

# Yoko Ono Exhibit Invites Collaboration

Yoko Ono: *Imagine Peace* opens on January 24 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in Fort Myers

by Tom Hall

A few months after first meeting her, John Lennon tried to commission Yoko Ono to build a "light house" in his garden.

"Oh, that was conceptual," Ono demurred, referring to a structure she'd built in her imagination with beams of refracted light emanating from hypothetical prisms. In the 47 years that have ensued since that conversation, Ono has constructed a legacy as the world's penultimate conceptual artist.

If Ono had her druthers, people entering the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on Friday, January 24 to see *Yoko Ono: Imagine Peace (YOIP)* would be handed a set of instructions and asked to fill the exhibition hall's blank walls with magnificent artworks projected from their individual and collective imaginations. YOIP does not go quite that far, but there will be no viewers or spectators at the exhibit. Everyone who passes through the Rauschenberg Gallery's doors will be magically converted into an active collaborator the instant they are handed an Onochord and encounter works such as *Wish Tree*, *Map Piece* and *Play It By Trust*.

"I spend a lot of time in museums and never fail to be amazed at how people spend more time reading labels than looking at the art," stated co-curator Kevin Concannon, the Virginia Tech director of visual arts who orchestrated the first YOIP exhibit in 2007 at the University of Akron in Ohio. "That doesn't happen with Yoko's participatory pieces. They induce an exchange between the audience and the artist."

While the manner in which each guest and audience make each new iteration of YOIP fresh and unique, the exhibition has been totally reconceived for the Rauschenberg Gallery. "It really is a 'new' exhibition, with everything except *Play It By Trust* being made site-specifically for our show," said new Rauschenberg Gallery Director Jade Dellinger. "We will include material related to Yoko's Indica Gallery exhibition and her original *Sales List*, which were never included in previous exhibitions and are being lent by Yoko's Studio One in New York City."

Material from *John & Yoko's Year of Peace* has also been eliminated, which serves to place the focus on Ono's contributions as a conceptual artist.

For Ono, thoughts are things. She is living testament to the affirmations mouthed by Napoleon Hill, Earl Nightingale and Brian Tracy that "what the mind can conceive, it will achieve with a positive mental attitude," "you become what you think about" and "like attracts like in the realm of the mind." She controls the images entering her own mind with Spartan-like self-discipline. That's why all the negativity that has been hurled at her since her liaison with Lennon has failed to derail either her creativity or message.

But Ono does not operate exclusively in the realm of the individual. The magic of *Yoko Ono: Imagine Peace* is that it works on the collective zeitgeist first of the audience, then of the surrounding community, and ultimately the entire world.

Say "imagine peace" enough and you will. Write your individual wish for peace on a tag and affix it to Ono's *Wish Tree*, and you've converted thoughts to action. Hear that your wish has joined more than a million others at the Imagine Peace Tower in Iceland, and you will come to believe that peace is not just possible, but inevitable when enough energized people share that dream.

"But peace can mean more than just the end of war," said Dellinger. "It can mean personal balance and well-being, harmony within your family or the end to gun violence."

Ono alludes to this more expansive interpretation in a cut from her current album, *Take Me To The Land of Hell*.

"We, the expendable people of the United States, ask for the violence to disappear..." she implores in *Cheshire Cat Cry*. "Stop the violence. Stop all the wars. Who needs violence? Who needs war? Who needs it?" She feels this refrain so deeply that she published the lyrics in a full page ad in *The New York Times* last September.

But make no mistake. Ono is not prone to wishful thinking.

"The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory," quotes Concannon from Ono's favorite passage in a 2004 Howard Zinn article. And since you become what you think about, there's everything to be gained by controlling your thoughts and attracting the future you want and deserve.

If those who attend the Bob Rauschenberg exhibit leave with that sense, with the conviction that they can change their lives and even our culture through the power of their imagination and a cognizance that we are all part of a universal scheme, then Concannon, co-curator John Noga and Dellinger will have done their job, and Yoko herself will be thrilled.

"A dream you dream alone is only a dream," Ono declared in her 1972 single, *Now Or Never*, "but a dream we dream together is reality." That's as true today as it was then.

You can share that dream and become part of a new "gallery happening" on January 24 when *Yoko Ono: Imagine Peace* opens at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the Lee campus of Edison State College. For more information, call 489-9313.\*



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