

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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SECTION

## Yoko Ono sends message to Lee County ahead of January show

BY GLENN MILLER

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The billboard design is simple, featuring two words and two colors (if white counts as a color).

The design is by one of the most famous people in the world — Yoko Ono, perhaps still best known as John Lennon's widow but also a world-renown conceptual artist in her own

SEE PEACE, C8 ► Yoko Ono's billboard appearing on U.S. 41 in Fort Myers.



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FLORIDA WEEKLY

## PEACE

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right. The billboard with two words in all capitals — “IMAGINE PEACE” — should now be up on U.S. 41 near Page Field in Fort Myers. The words in white are set against a blue sky with one little, puffy cloud below the letters I and M.

That upper-case message continues Ms. Ono's quest for peace and is also timed to an upcoming show at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at the Edison State College Fort Myers campus.

The billboard is not a replica of another.

“She designed this billboard specifically for us,” said Jade Dellinger, director of the Rauschenberg Gallery.

The billboard is dated 2014 and its prominence along such a heavily traveled road is tied to the Jan. 24 re-opening of the Rauschenberg Gallery. However, the billboard is not an ad for the show, Mr. Dellinger said.

The billboard's primary message harkens back to Mr. Lennon's song “Imagine,” which concludes with these words: “And the world will live as one.”

That goal is as elusive now, of course, as it was when the song was released in 1971. Ms. Ono, though, perseveres in her quest.

“It's something that she's been committed to for years,” Mr. Dellinger said.

Kevin Concannon, a professor of art history at Virginia Tech and director of its school of visual arts, has studied and written about Ms. Ono for years. He will lecture about her work when the gallery reopens.

Ms. Ono is much more than the widow of a Beatle, as Mr. Concannon pointed

out in an email to Florida Weekly. She was making conceptual art in the early 1960s. The professor added that she was doing this “before the movement as most know it was established.”

“She is the very definition of avant-garde,” Mr. Concannon wrote. “While she had established herself in the art scenes in New York, London and Tokyo before she met her famous husband, it's certainly fair to say that her liaison with Lennon catapulted her into a different world altogether and, arguably, lost her considerable ground, reputation-wise, in the art world.”

The billboard will be seen by thousands, many of whom likely never venture into galleries or museums.

“It is quite amazing the amount of excitement that is generated when an IMAGINE PEACE billboard is placed at a location within a community,” John Noga, a co-curator of the exhibit, wrote in an email to Florida Weekly.

The curators said Ms. Ono seeks such venues.

“The Imagine Peace billboard is an outstanding example of her use of advertising media to make her conceptual art available to people everywhere, not just those who attend her many exhibitions,” Mr. Concannon wrote. “It's a message to everyone that we can create the world we want. Imagine Peace! It seems simple on the face of it, but so do most advertisements, and obviously they are effective, or people wouldn't spend money to make them. She is fond of saying, ‘A dream you dream alone is just a dream, but a dream we dream together is reality.’”

Mr. Noga added that Ms. Ono appeals to a diverse audience.

“Beatles fans, peace activists, contemporary and conceptual art enthusiasts and just plain everyday folks,” he wrote. ■

WEEK OF JANUARY 1-7, 2014

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Vol. VII, No. 39 • FREE

FLORIDA WEEKLY  
FORT MYERS  
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