

# IMAGINING PEACE



## Yoko Ono

Written by Deborah M. Colton

**Y**oko Ono, an artist, composer, poet, celebrity, activist, a visionary who believes if you dream the same dream with others, that dream can turn into reality...and the power she places in simple words to uplift humanity has reached billions of people worldwide.

Her belief in the power of the mind to create good through positive visualization is an art form she perfected from her fluxus-conceptualist background since the sixties. Imagine.

Yoko Ono's use of various public space media to produce positive antiwar messages started with the creation of her first billboard art

piece, *WAR IS OVER! IF YOU WANT IT*, with her husband John Lennon in 1969, whereby this public space art was posted in over 12 cities worldwide to protest the war in Vietnam. The concurrent Bed-In for Peace events where John and Yoko received visitors while lying in bed during their honeymoon took place in Amsterdam and again in Montreal, making their wedding a celebration of hope for peace throughout the world.

In Houston, Yoko Ono's art has been visible for years now. Ironically, at the time of the September 11th, 2001 tragedy, Yoko Ono had a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (July

13th to September 16th) titled *Y E S YOKO ONO*, which featured the *WAR IS OVER! IF YOU WANT IT* billboard prominently displayed in the installation. This profound and comprehensive exhibition debuted at the Japan Society, New York, from October 18, 2000 to January 14, 2001 and then toured to many art institutions in the United States and other countries. After September 11th, 2001, there is no doubt the exhibition took on a whole new dimension of meaning to all viewers in the world.

Since then Yoko Ono has been a leader in the PEACE movement through her art and music in all continents, with many important projects about to unfold this fall.

## Ono, we asked:

What excites you the most about this movement and your current work?

**For me, *IMAGINE PEACE* is the most important movement now.**

How do you feel consciousness and ideas about peace have shifted in the last 10 years?

**We are all wanting World Peace as soon as possible!**

What is the most vulnerable part of living your art?

**I don't think it is vulnerable at all. Living *IMAGINE PEACE* is a very powerful thing to do.**

What is at the heart/essence of why you create?

**I create because I love to.**

What's the most powerful thing an individual can do to promote peace personally and globally?

**An individual must decide what is the most powerful thing for he/she to do.**

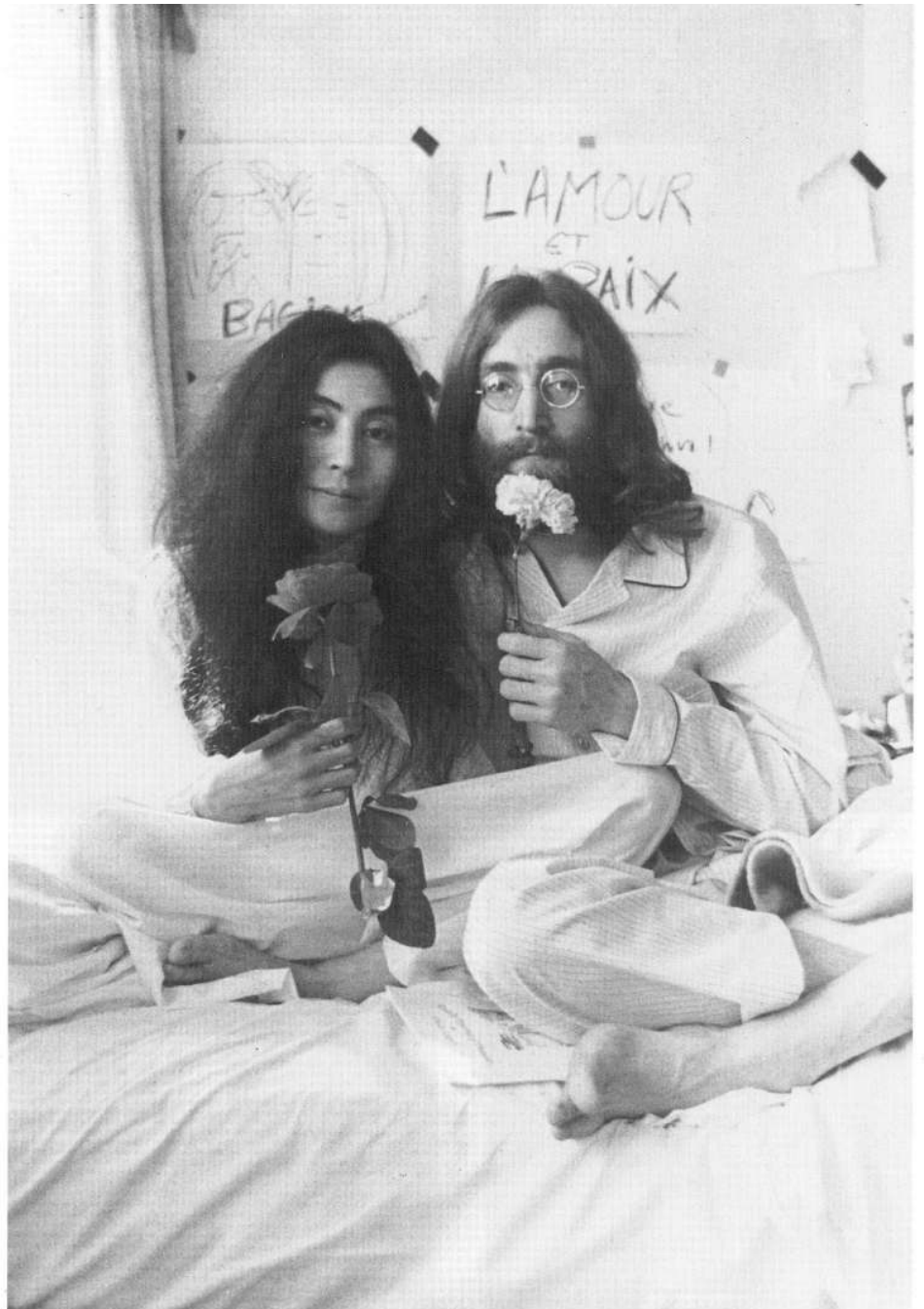
Why are these simple words received in such a powerful, profound way?

**Because the most important thing for us to do is usually quite simple... like breathing.**

Interview by Maranda Pleasant

Yoko Ono produced the *IMAGINE PEACE* billboard for New York City in 2001, responding to the September 11th, World Trade Center tragedy. Deceptively simple with its basic black and white palette, the billboard engages the thoughts of the viewer on an almost subliminal positive level, inevitably provoking discussion of current events. At a time now when the news, movies and video games often draw audiences into seductive worlds of warfare, Ono continues to offer us a refreshing reversal and positive perspective.

The *IMAGINE PEACE* billboard first came to Houston, September of 2006 in



Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Montreal Bed-In, 1969, Photo by Ivor Sharp, ©Yoko Ono

conjunction with the Deborah Colton Gallery's *WORD* show on a large commercial billboard going into downtown Houston at the intersection of I-45 and I-10. The unveiling of the *IMAGINE PEACE* billboard caught Houston by surprise. Within days, all local TV stations were featuring the billboard, as was the written press. At the time when national security and airport checks were tightened even further in September of 2006, the Gallery received literally hundreds of phone calls and emails with people emotionally touched by what those two simple words did for the tone of the city, with many people wanting to contribute to making this public space art billboard a permanent installation.

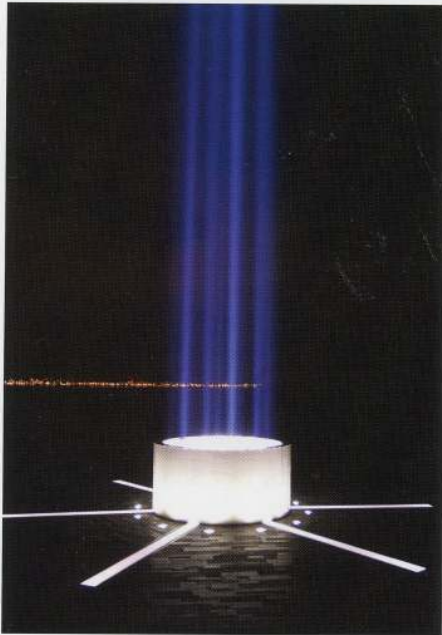
Since then, Yoko Ono's PEACE movement has grown even stronger. In 2007 Yoko Ono unveiled *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER*, which is located at Viðey Island in Reykjavík, Iceland and is dedicated to her late husband John Lennon. Yoko Ono shared her affirmation, "The *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER* will give light to the strong 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. Let us come together to realize a peaceful world." *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER* will be lit this year from **October 9th - December 8th and December 21st - 31st, 2011.**

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Yoko Ono, *WAR IS OVER!*, Billboard, Times Square, New York, 1969, © Yoko Ono



Yoko Ono, *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER*, Videy Island, Reykjavik, Iceland, Photo by TetsuRo Hamada, Courtesy of Yoko Ono

Yoko Ono participated in the opening ceremony for the 2006 Winter Olympics reading a poem calling for peace in the world. She continues to exhibit her installation *Wish Trees* in different cities all over the world - asking the audience members to contribute their wish to help heal our planet. Eventually



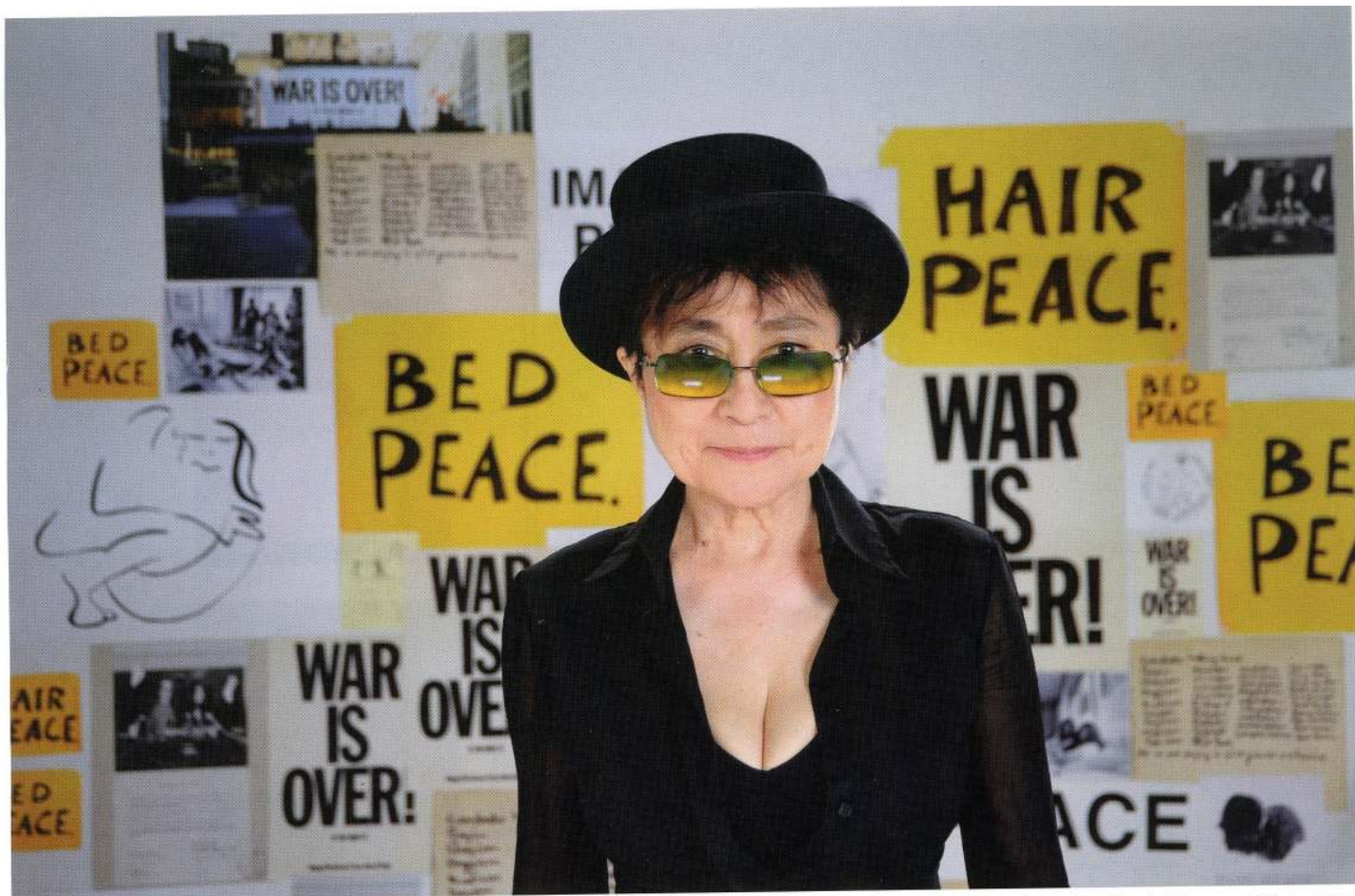
Yoko Ono, *WAR IS OVER!*, Taxi top ads, New York, December 2009, Sponsored by Art Production Fund, © Yoko Ono

all of the wishes from *Wish Trees* will be collected and they will be incorporated into *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER* in the future. There are now over a million collected wishes from all over the world. Yoko Ono recently received the Hiroshima Art Prize and opened her exhibition *THE ROAD OF*

*HOPE* at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art in Japan. She also has exhibited in the Yokohama Triennale in Japan and in the upcoming September 11 Group Show at PS1.

In Houston, on the **5th of September** this fall, in anticipation of the 10th anniversary





Yoko Ono, Photo by Kevin Mazur, © Yoko Ono

of 9-11, the provocative artwork *IMAGINE PEACE* will be unveiled on a commercial billboard along highway I-45 and I-10 East going into downtown Houston, in the same place as in 2006. We are sponsoring the billboard again, in Houston, in conjunction with the Colton & Farb Gallery *Positive Perceptions* exhibition that Yoko Ono is included in. With a size of 14 by 48 feet, the starkly visible billboard will be seen by thousands of commuters everyday bringing and unexpected art experience to the daily commercial environment.

It is a delight to be working with Yoko Ono and bringing the *IMAGINE PEACE* billboard to the city of Houston again... the fourth largest city in the country where the arts are strong, dynamic, entrepreneurial and vibrant. Ono's ability to subvert advertising for the purposes of art demonstrates the power that conceptual art can have.

The billboard and the exhibition reveal that art is free for those who will engage with it in their minds and their hearts and helps bring more positive connectivity into our world's human condition. *IMAGINE PEACE* speaks on so many levels: peace in your own being, peace in your relationships and global peace. It comes back to John Lennon's song, "IMAGINE." It's simple but powerful. It's not confrontational but it's about promoting



positive change. This art piece, like the others in our *Positive Perceptions* exhibition, reveals that through our collective optimism and open-minded perspective, we CAN all make a positive difference in the world, just by relating to each other with the right attitude.

Above: *IMAGINE PEACE* Billboard, Houston, Texas, 2006