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Yoko Ono 'Imagine Peace Maps' are visualization tool for imagining world peace



Tom Hall, 2014



Thomas Hall
Arts & Exhibits Examiner

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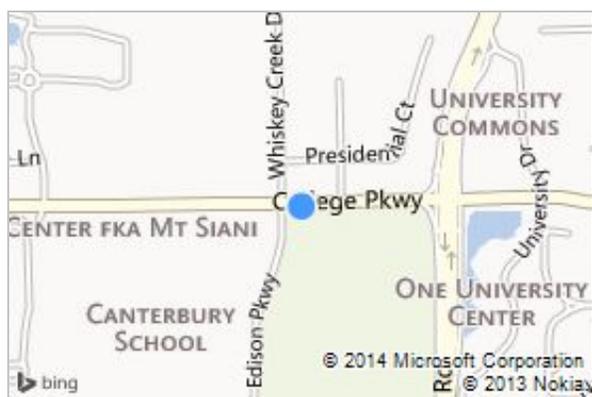
January 29, 2014

Yoko Ono has been advocating for peace through art and activism for half a century, and yet it's hard to imagine a spot on the globe where peace and love reign supreme. Afghanistan, Algeria, the Basque region of northern Spain, Burma (site of the world's longest and most complex ethnic conflict), Burundi, Columbia, Congo, Chechnya, Gaza, Iran, Iraq, Israel, the Ivory Coast, Kashmir, Lebanon, Nepal, North Korea, Palestine, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Syria are just the biggest, latest and most volatile war zones on the planet. But many of the 896 people attending the opening of *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* on January 24 bypassed these locales, opting instead to stamp the words "Imagine Peace" on places within the



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8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers, FL 33919



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United States, Florida and right here in Lee County.

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Ono's *Imagine Peace Maps* installation doesn't impose any strictures or mandates on those who interact with it. Yoko merely provides maps, rubber stamps and ink pads. It's then up to the viewer to engage the participatory piece in whatever manner they wish.

For example, neither the artist nor the art installation impose any definition of the word *peace*. Last Friday night, some people chose to stamp obvious sites such as Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea. But others inked places like New Town, Aurora, Scottsdale, Columbine, Virginia Tech and Detroit, where gun violence has torn at the fabric of American society and embroiled citizens and

politicians in an on-going argument over gun rights, civil rights and more effective treatment for people facing mental health challenges. And several chose their own homes and hometowns, opting to conflate peace with inner harmony, balance or freedom from domestic violence.

But *where* the stamp landed wasn't really the point of the exercise.

"I lost my best bud there," an unsteady voice informed, referring to a shooting victim who died in a town like any other in America. "Three guys in my unit were killed here by an IED

(improvised explosive device)," said someone else, pointing solemnly to bit of arid, rocky terrain somewhere in the Middle East. My brother. My son. My wife. My mom. So many in last Friday night's crowd had lost loved ones to war, gun, domestic and other forms of violence, and that dawning realization converted what started out for most as a purely personal experience into a group interaction. We're not alone. We're all affected. Imagine peace. Imagine the contributions the lost would have made to our lives had there been peace

Ono's pieces work that way. They evoke powerful emotions, be it loss, sadness, hope or determination. The latter also best describes the artist herself. Although world peace remains as elusive as ever, Ono continues to urge her fans, 4.5 million Twitter followers and people new to her work and political activism to continue to imagine peace. She operates from a place of unyielding, unshakable conviction that if enough people imagine peace long enough, their commonly-held dream will one day become a global reality. Visualizing creates that reality, and her *Imagine Peace Maps* installation is a powerful tool for enabling people to envision peace in places where people presently only see conflict.

It's a powerful psychic principle, but to experience it, you have to place your own stamp on the map. *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace* is on view now through March 29 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."

Suggested by the author

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