

Viva Video! The Art and Life of Shigeko Kubota

Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

English translations of the texts for individual works.

Chapter 1. From Niigata to Tokyo

Kubota family portrait, etc.

Shigeko Kubota was born in 1937; the second daughter among four sisters. Her father was a high school teacher and her mother was a music teacher, while her paternal grandfather was a Buddhist priest and maternal grandfather - a Nanga-style painter, who supported her artistic temperament. In her high school's sophomore year, her oil painting, *Sunflower*, entered the juried exhibition Nika-ten for the first time, and was featured in a local newspaper.

Photo album, etc.

After graduating from high school, Kubota entered the Tokyo University of Education (currently Tsukuba University) to major in sculpture. She apprenticed to sculptor Kiyoshi Takahashi, also from Niigata, and created sculpture in his studio. During her university years she participated in the students' movement and mountain climbing.

"I liked sculpture and my mentor taught sculpture. I wanted to become famous. There were fewer girls majoring in sculpture. There were only a few sculptresses, I mean."

(“Shigeko Kubota Interview,” Japanese Art Oral History Archive, October 2009)

[Photo] Chiya Kuni

In 1960, when Kubota became a middle school art teacher, her aunt Chiya Kuni (1911-2011) opened a dance institute for artists to present their interdisciplinary work. Soon Kubota, who was staying with her aunt, joined the circle of avant-garde artists, including members of Group Ongaku and Yoko Ono.

Kubi (Head) and the 15th Yomiuri Independent Exhibition

Kubota began submitting her works to the annual exhibitions of the Shinseisaku Society, which included her mentor Takahashi as a member. Her sculptural work became increasingly abstract.

In 1963, while she was active in the Tokyo avant-garde community, she submitted her metal abstract sculptures – which were very different from her preceding works in the 15th Yomiuri Independent Exhibition. Similar metal sculptures were utilized in her solo exhibition in December of that year.

Hi-Red Center and the concert of *John Cage and David Tudor*

Kubota witnessed various performance events at the Sogetsu Art Center in the early 1960s. The concert of John Cage (1912-1992) and David Tudor (1926-1996), who visited Japan as the representative of American avant-garde music, was among them.

The collective Hi-Red Center held *Shelter Plan* in a room of the Imperial Hotel, inviting people to get their body measurements taken and to receive their orders for a personal bomb shelter based on that data. Kubota's participation in the event was evidenced through a remaining chart. Later, Kubota edited Hi-Red Center's Events as one of the Fluxus publications in the United States.

N. J. PAIK: COMPOSITION

Born in South Korea, Nam June Paik (1932-2006) graduated from Tokyo University and moved to Germany. Soon he met John Cage and began avant-garde performances in Europe. His activities were introduced through Japanese newspapers and magazines; Kubota knew of him through a Yomiuri Shimbun in 1963. In his concert in Tokyo, Paik shocked the audience with a piano piece which destroyed the instrument, a drawing performance with his hair as a brush, and a performance of drinking water poured into his shoe.

"His cultural terrorism of deriding the world left a strong and clear impression in my heart." (Shigeko Kubota and Nam Jeongho, translated by Ko Seong-Jun, *My Love, Nam June Paik*, Heibon-sha, 2013)

1st. LOVE, 2nd. LOVE..., Shigeko Kubota Sculpture Exhibition

In 1963, Kubota held her first solo exhibition at Naiqua Gallery. Entitled, "1st Love, 2nd Love ...," the exhibition was filled with paper scraps, considered to be love letters. In order to see the sculptures placed on top of them, visitors needed to climb up the pile. Kubota sent letters with invitations to the active curators at the time, expecting their responses. Receiving no review, she was deeply disappointed. The invitation contained an instruction in English: "Make a floor with wastepaper which are all love letters to you. Spread a sheet of white cloth on the floor. Skin your lips by yourself, kiss a man who has mustach [*sic.*] in audience." A similar text was found in the program for the performing festival, "Sweet 16" held at the Sogetsu Art Center around the same time. Kubota sent similar instructions to George Maciunas (1931-1978) who spearheaded Fluxus in New York. These instructions characteristically contained the motifs of love, lips, blue, and beehive, evoking painful love.

OFF MUSEUM

Kubota also participated in the “Off Museum” exhibition organized by Ushio Shinohara and others in June 1964, after the stronghold of the avant-garde, the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, was discontinued. Her work, *Miss Universe*, consisted of a clock, a “donation box for Ms. Kubota to become Miss Universe” (according to a memo of Mr. Teruo Nishiyama who visited the exhibition), and a live white rabbit. The instructions included giving food to the rabbit or taking it for a walk at certain times of the day.

For the “Yasunao Tone Solo Exhibition” at the Naiqua Gallery in October and the “Flux Week” exhibition at Gallery Crystal in September of the following year, Kubota sent a work made of women’s underwear to be hung on the wall (title unknown).

Chapter 2. Relocation to the US, Participation in Fluxus

Letter to George Maciunas and Fluxus Suitcase

Kubota left for New York with Mieko Shiomi in July 1964, following an invitation from George Maciunas. She was corresponding with him after learning about Fluxus through members of Group Ongaku and Yoko Ono. The letter addressed to Maciunas before her departure expressed her determination to live as an artist. Ay-O, Takako Saito, and Nam June Paik, who had come to New York earlier, lived near her apartment in SoHo, prepared by Maciunas.

The aluminum suitcase which Kubota sent to care of Maciunas as mail art contained art materials for her future work. She used the same suitcase to transport materials to exhibit overseas later. In her 1991 exhibition catalog, Kubota called this suitcase, which she used to start her life abroad, *Fluxus Suitcase* - and included its image.

Flux Napkin in *Fluxus I*

Fluxus aimed at widely disseminating art under Maciunas’ lead and produced publications of scores by its members and multiples based on their concepts. Kubota helped the production with Saito and Ay-O. Kubota’s Flux multiples were *Flux Napkins* and *Flux Medicine*.

While participating in the “dinner commune” proposed by Maciunas, she took turns cooking with Shiomi, Saito, and Paik, and inserted images of women’s eyes and mouths which were cut from magazines within the napkins. She made her *Flux Napkins* based on this.

Soon after her move to New York, Kubota used an artist name of Love-ko AI which was given to her by Paik. One can find this name on the envelope containing her *Flux Napkins* inside *Fluxus I*, which featured various multiples by Fluxus members.

Flux Medicine

Inside the container of *Flux Medicine* are medicinal objects such as empty medicine capsules, Band-Aids, and a dropper. Kubota made conceived this piece as a joke for Maciunas, who was always taking a lot of medicine for his illness. Maciunas called Kubota Fluxus’ Vice Chairperson for her support for the collective. Although she and her partner’s illnesses would affect her life later, her awareness of the fragility of health and its care was already manifested in this work.

This work is part of *Fluxkit*, which used to belong to Ay-O, and is currently in the MOT collection. *Fluxkit* consists of an attaché case filled with multiples by various Fluxus members and can be seen in the concurrent exhibition, “MOT Collection: Journals vol. 2.”

Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*

Contrasting with Kubota, who worked in New York for the rest of her life, Mieko Shiomi, flew to the United States on the same flight but returned to Japan after a year. Shiomi demonstrated that one can make art from anywhere in the world using the postal system to mail art. Kubota received Shiomi’s invitation to her representative work, *Spatial Poem No. 5, Opening Event*, and responded as below.

“On August 4, at 4 p.m., I opened a bottle of mineral water with a bottle opener. I saw the ocean of Marseilles inside the bottle.” Shigeeko Kubota

Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*

Kubota learned of Fluxus and developed an interest in it through Yoko Ono. She participated in Ono’s *Morning Piece* in Tokyo in 1964 and continued her friendship with her after moving to the United States. Kubota kept a copy of Ono’s conceptual art book, *Grapefruit*, with Ono’s dedication in it, until the end of her life.

Fluxorchestra, etc.

Kubota not only helped productions of Flux multiples, but also edited Events by Hi-Red Center, whose members she was friends within Japan. Fluxus often held Events where they performed the scores written by its members. Kubota participated in some of them as a performer.

George Maciunas With Two Eyes 1972, George Maciunas With One Eye 1976

This is a single channel video which Kubota created in the 1990s about Fluxus activities in New York in the 1970s with a focus on her memory of George Maciunas. The first half shows *Flux Tour* in 1976 where Yasunao Tone and Nam June Paik are serving as guides in their native languages. Maciunas wore an eye mask then. The second half was

taken during the 1972 opening reception of an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in which a Fluxus member, Ben Vautier participated. Maciunas still had both eyes intact. He dedicated himself to the realization of his mission of providing the artists with coop housing so they could sustain their artistic practice. He was violently attacked during the process and lost one eye. Kubota never forgot her appreciation of Maciunas.

Vagina Painting

In the summer of 1965, a year after her move to the United States, Kubota presented a performance entitled *Vagina Painting* as part of the Perpetual Flux Fest. As the title suggests, it was a performance piece in which she painted with a brush inserted into her vagina, and it became Kubota's only Fluxus performance piece. Although the Fest was supposed to be held every Sunday in the fall of 1964, it was postponed many times. The Flux newspaper from March 1965 already announced this work by listing the title.

In her later years, Kubota stated that she did this performance at the request of Paik and Maciunas, and it was not her idea. The contact sheet of photographs, possibly taken for publicity at Peter Moore's studio in November 1964, suggest that she was preparing for it carefully and wanted to present her own performance. Although she is wearing panties with a brush attached, according to the statements of Ay-O, Mieko Shiomi, and Eric Andersen, who watched the actual performance, Kubota might have inserted a brush into her vulva. This work was featured in the Flux newspaper in the following year and became known through Maciunas's photographs.

Sonic Arts Union

Kubota met composer David Behrman in 1965. In the following year, she began participating in performances by the Sonic Arts Union (SAU), which Behrman co-founded with Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, and Gordon Mumma. In 1967, Kubota married Behrman and accompanied SAU's tour in Europe in the same year, and in 1969, along with the female partners of other members (Mary Ashley, Mary Lucier, Barbara Lloyd), occasionally performed in pieces. Kubota's friendship with Mary Lucier deepened and they would subsequently go on to form a collective together.

Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*

While she was married to Behrman, Kubota spent time in an experimental artists' colony, which included John Cage, at Stony Point, New York. In 1967, Kubota performed in Carolee Schneemann's multimedia work, *Snows* which expressed sorrow toward and anger against the Vietnam War. Sympathizing with the Anti-Vietnam-War movement, Kubota agreed to play the role of a Vietnamese woman.

[Magazine] Bijutsu Techo

From 1969 to 1971, Kubota published her own essays and translations of others (such as Jud Yalkut), introducing such varied topics as Air art, Hippie culture, and technology art in the art magazine, *Bijutsu Techō* (Art notebook).

The "TV as a Creative Medium" exhibition, held at Howard Wise Gallery in 1969, was a groundbreaking exhibition which considered television as a new artistic medium, and explored the intersections of art and technology in the late 1960s. It led to the subsequent emergence of Video art and Kubota mentioned that the exhibition affected her deeply afterwards. She went on to write a detailed report on it with many images for *Bijutsu Techō*.

"Even photography, which lacks relative plasticity and flexibility, has grown into an art form. TV art can easily be reproduced (like a photograph) and has so much more plasticity than oil paintings. There will be a major revolution in art in the future if TV art gets into full swing."

-Shigeo Kubota, ("TV as a Creative Medium," *Bijutsu Techō*, no. 317(September 1969), pp. 175.)

Marcel Duchamp and John Cage

On March 5, 1968, the performance and concert by Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, *Reunion* took place in Toronto, Canada. It was their chess match, and the chess board was equipped with an acoustic system which would pick up the movements of chess pieces and alter the sound. David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, and Kubota's husband David Behrman oversaw the sound. Kubota accompanied them on the trip and photographed the event.

Shortly thereafter, on March 9th, Kubota reunited with Mr. and Mrs. Duchamp on the airplane bound for Buffalo. About half a year later, Duchamp passed away. To commemorate this chance encounter, Kubota produced a photo book, *Marcel Duchamp and John Cage*. The book was comprised of Kubota's photographs of *Reunion* and Cage's acrostic poem and was self-published with Takeyoshi Miyazawa, then chief editor of *Bijutsu Techō*. The enclosed flexi disc (a thin record) contained the recording from the performance. Later, Kubota turned this book into a video sculpture, *Video Chess*.

Chapter 3. Encounter with Video, Collaborations with Women, and Curation

Portapak etc.

In the late 1960s, SONY researched the technology for a personal, open-reel recorder, and began selling a portable camera and recorder which could be carried on a shoulder - the Portapak (*Video densuke* in Japanese) in 1967. The emergence of a portable video recording device laid the foundation for the rise of video art in the 1970s.

In 1970, Kubota lived in Los Angeles with Paik who was teaching at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). With the engineer Shuya Abe, Paik was developing the

“Paik-Abe color synthesizer” which provides abstract colorization on video. Kubota would utilize this synthesizer in her videos going forward. Among the faculty of CalArts was Allan Kaprow, who was known for his theory and practice of performance art. Kubota had an opportunity to learn about the latest developments in art. She had Abe recorded a closeup of her face as she opened and closed her mouth and turned that self-portrait into the single channel, *One Day in California*, which was later incorporated into her video sculpture, *Video Poem*.

Kubota obtained her Portapak when Mrs. Abe was visiting her husband in the United States from Japan in 1972. She then traveled with it throughout Europe in May of the same year. In addition to visiting Bremen, Germany to attend John Cage’s concert and Duchamp’s grave in Rouen, France, Kubota toured Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Paris, Nice, and Venice, recording the rivers, cityscapes, and some performances. She created a single channel video, *Europe on ½ Inch a Day* from this footage, and premiered it at her first solo show, “Live and Videotapes Concert” in New York. Kubota and Paik returned to New York and started living in the artists’ collective at Westbeth.

Mary Lucier, *Polaroid Image Series*

Mary Lucier, who participated in Sonic Arts Union with Kubota, is another artist who is acclaimed for her video art. In one of her *Polaroid Image Series*, which utilizes the sound piece *I’m Sitting in a Room*, by her then husband Alvin Lucier, she uses her portrait photograph of Kubota from around 1968.

White Black Red & Yellow

In 1972, Kubota and Lucier formed White Black Red & Yellow, a group of “[F]our women dedicated to the presentation of original visual and vocal theater work,” and held live events at the Kitchen in December 1972 and April 1973. Kubota was “yellow” as an Asian, Lucier was “white” as a Caucasian, Charlotte Warren was “black” as an African American, and Cecilia Sandoval was “red” as a Navajo, though the order of colors in the name was unfixed. Corresponding to a rising second wave of the feminist movement, the group aimed to “serve as a kind of clearing house for feminist pieces,” but it dissolved after the second event.

Riverrun

At the first live event of White Black Red & Yellow, Kubota presented *Riverrun*, which showed videos of five rivers through multiple monitors. The concept was to play videos of the Seine, the Rhein, the canals of Amsterdam and Venice (which Kubota recorded during her Europe trip), and the Hudson river in New York, on five rows of six monitors, although it is not confirmed that 30 monitors were actually used. Kubota also intended to add the Shinano river from her home country to this

piece.

“*Riverrun* is like a strip of personal time from my long life. It is about my emotional life. It is an autobiography of running time like “riverrun” of James Joyce.”

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Women’s Video Festival, New York Avant Garde Festival etc.

From 1972 to 1976, video artist Susan Milano organized the Women’s Video Festival, in order to create opportunities for women video artists. Kubota participated in all four of the festivals held in New York City, and benefited from the publicity received. The first work she showed for the occasion was *Joa: The Impasse of Infidelity* which, according to a review, showed male and female sexually provocative performances on the split-screen. Unfortunately, this work may be lost, but it seems to have used footage from her Europe trip.

Kubota often participated in the New York Avant Garde Festival, organized by Charlotte Moorman who was a cellist-turned-performer known for her collaboration with Nam June Paik. At the ninth annual New York Avant Garde Festival, which took place inside the Alexander Hamilton docked at the South Street Seaport, Kubota showed a multi-channel video where one of the monitors may have live-fed the image of the audience through a closed circuit.

A36 – 24 – 36

In May 1973, Kubota showed a multiple-channel video, *A36 – 24 – 36* at the Second Video Arts Festival. According to Mary Lucier, it consisted of recordings of various appearances of Marilyn Munroe on television, and the title probably referred to an ideal female body shape regarding the bust, hip, and waist sizes. It was shown on multiple black and white monitors with colored gels on top. Although this work is no longer extant, Lucier reconstructed a partial view of the installation as prints for the present exhibition, using her photographs of Kubota’s screens.

Video Girls and Video Song for Navajo Sky

In June 1973, Lucier and Kubota accompanied Cecilia Sandoval of White Black Red & Yellow to her family home in the Navajo reservation in Chinle, Arizona. Kubota’s experience there left a strong impression and became reflected in her later video sculptures. She created *Video Girls and Video Song for Navajo Sky* from the footage she recorded during her visit. It begins and ends with a scene of Navajo people fetching water on a horse carriage, with Kubota’s abstracted face overlapping. Remembering that the temple of her father’s family did not have running water and learning that Shigeo meant sister or brother

in law in Navajo, Kubota found a special affinity with this Navajo family. The work expresses Kubota's transcultural experience through herself as an agency.

Guerrilla Television, "Tokyo New York Video Express," etc.

In New York in the early 1970s, alternative groups of video artists such as Raindance Cooperation and Videofreex were very active. In Japan in 1972, the collective Video Hiroba was founded by Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, Fujiko Nakaya, Nobuhiro Kawanaka, and Hakudo Kobayashi, among others. The 1971 book on media discourse, *Guerrilla Television*, edited by Michael Shamberg, was quickly translated into Japanese by Nakaya and published in 1974. Its acknowledgements suggest that Kubota made the initial introduction between Shamberg and Nakaya.

In January 1974, Kubota presented and talked about many videotapes of American artists which she "brought in a carry-on luggage" from New York at the "Tokyo New York Video Express," co-organized with Video Hiroba at the Tenjo Sajiki Hall in Tokyo over three nights. She also reported on the works of Japanese video artists at the international conference, "Open Circuit: The Future of Television", held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in late January. In it, Kubota highlighted the work of Japanese and American women video artists, and likened the international exchanges of video and lateral communication to a mobile library. Kubota published her essay on the new possibilities of video as "Video -- Open Circuit" in the Japanese magazine, *Geijutsu Kurabu* (Art Club) which has been reprinted in the present exhibition catalog.

The portrait of Shigeo and Nam June

This portrait taken in the Kubota-Paik studio in Westbeth (artists' housing building in New York) shows the "Paik-Abe Synthesizer" in the foreground between them. The monitor shows Kubota's *Self Portrait*.

Anthology Film Archives (AFA)

In the Fall 1974, Kubota began working as the video curator at the Anthology Film Archives (AFA) and continued until 1982. AFA was founded by the film artist Jonas Mekas with the mission of screening and preserving experimental films. While it was considered the palace of films, it decided to establish a new video department. George Maciunas, who - like Mekas was born in Lithuania, recommended Kubota as the curator. At AFA, Kubota established a program of inviting video artists to screen their work on Saturday afternoons and to have a dialogue with the audience. Bob (Robert) Harris, who soon became Kubota's collaborator, and inherited

her video curatorial work later, pointed out that Kubota's active and open character was well suited for connecting people in the nascent field of video art.

Around this time, Kubota and Paik purchased one of the co-op lofts which George Maciunas organized in So-Ho on Mercer Street near AFA and moved there. This loft, currently maintained by the Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation, became a space for artists and curators to gather after the screenings and discuss various subjects and exchange information in the early days of video art.

My Father

Kubota visited her father at his sick bed when she returned to Japan at the end of 1973. Her video recording of her father and herself watching the singing competition program in New Year's Eve turned into a video elegy, *My Father*, after he passed away in July of the following year. Shirley Clark, who is mentioned in the beginning of the video, is known as an experimental filmmaker but was transitioning to video then and had some interactions with Kubota. When Kubota called her upon the news of her father's death crying, Clark supposedly suggested to video record herself crying. The video alternates between the last recording of her father and Kubota and her grieving over his death.

Chapter 4. The Birth of Video Sculpture,

Duchampiana

Video Poem

The self-portrait video peaks through a hole in the middle of an air-filled bag. This was shown alongside *Duchamp's Grave* at Kubota's solo exhibition at the Kitchen in 1975. Kubota had sewn the original bag for Takehisa Kosugi's performance, *Anima 2 / Chamber Music*. The video seems to have been taken around 1970 when Kubota started to take video at California Institute of Arts (Cal Arts).

The text *Video Poem*, which is projected here, was presented at the international conference on video in 1974 and represents Kubota's video philosophy at the time. Kubota's early video sculptures were typically accompanied by texts. Although vinyl letters were used later, the texts were projected from slides in the beginning.

Duchamp's Grave

In 1972, Kubota visited Marcel Duchamp's grave in Rouen, France during her Europe trip. Carrying a heavy Portapak set, she recorded the tomb and her 1970 book, *Marcel Duchamp and John Cage* placed on top of it. The video was a colorized version of the black and white single-channel video, shown on stacked monitors. By using mirrors, Kubota multiplied the image and expressed the notion of time in video not having a beginning or end. This work is the origin of Kubota's "video sculptures" and demonstrates the prescience and originality in placing video within space.

“Despite the cool unsentimentality of Duchamp's own attitude toward death, I was very moved. My father's family, of monk's lineage, owns a monastery in the hinterlands of Japan, so I used to see a lot of funerals. I often did homework inside a temple room where fresh bones were stored. How I played with ghosts. . . all these childhood memories flashed back into my head, I put my *Duchamp and Cage* book on his grave, as in the oriental family custom of putting rice cookies on the dead ancestor's altar.”

Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Nude Descending a Staircase

One of Kubota's representative works appropriates Duchamp's oil painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912). Monitors inside the four wooden steps show a video of a nude woman descending a staircase: realizing an original representation of time. The four steps of the stairs were based on the number of monitors Kubota owned at the time. She sought to merge the stairs with the video. Al Robbins, who collaborated on many of her video sculptures, made the sculptural component which made the merger possible. The first iteration of this work was shown as part of the “Projects” series, which introduced emerging artists at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1978, and was later acquired as the first video sculpture by the same museum. The work shown in this exhibition was created in Japan for the exhibition of art and technology at the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art (currently Toyama Museum of Art and Design) and acquired afterwards.

“In the original oil painting, Duchamp showed an abstract nude in ‘motion.’ But he was restricted to a quasi-futuristic representation of time. . . that is, multilineal motion depiction. The four-dimensional medium of video knows no such restriction. I constructed a real staircase, made of four-color monitors; a lovely nude woman, Sheila McClaughlin, descends slowly/rapidly/flying in many colors and exposures. The image might live within the sculpture.”

Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Video Chess

After taking photographs of the *Reunion* event between Duchamp and Cage (1968), Kubota transformed the photographs into a video by keying and colorizing them between 1972 and 1973. Seven years after the event, in 1975, *Video Chess*, the video sculpture which uses a monitor under a chess board was born. This work evolved from the book, *Marcel Duchamp and John Cage* (1970).

“The monitor plays the videotape of Mr. Duchamp and Mr. Cage, and emits the original soundtrack of this unforgettable concert, a composition by John Cage. Every cross-point of the chess matrix has a hole and light cell, which is modulated by the proceeding of a chess game. This rich-sounding, intermodulated system was painstakingly designed and operated by virtuoso electronic musicians-composers David Tudor, David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, and Lowell Cross.

TV is always somewhere between dream and reality. When you and your chess partner play *Video Chess*, you are accompanied by the videotape of the two great masters playing from the other side of this world.”

Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Door

Appropriating Duchamp's work, *Door, 11 rue Larrey*, a single hinged door is attached to two frame joints at a 90-degree angle, with the result being that both sides cannot be closed simultaneously. Inside the small room, a monitor set up above the viewer's head plays a video of Marcel Duchamp smoking a cigar. Its image is superimposed with a video of vapor from a geyser at Yellowstone National Park. Duchamp's voice repeats “Art is mirage.” Kubota considered the inside of the door as a time tunnel where time/space changes mysteriously. Please go inside one person at a time.

Window

This series, entitled *Meta Marcel*, is based on Duchamp's *Fresh Widow*, but Kubota intended to break free from the spell of the master (Duchamp) and overcome his influence. While Duchamp's window is utterly black and the viewer cannot see anything, one can see snow (snow noise) made by a television behind Kubota's window. *Snow* shown in 1977 (displayed at the entrance of this exhibition) was made possible by connecting an open reel player without a tape to a TV. In later years, it was replaced by a video recording of the noise on a screen. In 1983, the works *Flower* and *Stars* joined *Snow*. As she states, Kubota considered video to be an open window connected to the outer world.

Chapter 5. Nature and Circulation

Three Mountains

Inside the three mountains, four-channel videos – the Grand Canyon as seen from helicopter, the Echo Cliffs as seen from a car window, a mirage over a sunset in Taos, and a sunset scene in the Grand Tetons – are incorporated. In 1973, Kubota stayed at the Navajo reservation in Chinle, Arizona while visiting Cecilia Sandoval - who was part of the group, White Black Red & Yellow. The landscapes there fascinated her. Three years later, she traveled the American West – Utah, New Mexico, Montana, and Wyoming, and took color videos of the mountains and valleys. The speakers play the sound of the wind, recorded by placing a microphone outside a travelling car's window. Kubota considered these mountains an “autobiographical landscape.”

“Mountain -- womb

My womb is a volcano.

Five-inch and eleven-inch images are dancing inside of it.

They sing of my history.”

“Why do I climb the mountain?” Not, “Because it is there,” a colonialist/imperialist notion, but to perceive, to see.”

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

River

The water inside a metal basin, made to resemble an origami boat, makes a wave and oscillates the reflected images of the monitors which are hung upside down above it. The image consists of the artist swimming, superimposed with colorful star and heart patterns. This work was created and first shown in Berlin. After it was included in the Whitney Biennial in 1983, a photograph from the exhibition was later featured on the cover of *Art in America*.

For Kubota, rivers symbolized the nature of an ever-changing world. She recorded various rivers and waterways from the time she began using video. This work represents “liquid reality”, which is never the same due to the reflecting images on the water’s surface.

“The role of water in nature is comparable to the function of video in our life. A river is replicated in video in its physical/temporal properties and in its information-carrying and reflective, ‘mirror’ qualities.”

“Once cast into video’s reality, infinite variation becomes possible, not only weightlessness, but total freedom to dissolve, reconstruct, mutate all forms, shape, color, location, speed, scale . . . liquid reality.”

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Bicycle Wheel I, II, III

Referencing Marcel Duchamp’s first readymade, *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), a bicycle wheel is placed on top of a stool. In Kubota’s work, the wheel turns automatically by motor. By attaching a small monitor to the wheel, she incorporated the moving image within the circulating movement. Although this work was created after a lapse since the *Duchampiana* series was presented between 1975 and 1977, her drawings from 1977 indicate that she already had a concept of combining a wheel and a monitor. In 1983, the weight of the CRT monitor made a continuous rotation difficult, but in 1990, lighter LCD monitors enabled the artist to attach multiple monitors to each wheel, as shown in the present work.

“Besides the Duchamp allusion, the *Bicycle Wheel* conveys fond memories of my childhood in the countryside. Wheel is one name of the circle . . . endlessly moving with no beginning, no ending and without any sense of order.

Wheel is also a positive word in Zen Buddhism, suggesting a trouble-free, transparent personality without an ego trap.”

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Video Haiku

A circular monitor moves back and forth. A curved, round mirror is placed underneath it. When a viewer looks into the mirror, the mirror reflects a live black and white image of themselves on the monitor. In the early 1970s, many video artists including Paik used closed circuit to play a live-fed video by connecting cameras and television. As the viewer sees the image of themselves, the actual space and image

intersect, which brings a new perspective to the act of looking. Although Kubota tried this technique earlier, she used previous recordings in most of her video sculptures. In this work created in the 1980s, Kubota combined the closed circuit with the pendulum movement and the changing reflection on the mirror, inviting the viewer with her playful spirit.

“My Video Haiku is a pendulum, hanging, swinging the time of a minute to a minute of my *Living Time*, one, two, three...”

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Photo by Shigeo Anzai, Takanawa Museum, Karuizawa

In 1981, the first exhibition of Marcel Duchamp was held at the Takanawa Museum of Art and Seibu Museum of Art. The exhibition showcased Kubota’s *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase* and *Meta-Marcel: Window*. This became the first opportunity for Kubota’s video sculptures to be shown in Japan. Later in 1983, both works were shown in the “Second Contemporary Art Festival – Art and Technology” at the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art.

Merce by Merce by Paik

This second part of Paik’s two-part video, *Merce by Merce by Paik*, is currently credited to both Paik and Kubota. This is an homage to the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham and Marcel Duchamp. In it, Paik and Kubota connected gestures in daily life to art. The interview of Cunningham is superimposed over that of Duchamp by the same interviewer, and fast forwarding, reverse, and cut back are often used. What Paik called the “dance of time” – or manipulation of reversible time is performed here.

Chapter 6. Expanding into space, into a Multi-layered Narrative

Trip to Korea

After the success of the opening of the “Nam June Paik: Mostly Video” exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in 1984, Kubota and Paik visited South Korea together. For Kubota, it was her first time visiting her husband’s country. Paik returned home after 34 years of absence, having left at the onset of the Korean War. The video shows the media and Paik’s relatives welcoming Paik as a world-famous artist, his visit to the location of Paik’s old home, the visit to his ancestors’ tomb, and a traditional art performance.

SOHO Soap/Rain Damage

This depicts the damage of a heavy rainstorm on Kubota and Paik’s SoHo loft, which was both their studio and home.

Due to a faulty repair in the building, the loft suffered a horrible leak which damaged equipment and video tapes. Kubota humorously yet sorrowfully depicts the scope of the damage and disputes with the coop board afterwards by comparing the views of the studio before and after the storm, and by incorporating Paik's partially non-sensical narration. While it is Kubota's personal diary, it is also a document of an artist who lives and works in SoHo, New York.

"Just after I made *Niagara Falls*, my studio became Niagara Falls, because of roofer's mistake.

'Art imitates Nature, Nature imitates Art'."

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

"It rains in my heart. It rains in my video art"

(artist's quote in the video)

Proposal of *Broken Diary*

In 1985, Kubota decided to compile her single-channel videos made from 1970 as the *Broken Diary* series, consisting of twelve chapters. The single-channel videos shown in this exhibition belong to the series. Besides these known works, there are the first videos shot at the California Institute of Arts, *One Day in California* (1970), a record of her days as the video curator of the Anthology Film Archives, *Video Curator Diary* (1974 – 82), an anecdote of her personal pains such as a miscarriage, *Berlin Diary* (1979 – 80), and a cheerful narration of her life in Chicago, *Shigeo in Chicago* (1982). These chapters have recently been discovered by her foundation and are being prepared for an upcoming premier.

Niagara Falls

Shown across ten monitors is a 4-channel, color-synthesized video representing the four seasons at Niagara Falls. The sounds of the waterfall in the summer overlap with the real-time sound of dripping water. The dynamic layout of monitors of varying sizes, water, and mirrors, along with the projected images, add further complexity to the images. Kubota mentioned her fear of death by being swallowed up while looking at the falls through a video camera, while shooting from a helicopter.

"Beauty of nature is nightmare, fear, and terror. Niagara Falls particularly, because of its magnetic force of magnificent nature, plunges into my impulse to thrust myself to death, releasing my body and jumping into the falls."

"With the three-color lens video camera zoomed into the falls, the close-up view of the falls got me more involved, inviting me and swallowing me into the world of death."

Shigeo Kubota: Video Sculpture (New York: American Museum of Moving Image, 1991)

Korean Grave

During her trip to Korea with Paik in 1984, the shape of Paik's ancestor's tomb left a strong impression. The tomb

was in a mountain and hemi-sphere shaped like an overturned bowl, with grass planted on it. Kubota took an interest in the Korean tomb because it lacks a tomb stone, and its edges are hard to distinguish. Shaped after a Korean tomb, *Korean Grave* has mirror-covered protrusions. The single-channel video, *Trip to Korea* (1984) is shown inside the protrusions as well as outside through projectors.

"Because I grew up in a temple, death was not an object of fear for me. I always witnessed the funerals of those who passed and found death familiar. That is probably why I who studied sculpture took special interest in the shape of the tomb."

(Shigeo Kubota and Nam Jeongho, translated by Ko Seong-Jun, *My Love, Nam June Paik*, Heibon-sha, 2013)

Skater

Inspired by the Japanese figure skater, Midori Ito, a wooden figure spins on top of a rotating rink. The fragmented mirrors on top of the rink reflect the images from the projectors and reflect light onto the surrounding walls. When she was invited to Artec '91, the Nagoya International Biannual, Kubota came across a big article on Ito in the *New York Times* and decided to make a work about her. She submitted a different work to the exhibition and related in a 1992 interview that *Skater* was in storage after being exhibited in New York only once. Ito received praise for her success with a repeated triple jump at the Calgary Olympic Games in 1988 but did not receive a medal due to a lower artistic score. Later, she became the first Asian World champion and won a silver medal at the 1992 Albertville Olympic Games. Kubota felt a proud kinship with Ito who was a successful athlete representing Japan to the world.

"She should have received a medal four years ago, but couldn't. I think there was a bias among the judges. If I show this work now [after she won a silver medal at the Albertville Olympic], it might be considered mere nationalism. When she played in New York, not many knew her. Now she is too famous."

("How to make a video: Interview Shigeo Kubota," *Video Culture*, Matsushita Electronics Video Department, 1992)

[Photo] Installation view of *Adam and Eve*

Figurative sculptures appeared in Kubota's work in the 1990s after years of appropriating Duchamp and working with natural motifs since the birth of video sculpture in 1975. Before *Skater*, the life-size male and female figural sculptures, *Adam and Eve* were made. To exhibit them, Kubota made an installation by combining multiple works. She placed *Video Byobu*, which contained numerous monitors, in the background, *Dry Mountain*, *Dry Water* was made into a stone garden on the floor, and two different videos of cherry blossoms were projected from a rotating projector.

La Biennale di Venezia, etc.

Her plan for the “Garden of Eden” at the 1993 Venice Biennial suggests a “narrative landscape” using many of these anthropomorphic sculptures, though she later reduced the number of works in the end. At her 1996 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum, she filled the walls and floor of the space with figurative sculptures such as *Jogging Lady*, and *Pissing Boy*, alongside pieces covered with plastic mirrors, such as *Birds* and *Korean Grave*, the rotating *Windmills* piece, as well as plants, a coyote, and a snake made of pointy metal pieces with small monitors. She even added moving images throughout by projecting around the room to integrate these disparate elements. Around the time when the nature of images was transitioning to digital, the monitors used in Kubota’s sculptures changed to small LCDs. New narratives were being told through environmental installations combining these sculptures.

Women of Fluxus, American Museum of Moving Image, etc.

In the 1990s, Fluxus drew renewed attention and reevaluation as related exhibitions were held around the world. Fluxus artists gathered for “Ubi Fluxus ibi motus 1990-1962” exhibition, part of Venice Biennial in 1990. Kubota submitted her videos sculpture in this exhibition. In 1991, Kubota’s first retrospective exhibition in the United States was held at the Museum of Moving Image. Built at a former movie location in Queens, New York, this museum specializes in films, television, and video. In this exhibition, Kubota showed more than 40 works made over 20 years since moving to the United States. The exhibition catalog is a valuable document which traces the history of video art and details Kubota’s contributions and is comprised of essays by curators such as Jo Ann Hanley and Brooks Adams. Also included are Kubota’s texts, which are filled with concepts and episodes surrounding the works. (Japanese translation of Kubota’s text is included in the present exhibition catalog.)

Sexual Healing

“April is the cruelest month,” once wrote British poet T. S. Eliot. It was also in April, when my husband and video artist, Nam June Paik, due to stroke, collapsed the night before Easter three years ago. “I’m an Easter baby. Since Jesus resurrected, I will get better for sure,” he said, with the left side of his body paralyzed.

The following morning after Nam June was hospitalized, two healthy and young female therapists took him out of the bed to start his rehabilitation. These single women, who just graduated from college, were wearing red lipstick and tights. They held Nam June like a baby, pressing him hard against their voluptuous breasts. When Nam June practiced taking a shower for the first

time, these girls curiously looked at his naked body and complimented by saying “Your skin and bones looks as young as if you were in your forties.” At that time he was actually sixty-four years old. They went on asking things like, “Are you officially married with your wife?” or, “Do you have children?” If didn’t have children, were they interested in having an affair? I was puzzled.

Like the song “Sexual Healing” by Marvin Gaye, this hospital conducts rehabilitation by assigning each patient with therapists of the opposite sex.

They also asked me, “You and Mr. Paik are video artists, right? Why don’t you bring your camera? Why don’t you videotape his walking therapy so he can watch himself?” Until then, I was reluctant to take the camera to the hospital, thinking maybe the other patients would feel intimidated. Encouraged by their suggestion, I shot the video of Nam June engaged in exercise.

“I don’t want to see it,” Nam June said, and refused to watch the video. Perhaps he did not want to confront the reality of what had happened to him.

To the melody of “Sexual Healing,” I made a video work for healing, for Nam June and his therapists.

(Work Sketches 1: *Sexual Healing*, “Sexual Healing” from the catalog of Shigeo Kubota: *My Life With Nam June Paik*, Maya Stendhal Gallery, 2007).

My Life with Nam June Paik exhibition at Maya Stendhal Gallery

Kubota’s solo show at the Maya Stendhal Gallery in New York after seven years since the last one was an emotional elegy to her husband, Nam June Paik, who had just passed away. It included *Nam June Paik I*, *Nam June Paik II* created after his death, in addition to Kubota’s representative works from the 1990s - such as *Korean Grave* and metal sculptures. Unfortunately, Kubota struggled with her own with illnesses, and after 2010 she could not return to work. This was to be her last exhibition.

My Love, Nam June Paik

An editorial reporter from *JoongAng Ilbo* (Korea Central Daily) in South Korea, Nam Jeongho, interviewed Kubota after Paik’s death and compiled her valuable account of her life with Paik into a book about the two artists. Originally published in Korean in 2010, this book was brought to Japan by Mayumi Hamada (The Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art), one of the co-curators of this exhibition, who visited Kubota in New York for her research. After Hamada asked her then colleague Ko Seong-Jun to translate it into Japanese, the Japanese edition was published in 2013.

Text by Mihoko Nishikawa
Translation by Midori Yoshimoto