public art museums within the acquisition procedure of museum collection** (2022), **Research on Daejeon Museum of Art Collection's conservation practice and policy** (2021), **Restoration Project on Nam June Paik's Fractal Turtle Ship** (2020), and **Research on installation and restoration of Tom Shannon's Ball Ray** (2019). Kim is interested in the conservation of contemporary art, conservation policies, and the museum collection management.

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Nam June Paik's **Fractal Turtle Ship** is a large video sculpture produced for the 1993 World Expo in Daejeon (hereinafter, 1993 Taejeon Expo). Formed by hundreds of CRT monitors and antique objects, the massive "turtle ship" is 5 meters tall with an area of 12 by 10 meters, making it one of Nam June Paik's largest video sculptures (Fig. 1). At the end of 1993 Taejeon Expo, **Fractal Turtle Ship** was relocated to Daejeon Museum of Art, where parts of the work had to be reduced or modified due to spatial limitations. In addition, it was installed in a lobby with external entrances, which posed many challenges for the work's conservation by preventing adequate control of the temperature and humidity while increasing the exposure to dust and other particles. The space was also not ideal from an artistic perspective, as the bright natural light of the lobby made it difficult to appreciate the luminous display of the monitors and neon lights.

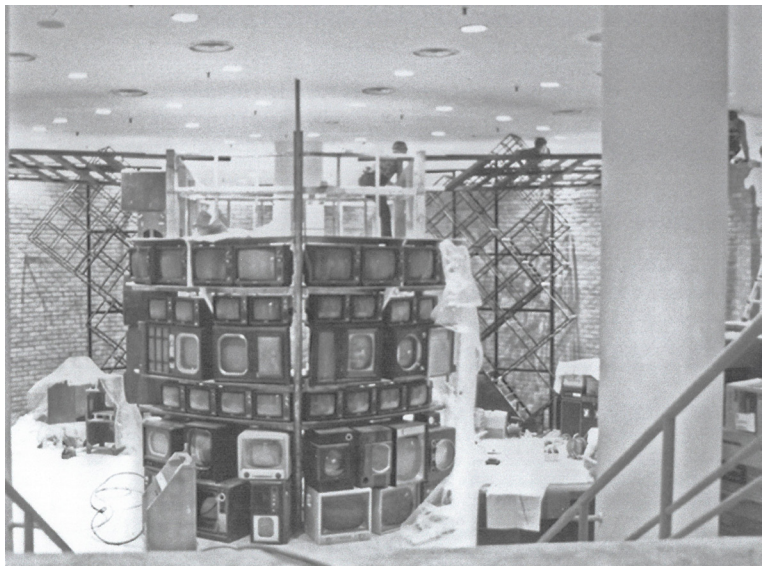


Fig 1. Installing *Fractal Turtle Ship* at 1993 Taejeon Expo

After a long search for solutions, a plan was established in 2017 to construct an "Open Storage" that would include a dedicated exhibition space for **Fractal Turtle Ship**. In 2022,

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through the “Nam June Paik’s Fractal Turtle Ship Restoration Project,” the artwork was restored and relocated in its own exhibition space within the DMA Open Storage (Fig. 2). The project consisted of nine detailed tasks, including the deinstallation, restoration, relocation, and reinstallation of the artwork, as well as transferring and improving the work’s video and electrical equipment; conservation treatment for the CRT monitors and electronic components; conservation treatment for the antique objects; documentation of the antique objects; and production and installation of hull supports. Through this process, the original form of the artwork was recovered and its conservation conditions were significantly improved. Moreover, the creation of a new space specifically designed to enhance viewers’ appreciation of the work marked a crucial turning point in its conservation.



Fig 2. *Fractal Turtle Ship* installed at (from left) 1993 Taejon Expo; in the lobby of DMA (2002); and in the new *Fractal Turtle Ship* Gallery at DMA (2022)

The most fundamental task of the project was to secure information and materials related to the structure and installation of the work. However, like the majority of Nam June Paik’s works, there were no design drawings or other documentation regarding the original installation process of **Fractal Turtle Ship**. Therefore, to ensure the safe and accurate relocation and restoration of the artwork, we collected as many research materials from that time as possible, including photographs and press coverage, and obtained further information through interviews with technicians involved in the original installation. Also, before the project was initiated, preliminary work was

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conducted by a consultation committee composed of conservation and restoration experts.

Using our research data, we were able to restore the original shape of the wings and the form of Hansando, which had been reduced. But other tasks proved more problematic, such as deciding how to restore the original beam projection, which was not captured in photographs, or determining whether the temporary walls installed around the artwork should be considered as part of the work itself. Furthermore, at the original exhibition in 1993, large tanks containing live turtles were placed on both sides of the ship's hull. However, the live turtles were removed after a few days due to protests from animal rights groups. After reviewing related laws and debating the importance of the artist's intentions at consultation meetings, it was decided that the live turtles would also not be included in this restoration project. Throughout the entire project, the steps of the restoration were decided on a case-by-case basis according to multiple considerations, beyond simply pursuing the ideal conditions for conservation. In some cases, the artist's intent was prioritized over maintaining the original physical form, while in other cases, the practical conditions of the museum took precedence over the artist's intent.

Another recent project that demonstrates the multifaceted nature of preserving contemporary art is the exhibition **Future Lies Ahead: Daejeon 1993/2023** at the Daejeon Museum of Art (November 7, 2023–February 25, 2024). This exhibition reproduced the outdoor exhibition held at 1993 Taejon Expo inside the museum. The daunting task of replicating an outdoor exhibition from thirty years ago indoors required extensive discussions with the artists. The participating artists showed a range of attitudes towards this project, with some claiming that their works were site-specific, and thus had no meaning if removed from their original venue. Other artists accepted the unavoidable circumstances of indoor exhibition and provided new guidelines to ensure that the original intent of their works could be maintained.



Fig. 3. Installation of *The Ball Ray* at 1993 Taejeon Expo

One of the works that exemplifies the decision-making process for this exhibition was **The Ball Ray** by Tom Shannon, an American installation sculptor, which is now in the collection of Daejeon Museum of Art. This artwork originally consisted of fifty-five stainless steel balls that were installed in a straight line. The largest ball is 40 centimeters in diameter, and each successive ball decreases in size by approximately 0.917 times (about  $1/1.09$ ), such that the final ball has a diameter of only 3.6 millimeters. Concurrently, the gap between the balls also decreases by the same ratio, yielding a unique optical effect. Because of its outdoor location, many of the original steel balls went missing during or after the 1993 exhibition. In fact, when the museum acquired the piece in 2012, only four of the fifty-five original balls remained. After the acquisition, the missing fifty-one balls were replaced and the work was newly installed in the museum square. Through the years, however, various balls were again lost or damaged. In preparation for the 2023 exhibition, the artist initially stated that he wanted the piece to be installed outdoors as he had originally



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intended, but the museum was concerned that the balls would inevitably be lost again if installed outdoors. Thus, after further discussions with the artist about conservation, he provided a new guide for installing the work, which involved creating a huge base for the balls (44 meters long, 25 centimeters wide, and 15 centimeters in height). Through collaborative discussions and reviews between the artist and museum, various details of the base, such as its material and color, were chosen, giving consideration to factors such as its physical stability and future storage. After some details were adjusted, the base was fabricated and the artwork was restored with new measurements reflecting the height of the base. Thus, although the installation format and environment have changed from the original installation at 1993 Taejon Expo, I believe the restored work upholds the artist's intent while addressing various practical issues. This process of open collaboration and consultation with the artist exemplifies the characteristics of contemporary art conservation.



Fig.4. Installation locations of *The Ball Ray* (From the left: Expo park in 1993 & 2010, DMA Square in 2012 and DMA Gallery in 2023)

The conservation of contemporary art requires comprehensive consideration of both artistic meaning and practical conditions, often resulting in situations in which one cannot simply abide by a single principle. The concept of authenticity encompasses not only the physical form but



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also the intangible values of a work, leading to different interpretations of what and how it should be properly preserved. Consequently, various conservation methods may need to be applied to the same piece. From this perspective, the decision-making process itself is as significant as the final outcome of the treatment. The gaps in unresolved ethical issues must be filled through interdisciplinary discussions and research, incorporating both interpretations from past records and current perspectives. I believe that this process is unique to contemporary art conservation, and should be continuously studied through more cases.