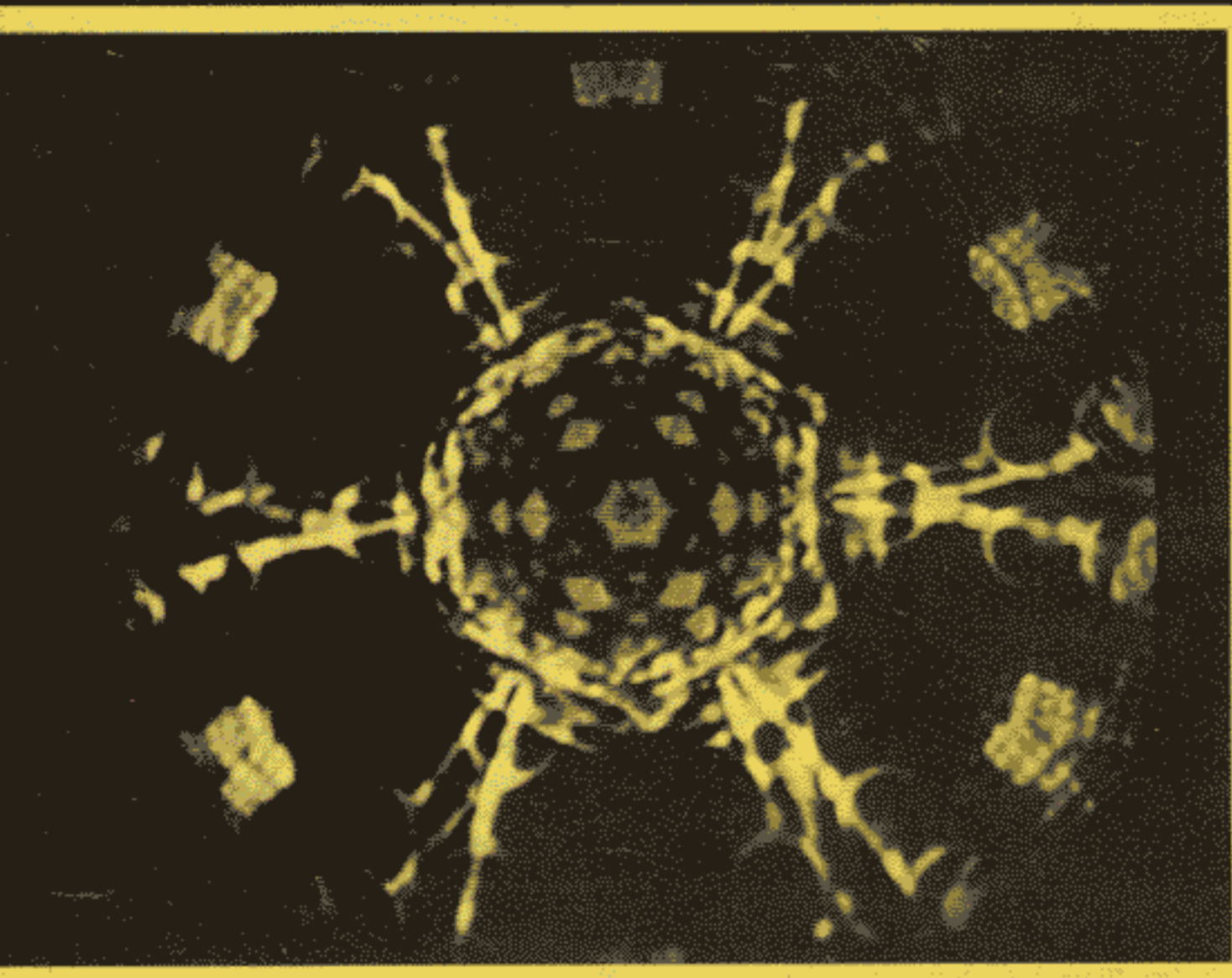


Wipe Cycle  
by  
Frank Gillette  
and  
Ira Schneider



Archetron  
by  
Tom Tadlock

Participation No. 1  
by  
Nam June Paik



All photos by Howard Wise Gallery



# TV AS ART

by Richard Skidmore

More than two hundred years ago, Francis Bacon defined "art" as "the creative addition of man and nature". Today we might add: "...and technology." Technologies are becoming as much a part of man's environment as nature — and, logically, electronics has become the new tool in sculpture, painting, and music.

Artists bent on controlling the intangibles, light and sound, have found that the basic equipment and technique is no further than *The Beverly Hillbillies* — television.

Isn't that the "wasteland"?

Yes, but Thomas Tadlock, John Seery, Frank Gillette, Nam June Paik (pronounced Pike), and others are attempting to reclaim the land for the living. Through the work of these artists, television has begun to liberate itself from both technology and commerciality. It is beginning to define its own form.

Right now, there is very little on your screen that can be considered part of the "art" of television. There are fine plays, movies, and cartoons, but with the exception of sports and live news coverage, everything has been borrowed from another medium of expression: the film, theatre, etc. The magic of "live" television is a major part of the medium's identity. The immediacy distinguishes TV from film (which has a delay from recording to viewing that makes it an historical record).

But television can achieve the status of art. *TV as a Creative Medium* a recent show at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City proved this. The show demonstrated that the artist has two choices: to use the television as an art *object*, or to use the *medium* itself as art. There were four works in particular that illustrate the present developments in each direction.

*TV Time Capsule* by John Seery and *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* by Nam June Paik, broke the art barrier using humor to create a new perspective on the TV as an object.

Seery's piece — a television sealed in clear plastic was a very cynical commentary on our television-born and television-bred society. John Seery: "The em-

bedment of a TV in clear plastic, seals it from all human contact except for plugging and unplugging it. It is a relic of this civilization. When the TV stops functioning, the work is complete."

Paik utilized, as "living sculpture", infamous topless celloist Charlotte Moorman. He modified her standard attire with two working 3 inch televisions strapped across her chest. Bowing the cello caused distortions on the two screens. Paik: "*TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (Charlotte Moorman) is also one sharp example to humanize electronics... and technology. The real issue implied in "Art and Technology" is not to make another scientific toy, but to humanize the technology and the electronic medium...."

In creating, Seery and Paik used the television as a prop. The screens, the electronic capabilities were, in effect, mute since they used untouched commercial programming. Both were intent on producing an extreme reaction to the *medium* indicating the need for change.

In the case of *Wipe Cycle* by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider and *The Archetron* by Thomas Tadlock, the art work was produced from within the medium. *Wipe Cycle* is a mural consisting of nine television screens with an intricately programmed exchange of images. It combines live broadcast of the viewer with: pre-recorded tapes, the current commercial programming, a blank, pulsating screen and delayed live tapes (like instant replay). It also uses a soundtrack to enhance the visual imagery. "Thus, the information on the programmed tapes, juggles and re-combines elements within the gallery and its immediate environment, with portraits, landscapes, montages and video distortions." says Frank Gillette.

*The Archetron* uses a console similar to that of a television broadcast studio, plus a system of mirrors and color filters. The artist sits in front of three separate live broadcasts. He actually composes with them by mixing the images and controlling color and composition. This results in a kaleidoscopic image which moves and changes as the subjects in each

of the three broadcasts shift. Says Tadlock: "...I developed devices with patterns, sequences, motion, color, programmed to make the viewer get involved in the unfolding composition, to relax and want more, to develop a new way of seeing."

These two works use the *immediacy* of the television medium, the instantaneous capability that has the viewer feeling he is present during moments of creation. No art form could hope to convey more.

And the work that conveyed this feeling the most sharply was Nam June Paik's *Participation TV*. It uses a closed circuit television and three TV cameras. Exhibit viewers place themselves within range of the cameras and their image is picked up in triple (and in three different colors — red, blue, green) and transmitted to the TV screen. You see a tripled, artistic transmission of what you do. The viewer *and* the television technology (the cameras) are creating an art work together. Collaborative-simultaneous art.

The real importance of a show such as the Wise gallery's, is that it displays the potential uses of TV in the home. With widespread adoption of cable TV and the resulting new television stations, there will be an upsurge in programming needs and more time to fill. To compete with existing commercial stations, there will be more creative use of air time. Instead of another talk show with the same guests, or another situation comedy, or another vaudeville show like Ed Sullivan's, perhaps there might be an Archetron channel, with a guest artist at the controls every few hours.

Now that television technology is advanced to the point where fidelity, color, and stereophonic sound are everyday occurrences, it has taken real artists to advance concepts worthy of the medium's sophistication. TV is not only the *new art form*, it is one available to everyone with no compromise. Technology, once the ultimate in coldness — bringing thoughts of inhuman computers or gigantic mindless machines — may well be responsible for distributing the precious commodity — *beauty* — everywhere. ●