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Fort Myers' wishes for peace to be added to Imagine Peace Tower in Iceland



Tom Hall, 2014



Thomas Hall
Arts & Exhibits Examiner

January 27, 2014

Yoko Ono Imagine Peace opened January 24 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in Fort Myers. While each of the works included in the show are highly interactive, Ono's *Wish Tree* involves participants on multiple psycho-social levels.

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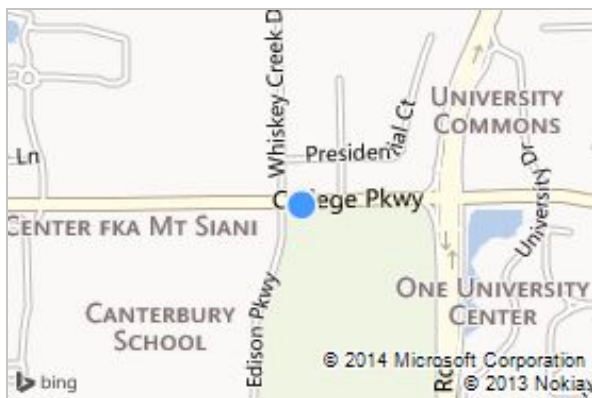
Wish Tree has been a cornerstone in Ono's exhibitions since her introduction of the concept sometime in the early '90s, and so co-curators Kevin Concannon and John Noga and new Director Jade Dellinger installed two ficus trees inside the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery to serve as receptacles for wishes scribbled by visitors on shipping tags that have been provided for that purpose. Virtually every one of the 896

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8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers, FL 33919



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people who attended last Friday night's opening reception took the time to attach their written wish to a branch. As Yoko intended, most were visibly affected, not only by the exercise of formulating and writing out their personal wish for peace, but by the collective effort codified by the growing bloom of tags covering each tree.

"By inviting people to make a wish and to place it on a tree branch, [Ono] compels the viewer/participant to really focus on what's central to his/her life and determine whether this is as meaningful as it should be,"

observes NY Art Examiner Daniel Gauss.

"Some people have written frivolous things, some people make political statements (I saw: "Down with the patriarchy!" written on one slip) but many people express thoughts directed to others who are hungry, homeless, impoverished, suffering injustice/cruelty or in need of some type of assistance. Of course, after making the wish, the participant is also tacitly invited to question what exactly is stopping this wish from coming true. Is it political? economic? racial? Each person is invited to reflect on the extent to which he/she can and cannot take action to make this wish a reality. Each person is, in fact, invited to begin to take action again, on

whatever level, to spread peace and justice throughout his/her community."

Yoko herself likens this to a collective prayer.

"As a child in Japan, I used to go to a temple and write out a wish on a piece of thin paper and tie it around the branch of a tree. Trees in temple courtyards were always filled with people's wish knots, which looked like white flowers blossoming from afar," she has explained in interviews.

Many cultures have wishing trees, where believers make votive offerings in order to gain fulfillment of their wish. For example, there is a hawthorn tree in Argyll, Scotland where hundreds of coins have been hammered into the trunk and branches in hopes that wishes for fertility will be granted by the spirits or faeries associated with the tree.

The practice of tying pieces of cloth to a wish tree is often directly associated with nearby cloutie wells, as they are known in Scotland and Ireland. Locals and visitors in Hong Kong write wishes on joss paper, tie them to oranges and toss them into two banyan trees known as the Lam Tsuen Wishing Trees. Legend states that if the paper sticks to one of the branches, that wish will come true.

In the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Centre Scotland, people ties their wishes for the environment to wish trees located there. In a related cultural tradition found in many places, including the United States, supplicants hurl shoes into trees that are locally designated as wellsprings of good fortune.

Not all of Ono's *Wish Trees* are associated with larger exhibitions of her work. For example, a *Wish Tree* has been installed in the sculpture garden **at New York's Museum of Modern Art**, with another being placed **in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C.** But no matter where or why the *Wish Tree* appears, the wishes attached to their branches are destined for interment inside the base of the **Imagine Peace Tower** on Videy Island in Kollafjörður Bay near Reykjavík, Iceland.

In the early days, Yoko collected the wishes herself and either took them or sent them on to Reykjavik.

"I never read any of them," she told Hans Ulrich Obrist in a 2002 interview. "I feel it's not right to read people's private wishes." But now, she encourages curators and exhibitors to send

their wishes directly to the Tower. In fact, the website she's created for the tower provides both an email address (**wish@imaginepeace.com**) and post office box (IMAGINE PEACE TOWER, P.O.Box 1009, 121 Reykjavik, Iceland) for this very purpose.

To date, the wishing-well base of the Imagine Peace Tower holds more than a million wishes from people across the globe, and the wishes collected during *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* in Fort Myers will be added to them. However, they won't be mailed to shipped to Reykjavik. Funds are being raised on campus to send three Edison State College students to Reykjavik after the exhibit ends so that the wishes visitors attach to the Wish Trees during the course of the Rauschenberg Gallery exhibition can be hand delivered.

"I hope Imagine Peace Tower will give light to the strong wishes of World Peace from all corners of the planet and give encouragement, inspiration and a sense of solidarity in a world now filled with fear and confusion," Yoko writes on the tower's website. "Let us come together to realize a peaceful world."

If you want your personal wish for peace to be included with those taken by the Edison State College delegation to Reykjavik, you have until March 29 to visit *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the Lee campus of Edison State College. During the exhibit, gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday (closed Sundays and holidays). For more information, please telephone 239-489-9313.

"All my works are a form of wishing," notes the artist. "Keep wishing while you participate."

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