



**Art:** *Video Arbor*

**Site:** Urban redevelopment site

**Place:** Franklin Town

**Location:** Philadelphia, PA

**Artist:** Nam June Paik

This rigid, mechanical arbor brings surprising and welcome green to an otherwise relentlessly hard-surfaced environment. It is the skeletal structure of an arcade with references to classical architecture, its friezes made of video monitors rather than carved reliefs. It is a transitional space between two buildings, but also between public and semi-private realms, connecting the streetscape to a pocket courtyard in a small nook of an apartment building. The video part, which is one-sided, facing only out toward the street, seems nonfunctional at this time. Even though the artist is known for video work, its absence in this place is inconsequential to the success of the effect. The real effect is one of a lovely merging of – really a weaving together of – plant material and manufactured elements. The structure alone, even with working monitors, would be too machine-like, too devoid of energy. It is the blending, the softening by the wisteria growing up through the metal-framework columns that humanizes the space, surely not by the manmade parts. Steel trusses add sculptural dimension to the patterned covering, like a giant grape arbor, but it is the wisteria, again, that has done the artful part – a drawing in tracery in and around the trusses, its wiggly lines in counterpoint to the geometric ones that support it. And the canopy that the two together create is like a free-form basket or incredibly large and intricate bird's nest built on a grid, and lighted from above – the natural lighting adding more depth and detail to



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the layering of branches and their shadows. The light acts as an enlivening element in the drawing and it filters through to affect the space beneath, the inhabitable space. It is so unexpected: the whole is like an abstract stained-glass window, a thicket of order and disorder grown into a magical, spiritual convergence.

**Impact:**

- Context/contrast
- Combination of natural & manmade
  - Interactive
  - Framing
  - Light
  - Minimal

**Art-to-Site Rating:** High

**View Date:** November 2009

