

Yoko Ono's IMAGINE PEACE Exhibition Comes to Fort Myers

By JOHN DAVIS



Co-Curators Kevin Concannon and John Noga with Rauschenberg Gallery Director Jade Dellinger (from left to right)

Credit John Davis / WGCU-FM

The exhibition harkens back to a theme that's been prominent in Ono's work since her early activism in the 1960s and her work with late husband and Beatles legend John Lennon. Many pieces turn patrons into active participants rather than passive viewers. "I think the museum people are probably a little more freaked out about it than the average museum visitor," said art historian and co-curator Kevin Concannon who's been traveling with the exhibit for the past seven years.

“Mostly the idea that you can pick up a rubber stamp and stamp something on a map on the wall is a bit overwhelming for the average museum person who is used to ‘do not touch, stand back.’ So it’s kind of counterintuitive and it’s wonderful to see people become so engaged and you can almost feel the kind of freedom and liberation they experience.”

One work which is new to the exhibition titled “*Mend Piece*,” has participants physically or conceptually putting broken ceramic globes back together. Another has viewers write their own personal messages of peace that will hang from a “wish tree” in the exhibit and will eventually make their way to the **IMAGINE PEACE TOWER** in Reykjavik, Iceland. “They’re placed in the base of the **IMAGINE PEACE TOWER** which was built in 2007,” said co-curator John Noga. “It’s a great opportunity. It’s part of that collective thought. The **IMAGINE PEACE TOWER** which is on an island off the city of Reykjavik, a large light tower that shoots up into the sky and knowing that sort of all of that collective thought is underneath almost empowering it is, I think, a great thought.” The tower currently holds the personal messages of millions of people around the world.

“At the end of the exhibition those collected wishes are actually going to be hand delivered by a group of students to Iceland,” said Rauschenberg Gallery director Jade Dellinger. “They’re all being given a little grant and will be accompanied by our art professor here, Dana Rose who is quite familiar with Iceland.”

The exhibit also includes a 20 minute video called “*Passages to Light*” which explains the history and evolution of Ono’s work. “It’s very emotional. I think that period in history sometimes for a lot of people have a lot of emotion,” said curator Noga. “I know in previous installations a lot of museums would put a box of tissues because people would cry. They would watch it two or three times.”

The interactive quality of the exhibition is a hallmark of Ono’s work and of other artists like her who came out of the Fluxus movement according to Concannon. The curators believe that regardless of whatever preconceived ideas people may have about Yoko Ono or her work, experiencing the exhibit is effecting. “I don’t think anybody leaves without sort of being changed in a way,” said Noga. “And I think that is a lot about what her art is and I think this exhibition and her work specifically, fosters that in a perfect way.”

The opening reception for the exhibition is Jan. 24 at 7:00 p.m. The reception is preceded by a lecture at 6:00 p.m. by co-curator Concannon about Ono’s work and history.