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# 45 years after John and Yoko's Year of Peace, Fort Myers gets its own billboard



Tom Hall, 2014



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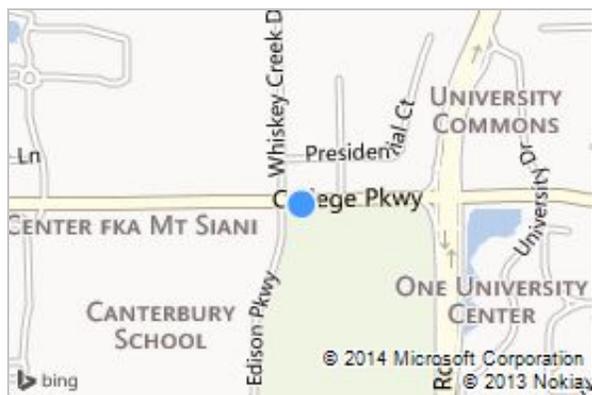
After their marriage in 1969, Yoko Ono and John Lennon embarked upon a Year of Peace that featured "bed-ins" and billboards erected in cities around the world that read "War is Over! If You Want It," which they later simplified to "Imagine Peace." Fort Myers wasn't one of the towns where Yoko and John stopped. But 45 years later, Fort Myers finally has its very own Imagine Peace billboard, and in addition to peace, it touts the coming *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* interactive art exhibition, which opens January 24 at the **Bob Rauschenberg Gallery** on the Lee campus of Edison State College.

The Rauschenberg exhibit promises to be a gallery happening. That's the nature of Ono's conceptual art. Every piece is infused with



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highly participatory, viscerally interactive, theatrical content that induces visitors to not only connect with the art, but with each other as well. And that's part of Ono's artistic message. Each of us is interconnected through the power of our imagination with each other and a higher universal scheme. Whether you label it cosmic law or something more religious does not matter. What's important to Ono is that the people who come to *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* get to experience that interconnectedness.

But for that magic to work, people first need to hear about the exhibition and become intrigued or excited enough to come. Which, of course, is the chief purpose of the billboard on the east side of Cleveland Avenue, right next to Drive Time Used Cars. Two words. Twelve letters. Framed against a clear cerulean blue background that's just a touch darker than the Southwest Florida blue skies.

The billboard doesn't mention the exhibit. It doesn't say anything about the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. It simply invites commuters to Imagine Peace. Word of mouth, articles in newspapers and magazines, grassroots initiatives by local artists and Google Search will do the rest.

But admittedly, the slogan will work on each viewer on both a conscious and subconscious level. What would it be like not having to hear the news, oh boy, about more soldiers and civilians being maimed or killed in Afghanistan? Or a vet with PTSD taking his own life? Or the life of someone else? And dare we imagine peace from gun violence, economic oppression or

the lack of effective health care?

That's the beauty of conceptual art like Yoko Ono's. She cedes control to you. You - and the people you view her art with - get to decide what you see, how you feel and what you take away from each individual piece and the exhibition as a whole.

*Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* is curated by Kevin Concannon and John Noga with the support and involvement of the artist. The installation at the **Bob Rauschenberg Gallery** has been configured in collaboration with Yoko Ono to reflect the Gallery's mission and role as a learning laboratory on the campus of Edison State College in Fort Myers, Florida. The exhibition opens at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, January 24, with a Gallery Talk by co-curator Kevin Concannon scheduled for 6:00 p.m. in the Rush Auditorium in Building J.