

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on March 14, 2014

Yoko Ono. Half-A-Wind-Show — A Retrospective

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In today's difficult economic climate, companies must carefully weigh every decision when it comes to choosing the projects in which they invest their resources.

Here at Seguros Bilbao and Fundación Jesús Serra, we have never doubted the need to get on board with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, given its dual importance as a leading cultural center and flagship of the new Bilbao, which is why we have faithfully supported this institution ever since its doors first opened over 16 years ago.

For this same reason, we have also participated in singular exhibitions such as the current show dedicated to Yoko Ono, responsible for bringing one of the greatest cultural icons of our time to Bilbao.

We are therefore delighted to continue our tradition of sharing and supporting the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's enthusiastic promotion of art, in all its myriad forms, and its efforts to connect with audiences of every age and background.

Iñaki Álvarez
CEO, Catalana Occidente Group

Yoko Ono. Half-A-Wing Show – A Retrospective

- Curators: Ingrid Pfeiffer, curator Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, curator Museo Guggenheim Bilbao; Jon Hendricks, curator Yoko Ono Exhibitions
- Dates: March 14 – September 1, 2014
- An exhibition of Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in cooperation with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
- Sponsor: Seguros Bilbao

In celebration of Yoko Ono's eightieth birthday in 2013, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao welcomes a unique retrospective of one of the most influential artists of our times—a living legend who holds a special place in contemporary art, music and experimental film—[*Yoko Ono. Half-A-Wind Show – A Retrospective*](#) from March 14 to September 1, 2014.

The exhibition, sponsored by Seguros Bilbao, includes nearly 200 pieces throughout the entire third floor of the Museum. Visitors will discover more than five decades of creativity, from the mid-1950s to the present, in the multi-faceted artistic universe of Yoko Ono. The exhibition includes some of her most recent creations, as well as a new version of the installation and performance *Moving Mountains*.

Yoko Ono (B. 1933, Tokyo) has been recognized as one of the most outstanding avant-garde artists for over sixty years. She is a pioneer in many of the artistic fields to which she has dedicated her life, and is considered to be one of the precursors to conceptual art, film and performance art. She is also a key figure in the music world, having produced numerous albums over the years.

As you travel through the third floor of the Museum, you are led through the artist's diverse spectrum of mediums used throughout her extensive career: from plastic arts to drawings, poetry, film, music, installations, video and performance art, among others. The heterogeneous shapes and mediums of her work challenge conventional ideas of art and raise questions that are essential to the human existence.

This fascinating journey delves into the main recurring themes and ideas that have driven her career, including her belief in the power of the imagination, her political commitment, her sense of humor and the absurd, her sensitivity to global conflicts, and the role of women in society. Ideas inspired both by her own life and universal questions have driven her to adopt a prominent position at the forefront of movements such as peace and feminism.

Yoko Ono's work is based on ideas, some of which are manifested in the form of objects while others remain immaterial, enriched by certain traditional Asian elements. A poetic dimension can often be denoted in her work—a subtle sense of humor and an attitude of social criticism anchored in concepts of unity, trust, and balance.

Yoko Ono's *Instructions* are the starting point for many of her pieces; the artist's verbal and written scores invite viewers to execute both unrealistic and plausible actions, thereby giving the observer an active role in the process, encouraging them to participate and delve further into self-reflection and the mind's potential.

The word "Participate" that appears next to some of her pieces is Yoko Ono's direct invitation to interact with her art. Such is the case with *En Trance* (1998/2013), an architectural installation with a rotating glass door and a beaded curtain that welcomes the public to the exhibition.

First installations, films, and objects

Born in Tokyo in 1933, Yoko Ono spent her childhood in Japan and America. In 1952, she moved with her entire family to the U.S. to attend Sarah Lawrence College, outside New York. In the late 1950s, after completing her studies in creative writing and contemporary poetry, she became involved in the avant-garde life in New York City. At this time the artist was first recognized for her innovative experimental pieces of conceptual and performance art. The first part of the exhibition features photographs and films of her first performances and texts, including some of the artist's physical artworks.

Ono's *Instructions for Paintings*, written in 1961 and 1962, her celebrated 1964 performance of *Cut Piece*, and the book *Grapefruit*, a collection of instructions published in 1964, are all still relevant today. These poetic pieces double as a manual for encouraging artistic production, and have all contributed to the definitive consolidation of Yoko Ono as part of the Japanese and United States' avant-garde. She was influential in the formation of the Fluxus movement, which was founded by artist, designer, architect, and gallerist George Maciunas.

On July 16, 1961, the artist inaugurated her exhibition *Paintings & Drawings by Yoko Ono* at the AG Gallery in New York. The exhibited pieces have little in common with conventional paintings except for the format. These "paintings" consist of pieces of unstretched canvas painted with Japanese ink and installed on the floor, such as *Painting to Be Stepped On*, or hung near the windows and on the walls of the room. The artist at times provided verbal guidelines on how visitors could interact with the paintings, such as dripping water in *Waterdrop Painting*, and using your imagination in *Painting for the Wind*. The Museum displays George Maciunas's original photographs of the exhibition.

Following is *Ceiling Painting*, a piece that was first presented in 1966 at Ono's exhibition at the Indica Gallery in London. With this piece, the artist invites viewers to mentally climb to the top

of a white ladder, where a magnifying glass hangs from a chain attached to a frame on the ceiling. Using the magnifying glass, viewers will discover the instruction: “YES.” This was the piece that brought Yoko Ono and John Lennon together—he was so moved by the positivity of this piece that he asked to be introduced to the artist.

Half-A-Room (1967) and *Air Dispensers* (1971) are next on this journey. The first piece is a room in which all the objects, from the suitcase to shoes, have been cut in half and painted white. The background theme is the bisection of the physical and psychological, which Ono considers to be a condition of the human existence. *Air Dispensers* features a candy dispenser filled with seemingly empty capsules. Instead these plastic containers are filled with something valuable—air—which, according to the artist, is “the only thing we share.”

Important Performances

The exhibition continues with a section dedicated to performance art, a discipline in which Ono is revered as a renowned pioneer. In fact, she is considered to be one of the most relevant personas in the so-called “golden age” of performance art.

After three years in Tokyo, Yoko Ono returned to New York 1964 and immediately immersed herself again in the artistic life of the city. In 1966, she participated in *Destruction in the Arts Symposium* (DIAS) in London, an international event organized by Gustav Metzger and others that brought together prominent artists from around the world.

This room displays diverse documentation of her most renowned performance, *Cut Piece* (1964), which was performed for the first time in Kyoto in 1964 and considered to be a milestone in the history of performance art. For this piece, the artist invited members of the audience to go up on the stage where she is kneeling or sitting, and were invited to cut pieces of her clothing with a pair of scissors.

One of the artist’s impressive actions was *Lion Wrapping Event* (1967), which consisted of wrapping up one of the four enormous lions in London’s Trafalgar Square. Her first attempt, using paper, was stopped by the police. The second try, with cloth, was successful because the artist claimed that the wrapping of the lion would become part of a film. This performance was considered a political statement, as she had covered up a typical symbol of the British Empire.

The Museum will also exhibit materials documenting the piece *Museum of Modern (F) art* (1971). In this extremely ironic, subversive piece, the artist created an imaginary individual exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York by publishing an advertisement in the American newspaper *The Village Voice*. In a 7-minute-long film called “The Museum of Modern (F) art” pedestrians were asked whether they had seen the Yoko Ono exhibition at the museum. Most people answered along the lines of: “No, but I plan to.” Yoko Ono wanted to call the public’s attention to the fact that the museum held very few art exhibitions dedicated to women artists during that period.

Experimental film

Ono's films have also made a significant contribution to art history in recent times. After her first artistic experiences with music and performance art (some belonging to the Fluxus movement), the artist began making film scripts and conceptual films in 1964. By 1972, she had produced a total of 19 films, some in collaboration with John Lennon.

Her underground film proposals reveal the artist's concern for recurrent themes in her life's work, including the body, women's rights, and her personal quest for inner freedom. The Museum features important pieces such as *Rape* (1969), filmed in London in collaboration with John Lennon. For this film, a cameraman and a sound technician follow a young woman selected at random from the street and stalk her for two days, apparently filming her without her consent, provoking intense reactions of despair.

In the same room, visitors will encounter Ono's renowned film *Fly* (1970), which focuses on a close-up of a fly walking on a woman's naked, unmoving body. This piece offers viewers the opportunity to discover strange, unique "body landscapes" from the perspective of an insect.

Film No. 1 (Match Piece) (1966) depicts the simple process of a match burning in the foreground in slow motion, being consumed by the fire, a simple phenomenon that nonetheless radiates a transcendental meditative quality when seen up close. This piece can also be interpreted in a figurative sense: the brevity of human existence that bursts forth, burns briefly, and is finally extinguished.

Installations and recent work

The journey continues through a series of large-scale installations created over the past few decades and a series of recent pieces, including *Water Event* (1971/2013). Yoko Ono originally created this piece for her first retrospective at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse in 1971, inviting her friends to participate with the following message:

"Yoko Ono wishes to invite you to participate in a water event by requesting you to produce with her a water sculpture by submitting a water container or idea of one which would form half of the sculpture. Yoko will supply the other half – water."

Nearly 120 people collaborated on this work of art, including artists such as Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Willem de Kooning, composer John Cage, musicians like John Lennon and Bob Dylan, and actor Jack Nicholson. The water containers they provided were extremely varied, from George Harrison's milk bottle to Robert Watts's Volkswagen. Visitors can see the new version of the piece in Bilbao, which includes contributions from artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Christian Marclay, Pilar Albarracín, Txuspo Poyo, Asier Mendizabal, and Vasco Araujo, among others. Water represents a broad range of meanings and metaphors for Yoko Ono. It is a universal resource that is necessary for our survival and, as such, a symbol of egalitarianism. It is

also the most prominent component of the human body and, therefore, represents us in a certain sense.

The installation *Telephone in Maze* (1971/2011/2013) can also be seen in Bilbao, which consists of a maze of plexiglas leading to a cubicle at the center. This central space is built with a one-way mirror, allowing the people inside to see outside while remaining partially hidden to the outside world. There is a telephone in this booth that Yoko Ono occasionally calls to talk to members of the public. Ono's interest in architecture dates back to the early 1960s or even the 1950s. By playing with the viewer's perception and physical orientation, the piece is intended to provoke an unexpected experience.

This same gallery features the powerful *Balance Piece* (1997/2010), an installation that recreates a room with a powerful electrical magnet attached to the wall on the left side. The artist explores ideas that are essential to Zen Buddhism in this piece, such as the quest for "mental balance" – an attempt to achieve a middle ground between oppositions and self-awareness.

A series of 21 photographs with 21 textual pieces entitled *Vertical Memory* (1997) completes the room, bringing us along a vital journey from birth to death. The artist created this series by "putting together photographs of my father, my husband, and my son. I selected photographs of them facing the same direction, overlapped them and morphed it. Every photo represents the man who was looking over me in a precise moment when I went through an important situation in my life."

Architecture and representing nature

Another room in the Museum, shaped like a petal, features two dramatic installations, which were conceived as two separate pieces although they have occasionally been shown together due to their complementary nature: *Morning Beams* (1996/2014) and *Riverbed* (1996/2014). In *Morning Beams*, one hundred white nylon ropes suggesting sun rays emanate from the gallery's ceiling down to the floor, where they are anchored with sailing knots.

The same space also features a piece of a very different nature: *Blue Room Event* (1966). This creation is based on words written by Ono on the walls of the room, with the intent of subverting our normal perception of space. These *Instructions* include the following: "Stay until the room is blue./This window is 2000 ft. wide./This room is bright blue./This room slowly evaporates every day. /This room glows in the dark while we are asleep."...

Our journey through Yoko Ono's installations ends with a new version of *Moving Mountains* created especially for this exhibition. This piece invites the public, either individually or cooperating with other people, to enter the bags to form mobile sculptures in the room, all to the sound of Yoko Ono's song *Moving Mountains*, from her album *Between My Head and the Sky*.

The exhibition ends with a space that is entirely dedicated to the artist's music, with videos, concert recordings, CD and LP covers, concert posters, and broadcasting stations playing her music, including Yoko Ono's collaborations with her son Sean, among others. In 1970, *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band* was released, marking a milestone in her ongoing musical career.

Dream, fly, imagine

Yoko Ono is famous for using urban spaces as an extension of her exhibition space. A series of billboards will be placed at select points throughout the city for the exhibition in Bilbao. The artist has chosen the following messages: "DREAM," "FLY" and "IMAGINE." These words can be interpreted as a thoughtful poetic break from the bustling life of the city.

Catalog

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has published an exhibition catalog in Spanish, edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein in collaboration with Jon Hendricks. The catalog includes essays on cultural aspects of Yoko Ono's work, written by Jon Hendricks, Ingrid Pfeiffer, Alexandra Munroe, Kerstin Skrobanek, Kathleen Bühler, and Jörg Heiser, as well as a selection of texts by Yoko Ono and an illustrated chronology.

Didactic space

A didactic space has been designed to complement the exhibition, which depicts Yoko Ono as a seminal artist. Key concepts of her artistic production, such as *Instructions*, performance art, activism, and participation, are presented through texts, images and videos.

Cover image

Yoko Ono

Walking On Thin Ice (video still), 1981

© Yoko Ono

For more information:

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Press Images for
Yoko Ono: Half a wind-show. A Retrospective
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Online Photo Service for Press Images

At the press area (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en) you can register and download high resolution images and videos featuring the exhibitions and the building. Sign in to get access. If you are already a user, log in here (you need your username and password).

For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

1. *Add Color Painting*, 1960/1966

Paint, newspaper, tin foil on canvas

40 x 40 cm

Private collection

© Yoko Ono



2. *Ceiling Painting, Yes Painting*, 1966

Text on paper, glass, metal frame, metal chain, magnifying glass, painted ladder

Ladder: 183 x 49 x 21 cm, framed text: 64.8 x 56.4 cm

Private collection

© Yoko Ono



3. Advertisement for *Museum of Modern (F) Art*, 1971

Published in Village Voice, December 2, 1971

Private collection

© Yoko Ono



4. Filmstill from *Film No. 4 (Bottoms) Fluxfilm No. 16*, 1966

16mm film transferred to digital, black and white

Silent

5min 30 sec

Private collection

© Yoko Ono



5. Filmstill from *Fly*, 1970

Performed by Virginia Lust

16 mm film transferred to digital

color with sound

25 min

Sound track by Yoko Ono

Private collection

© Yoko Ono



6. *Fly*, 1996

Billboards

Dimensions variable

Private collection

Courtesy of Yoko Ono



7. Yoko Ono and John Lennon performing *Bed-In for Peace*

Hilton Hotel, Amsterdam, March 25-31, 1969

© Yoko Ono



8. Yoko Ono and John Lennon

War Is Over!, 1969

Billboard installed in Times Square, New York

© Yoko Ono



9. *Walking On Thin Ice* (video still), 1981

© Yoko Ono



10. Yoko Ono in *Half-A-Room*

Lisson Gallery, London, 1967

Photo by Clay Perry

© Yoko Ono



11. *Cut Piece*, 1965

Performed by Yoko Ono

Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, March 21, 1965

Photo by Minoru Niizuma

Courtesy of Yoko Ono



12. *Morning Beams / Riverbed*, 1996

Installation view, Israel Museum, 2000

Photo by Oded Löbl

© Yoko Ono



13. *Sky Piece to Jesus Christ*,

Performed piece for orchestra

Performed by Yoko Ono, La Monte Young (conductor), and the Fluxus Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, September 25, 1965

Photo by Peter Moore © Barbara Moore/Licensed by VAGA, NY



Educational activities

Creative sessions for adults *ACTIVATE YOUR MIND*

Participate in a series of workshops that pay tribute to Yoko Ono. Each action is inspired by a key word given by the artist. Check the Museum website for more information.

- Thursday May 8. *Imagine: Follow the instructions!* Workshop inspired by Ono's book *Grapefruit* and the instructions included in the book to create artworks.
- Thursday May 15. *Dream: Moving Images!* Photography and video workshop where human body will be the focus.
- Thursday May 22. *Fly: Waving flags!* Everyday objects will be transformed to send a message to the world.

New education areas and Zero Espazioa. 6–8 pm. Tickets only available on the website for April 8: €15 general public /€12 Museum Members. Ages 18 and over.

Tour

Discover the highlights of an exhibition, the behind-the-scenes work, and curious details about the exhibitions on special tours led by museum professionals.

Curatorial Vision :

Wednesday March 19: Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Key Concepts:

Wednesday March 26: Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Education and Interpretation

Meeting point: Information Desk. Time: 6:30–7:30 PM. Tickets: €3, €2 Members (price of admission not included). Activities sponsored by Fundación Vizcaina Aguirre

Docents:

Throughout the exhibition this docents will give you information on the artist and her work. Tuesdays–Sunday, until June 29. 11 am–2 pm.