

TAIPEI  
NEW TAIPEI CITY  
ART MUSEUM

## Samson Young *Pavilion*

Samson Young's *Pavilion* (2025) jolted the gaze upward, to confront uncharted depths. A massive, multiscreen contraption loomed high in the pitch-black ether of the New Taipei City Art Museum's cavernous main hall, raining torrential images from the information heavens: stuttering footage of athletics meets (odes to human aspiration and bodily perfectibility); glitching, overexposed spacecraft interiors (visions of technological mastery and progress); and blinking, diagrammatic abstractions that cascade without end, never coalescing into narrative. What cohered was less iconographic program than kinetic regime: things warped, accelerated, spasmed, and spluttered toward an indeterminate elsewhere, while sonorous harmonies of a male choir, echoing the György Ligeti textures Stanley Kubrick deployed in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), flooded the

vast darkness. The effect was paradoxically soothing and deeply foreboding—an aural gravity that coursed through the body with magnetic, trance-inducing intensity.

Humans have long constructed overhead image-worlds for what they fear and venerate most. Paleolithic painters turned caves into surround-fields of animal and spirit; tombs encased the dead in elaborate cosmologies; and Renaissance ceilings choreographed passing glances into awe-inducing theaters of ascent and judgment. In 1964, the IBM Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, with Charles and Ray Eames's 22-screen film *THINK*, entered this lineage as a kind of corporate-technological sublime: an image of a world run on—indeed, by—information. Young considers *THINK* an early precursor to database cinema—one that cast computers as models of human rationality and problem-solving, promising speed, clarity, even enlightenment: a midcentury liturgy in which data itself was worshipped. Six decades later, *Pavilion* inherited this genealogy but transformed it: filmed and archival material folds into generative AI that updates,

revises, and recomposites it in perpetuity, splintering order and resolution into a technospheric climate of fragments—an informational weather that hovers, thickens, and persists.

Before *THINK*, the 16th-century cabinet of curiosities was one of the earliest formalized architectures of knowledge—a space designed to classify and display wonder. Young's canopy of screens, itself resembling an inverted cupboard, seems to have emptied its logic, evacuating both enchantment and pedagogy: if cabinets and computers once pledged to order and illuminate the world, teaching us how to apprehend it, is generative AI now simply shuffling it in place? Philosopher Yuk Hui argues that contemporary digital infrastructures no longer function as neutral tools—they congeal into a pervasive milieu that structures what can appear and how relations can be formed. Within this planetary-scale computational apparatus that he calls “artificial earth,” recursivity—the capacity of systems to loop back on themselves while remaining open to contingency—marks an epistemological break from mechanical causality,

approaching the way how organic life evolves by integrating the unexpected. The danger, then, lies not in recursivity itself but its capture: when feedback loops are harnessed solely for optimization and prediction, contingency is not embraced, but eliminated.

Young's *Pavilion* both mourns and resists this closure. The installation's shock exceeds media excess: the automaton that solely circulates intelligence trains an attention style both hyperinformed and calibrated to indifference—always on, always scanning, rarely moved to judgment. If earlier pavilions promised coherent representations of nations, corporations, or futures, *Pavilion* staged the experience of being within machinic time—where perception, processing, and critique feel infrastructural. Against this, the vocal symphony introduces a counter-temporality: choral sound is bound to breath, phrasing, fatigue, and decay, and the Requiem inflection carries an elegiac rhythm in which repetition bears memory rather than mere refresh. *Pavilion*'s strongest affect arose from this dissonance: one was lulled by the surging sonic textures while half watching images that no longer matter, sensing in the body the clash between mortal and machinic time. If there is any saving grace here, it lies not in an escape from the artificial earth but in the choir's insistence that the system's temporal violence can still be made sensorially palpable—that some lines of human time still resist full integration into its smooth, recursive atmosphere.

**MICHELE CHAN**

Installation view of **SAMSON YOUNG's** *Pavilion*, 2025, mixed media, dimensions variable, at the New Taipei City Art Museum (NTCAM), 2025. Photo by Chu Chi-hung. Courtesy NTCAM.

