

The Medium is the Message

TELEVISION NOW & THEN

On June 1st 1960, television went live from this building, marking the first official public television broadcast in Aotearoa and a pioneering moment of ingenuity for the country. Sixty years on, we remember the days of television's past and look to present and possible futures of a medium that has forever changed how we interpret the world around us. Combining rarely-seen archival footage and ephemera with ambitious works by contemporary artists, we propose a line of continuity filled with glitches, quirks, intermissions and re-runs that both celebrates and problematizes our much-loved relationship with broadcasting.

"The Medium is the Message" is a phrase coined by visionary philosopher and communications theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980). His extensive theories on technology posited the non-neutrality of mediums like television and provided incisive critique on its structures and influences. In his significant publication of 1967 he wrote, 'Ours is a brand-new world of allatonce. "Time" has ceased, "space" has vanished. We now live in a global village... a simultaneous happening.'¹

Beginning with the work of ground-breaking artist Nam June Paik, the exhibition looks at both the origins of television as a medium offering limitless possibilities and its changing role and relevance today. From the evening news report to the relatable soap opera, a means of both information and entertainment, the arsenal of television's repertoire has been vast and highly controlled.

Pioneering the use of television and video in art, Nam June Paik used an experimental approach to counter the domination of public service programmes and the commercialisation of television. The artist's seminal film *Global Groove* (1973) is a critical proposition in the form of a television programme. As a kaleidoscopic landscape of dance and music sequences join interludes of artist performances, the viewer is lulled into a surreal and ever-changing environment. Precipitating the exhibition's narrative, Paik's work stretches towards the reminiscent days of television's past and the experimental approach beckoning its then future. As the opening titles of *Global Groove* commands: *This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the Earth and TV guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.*

Flipping between rarely-seen footage and the critically astute artworks of contemporary artists, *The Medium is the Message* invites us into the nation's living room of broadcasting history where fond memories are juxtaposed with urgent conversations, and the pioneering mentality of our forebears is rekindled with fervour and debate.

1. Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore & Jerome Agel, *The Medium is the Message* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 63.

Artists:

Nam June Paik (Korea / USA)
Carolee Schneemann (USA)
Kevin Atherton (UK)
George Barber (Guyana / UK)
John Smith (UK)
Jesse McLean (USA)
Robyn Walton & Peter Cleveland
(Aotearoa New Zealand)
Janet Lilo (Ngāpuhi, Samoan, Niue /
Aotearoa New Zealand)
Joe Sheehan (Aotearoa New Zealand)
Claudia Kogachi (Japan / Aotearoa
New Zealand)
Yvonne Todd (Aotearoa New Zealand)
Edith Amituanai (Aotearoa New Zealand)
Gordon H. Brown (Aotearoa New Zealand)

Also including material kindly donated from TVNZ Digital Production Library, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision TVNZ Collection, NZ on Screen Iwi Whitiāhua, The University of Auckland's Cultural Collections and Video Data Bank. Thank you to all the individual lenders to the exhibition.

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