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6 Points Mentioned

Rauschenberg Gallery reopens with Yoko Ono's conceptual art

BY NANCY STETSON nstetson@floridaweekly.com



ONO

Yoko Ono believes in the power of ideas.

"An idea is so important, and then sharing is so important," she says. "So many people sharing one idea and doing it together is incredible. There is something so much more powerful about it."

When that happens, she says, "The planet's going to shake a little."

On Jan. 24, the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Edison State College in Fort Myers reopens with "Yoko Ono Imagine Peace."

"It invites viewers to be participants," says John Noga, cocurator of the show with Kevin Concannon.

"They become part of the work. That's part of the magic. It's not just something you observe, it's

something you participate in.

"I look at a lot of contemporary art," Mr. Noga adds. "I stand in front of great paintings, historical work, and they affect me and move me. But there is something about work you have to participate in. Your thinking is accompanied by an action. It's like a seal: to think about it, but to then have an action.

"I think it harkens back to the Fluxus movement. These very simple actions of everyday life can make you reconsider your existence, and that's exactly where her work comes from," he says about the avant-garde Ms. Ono, an early pioneer in conceptual art.

For example, "Mend Piece," newly revised for Fort Myers, consists of white globes broken in shards. Viewers are invited to help put the world back together again, using glue, tape, twine.

"You see, when you're mending the globe, you're thinking of mending the world," Ms. Ono says. "That's the catch. You're doing it."



Workers install Yoko Ono's message of peace along U.S. 41.

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Judging art: Florida Weekly looks at the work of National Art Exhibit's juror Carl Samson.

A VIEW FROM THE PUMPS HYBRIDS: FUTURE, FAD, OR FAILURE FIRST OF A SERIES.

As fuel prices inched their way up towards \$5.00 a gallon, not so many years ago everybody had only one thing on their mind. Saving fuel meant saving money. Preventive maintenance related services were in demand, so long as we, the service providers, could show a real return on investment. So many vehicles were in such disrepair, that to show a 10% increase in fuel economy, or a 10% drop in fuel consumption, meant a \$50 discount in the price of fuel. This is all still true today but for some reason saving a mere \$3.50 a gallon is not quite as impressive as saving \$50. The irony of it all is that people have been brainwashed to sleep at certain grocery stores to save just pennies on a gallon rather than maintaining their vehicles to garner that savings at every fill up instead of just once a month.

But we're not here to talk about that just yet, maybe during a later article. Hybrids are not new to the automotive industry. The first hybrid automobile as we know it appeared in the year 1898. It was a front wheel drive vehicle that had a small "internal combustion engine" that will referred to as ICE that powered a small electric generator to run 2 electric motors located on the front wheel hubs. It had a 40 mile range when running on battery power only. Its inventor and designer was Du. Ferriard Ponce, age 23. In 1900 a Belgian company built and marketed a vehicle that had a small ICE that ran an electric motor that was under the seat. The electric motor was actually a generator that kept the batteries charged except on heavy loads, such as climbing grades the ICE actually was used to give the electric motor a boost. The patent holder for this vehicle was a company named Pequet. Since 1906-1912 a Belgian manufacturer, Auto-Moto, used these patents to build commercial vehicles.

Now I can go on and on and you'll get bored and turn the page, so the history lesson is over. But, the very point that I was trying to point out is that the idea of combining an ICE and an electric motor for maximum performance and economy is not new.

If you look at the picture it's very evident that the confirmed mode of energy

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**in the know**  
**'Yoko Ono Imagine Peace' exhibit**

>> **When:** Jan. 24-March 29  
 >> **Where:** The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Edison State College, Fort Myers  
 >> **Cost:** Free  
 >> **Info:** (239) 439-9313 or www.bobrauschenberggallery.com  
 >> **Note:** Lecture by co-curator Kevin Concannon 6 p.m. Jan. 24 in the Rush Auditorium, J Building, opening reception 7-9 p.m. in the gallery. Regular gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

The show is the first at the Rauschenberg gallery under the guidance of Jade Dellinger, who became gallery director in September.

"She's revisiting an old piece, but making it new for us," says Mr. Dellinger. In the 1960s, Ms. Ono did "Mend Piece" using broken cups. "This is the first time ever she's using globes," he says.

The artist has also written a new text to accompany the work.

"She does a version, sometimes as an interactive gallery piece, and sometimes as a performance piece," explains Mr. Concannon, who'll lecture about Ms. Ono's art on opening night of the exhibit at ESC. "Fairly often, when she does a lecture or a performance event, she will take an

existing pot, smash it in the middle of the performance or lecture, and invite members of the audience to come and take a piece, (saying,) 'In 10 years we'll get together and put it together again.'"

**Always with humor**

Ms. Ono says she knew she was an artist when she was 3 or 4 years old.

"No one would believe that, but I was creating things, and saying, 'I need to share this with the world,'" she says. "I would think, 'Why don't we put this seed of plum and seed of peach in together, and bury them in the garden? Maybe it will come out a peach plum.'"

"My art is a conceptual thing. It comes very naturally to me."

Some of her work doesn't even exist physically, only in the mind or the imagination.

What inspires her to create?

"I don't know," she says. "I get the inspiration, and I don't want to keep it in my mind. I think it's better to dish it out, that's all."

Her work is imbued with whimsy and a sense of the absurd.

"Humor is there in life," she says, explaining why it's prominent in her work. "That's a part of life. It's very important."

She and her late husband, the Beatle John Lennon, met at the Indica Gallery in London in November 1966, just before her one-woman show, "Unfinished Paintings and Objects," opened.

A version of "Play It By Trust," one of the pieces in that 1966 exhibit, is in the show coming to the Rauschenberg gallery. It consists of a lawn-sized chessboard, with pieces and board painted all white. The original instructions: Play it for as long as you can remember who is your opponent and who is your own self.

"It shows the futility of conflict," Mr. Dellinger explains. "After you move pieces a few times, you lose track of which side you're on."

A new interpretation of Ms. Ono's "Parts of a Lighthouse" will also be featured in the show.

Mr. Lennon, intrigued by the idea of a house made entirely of light, wanted to purchase the work for his garden after seeing it listed for sale at the Indica Gallery, Ms. Ono says.

"I said, 'I can't do it because I don't know how to,'" she told him.

However, on Oct. 9, 2007, she made that concept reality with the Imagine Peace Tower on an island outside of [Reykjavik, Iceland](#). The work is a tower of light that rises a mile into the sky and is lit from Oct. 9, Mr. Lennon's birthday, through Dec. 8, the day he was shot.

"It was a bit slow," Ms. Ono says. "It took a long time to do it, but John pushed the piece. "It was the first piece of mine he liked that he wanted in his garden."

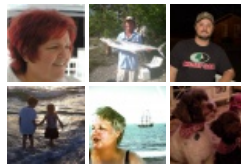
The Imagine Peace Tower light is also turned on for Ms. Ono's birthday. (She turns 81 on Feb. 18).

"These days, they do it for me, which is very sweet," she says.

A 19-minute video that tracks the making of the tower from conception to completion can be viewed as part of "Yoko Ono Imagine Peace" at the Rauschenberg gallery. Also on display will be the original sales list from Ms. Ono's 1966 show at the Indica Gallery.

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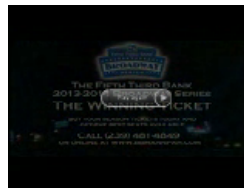
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was the electric motor and not an ICE. As a matter of fact a poll taken at the 1900 National Automobile Show in New York City showed that the motoring public preferred electric powered vehicles slightly more than steam engine vehicles with the internal combustion engine powered vehicle as a third choice.

Enter the 20th Century, fuel is at its highest cost since the beginning of time, the economy is faltering and people are holding on to every last penny as hard as they can. The United States is reeling from CARR, Global Warming, Carbon Footprint, Tree Hugger and conspiracy theorists. From 1900 to 1950 almost every automobile manufacturer released articles, papers and prototypes of fuel electric and hybrid vehicles trying to find the perfect combination. In 2000 Toyota mass produced and marketed the Prius in the United States, promising clean air and unheard of fuel ratings in the world. In 2002 Honda also joined the fray with the Insight. Both vehicles promised 50+ miles per gallon, clean air and a smaller carbon footprint than any other vehicle in the world at that time. As fast they were "tree huggers", without many amenities and were somewhat under powered. Vehicles sold in the snow and sun belts could not maintain the heat or air conditioning demands without the engine running almost all of the time, which seriously hampered the "promised" economy ratings. As battery technology improved along with the technology of computer controlled strategies and improvements made in the waste reduction, low drag body shapes, low metal and more plastic or carbon fiber in the body panels and interiors, low rolling resistance tires and have all helped in keeping that magical mpg rating in the 50+ zone.

So as we ramp into the 21st century are these reworked designs and ideas going to save the American consumer or run him into bankruptcy?

Will these vehicles free us from foreign oil, or fill our land fills with unrecyclable batteries and substitute our oil consumption from fuel to plastic?

Stay tuned for part 2.  
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And in the gallery's alcove will be "Parts of a Lighthouse," which incorporates 55 glass tetrahedral prisms and light to create a house of light.

Three ficus trees will comprise the "Wish Tree" piece. Viewers can write a wish on a shipping tag and hang it from a tree. Throughout the years, hundreds of thousands of wishes have been collected from people worldwide and placed at the base of the light tower in Iceland.

The wishes at the Fort Myers exhibit will be collected and hand-delivered by three ESC students in an all-expenses-paid trip to Iceland, accompanied by art professor Dana Roes. Mr. Dellinger will announce the names of the students at the show's opening.

### A map to peace

Much of the work in the exhibit is white.

When asked why, Ms. Ono explains, "Because then you can put any color you want on it. It's very hard if you have a definite color, (such as) bright red. But white gives you an opportunity to give something that you want."

Possibly the most colorful piece in the exhibit is the "Imagine Peace Maps." Domestic maps line one wall: one of the United States, one of the state of [Florida](#) and a local one showing a radius of 25 miles from the gallery.

On an adjoining wall hang four maps: one of the Middle East, a world map, a map of Africa and a map that includes China, Russia and India.

Viewers are invited to take a rubber stamp and stamp the words "IMAGINE PEACE" on them.

Mr. Noga recalls seeing his sister and brother-in-law at the inaugural exhibit in [Akron, Ohio](#).

"Her husband is a great guy, stoic, doesn't say too much," Mr. Noga says. "I said, 'Dave, are you going to stamp the map?' He said, 'Probably not.' But then later on, I saw him ... stamp 'Imagine Peace' on [Lebanon](#), because he's half-Lebanese. That's the power of Yoko's work ... I never asked him about it. I like not knowing what made him change his mind.

"(Maybe) he thought, 'Maybe this doesn't mean something, but what if it does mean something?'"

"It's her invitation to reconsider ideas, and consider ideas you haven't thought about and integrate them into your life for a change."

Ms. Ono's work attracts a diverse crowd of viewers, some of whom only know the artist because of her husband. Others are familiar with her work.

"All these diverse people ... leave changed because of their experience," he says. "It alters their knowledge of her, and of themselves and of the world."

He acknowledges that some criticize Ms. Ono's work as being too simplistic, too naïve.

"I think we underestimate the power of simplicity in things presented," he says. "We almost doubt simplicity. Things in our world have become so complex, we cast a leery eye toward simplicity. But I think that in simplicity sometimes there is great truth, and also great impetus for change."

It can be easy to look at her work and think, this is simple, it's not going to affect me, he says. "But it's pretty powerful."

The maps, which start out pristine, become so blackened with the words "Imagine Peace" that it is difficult to distinguish one country from another.

When that happens, "It's very beautiful," says Ms. Ono.

She recalls an incident that happened at the Venice Biennale.

"People from Eastern Europe, very serious people, said, 'Look, I can't find my village.' They said, 'Oh, Yoko, my village was there, but with the war, they took it away.' They were very upset about it. It's a very interesting thing that happens. He was trying to put the rubber stamp where his village once was, but it wasn't on the map anymore (because war had obliterated his village.)

"That's the kind of thing you discover, when you go through the map. That's why we don't want war: it just makes my village disappear."

### Public art in place

One of Ms. Ono's pieces can be seen in Fort Myers on U.S. 41, south of [Colonial Boulevard](#). The "Imagine Peace" billboard, which went up on New Year's Eve, shows a blue sky with a single white puffy cloud and the words "IMAGINE PEACE" in white. Underneath, in smaller letters, it says "Yoko Ono 2014."

The billboard contains no mention of ESC, the gallery or the exhibit — because it's not an advertisement but a public art piece. If anything, it could be considered an "advertisement" for peace.

Ms. Ono and John began using billboards for peace in 1969 by putting the words "WAR IS OVER (IF YOU WANT IT)" on billboards in major cities, cleverly using a form of mass communication used to sell products to "sell" something far more valuable and rare: peace.

According to Mr. Dellinger, Ms. Ono likes to say, "A dream you dream alone is just a dream, but a dream we dream together is reality."

"This has been her message, a constant theme," he says. "She sees herself as a pragmatist, not as an optimist. It's really, for her, about collective action, changing our reality by all dreaming the same dream."

"I think that the dream does come true," Ms. Ono says. "In the beginning there was the word. And the word, I think, is 'Imagine.'" ;



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