

# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. In this talk I continue experimenting with AI, my other academic interest. I have cloned my voice using the new version of ElevenLabs, version 3, which provides a much more natural voice in terms of stress and rhythm. It also has a much better French accent than me.

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## 60-09 VIDEO AND PERFORMANCE ART

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Yves Klein  
*Leap into  
the Void*  
1960

- This is Section 60 on recent art movements. and this talk is about Video and Performance Art. Video and performance art collapse the distance between creator and witness. Performance utilizes the **physical body** as a transient medium, emphasizing the "now." Video preserves these ephemeral acts or serves as a standalone digital canvas. Together, they challenge traditional permanence, turning fleeting gestures into provocative, multisensory critiques of culture.

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Yves Klein (1928–1962),

***Leap into the Void***

*(Le Saut dans le vide)*

1960

Gelatin silver print (photomontage)

25.9 × 20 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Yves Klein (1928–1962), Leap into the Void (*Le Saut dans le vide*), 1960, Gelatin silver print (photomontage), 25.9 × 20 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- This talk traces two radical art forms that shattered the white cube: **performance art** and **video art**. Both emerged in the 1960s from a shared impulse – the conviction that painting and sculpture were no longer enough. Artists wanted to use the body, time and technology as raw materials. We begin with an image that captures that leap of faith.
- In October 1960, **Yves Klein** hired photographers **Harry Shunk** and **János Kender** to stage a photograph of him hurling himself from a second-storey window in the Paris suburb of **Fontenay-aux-Roses**. Friends held a tarpaulin below to catch him. Two negatives were then printed together, erasing the safety net to create a seamless image of a man in flight. Klein distributed a fake broadsheet at Parisian newsstands headlined: **“A man in space! The painter of space throws himself into the void!”**
- The image became an icon of the emerging performance art movement. Critic **Pierre Restany** described it as hovering over **“the greatest mystery”**. Klein, a fourth-dan judo black belt, knew precisely how to fall. His real subject was dematerialisation – the idea that art could exist as pure experience rather than object.
- Klein was a founder of the **Nouveau Réalisme** movement just weeks before this photograph was made. He had already sold “zones of immaterial pictorial sensibility” – empty space – in exchange for gold leaf, half of which he threw into the Seine. He died of a heart attack in 1962, aged just 34, leaving behind an extraordinary body of work that predicted conceptual art, minimalism and performance.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Yves Klein – EEV KLEÏ

Le Saut dans le vide – luh SOH dañ luh VEED

Fontenay-aux-Roses – fon-tuh-NAY oh ROHZ

Nouveau Réalisme – noo-VOH ray-ah-LEEZM

Pierre Restany – pee-AIR reh-stah-NEE

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Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019),

***Meat Joy***

1964

Group performance with raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, plastic, rope, paper

Duration: 60–80 min.

First performed: American Center, Paris

Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019), *Meat Joy*, 1964, Group performance with raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, plastic, rope, shredded scrap paper, Duration: 60–80 min., First performed: American Center, Paris

- Nine semi-naked performers writhed together on plastic sheeting, smearing raw fish, chicken, sausages and wet paint onto one another's bodies. **Carolee Schneemann** called it "**kinetic theatre**" – an erotic rite whose propulsion was "**toward the ecstatic, shifting and turning between tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon**". The work shattered taboos around the body, gender and sensuality in art.
- First staged at the **Festival de la Libre Expression** in Paris in May 1964, ***Meat Joy*** provoked extreme reactions. During one Paris performance, an enraged audience member dragged Schneemann across the floor and attempted to strangle her before being restrained. Dance critic **Jill Johnston** asked in the *Village Voice*: "**Why bother with relative nudity if you can make something happen with paper?**" Dancer **Yvonne Rainer** dismissed it as "**brainless**".
- Schneemann was a trained painter who had studied with **Philip Guston** and **Robert Morris**. She was deeply influenced by **Antonin Artaud's** Theatre of Cruelty and **Wilhelm Reich's** theories of bodily liberation. She described her move from painting to performance as taking "**the action of Action Painting and liberating it into three-dimensional lived space**".
- The cast for the New York staging at **Judson Memorial Church** was entirely recast and included minimalist painter **Dorothea Rockburne** and composer **James Tenney**, Schneemann's then-partner. A sound collage mixed **Elvis Presley**, **The Supremes** and

recordings of Parisian fish-market vendors. Schneemann later said the nude works terrified her but were motivated by the absence of any honest depictions of female sensual experience in culture.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Carolee Schneemann – CAR-oh-lee SHNEE-mun

Antonin Artaud – ahñ-toh-NÃ ar-TOH

Wilhelm Reich – VIL-helm RYSH

Judson Memorial Church – JUD-sun

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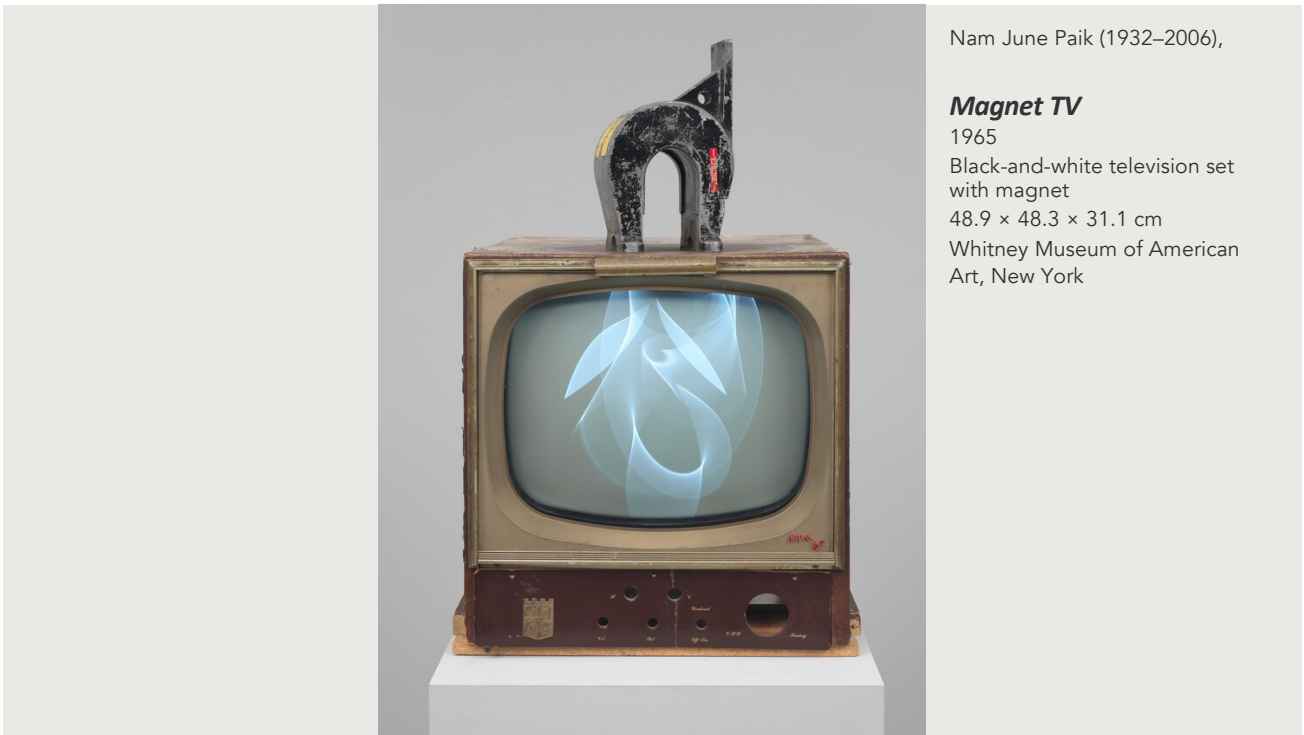
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Nam June Paik (1932–2006),

***Magnet TV***

1965

Black-and-white television set  
with magnet

48.9 × 48.3 × 31.1 cm

Whitney Museum of American  
Art, New York

Nam June Paik (1932–2006), *Magnet TV*, 1965, Black-and-white television set with magnet, 48.9 × 48.3 × 31.1 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

- A large horseshoe magnet sits atop a 17-inch black-and-white television. The magnet distorts the cathode-ray tube's electron beam, warping the broadcast image into swirling abstract patterns that shift each time the channel changes. **Nam June Paik** had effectively turned a mass-produced consumer appliance into a paintbrush. This is the founding gesture of **video art**.
- Paik had already made his debut in 1963 at **Galerie Parnass** in Wuppertal, Germany, scattering thirteen manipulated TV sets across a three-storey villa – the first time an artist had used television as a medium. Critic **Calvin Tomkins** later wrote that Paik wanted to “**shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo, as freely as Picasso, as colourfully as Renoir, as profoundly as Mondrian, as violently as Pollock and as lyrically as Jasper Johns**”.
- Born into a wealthy Seoul business family, Paik fled Korea during the Korean War and studied classical music in Tokyo and Germany, where he met **John Cage** and joined the **Fluxus** movement. In a notorious 1960 Cologne performance, Paik played Chopin, then attacked Cage and pianist **David Tudor** with scissors and shampoo. Cage suggested he look into Zen Buddhism. Paik moved permanently to New York in 1964.
- When Paik acquired a **Sony Portapak** – the first portable video recorder – in 1965, he reportedly captured Pope Paul VI's motorcade through New York and screened it that evening at **Café au Go Go** in Greenwich Village, declaring the footage a work of art. Whether the story is entirely true remains debated, but the principle was revolutionary:

video was no longer just for television studios.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Nam June Paik – NAM JOON PIKE (rhymes with bike)

Galerie Parnass – gah-leh-REE par-NASS

Wuppertal – VOO-per-tahl

Fluxus – FLUX-us

Portapak – POR-tuh-pack

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Bruce Nauman (b. 1941),

***Walking in an Exaggerated Manner  
Around the Perimeter of a Square***

1967–68

16mm film transferred to video  
(black and white, silent), 10 min.

Museum of Modern Art, New York

Bruce Nauman (b. 1941), *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, 1967–68, 16mm film transferred to video (black and white, silent), 10 min., Museum of Modern Art, New York

- For ten silent minutes, **Bruce Nauman** walks around a square of masking tape on his studio floor, rolling his hips with deliberate exaggeration. He moves forward, then backward, placing one foot precisely before the other. A small mirror on the back wall catches fragments of his action. That is the entire work. It is simultaneously absurd and mesmerising.
- The choreography was devised in collaboration with avant-garde dancer **Meredith Monk**. Nauman later explained: **“You have the repeated action, and over a long period of time you have mistakes, changes, you get tired and all kinds of things happen, so there’s a certain tension.”** The film’s static camera refuses to edit or intervene – it operates as a purely dispassionate observer, stripping cinema to its barest documentary function.
- Nauman had recently graduated from the **University of California, Davis**, where he studied with **William T. Wiley**. Alone in his San Francisco studio, unsure what to do as an artist, he asked himself a crucial question: **“If I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art.”** This logic – treating ordinary bodily actions as aesthetic material – connects Nauman to Cage, to Fluxus, and to the whole tradition of performance art.
- The film was part of a series of studio exercises including ***Bouncing in the Corner*** and ***Violin Tuned D.E.A.D.***. Nauman has stated the proper way to exhibit these works is as

an endless loop, eliminating beginnings and endings. His influence on later video and performance artists – from **Marina Abramović** to **Douglas Gordon** – is incalculable. He won the Golden Lion at Venice in 2009.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Bruce Nauman – BROOS NOW-mun

Meredith Monk – MARE-uh-dith MUNK

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surveillance, voyeurism and the boundaries between public and private.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Vito Acconci – VEE-toh ah-KOHN-chee

Erving Goffman – UR-ving GOFF-mun

Sophie Calle – so-FEE KAL

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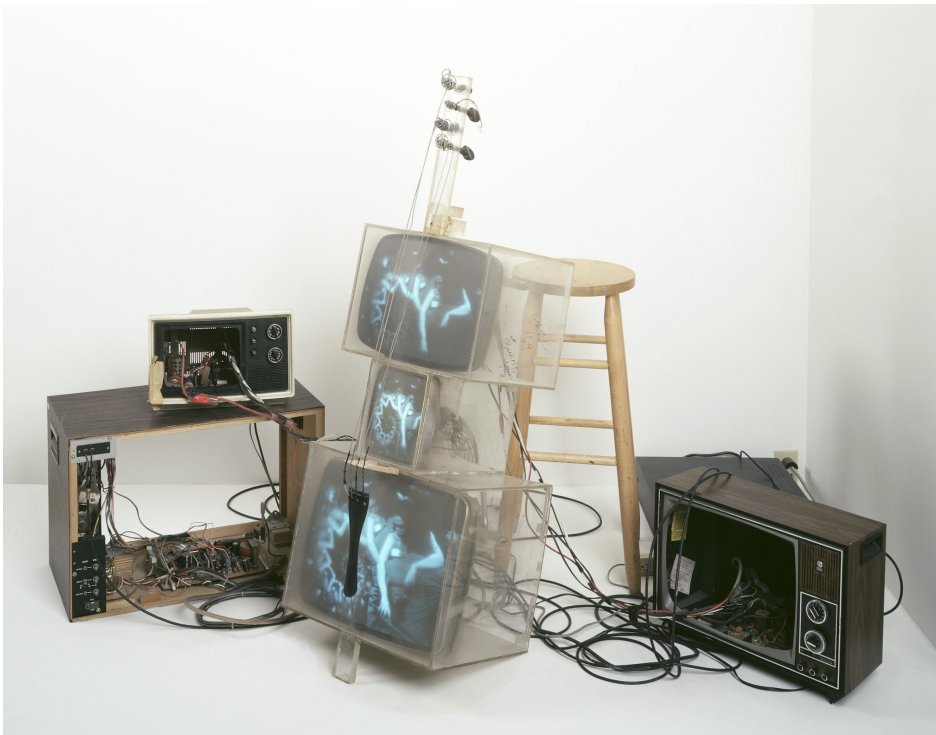
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Nam June Paik (1932–2006),

**TV Cello**

1971

Three television sets, plexiglass frames,

cello strings, electronics

152.4 × 45.7 × 50.8 cm

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Nam June Paik (1932–2006), *TV Cello*, 1971, Three television sets, plexiglass frames, cello strings, electronics, 152.4 × 45.7 × 50.8 cm, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

- Three television sets stacked vertically and strung with cello strings form a functioning – if unconventional – musical instrument. When cellist **Charlotte Moorman** drew her bow across the strings, images of her and other cellists playing appeared on the screens in real time. The sound of her bowing also affected the video signal, creating a live feedback loop between performer, instrument and image.
- Paik and Moorman had been collaborating since 1964, combining his electronic experiments with her classical training. Their partnership was both artistically revolutionary and legally scandalous. In 1967, Moorman was arrested for indecency during Paik's *Opera Sextronique* when she performed topless. A judge found her guilty of the charges. The art world rallied around them; the incident only amplified their notoriety and commitment to breaking boundaries.
- Moorman, dubbed “**the Jeanne d’Arc of new music**” by the press, had trained at Juilliard. She was not merely a performer of Paik’s work but an essential collaborator. Two years earlier, she had worn his *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969) – two functioning TV screens worn over her breasts while she played cello. These works fused the female body, technology and classical music into something entirely new.
- A second version of *TV Cello* was created in 1976 as a **Kaldor Public Art Project** in Sydney, Australia. Moorman continued to perform with Paik until cancer forced her retirement in the late 1980s; she died in 1991. Paik created *TV Garden* (1974) and the monumental *Electronic Superhighway* (1995), a 15-metre wall of 336 televisions, now

in the Smithsonian. Paik himself suffered a stroke in 1996 that left him partially paralysed. He died in Miami in 2006.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Charlotte Moorman – SHAR-lot MORE-mun

Opera Sextronique – OH-peh-rah sex-troh-NEEK

Jeanne d’Arc – ZHAHN DARK

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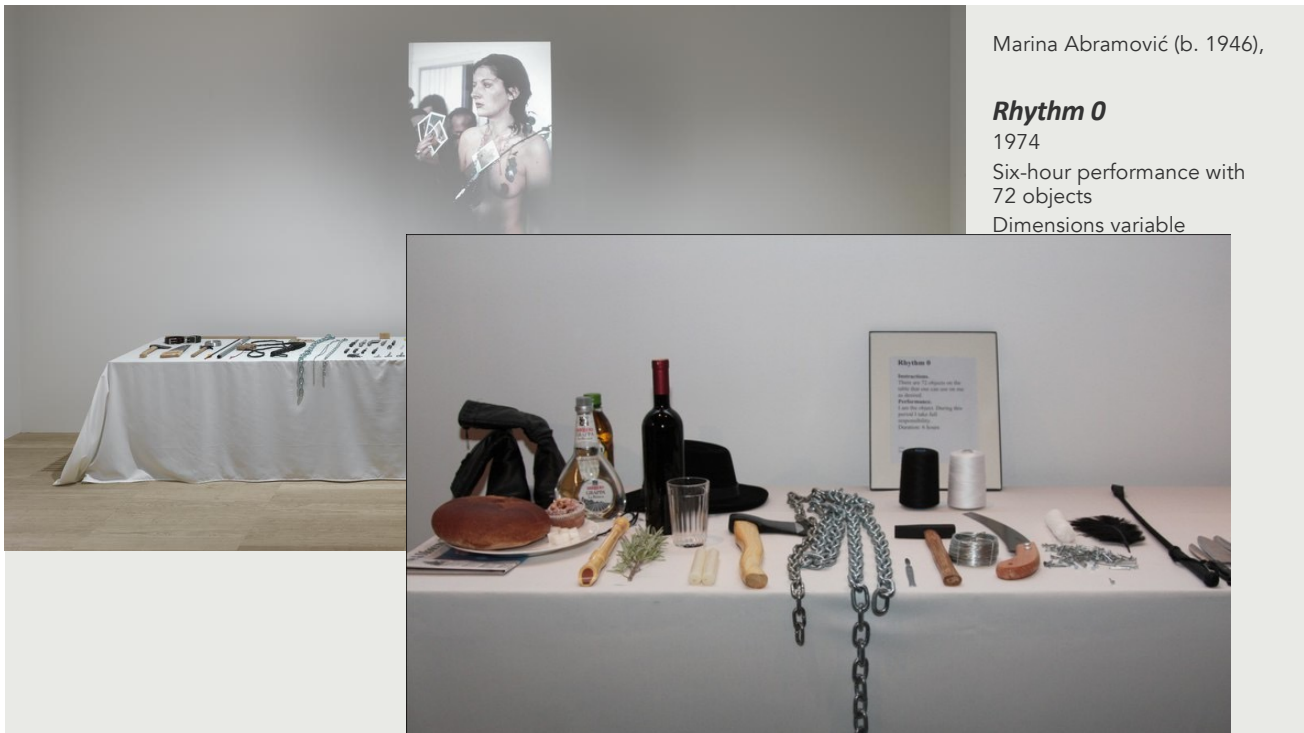
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Marina Abramović (b. 1946), *Rhythm 0*, 1974, Six-hour performance with 72 objects, Dimensions variable, Studio Morra, Naples

- **Marina Abramović** stood immobile for six hours and issued a single instruction: **“There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired. I am the object. During this period I take full responsibility.”**
- (CLICK) Seventy-two objects were arranged on a table. You can see some here. Among them: a rose, a feather, honey, a scalpel, a razor, a loaded pistol.(CLICK)
- What followed was a terrifying demonstration of crowd psychology. At first, participants were tentative – offering roses, rotating her body gently. After a few hours, the mood darkened. People cut her clothes with razors. They sliced her skin. They sexually touched her. Finally, someone placed the loaded gun in her hand and pointed it at her neck. Another audience member intervened to remove the weapon. When the six hours ended and Abramović began to walk, the audience scattered – **“apparently terrified they had awakened her”**, as one witness recalled.
- Abramović had grown up under the strict authority of her **Yugoslav Partisan** parents in Belgrade. Her mother imposed a military-style curfew; physical endurance was woven into her childhood. She studied at the **Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade** from 1965 to 1970, but found painting insufficient. Her memoir opens with the line: **“I come from a dark place.”**
- ***Rhythm 0*** was the culmination of her ***Rhythm*** series. In ***Rhythm 5*** she lay inside a burning star until she lost consciousness from oxygen depletion and had to be rescued. In ***Rhythm 10*** she jabbed knives between her fingers, recording each cut. These works

made Abramović the most uncompromising figure in performance art – and they were only the beginning of a career spanning five decades.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Marina Abramović – mah-REE-nah ah-BRAH-moh-vitch

Studio Morra – STOO-dee-oh MOR-rah

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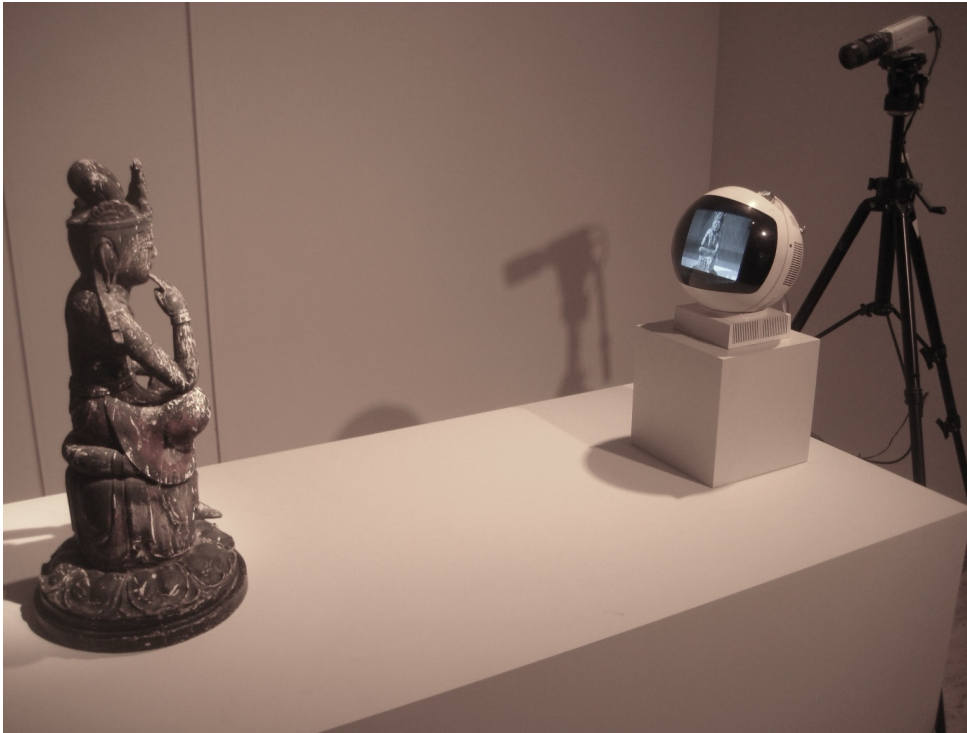
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Nam June Paik (1932–2006),

**TV Buddha**

1974

Bronze sculpture, closed-circuit video camera, television monitor

Dimensions variable  
Stedelijk Museum,  
Amsterdam

Nam June Paik (1932–2006), TV Buddha, 1974, Bronze sculpture, closed-circuit video camera, television monitor, Dimensions variable, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

- A bronze Buddha sits serenely before a closed-circuit television. A camera positioned between the statue and the monitor captures the Buddha in real time, so the figure appears to contemplate its own live image on screen. It is a closed loop of eternal self-regard – ancient spirituality locked in dialogue with contemporary technology. **Nam June Paik** described video as the meeting point between East and West.
- Curator **John Hanhardt** of the Smithsonian described Paik’s work as establishing “**a profound dialog across his global vision – from Asian thought, through Europe, through new technologies**”. For his 1963 *Zen for TV*, Paik had reduced the television image to a single horizontal line, then turned the set on its side – a minimalist gesture that channelled both Western abstraction and Eastern contemplation.
- By 1974, Paik was a central figure in New York’s downtown art scene. He and electronics engineer **Shuya Abe** had built the **Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer** in 1969, one of the first devices allowing artists to manipulate video signals in real time. This tool was crucial for the early generation of video artists, offering a visual equivalent to the electronic music synthesizer.
- Paik created multiple versions of **TV Buddha** throughout his career – some used an 18th-century wooden figure, others a plaster cast. The concept anticipated our age of selfies and screen addiction by decades. On New Year’s Day 1984, Paik broadcast **Good Morning, Mr. Orwell** – a live satellite link between New York, Paris and Seoul featuring **John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Laurie Anderson** and **Salvador Dalí**, proving that George

Orwell's Big Brother had not arrived.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Shuya Abe – SHOO-yah AH-beh

Paik-Abe – PIKE AH-beh

Joseph Beuys – YOH-zef BOYSS

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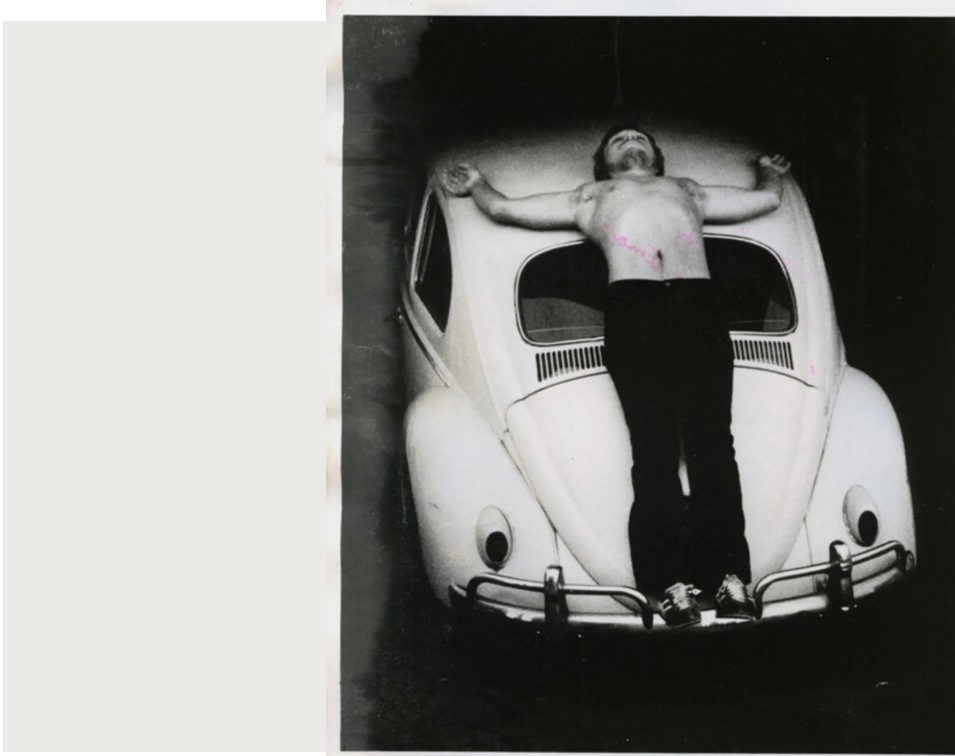
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Chris Burden (1946–2015),

***Trans-fixed***

1974

Performance

Duration: 2 minutes

Speedway Avenue, Venice,  
California

Chris Burden (1946–2015), *Trans-fixed*, 1974, Performance, Duration: 2 minutes, Speedway Avenue, Venice, California

- On 23 April 1974, **Chris Burden** lay face-up on the rear of a Volkswagen Beetle. Two nails were driven through his open palms, crucifying him to the car's roof. The engine was revved to full speed, the garage door opened, and the car was pushed halfway out into Speedway Avenue in Venice, California. It remained there for two minutes before being pushed back inside. The engine was switched off. The nails were removed.
- The imagery was unmistakable: Christ crucified on the symbol of post-war consumer culture. Burden never explained the work in religious terms, preferring to let the raw physical fact speak for itself. His approach stripped performance art to its most confrontational extreme. Art critic **Robert Hughes** described Burden's body works as possessing "**the quality of a dare raised to the level of existential declaration**".
- Three years earlier, Burden had achieved notoriety with *Shoot* (1971), in which a friend fired a rifle at his left arm from 4.5 metres, grazing it as planned. In *Deadman* (1972), he lay under a tarpaulin on a Los Angeles boulevard. In *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971), he confined himself to a 60 × 60 × 90 cm school locker for five consecutive days. Each work tested the audience's complicity in witnessing danger.
- Burden later abandoned extreme body performance, feeling he had exhausted its possibilities. He turned to large-scale engineering sculptures, including *Urban Light* (2008), an installation of 202 restored vintage street lamps outside the Los Angeles County Museum of Art – now one of the most photographed artworks in America. He taught at UCLA for decades, mentoring artists including **Paul McCarthy** and **Mike**

**Kelley.** He died of melanoma in 2015, aged 69.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Chris Burden – KRIS BUR-dun

Volkswagen – FOLKS-vah-gun

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Marina Abramović (b. 1946) & Ulay (1943–2020),

***The Lovers (The Great Wall Walk)***

1988

Performance, 90 days, 2,500 km each

Documented in photographs and film  
The Great Wall of China

Marina Abramović (b. 1946) & Ulay (1943–2020), *The Lovers (The Great Wall Walk)*, 1988, Performance, 90 days, 2,500 km each, The Great Wall of China

- On 30 March 1988, **Marina Abramović** set out from the eastern end of the **Great Wall of China** at Shanhaiguan, on the Yellow Sea. Simultaneously, **Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen)** began from the western end at Jiayuguan, in the Gobi Desert. For 90 days, each walked roughly 2,500 kilometres toward the other. When they met in the middle, in Shaanxi province, the original plan had been to marry. Instead, they separated.
- Abramović later recalled: **“Each of us walked two and a half thousand kilometres to meet in the middle and depart from each other and continue working as a single artist. It was very dramatic and a very painful ending.”** The eight-year wait for Chinese government permission had eroded the relationship. Both had begun seeing other people.
- Their twelve-year collaboration as **The Other** had produced some of the most significant performance works of the 20th century. In ***Relation in Time*** (1977), they sat back-to-back, their hair tied together, for 16 hours. In ***Rest Energy*** (1980), Ulay held a drawn bow aimed directly at Abramović’s heart. These works explored trust, dependency and the tension between two bodies as sculptural material.
- The painful story had a famous coda. In 2010, during Abramović’s ***The Artist Is Present*** at MoMA, where she sat silently for 736 hours as visitors took turns facing her, Ulay appeared unannounced and sat opposite her. Both wept. The moment, captured on video, went viral and became one of the most viewed art clips in Internet history. Their emotional reunion – and subsequent legal disputes over authorship of their joint works

– added layers of complexity to their legacy.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Ulay – OO-lay

Frank Uwe Laysiepen – FRANK OO-veh LAY-zee-pen

Shanhaiguan – SHAN-hai-GWAHN

Jiayuguan – jee-AH-yoo-GWAHN

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Bill Viola (1951–2024),  
Nantes Triptych  
1992

Video and sound installation,  
three channels of colour video  
projection  
460 × 970 × 1680 cm  
Tate, London

London

- Three vast projected panels arranged like an altarpiece. On the left: a woman giving birth. On the right: an elderly woman dying. Both are documents of real events. In the centre: a clothed man suspended underwater, drifting between turbulence and stillness. The work runs for nearly thirty minutes on a continuous loop, measuring life from its first breath to its last. **Bill Viola** borrowed the language of Renaissance devotional painting and filled it with the raw biology of human existence.
- The dying woman in the right panel was Viola's own mother, filmed in her final week of life. He later described this as the most difficult footage he ever shot. The work was commissioned by the **Centre National des Arts Plastiques** for display in a 17th-century chapel in the **Musée des Beaux Arts in Nantes**, France – a context that amplified its spiritual resonance. The Observer's **Laura Cumming** noted that "**Viola has been using the newest technology to stir the oldest of emotions.**"
- Born in New York in 1951, Viola arrived at **Syracuse University** in 1969 intending to study commercial art but was captivated by the first portable video cameras arriving on the market. He spent his early twenties working at one of Europe's first video art studios in Florence, visiting the city's cathedrals daily. He later studied for eighteen months under a Zen Buddhist teacher in Japan and travelled extensively through Asia.
- Viola has been called "**a Rembrandt of the video age**" and "**a hi-tech Caravaggio**". He represented the United States at the 1995 Venice Biennale and held a joint exhibition

with Michelangelo drawings at the Royal Academy in 2019. His work elevated video art from the experimental margins to the mainstream museum. He once said: **“People say ‘oh it’s a video’, but what I work with is light. I work with pure light.”** Viola died in July 2024 at the age of 73 following a long struggle with Alzheimer’s disease.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Bill Viola – BILL vee-OH-lah

Nantes – NAHNT

Musée des Beaux Arts – moo-ZAY day boh ZAR

Centre National des Arts Plastiques – SAHN-truh nah-see-oh-NAL day zar plah-STECK

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Marina Abramović (b. 1946),

### ***Balkan Baroque***

1997

Performance installation with cow bones, video, copper basins

Dimensions variable, 4 days  
Venice Biennale

Marina Abramović (b. 1946), *Balkan Baroque*, 1997, Performance installation with cow bones, video, copper basins, Dimensions variable, Venice Biennale

- For four days during the 1997 Venice Biennale, **Marina Abramović** sat on an enormous pile of 1,500 raw, bloody cow bones in a white dress, scrubbing each one methodically with a brush while singing folk songs from her childhood. The stench in the summer heat was overwhelming. Three video screens behind her showed her parents and herself performing surreal, ritualistic actions. The work was a direct response to the atrocities of the **Yugoslav Wars**.
- The piece won the **Golden Lion** for Best Artist at the Biennale, transforming Abramović from a cult figure into an internationally recognised star. The award jury praised the work's ability to transmute personal grief into universal meaning. Art historian **Thomas McEvilley** wrote that Abramović "**transformed personal history into a universal artistic statement**".
- The conflict in the former Yugoslavia – including the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre – had torn apart the country where Abramović was born and raised. Though she had lived abroad for decades, the war devastated her sense of identity. Her father, a decorated Yugoslav Partisan hero, had died in 1988. Her strict, authoritarian mother was still alive. The three video projections captured them both, dressed in white, performing symbolic gestures.
- The act of cleaning bones was simultaneously futile and essential – the blood could never be fully removed, yet the repetitive scrubbing became a meditation on mourning, guilt and the impossibility of purification. The work marked a turning point in

Abramović's career: from this point, her performances moved toward grander scale and deeper emotional resonance. It also demonstrated that performance art could engage directly with geopolitical trauma in ways that painting and sculpture rarely achieved.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Balkan Baroque – BAWL-kan bah-ROCK

Biennale – bee-en-NAH-leh

Srebrenica – SREH-breh-nee-tsah

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Nam June Paik (1932–2006),

***Electronic Superhighway:  
Continental U.S., Alaska,  
Hawaii***

1995

49-channel closed-circuit  
video installation,

336 televisions, neon tubing,  
steel

457 × 1219 × 122 cm

Smithsonian American Art  
Museum, Washington

Nam June Paik (1932–2006), *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995, 49-channel closed-circuit video installation, 336 televisions, neon tubing, steel, 457 × 1219 × 122 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

- A wall fifteen metres wide and over four metres high, composed of 336 television monitors framed by neon tubing that outlines each of the 50 American states. Every screen flickers with imagery chosen to represent its state – clips from *The Wizard of Oz* for Kansas, *Oklahoma!* for Oklahoma – creating a dazzling, cacophonous video mosaic of American identity. The sheer scale is overwhelming: part pop art spectacle, part data overload prophecy.
- Paik had coined the phrase “**electronic super highway**” in a 1974 report to the Rockefeller Foundation, predicting a future telecommunications network two decades before the World Wide Web became mainstream. He wrote: “**The building of new electronic super highways will become an even huger enterprise.**” This work is the physical manifestation of that vision.
- By the mid-1990s, Paik had suffered a devastating stroke that left him partially paralysed. Much of the fabrication of his late works was carried out by studio assistants, particularly **Jon Huffman**, working under Paik’s direction. His nephew **Ken Hakuta** helped manage his financial affairs and care in his final years. Despite his physical limitations, Paik’s creative ambition remained immense.
- The Smithsonian acquired the work along with Paik’s entire archive in 2009, three years after his death. The installation requires constant maintenance – the cathode-ray tube monitors are obsolete technology, and sourcing replacements becomes harder each

year. This practical dilemma mirrors a central question for all video art: how do you preserve works whose medium is inherently impermanent? *Electronic Superhighway* remains the Smithsonian's most visited contemporary artwork and the definitive summary of Paik's career-long project to humanise technology.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Nam June Paik – NAM JOON PIKE

Ken Hakuta – KEN hah-KOO-tah

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Marina  
Abramović (b.  
1946),

***The Artist Is  
Present***

2010  
Durational  
performance  
736 hours, 30  
seconds over 3  
months  
Museum of  
Modern Art,  
New York

Marina Abramović (b. 1946), *The Artist Is Present*, 2010, Durational performance, 736 hours over 3 months, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- For the entire duration of her MoMA retrospective – nearly three months, seven hours a day, six days a week – **Marina Abramović** sat motionless in the museum’s atrium. A chair stood opposite her. Visitors queued for hours for the chance to sit and simply look at the artist while she gazed back. No words were exchanged. Some sitters wept. Some sat for minutes. Some returned day after day. In total, 1,545 people took the chair across 736 hours.
- The retrospective, curated by **Klaus Biesenbach**, was the first major performance art survey at MoMA and included reperformances of Abramović’s earlier works by trained performers. Critics debated whether these reperformances diminished or preserved the originals. Art historian **Nancy Spector** of the Guggenheim asked: **“Can ephemeral works be reenacted? Does their power diminish when restaged?”**
- The most electrifying moment came when **Ulay** appeared unannounced and sat opposite Abramović. They had not seen each other in years. Tears streamed down both their faces. Abramović broke her own rules and reached across to take his hands. Video of the moment became one of the most-watched art clips on the Internet, accumulating millions of views and introducing performance art to an entirely new global audience.
- The work made Abramović a celebrity. She appeared on the cover of magazines. **Lady Gaga**, **Jay Z** and **James Franco** sought collaborations. The 2012 HBO documentary ***Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*** brought her story to millions more. She has

since described the piece as proof that presence – simply being fully there with another person – is the most powerful artistic material of all. She founded the **Marina Abramović Institute** to support future generations of performance artists.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Marina Abramović – mah-REE-nah ah-BRAH-moh-vitch

Klaus Biesenbach – KLOWS BEE-zen-bahk

Ulay – OO-lay

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<https://theartsociety.org/arts-news-features/become-instant-expert-%E2%80%A6-performance-art-marina-abramovi%C4%87>

Marina Abramović (b. 1946),

**Seven Easy Pieces**

2005

Seven durational performances over seven consecutive nights  
Duration: 7 hours each  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965)



Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969)

Marina Abramović (b. 1946), *Seven Easy Pieces*, 2005, Seven durational performances over seven consecutive nights, Duration: 7 hours each, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

- Over seven consecutive nights in the Guggenheim's rotunda, **Marina Abramović** restaged five seminal pieces by other artists alongside two of her own. She restaged **Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure***, **Vito Acconci's *Seedbed***, **Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic***, **Gina Pane's *The Conditioning***, and **Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare***. Each lasted seven hours.
- The project was a landmark act of art-historical preservation. Abramović argued that performance art, unlike music or dance, had no tradition of restaging canonical works. Curator **Nancy Spector** posed the fundamental question the series raised: **"The conservation of a performance poses a complex and debated question. Should we strive to replicate the formal features of a live performance, or should we prioritise the concept, its spirit?"**
- This talk has traced the parallel histories of video and performance art from their shared origins in the early 1960s. Both emerged from the conviction that art must engage directly with the body, with time and with technology. **Yves Klein** leapt into the void. **Nam June Paik** placed a magnet on a television. These twin gestures – one physical, one electronic – launched movements that transformed what art could be.

**Notes**

1. Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974)

2. Vito Acconci's Seedbed (1972)
3. Valie Export's Action Pants: Genital Panic (1969)
4. Gina Pane's The Conditioning (1973)
5. Joseph Beuys's How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare (1965)  
Abramović originally intended to recreate Chris Burden's Trans-Fixed (1974)
6. Abramović's own Lips of Thomas (1975)  
Abramović originally intended to recreate her own Rhythm 0 (1974)
7. Abramović's own Entering the Other Side (2005)

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Valie Export – VAH-lee ex-PORT

Gina Pane – JEE-nah PAN

Joseph Beuys – YOH-zef BOYSS

Guggenheim – GOO-gun-hime

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Marina Abramović (b. 1946),  
*Seven Easy Pieces: Gina Pane's The Conditioning*  
(1973)  
2005

## 60-09 VIDEO AND PERFORMANCE ART

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

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- This is another of Abramović's Seven Easy Pieces.
- Today, video art has entered every major museum collection. Performance art fills biennales worldwide. Their legacy is woven into how we understand **installation art**, **digital art**, **live art** and even social media culture – our age of selfies, livestreams and perpetual self-documentation owes a debt to Paik's camera and Abramović's gaze. The question these artists asked – can the body and the screen replace the canvas? – has been answered decisively. **The answer is yes.**
- Thank you for your time and attention.



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