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Gulf Coasting's guide to this weekend, the next 10 days and a month ahead. Go to gulfcoastinglive.com to see full, searchable calendar of events for this week and beyond.

PROFILE

YOKO

John Lennon's widow brings a new version of her 'Imagine Peace' exhibit to Rauschenberg Gallery. It's one of two Beatles-themed shows opening today.

By Charles Runnells

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Yoko Ono knows what you're probably thinking.

She knows people still blame her for breaking up The Beatles. She knows they have less-than-kind things to say about her singing.

But you know what? She's too busy to give it much of her time.

At 80 years old, Ono's hectic schedule includes making art, making music and opening art exhibits such as today's "Imagine Peace" at Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. The south Fort Myers show continues through March 29.

It's one of two Beatles-themed exhibits opening today in Lee County. The second features photos from The Beatles' triumphant first visit to the United States in 1964 (*see sidebar*).

Decades after The Beatles fell apart, Ono remains a polarizing figure who generates lots of venom from people. But Ono refuses to give that negativity any thought.

"If I started dealing with it, it would be so tiring and exhausting," she says. "I just don't do it."

Instead, she focuses on her career and her everyday life.

"The kind of thing I'm thinking about every day is,

See **YOKO** » 25

Yoko Ono's Imagine Peace Tower is dedicated to her late husband, John Lennon. In her current Rauschenberg Gallery exhibit, visitors can write down wishes on pieces of paper and hang them in the branches of a "Wish Tree." Then those wishes will be transported to Iceland to be part of the tower. PHOTO

COURTESY OF YOKO ONO

Yoko

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“Well, I better walk so it’ll be good for my health,” she says and laughs. “But also my work. I keep working still.”

Her “Imagine Peace” exhibit features new or reimagined work from the conceptual artist most famous – or infamous – for her relationship with the late John Lennon of The Beatles.

The News-Press chatted with Ono recently about the exhibit, Lennon and more. Here’s what she had to say.

How are you, Yoko?

I’m fine. I’m excited about the “Imagine Peace” show! Only about five years ago, nobody wanted to know about the “Imagine Peace” shows [this is a reimagined, expanded version of a show that’s been touring for years]. Now, I think, everybody is sort of desperate: “We want peace!”

Are you going to attend the show?

Well, my spirit will be there! I just don’t have the time to do it right now.

Obviously, peace is a big theme for you, and it always has been [Ono and Lennon promoted peace in 1969 through their famous “Bed-In” war protests and the Lennon song “Give Peace a Chance”].

It is a very big thing! That’s all I’m thinking about every day. I think we have to do something about it, for ourselves and for our children and for our grandchildren. I think this planet is worth saving, you know?

Do you hope your art helps spread that message?

Well, in a very quiet way, it might be helping. When John and I started doing it – and even before that, I did it, myself – when those things were going on in the ‘60s, people just didn’t want to know! They were into psychedelic, but they were not into world peace.

There were just four or

IF YOU GO

» **What:** Yoko Ono art exhibit

» **When:** Now through March 29

» **Where:** Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Edison State College, 8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers

» **Admission:** Free

» **Gallery hours:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday

» **Info:** 489-9313 or brauschenberggallery.com

five nerdy people in the streets passing pamphlets. That was what it was. But we said, “We’re not going to just pass pamphlets. We have to do it bigger.” And that’s why we did the Bed-In. And the Bed-In was not necessarily greeted by people, but it was good.

I feel that, these days, there are more activists in the world. I mean, most people are activists now! Isn’t that amazing? That didn’t happen when John and I were doing it. We just didn’t feel like there were that many people with us. But now the whole world is activism! It’s great!

Do you think that’s partly because of what you and John did in the late ‘60s?

Well, it had a little to do with it, I suppose. I hope. I like to feel that way (laughs)! I’d like to think that the effort that John and I made was not in vain.

Speaking of your relationship with John, people still blame it – and you – for breaking up The Beatles. But Paul McCartney recently said he no longer holds a grudge against you and that, in regards to The Beatles, you “certainly didn’t break the group up.” How do you feel about that?

Well, that was very nice of Paul. You know, the people and their feelings about me being the one who broke up The Beatles or something – it

was not true. But those feelings were so strong that even Paul, I’m sure, would have felt a little hesitant about coming out and saying, “No, Yoko didn’t do it!” But I think that now, it was about time for him to say it.

Tell me more about some of the art in the Rauschenberg Gallery show. There are some interesting pieces, such as the oversized chess board with all-white pieces (“Play It by Trust”). The white pieces are a metaphor for war, right?

It’s not black and white, having wars, you know. Both sides are exactly the same. So pretty soon, it starts to sort of become very difficult to define which is yours and which is theirs.

Tell me about “Wish Tree.” In this work, people write their wishes on pieces of paper and hang them on a tree inside the gallery. And then you gather those wishes and send them to your Imagine Peace Tower in Iceland (a tower made of a column of light and dedicated to Lennon).

The wishes that the people make, they collect them. They don’t throw them away. They send them to Iceland to the Imagine Peace Tower. We put them around the tower. Wishes all together – it’s very strong.

Through your art, you’re continuing the message of peace that you and John started in the late ‘60s. Do you still think about him a lot?

Definitely! He’s right there with me. He’s always there with me.

Do you ever think, “What would John think about this art project?”

Oh, yeah, yeah! Like this one. I’m saying, “John, how do you like it?” And I know John would love this. I don’t even have to ask! I just know it.

Connect with this reporter: Charles Runnells (News-Press) (Facebook) [@charlesrunnells](https://twitter.com/charlesrunnells) (Twitter)



Ono’s “Play It by Trust” uses a chess game as a metaphor for the pointlessness of war. All the game pieces are white. PHOTO COURTESY OF MAXINE HICKS



Yoko Ono