

IMAGINE PEACE

yoko ono

Cover Image

Yoko Ono *Imagine Peace*, 2007. Billboard installation, Dimensions variable.

© **Yoko Ono 2007** *Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive*

YOKO ONO IMAGINE PEACE

Featuring John & Yoko's Year of Peace

Kevin Concannon, Curator of the Exhibition

John Noga, Assistant Curator and Production Manager

Emily Davis Gallery / Mary Schiller Myers School of Art / The University of Akron

6 July – 7 September 2007

Department of Art and Art History / The University of Texas at San Antonio

26 September – 28 October 2007

The
University
of Akron

Rod Bengston, Director, University Art Galleries

Del Rey Loven, Director, Mary Schiller Myers School of Art

James M. Lynn, Interim Dean, College of Fine and Applied Arts

Published by The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, 2007. Essays copyright the authors 2007. All artworks and photographs copyright Yoko Ono unless otherwise indicated. All photographs courtesy Lenono Photo Archive unless otherwise indicated.

IMAGINE PEACE

Kevin Concannon, Ph.D.

A simple message, delivered on billboards, posters, postcards, badges, T-shirts and rubber stamps, *Imagine Peace* exists as a seed, activated individually and collectively in the minds and actions of those who encounter it. Like much of Yoko Ono's artwork over the past forty years, *Imagine Peace* is a work that is dependent upon a collective realization on the part of

her audience. As she declared in her 1972 single, *Now Or Never*, **“A dream you dream alone is only a dream, but a dream we dream together is reality.”** As is often the case with her work, this germinating idea is manifested in multiple variations.

In one such piece, gallery visitors are invited to literalize their wishes by stamping the phrase “Imagine Peace” on maps attached to the gallery walls (or tables). In this work, *Imagine Peace (Maps)*, Ono transforms the exhibition space into the antithesis of the War Room—the Peace Room. [Figure 1] Instead of generals positioning artillery, identifying military targets, and tracking the enemy, gallery visitors are prompted to express their wishes for peace, designating geographic locations to which they have a special affinity with the stamped text, “Imagine Peace,” becoming as much a prayer as a work of conceptual art.

However, the work extends far beyond the gallery walls. Billboards, posters, postcards, badges, T-shirts and rubber stamps circulate the message throughout the everyday world. In Reykjavik, Iceland, the IMAGINE PEACE TOWER [Figure 2] is currently under construction, a column of light that will contain wishes collected during the past eleven years by Ono from around the world. At a ceremony announcing the project on 8 October 2006, Ono stated: “It will be over forty years ago, when I conceived this idea of a light house made of light, and listed it in my *Conceptual Sales List*. Two hundred copies of which were sent out to people who followed my work.”¹ Ono’s *Sales List* (1965), the work to which she refers, offered the light house as one of several “architectural works,” identified in the list as follows:

E. Architectural Works (priced according to the contractors’ arrangements and cost of property)

Types: a. LIGHT HOUSE - a house constructed of light from prisms, which exists in accordance with the changes of the day.

During the Reykjavik ceremony, she told a story about the project’s early development.

In 1967, John Lennon invited me for lunch at his Kenwood residence in England. It was about six months after we first met in my Indica Gallery Show in London. He told me that he read about the Light House in my publication and [asked] if I would build one for him in his garden. “Oh that was conceptual. I’m convinced that one day, it could be built, but I don’t know how to do it.” I said with a laugh. “Oh, I thought Americans came up with something” was what he said. And that was that. I still marvel at the fact that John was touched by that particular concept in my catalog, and forty years ago at that!²



Figure 1

Yoko Ono *Imagine Peace (Maps)*, 2003.
Maps, rubber stamps, inkpads, badges. Dimensions variable.
Photo by Karla Merrifield
©**Yoko Ono** *Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive*



Figure 2

Yoko Ono *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER*, 2007.
Island of Viday, Reykjavik, Iceland.
(Artist's Rendering, 2006)
©**Yoko Ono** *Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive*



Figure 3

Yoko Ono *Parts of a Light House*, 1965.

Photo by Iain McMillan.

©**Yoko Ono** Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive

The Indica show at which Ono and Lennon first met included not only a reference to the *Light House* in the catalog, but apparently featured a related object, *Parts of a Light House* (1965).³ [Figure 3] Her description (actually a caption for the photograph) is consistent with the *Sales List*, except that here it is dedicated to Fluxus “chairman” George Maciunas. *Parts of a Light House* is simply a small cluster of crystal forms.

Much of Ono’s work during this period (and even now) is characterized by the artist as “unfinished.” While during the Indica exhibition this apparently caused some people to assume the artist was deceased, it in fact reflects her aspiration that the pieces would be constantly transformed by viewers, either physically or in a purely conceptual way.⁴ Thus the “parts” of *Parts of a Light House* was offered by the artist as a basis from which the viewer could construct the light house in her or his own mind.

For her 1967 exhibition at Lisson Gallery, she expanded the concept, listing it among “some practical and tangible future plans:”

The light house is a phantom house that is built by sheer light. You set up prisms and at a certain time of the day, under a certain evening light which goes through the prisms, the light house appears in the middle of the field like an image, except that, with this image, you can actually go inside if you wanted to. The light house may not emerge every day, just as the sun doesn’t shine every day.⁵

When completed, on the sixty-seventh anniversary of Lennon’s birth (9 October 2007), the IMAGINE PEACE TOWER, a twenty meter high tower of light, located on the island of Viday and sponsored by the City of Reykjavik and the Reykjavik Art Museum, will contain in its base wishes that the artist has collected from more than 900,000 people since 1996.⁶ While it will not “emerge” every day, it will shine on perpetually.⁷ As Ono explained, “this column of light in Iceland will not be extinguished. It is the eternal flame we send out to the world and the universe to give light and warmth.”⁸ A special mailbox for the monument will be set up in the city to continue accepting more wishes for this purpose.⁹ On the face of the tower will be engraved the lyrics to Lennon’s song, *Imagine*, inspired itself by Ono’s instruction pieces.¹⁰

The warmth and light provided to the universe by the IMAGINE PEACE TOWER is also at the heart of *Onochord* (2004), another participation piece featured in the exhibition. Consisting of an “instructional” video, the *Onochord Documentary*, and a supply of instructional postcards and keychain flashlights, participants are asked to use the flashlights to beam the message “I Love You” to one another and throughout the universe.¹¹ Ono’s variation of Morse code, dubbed *Onochord*, uses a simple series of light pulses: I (one pulse) Love (two pulses) You (three pulses). Significantly, she chooses a musical term for her instructional enlightenment. Music and light, both ethereal phenomena, are traditionally associated with love and spirituality, respectively.

As with the IMAGINE PEACE TOWER, the seed for *Onochord* is likely from another work, *Switch Piece*, featured in the 1967 Lisson Gallery exhibition. In a recollection of the Lisson show, published in 1985, Ono explained:

Switch Piece – It was a little electric bulb attached to your under or over pants or a T-shirt, that lit up only by a remote control switch which was held by another person. The person with the remote control could light up the bulb whenever he/she would like to send an I Love You message from wherever. Imagine you were at a chic cocktail party or something and your pants suddenly lit up! I liked the idea so much that I was going to elaborate on it....¹²

Themes of peace and love pervade both Ono’s and Lennon’s previous solo work. Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964), performed in London in 1966, was understood by some critics as a plea for non-violence—and seen specifically in relation to the Vietnam War.¹³ (For this performance work, audience members approach the stage, one at a time, to cut a piece of the performer’s clothing.) In early 1967, she began production of a feature-length version of *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, a film featuring an eighty-minute procession of unadorned posteriors (tightly framed and on a treadmill). An advertisement for the premiere public screening announced “365 BARE BOTTOMS Strike a blow for WORLD PEACE.”¹⁴

When Ono organized a demonstration in front of the censor’s office in London after she was refused a license for screening the film in Britain (on grounds of obscenity, specifically the “naughty bits” that dangle in the lower

center of the screen during a few scenes), she handed out flowers to passersby and told reporters about her peaceful intentions:

She talked slightly distractedly, in between distributing daffodils to passers-by.... “The whole idea of the film is one of peace,” she explained. “It’s quite harmless; there’s no murder or violence in it. Why shouldn’t it be given a certificate? Two policemen strolled up and asked us to keep the pavement clear. “What a terrible world this is when people can’t give flowers to each other,” Miss Ono observed. “I tried to give one to a policeman but he wouldn’t take it.”¹⁵

Her then-husband, Tony Cox, elaborated:

In a way you can see this film as a great gesture towards world peace. The backside is a meaningless part of the body. It is not aggressive, but it is vulnerable. The fact that people are prepared to expose it indicates that they are making a peaceful gesture. You know the phrase about being caught with your trousers down; it means being caught in a vulnerable position, and if all the world’s leaders were prepared to expose themselves like this, there couldn’t be any war.¹⁶

Ono’s all-white chess set, exhibited at both the Indica show and at Lisson, is perhaps a more obvious realization of the concept of peace in her art. Produced in numerous variations under different titles, the all-white chess set makes it all but impossible to distinguish one’s own pieces from those of an opponent. *Play It By Trust* (1966/2007), the version in this exhibition, is a modified garden chess set. Arranged on an equally monochrome playing board on the gallery floor, visitors may play an actual game of chess, as long as the opponents agree on which piece belongs to each player.

Lennon also was concerned with the themes of love and peace that predate the couple's personal and artistic collaboration. His 1965 song for The Beatles, *The Word*, reflects the emerging flower power scene and, arguably, his own nascent political activism.

Spread the word and you'll be free
Spread the word and be like me
Spread the word I'm thinking of
Have you heard the word is love?¹⁷

The track represents a decisive shift from the more conventional pop love songs, such as *I Want To Hold Your Hand*, that the group had recorded with great success up until that point. Only two years later, he would pen the classic anthem, *All You Need Is Love*, a song broadcast live and worldwide from Abbey Road recording studios in London as part of the program, *Our World*, the first-ever international live satellite broadcast. Lennon wrote the track specifically for this occasion, which had the largest television audience ever at the time.¹⁸ Performers from nineteen nations were featured; The Beatles represented Great Britain. The studio audience included pop stars such as the Rolling Stones and Marianne Faithful. Several participants paraded through the studio carrying signs that featured the word "love" in multiple languages, giving the event the flavor of a love-in and launching for many what would be known as the Summer of Love. Only a few months later, Ono would be hailed as the "High Priestess of the Happening" by the *Liverpool Daily Post*.¹⁹

In a certain sense, it was during this period that Ono and Lennon first became artistic collaborators. Ono sought Lennon's sponsorship of her Lisson Gallery exhibition that fall, which featured, among other things, a half of a room (*Half-A-Room*). The *Half-A-Room* contained half-a-chair, half-a-cabinet, and so forth, all painted white. In the exhibition pamphlet, Ono tells the now-famous story of meeting Lennon at her Indica exhibition, as well as explaining the *Air Bottles* featured in the exhibition that were credited to John Lennon and Yoko Ono. "This time John suggested how about selling the other half of my half-a-matter objects in bottles. It was such a beautiful idea I decided to use it even though it was not mine."²⁰

The following spring, their joint exhibition, *Four Thoughts*, would open at London's Arts Lab.²¹ Two weeks later, they would contribute jointly to the *National Sculpture Exhibition* at Coventry Cathedral. Within an area of a circular, white, wrought-iron garden seat in the Cathedral Garden, Ono and Lennon planted two acorns in an east-west axis. [Figure 4] Titled, *Yoko by John—John by Yoko*, the accompanying catalog featured their artists' statement: "This is what happens when two clouds meet." The Cathedral Canon, Stephen Verney, refused to allow the catalogs to be distributed, apparently because of the artists' extramarital affair. "People would not realize that the work of art was not about acorns growing into oaks, but about the artists' relationship," a spokesman offered. Lennon replied: "Of course the piece (the exhibit) is about Yoko and me. It's also about you and me and anyone else you care to mention. It's about everything and everyone. Jesus would have loved our piece for what it is."²²

Once their divorces were final, Ono and Lennon did marry. The unrelenting spotlight focused on them by the worldwide press, however, offered them little *personal* peace, even in their state of respectable matrimony. Turning lemons into lemonade, though, Ono and Lennon transformed their honeymoon (25-31 March 1969) into a happening of unprecedented international significance, the *Bed-In*.²³ [Figure 5] Following their marriage in Gibraltar, the couple announced that their honeymoon suite at the Amsterdam Hilton, would be open to the press from 10 AM to 10 PM for the entire week. The press, many of whom assumed scandalous copy and titillating photo opportunities were on offer, took up the invitation. Instead, Ono and Lennon appeared in rather conservative attire and spoke about peace for the entire week. As the *Daily Mirror* reported, "John and Yoko, who married last Thursday, took to their bed 'as a protest against war and violence in the world.' They plan to stay tucked up for seven days."²⁴



Figure 4

Yoko Ono & John Lennon

Yoko by John; John by Yoko (Acorn Event) (detail), 1968.

©Yoko Ono Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive



Figure 5

John Lennon & Yoko Ono Amsterdam Bed-In, 1969.

Photo: Ruud Hoff.

©Yoko Ono Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive



Figure 6

John Lennon & Yoko Ono Montreal Bed-In, 1969.

Photo: Ivor Sharp.

©Yoko Ono Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive

Asked by a reporter what inspired their Peace Campaign, Lennon replied:

Well, it built up over a number of years, but the thing which struck it off was we got a letter from a guy called Peter Watkins who made a film called *The War Game* and it was a long letter stating what's happening—how the media is controlled, how it's all run, but he said it in black and white, and the letter ended up “What are you going to do about it?” He said people in our position and in his position have a responsibility to use the media for world peace. And we sat on the letter for three weeks and thought it over and figured at first we were doing our best with songs like *All You Need Is Love*. Finally, we came up with the bed event after that and that was what sparked it off. It was like getting your call-up papers for peace.²⁵

Returning to London from Amsterdam, the artists announced that they would be mailing acorns, as symbols of peace, to ninety-six world leaders.²⁶ That May, they set their sights on Washington and New York. *Kaleidoscope*, an underground newspaper based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reported on their plans:

John Lennon and Yoko Ono, inseparable everywhere, will arrive in NYC later this month to give a concert with a ‘plastic band’ (plastic pillars and speakers containing tape tracks and equipment). They’ll also take a helicopter’s eye view of Manhattan and try to reach as many heads of state as possible, at the UN, to hand out their little boxes of acorns....²⁷

When the U.S. State Department indicated they were not likely to issue Lennon his visa (due to his earlier conviction in London for marijuana possession), Lennon withdrew his application and announced that he and Ono would head instead to the Bahamas for another *Bed-In*.²⁸ “During our stay in the Bahamas we will protest against violence, talk to students and send some acorns to President Nixon. I will also talk about my visa situation.”²⁹ Unwilling to suffer the heat, and recognizing that the island was further from the United States than they had realized, within twenty-four hours the couple departed the Bahamas and headed to Toronto with an entourage of technicians, planning to beam radio broadcasts to the United States. They told reporters that Canada was as close as they could get to the United States.³⁰

Ono and Lennon set themselves up at Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel between 26 May and 2 June, 1969.

[Figure 6] Ono told *Penthouse* magazine's Charles Childs: "Many other people who are rich are using their money for something they want. They promote soap, use advertising propaganda, what have you. We intend to do the same."³¹ Over the course of the week, scores of journalists and photographers, disc jockeys, and celebrities visited the artists. Radio stations throughout North America took the opportunity to interview Ono and Lennon live from the *Bed-In*. As the *Bed-In* transpired in Montreal, antiwar demonstrators in "People's Park" in Berkeley seemed poised to engage with police; over a live radio transmission via telephone link, Ono and Lennon encouraged the demonstrators to take the path of non-violent resistance, going so far as to suggest that they simply leave the park if left no other alternative. It was also during the Montreal *Bed-In* that The Beatles' *Ballad of John and Yoko* was released as a single. The ballad refers to John and Yoko's wedding, the Amsterdam *Bed-In*, and the *Acorns for Peace* project. Arriving on the airwaves and in the shops during the Montreal *Bed-In*, the song further fueled press attention.

The highlight of the Montreal *Bed-In* was the recording of the song, *Give Peace A Chance*. Abbie Hoffman, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Dick Gregory, Tommy Smothers, and dozens of others joined Ono and Lennon in their hotel suite to record this classic track as part of the weeklong event. At the 15 November 1969 antiwar demonstration in Washington DC, one of the largest ever, folk singer Pete Seeger sang the song for the quarter million people in attendance. As *Newsweek* reported:

Soon the entire assemblage was chanting the plaintive hymn—"All we are saying is give peace a chance"—over and over. The peace movement had found an anthem.

Although surprised by the sudden emergence of the song as America's peace anthem, Lennon calculated from the beginning to market "the product called peace." "It's got to be sold," he said, "to the man in the street. We want to make peace big business for everybody."

"We might not have a leader," one protester in Washington said last week, "but now at least we have a song—and a mass movement doesn't go anywhere without a song."³²

But for Ono and Lennon, their own protest had broader implications. As Ono told Charles Childs:

In fact, we don't point a finger at the U.S. because of Vietnam alone. That's very dangerous—it's misleading to criticize one particular war or accuse one particular people. It's a danger for people to start thinking, not *us* but *them*. We're trying to say everyone's responsible, Canadians, Africans, all of us. It's not just the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War is just a symbol of all the violence in the world.³³

Indeed, after months of trying to bring their *Bed-In* to the United States, Ono and Lennon launched the worldwide billboard and poster campaign, *War Is Over!* As an international pop star, Lennon certainly had experience with advertising propaganda. Ono had also previously utilized advertising media as part of her conceptual artwork. In 1965 and 1966, she produced a series of conceptual artworks for advertising spaces in art magazines—first in New York and then in London. For the March and April/May issues of the *New York Arts Calendar*, she created pieces advertising a fictional gallery, the *IsReal Gallery* (real, however, only in the minds of the artist and her readers). In both instances, readers were invited to create the pieces (circles and holes, respectively) themselves.³⁴ Clearly labeling her pieces “Concept Art” in the ads, Ono’s works preceded similar artworks in advertising media by conceptual artists such as Dan Graham and Joseph Kosuth by at least two years.³⁵ As activism colluded with performance art in the *Bed-Ins*, the *War Is Over!* campaign employed the visual economy of the billboard and Ono’s conceptual strategy of empowering the viewer to complete the work. In this instance, “the dream we dream together” is *War Is Over!* In London, New York, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam, Athens, and Tokyo, the couple commissioned posters and billboards that declared in various languages: “War Is Over! If You Want It. Happy Christmas from John and Yoko.” [Figures 7, 8, and 9]



Figure 7

John Lennon & Yoko Ono *War Is Over!* – Los Angeles
(War Is Over! If You Want It
Love and Peace/Happy Christmas
from John and Yoko).
1969 *War Is Over!* billboard campaign.
Photographer unknown.

As the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* reported, “Beatle John Lennon said from his Ascot, Berkshire, home: ‘This is part of our peace campaign. Our theme is that people have the power to stop things they don’t like. And wars must be the first thing.’ The poster idea was Yoko’s he said.”³⁶ The campaign was launched on 15 December 1969 at the Peace for Christmas concert, a benefit for UNICEF held at London’s Lyceum Ballroom. Ono and Lennon performed with George Harrison, Keith Moon, Billy Preston, and The Delaney and Bonnie Band—as the Plastic Ono Supergroup. Their two-song, twenty-five minute set featured extended versions of both sides of their latest single: *Cold Turkey* and *Don’t Worry Kyoko*. A huge *War Is Over!* banner was hung across the stage, and postcards were distributed to the audience.

Two days later, Ono and Lennon flew to Toronto to announce a peace festival that was to take place the following summer in Canada. En route, Lennon told reporters he would send the \$72,000 printing bill to Richard Nixon, adding that the posters “cost less than the life of one man,” presumably in Vietnam.³⁷ The press conference focused largely on the *War Is Over!* campaign.

“You see, advertising is the game. We would like to make our campaign as you see the ads on TV. Every time you’d turn on the TV set, you’d see ads for peace.” “If anyone thinks this campaign is naïve, let them come up with something better and we’ll join it. We’re artists, entertainers and this is our way.” The Lennons argued that although the prospects for peace might appear bleak at times, there’s no reason to give up the quest. “We keep on with Christianity although Christ was killed,” he said, “and it’s the same thing.”³⁸



Figure 8

John Lennon & Yoko Ono *Der Krieg Ist Aus!* - Berlin
(War Is Over! If You Want It
Love and Peace/Happy Christmas
from John and Yoko).
1969 *War Is Over!* billboard campaign.
Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive



Figure 9

John Lennon & Yoko Ono *E Finita La Guerra!* - Rome
(War Is Over! If You Want It
Love and Peace/Happy Christmas
from John and Yoko).
1969 *War Is Over!* billboard campaign.
Courtesy of Lenono Photo Archive

The *War Is Over!* campaign was also the centerpiece of a *Christmas Party for Love and Peace*, a major demonstration in an outdoor arena in Tokyo. [Figure 10] Ono contacted friends of hers in Tokyo about the poster campaign, which prompted them to organize the demonstration. Ono and Lennon recorded a short message in Japanese that was played at the event. Tadanori Yokoo, a popular graphic designer, created a variation of Ono and Lennon's posters advertising the event.³⁹ [Figure 11]

The *War Is Over!* campaign adopts the form of Ono's instruction pieces—a minimalist conceptualism—in which viewers “realize” the work in their minds. While her earlier *IsReal Gallery* pieces appeared to poke fun at the art world, if not the institution of advertising itself, the *War Is Over!* event worked surprisingly well as advertising. A Toronto ad agency reprinted the *War Is Over!* advertisement with the footnote: “We know a good ad when we see one,” according to *The Detroit News*. The Dutch advertising firm, Publex, hired to manage the campaign in Amsterdam, reprinted the posters, also, sending them to prospective clients with a notation, printed in English and in cursive text. The text read, “Hi Publex! Can you stick our posters in strategic spots.... Erect boards for us... all in one night?” An additional text, in Dutch, read “Beatle John Lennon and Yoko Ono were able to find us in 1969. You too??—in 1970. Best Wishes [in this context suggesting “Happy New Year!”] from Publex BV, Amsterdam.”⁴⁰ [Figure 12]

Ono and Lennon announced that they would refer to 1970 as Year One A.P. (After Peace). A calendar included in their *Live Peace in Toronto* LP (issued 12 December 1969) reflected this new designation. At the Toronto conference on 17 December (at which they also promoted the new record), they addressed not only their plans for the new calendar but also for a *Peace Station Network*:

...John and Yoko announced that they and all similarly inclined people would regard the new year not as 1970, but as Year One A.P., for After Peace.... Lennon also announced plans for a network of peace radio stations which will broadcast his Radio Peace jingles and a regular “John and Yoko Report on Peace.” Thirty-five stations have already signed up, he said.⁴¹



Figure 10

Participants in John and Yoko's Christmas party at the Hibiya Outdoor Concert Hall march to Tokyo Station, 24 December 1969.

Photo courtesy Hamada Tetsu



Figure 12

Promotional copy of *War Is Over!* poster distributed by Publex BV, Amsterdam (detail), 1969.



Figure 11

Yokoo Tadanori *War Is Over!*: A Christmas Party for Love and Peace
Called for by John and Yoko Lennon, 1969.

Poster

Courtesy Yokoo Tadanori

Recorded jingles were distributed for *Radio Peace*, and promotional spots announcing *Year One* were provided to participating stations. Mimeographed “Peace Reports” were also distributed. In January 1970, the couple placed an advertisement in *Billboard*, the record industry trade publication, for *The Peace Station Network*: “War Is Over! If You Want It. Communications can bring peace. John and Yoko Lennon warmly invite your radio or TV station to join the Peace Station Network.”⁴²

While in Toronto for the peace festival press conference, Ono and Lennon stayed with rocker Ronnie Hawkins. While there, Lennon signed 3,000 lithographs from his *Bag One* portfolio, to be issued after the holidays. Along with images of their wedding and the *Bed-Ins*, several erotic images of the couple were featured, provoking the closure of the exhibition at a London gallery in January. At the beginning of February they announced: “We are now calling it new blue peace, like they do with washing powders.”⁴³

Hawkins and music writer Ritchie Yorke became ambassadors for the *War Is Over!* campaign, traveling the globe between January and March to promote peace and the peace festival that would soon disintegrate. In Hong Kong, the pair encountered trouble: *[Figure 13]*

John Lennon’s peace campaign nearly started a border incident with Communist China recently—with the help of American rock star Ronnie Hawkins. Hawkins and a friend were on a world peace tour, and while in Hongkong it was suggested China should be told “War is over—if you want it.” So off they went, barged through the first barrier in their car to the hill-top police station and waved two signs, one in English, one in Chinese, at the Red border guards. Naturally the police were upset and rushed to tell Hawkins to leave immediately, or be arrested. They left.⁴⁴

While the primary activities of John and Yoko’s *Year of Peace* played out between their March 1969 wedding and the conclusion of Hawkins’ and Yorke’s international tour in March of 1970, Ono and Lennon persisted in their efforts. In October of 1971, they recorded *Happy Xmas (War Is Over!)* as a Christmas single. A holiday staple on pop radio to this day, the track uses the *War Is Over* slogan as its chorus. The record’s release was accompanied by promotional advertisements and T-shirts bearing the *War Is Over!* message, effectively continuing the campaign of two years earlier through commercial channels.



Figure 13

Ritchie Yorke (left) and Ronnie Hawkins holding the English and Chinese *War Is Over!* posters at the Hong Kong–China border in 1970.
Photo courtesy Ronnie Hawkins Promotions

Lennon and Ono were eventually allowed to enter the United States on temporary visas. In September of 1971, they arrived in New York to begin searching for Ono's daughter, Kyoto, who had been recently abducted by her father. Lawyers advised Ono that to secure custody, she would have to take up residence in the United States. By the time their temporary visas were about to expire, it had become evident that the couple had been targeted for deportation by the Nixon administration. Despite the fact that the deportation was clearly politically based, Ono and Lennon persisted in their peace activism. After a press conference in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service announced the granting of Ono's permanent-residence status and the denial of Lennon's, the couple's attorney held a press conference to announce their appeal. At one point during the proceedings, Ono and Lennon asked their attorney to stop for a moment. Surprising everybody, they each waved a white tissue and read a prepared declaration that was handed out to the audience:

DECLARATION OF NUTOPIA

We announce the birth of a conceptual country, NUTOPIA.

Citizenship of the country can be obtained by declaration of your awareness of NUTOPIA.

NUTOPIA has no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people.

NUTOPIA has no laws other than cosmic.

All people of NUTOPIA are ambassadors of the country.

As two ambassadors of NUTOPIA, we ask for diplomatic immunity and recognition in the United Nations of our country and its people.

YOKO ONO LENNON (with signature)

JOHN ONO LENNON (with signature)

The tissues, of course, were the white flags of their imaginary nation.⁴⁵

In the end, they both won their permanent residence status, but Lennon would be gone only five years later, a victim of the violence against which he protested. Ono has carried on the peace campaign in various ways over the intervening years. In its current manifestation, her *Imagine Peace* campaign, she has once again returned to her original form of conceptual instruction pieces—and to the medium of advertising. The *Imagine Peace* message has circulated since 2003 in its various forms. In Akron, Youngstown, and San Antonio the simple text now greets passersby on plain white billboards. Now, as then, there are those who consider it naïve. But Ono is not the only dreamer. Historian Howard Zinn, in an essay published in September 2004, addressed cynical responses to such unbridled optimism:

An optimist isn't necessarily a blithe, slightly sappy whistler in the dark of our time. To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. 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.⁴⁶

Ono still believes, **“a dream you dream alone is only a dream, but a dream we dream together is reality.”**

This exhibition is your personal invitation to join her.

¹ Yoko Ono, “Let’s,” artist’s statement distributed as part of the press packets at the ceremony, 8 October 2006.

² Ono, “Let’s.”

³ See: Ono, *Yoko at Indica*, exh. cat. (London: Indica Gallery, 1966). An image of the *Parts of a Light House* appears as an illustration. No information regarding media is provided, but it appears to be made of Perspex.

⁴ She writes, in a letter to Gene Swenson (now in the Estate of Ray Johnson), postmarked 15 November 1966, “some people called the gallery to find out if the artist was dead since the show’s titled ‘Unfinished.’”

- ⁵ Ono, "Some Notes on the Lisson Gallery Show," in: *Yoko Ono at Lisson's Half-A-Wind Show Oct. 11 Nov. 14 1967*, exh. cat. (London: Lisson Gallery, 1967) mimeographed pamphlet, n.p.
- ⁶ The wishes were primarily collected from Ono's *Wish Trees*, onto which visitors tied wishes in many of her exhibitions since then. Others were written on postcards specifically printed for mailing to the *Peace Tower*.
- ⁷ In her work *8 Architecture Pieces* (1965), Ono offers the option to build such a house using additional materials: "Build a house/with walls that come into existence/only with a particular prism effect/created by the sunset/if necessary, some walls or parts of/the walls can be made of material other/than light," reproduced in: *Grapefruit* (Lund, Sweden: Bakhäll, 2001): 242.
- ⁸ Ono, "Let's."
- ⁹ Wishes may be sent to: IMAGINE PEACE TOWER, PO Box 1009, 121 Reykjavik, Iceland.
- ¹⁰ Details of the monument's construction are taken from two sources: "Yoko Ono to create column of light for peace in Iceland," *Japan Economic Newswire* (10 October 2006) (accessed via LexisNexis Academic, 8 June 2007) and "Yoko Ono to Erect IMAGINE PEACE TOWER in Iceland," press release dated 1 November 2006 from the Icelandic Tourist Board, http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:YVZVn1XfVFUJ:www.saltmarshpr.co.uk/pr_iceland_3.htm+ono+postcards+from+iceland+saltmarsh+partnership&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us&client=safari (accessed 8 June 2007). It has often been noted that Lennon's "Imagine" took inspiration from Ono's *Grapefruit* (1964), a book of instruction pieces, many of which ask the reader to "imagine."
- ¹¹ As of 20 September 2006, the *Onochord* video can be accessed at: www.a-i-u.net/onochord_doc.html.
- ¹² Ono, [Comments on the Lisson Show for *Yoko Only*], *Yoko Only* #8 (1985): 15.
- ¹³ See, for example: Brenda Jordan, "DIAS," *Resurgence* (November/December 1966): 19.
- ¹⁴ Advertisement (clipping) for *No. 4 (Bottoms)* from an unidentified periodical in the artist's archives, probably July or August 1967.
- ¹⁵ (A Staff Reporter), "Bottomless Indignation of Miss Yoko Ono," *Times* (London) (11 March 1967). The demonstration took place on 1 March. Ono had previously performed an event during which she distributed flowers on the streets of Tokyo in 1964. Curiously, the term "Flower Power," generally associated with 1960s peace movement, would not be coined until the following year, by poet Allen Ginsberg.
- ¹⁶ Quoted in: Ivor Turnbull, "The Strange Arts of Yoko Ono," *London Look* (18 March 1967): 32.
- ¹⁷ John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "The Word," on the LP *Rubber Soul* (London: EMI Records, 1965). Copyright Northern Songs. While it was customary for Lennon and McCartney to take joint credit for whatever either of them wrote for the Beatles, this track is generally acknowledged to be primarily a Lennon track.
- ¹⁸ *Our World* was broadcast 25 June 1967.
- ¹⁹ Gillian Linscott, "The High Priestess of the Happening," *Liverpool Daily Post* (3 October 1967).
- ²⁰ Ono, "Some Notes...", n.p.
- ²¹ The exhibition opened on 28 May 1968. Surprisingly, there was scant coverage in the press.
- ²² John Lennon, [Letter to Canon Verney], excerpt published in: Michael Housego, "Beatle John Attacks Canon in Arts Show Row," *Daily Sketch* (London) (16 July 1968).
- ²³ For further information on the *Bed-In*, see: Kristine Stiles, "Bed-In for Peace," in: YES YOKO ONO, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and the Japan Society of New York, 2000): 172-73.
- ²⁴ "Beatle John and Yoko are forced out of their £20-a-day bed by Maria, the hotel maid," *Daily Mirror* (London) (27 March 1969).
- ²⁵ Toby Ian, "Sounds," *The Detroit News* (19 February 1970). The article recounts a press conference announcing the *War Is Over!* campaign held in Toronto on 17 December 1969.

- ²⁶ “Acorns Galore for Lennon,” *Daily Express* (London) (18 April 1969).
- ²⁷ “Other Scenes—Lennon & Ono in New York City,” *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) (23 May-5 June 1969): 9.
- ²⁸ The drug found in the artists’ flat was in fact cannabis resin (actually, hashish). The U.S. law that obstructed Lennon’s path to a visa specifically prohibited those with marijuana or narcotics possession charges from entering without waivers. The couple’s attorney considered appealing the denial based on this distinction, since Lennon was not technically charged with ‘marijuana’ possession.
- ²⁹ Lee Dembart, “Lennon Sends Acorns Instead of Himself,” *New York Post* (24 May 1969).
- ³⁰ “John Lennon, Wife Arrive in Toronto,” *Pembroke Observer* (Ontario) (26 May 1969).
- ³¹ Charles Childs, “Penthouse Interview: John and Yoko Lennon,” *Penthouse* 1, no. 2 (October 1969): 28.
- ³² “The Peace Anthem,” *Newsweek* (1 December 1969): 102.
- ³³ Charles Childs, “Penthouse Interview: John and Yoko Lennon,” *Penthouse* 1, no. 2 (October 1969): 32.
- ³⁴ For more information on Ono’s adworks, see my “Nothing IsReal: Yoko Ono’s Advertising Art,” in: YES YOKO ONO, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and the Japan Society of New York, 2000): 176-97.
- ³⁵ Artist Ray Johnston had actually advertised his own fictional gallery, the Robin Gallery, the previous year. For more information on artists using advertising as a medium for conceptual art, see my: “Advertising and the Artist’s Multiple,” *Grouper 2* (Summer 2005) (a special issue of the magazine published by Publico alternative space, Cincinnati, as the catalog for the *Multiple Strategies* exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati): 7-16; and my: “Fluxus and Advertising,” *Performance Research* 7, no. 3 (2002): 55-63.
- ³⁶ “Cities get the Lennon message,” *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* (15 December 1969).
- ³⁷ “Herguth’s People,” *Chicago Daily News* (17 December 1969).
- ³⁸ “Beatle John Lennon Sells Peace,” *News* (Framingham, Mass.) (7 January 1970).
- ³⁹ For a more thorough account of the Tokyo event, see my: “War Is Over! John and Yoko’s Christmas Eve Happening, Tokyo, 1969,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 17 (2005) Center for Intercultural Studies and Education, Josai University: 72-85.
- ⁴⁰ A copy of this “Publex” version surfaced on a Dutch internet auction site in 2005. Thanks to Ronald Teunissen van Manen for the translation. While the English text implies it was written by Ono or Lennon—or one of their staff members—the fact that the Dutch text appears in the same handwriting and ink suggests otherwise.
- ⁴¹ Ritchie Yorke, “John, Yoko, Pop, and Peace,” *Chicago Today* (17 January 1970).
- ⁴² [The Peace Station Network] (Advertisement), *Billboard* (24 January 1970): 49.
- ⁴³ James Brewer, “Now John and Yoko plan a peace campaign that’s bluer than blue,” *Liverpool Daily Post* (5 February 1970).
- ⁴⁴ “Pop,” *The Northern Echo* (19 February 1970).
- ⁴⁵ The press conference took place on 1 April 1973, April Fools Day!
- ⁴⁶ Howard Zinn, “The Optimism of Uncertainty” *The Nation Online* (posted 2 September 2004), accessed on 26 May 2007 at www.thenation.com/doc/20040920/zinn. Shortly after its publication, Ono distributed a link to his essay in an email to friends.