MAP PEACE

Colorthe map
with your heart.

I love you.
Yoko
December 2014

YOKO ONO
ONE WOMAN SHOW
1960–1971

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The Museum of Modern Art, New York
sculpture, then it's because of its mode of display—inviting viewers to go around it—and its three-dimensionality. The work is also, however, a readymade item—an object chosen, rather than created, by the artist. To complicate things further, it is a perishable item that requires replacement with every new showing. Not only does the fruit-as-artwork thus resist fetishization and commodification, but our focus shifts from the apple to the action of choosing it and displaying it to the public. As a result, each presentation of Apple should be regarded as a unique and singular performance of the work. This piece encapsulates precisely what makes Ono's art so essential to our time: its capacity to always be in the present and to never make us look back.

NOTES


2. Ibid.


5. Ibid., p. 28.

6. Barbara Moore, e-mail to Francesca Wilmott, August 6, 2014.


In a sketch from 1971, part of a book of ideas for a possible one-woman intervention at The Museum of Modern Art, Yoko Ono drew images and wrote directives for an imagined exhibition called Posternity Show (fig. 1). Over the course of four frames and in the description that accompanies the drawings, Ono lays out her vision for a participatory work that would progress as the evening unfolded, in which "the backside of every person who attended the opening was photographed for world peace." Illustrated by renderings of a variety of cropped cheeks hung on a wall, the text continues, "They were instantly blown up to appropriate size and exhibited in the posterity showroom." Ono's speculative piece (written in the past tense, as if it had already happened) incorporates and annexes the presumed spectators of the show, putting them, and their vulnerable bodies, on display. Along with providing simple renderings of their naked forms from behind, she labels some of her potential subjects: Salvador Dali, Truman Capote, Jacqueline Onassis. One frame shows a photographer at work with his camera and tripod, and Ono explains that the pictures would later be aggregated into wallpaper for purchase, with proceeds benefitting the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, "ere spelled UNISEF.").

With this unrealized project, Ono crystallizes her unique brand of corporeal institutional critique—akin to what Chrisiss Ives has dubbed the "erotic conceptualism" in Ono's film works—as she conjures bare buttocks, upended museum protocols, and global politics. Playing on the close proximity of the words posterity and posterior, Ono offers a raucous alternative vision of a future art world that is concerned with de-hierarchizing the artist, stripping down the audience, and securing world peace. These were issues she dealt with often, as in previous works like her instruction paintings and scores; her billboard project WAR IS OVER! (1969— , pp. 200—203), conceived with John Lennon; and films including the two works titled Film No. 4 (1966—77; pp. 184—87), compilations of ambulating asses that she considered "a petition for peace."

In Posternity Show, Ono blurs the public/private division, "onioning in, uncovering, and celebrating a body part often associated with shame, excrement, and scatology; the divide is further complicated when, according to Ono's plan, the built pictures enter the realm of the domestic as decorative wallpaper. Art historian Mignon Nixon astutely grasps the double nature of Ono's utilization of the derrière, noting that Film No. 4 is both "hypnotic and sweetly sixties" as a reminder of "a decade of love" as well as a "performance of a mock march." Infantile but also militarized, the roaming backsides are a fraught locus of innocence, pleasure, and sensuality, but also disgrace, training, and parental discipline. In Freudian language, a fixation on the anal is an indication of psychological devolution or a "return from a higher to a lower state of development." Ono's bodies advance as they regress, a rejection of Freud's terms and an implicit embrace of one of the least gender-specific erogenous zones (neither breast nor genitalia). Evoking looping bodily rhythms, oscillations between past and present, swerves away from strict linearity, flabby reminders of physical processes that are not predicated on a male/female binary. Ono's forward march of behinds prefigures and modulates what French theorist Julia Kristeva would, later that decade, call "women's time."
In another drawing from Ono’s 1971 sketchbook (fig. 2), labeled “people who attended the opening,” we see a cast of celebrity characters that includes Jackie O flanked by two bodyguards, Dali and two female friends (the three appearing to have arrived already naked). Richard Nixon smiling from his presidential car, and Andy Warhol surrounded by his superstars. A flag reading “Museum” delimits the otherwise unelaborated setting. The notebook is brimming with musings on how to make the Museum’s architecture and contents more irreverent, with a decidedly feminist bent, including thoughts about using art as a household object (making a Henry Moore piece into a diaper hanger, for instance, a version of Marcel Duchamp’s suggestion to turn a Rembrandt into an ironing board), dressing sculptures in drag, and staging a large-scale adaptation of Ono’s legendary performance Cut Piece (1964; pp. 106–9), in which the audience would cut off each other’s clothes. These drawings provide a glimpse into Ono’s own process, with her wide-ranging ability to reimagine assumptions about how art and art objects and spectators are expected to function within institutional contexts. They also indicate that The Museum of Modern Art, in 1971, was understood (not least at its exclusive openings) as a gathering place for the rich, the famous, and the powerful, a destination for those renowned in culture as well as in politics, who came to be seen as much as to see the art. “Clever move,” Ono notes about Nixon, whose arm is raised in his signature gesture.

FARTS

In November 1971, Ono launched her piece Museum Of Modern Fewnętr (pp. 289–13), which centered on a conceptual exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. She advertised the show in The Village Voice and the New York Times, including a mail-order form for the catalogue, priced at one dollar. The ad (fig. 3), reproduced on the cover of the catalogue, features a manipulated photo in which Ono has placed the Museum’s name on an awning above the main entrance, using a structural indentation to create a large gap between the last two words. The image appears to catch the artist at a moment when she strolls by below the gap, which is symbolically filled by the big “F” on a shopping bag she carries—the institution thus being renamed the Museum of Modern Fart.

Held from December 1 to 15, 1971, without the Museum’s consent, the exhibition involved a man wearing a sandwich board who walked outside the entrance on 53rd Street from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. wearing a sign that read:

flies were put in a glass container the same volume as yoko’s body the same perfume as the one yoko uses was put in the glass container the container was then placed in the exact center of the museum the lid was opened the flies were released photographer who has been invited over from england specially for the task is now going around the city to see how far the flies flew the files are distinguishable by the odor which is equivalent to yokos join us in the search observation flight 12/71

Midway through the two-week duration of the piece, the man wrote to Ono cataloguing some of the reactions he received, noting that “the majority of believers were between ages 17–25, the majority of skeptics are between 35–55.” He included a more detailed breakdown of age groups and their responses, mentioning, for instance, that those between twenty-five and thirty-five were “the most violent . . . indeed quite lavish with their expletives as I tried to explain. Indeed, one even tried to put me through the window before I cleverly muttered some nonsense about karate.” The correspondence indicates a couple of things: one, that this man, perhaps predictably, met with a spectrum of sympathies and hostilities toward Ono (or, more precisely, toward a nonexistent show advertised as actual), and two, that he was not a passive or silent sign-carryer but an active part of the reception of the piece as he conversed with those on the...
sidewalk, eliciting their responses. A seven-minute documentary, *The Museum of Modern Art Show* (1971), captures responses of pedestrians who thought they might see Ono’s exhibition, and contains brief interviews with visitors amused, angry, and perplexed to discover that no physical show existed. The content of the exhibition was in fact the sum of the Museum’s changing staff, 1972 text: “The Feminization of Society,” serves—the audience’s comment as much as the artist’s intervention, were the work—with Ono suggesting that the line between artist and audience is arbitrary, and attempting to level the discrepant valuations it produces. “Democratization was a goal as well as a starting point for Ono’s art,” observes Midori Yoshimoto.13

The *New Yorker* referred to the ad and signboard, with their “mixture of cleverness, sentimentality, coyness, sweetness, satire, and mystification,” as “typical of her work.”14 But far from merely iterating her own ethos, Ono was working within arenas of Conceptualism that sought to move art beyond the walls of the institution by turning to advertising, fake or inaccessible exhibitions, and signage woven on the body. Such arenas included Dan Graham’s and Adrian Piper’s uses of the magazine page, Robert Barry’s *Closed Gallery Piece* (1969), and Daniel Buren’s striped Sandwich Men walking the streets of Paris in 1968.15 Like Ono, Piper chose *The Village Voice* as her venue, placing her first ad in 1969 and in 1973 commencing a project in which she published a series of almost-monthly ads that interrupted the announcements of gallery exhibitions to broadcast her internal (ostensibly private) thoughts, including enigmatic disclosures of desire. Dressed in sunglasses, a mustache, and a wig, Piper appears in the guise of her persona the Mythic Being, with hand-drawn thought bubbles containing excerpts from her personal journal floating up from her head.16

In addition, throughout the preceding decade, artists had taken up signs and post- ers outside of museums to make critical points about the role of taste-making and exclusionary practices. In 1963, artist Henry Flynt and filmmaker Jack Smith picketed *The Museum of Modern Art* (as well as *The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art*), with demands to “DEMOLISH ART MUSEUMS,” and “DEMOLISH MUSEUM CULTURE” (fig. 4), part of Flynt’s campaign to reevaluate individual assessments about art and throw off what he considered dictatorial decisions made by elite curators. Starting in February 1968, art critic Gene Swenson marched daily in front of MoMA, alone, holding up a blue question mark to signify his discontent with the institution’s policies and ideologies.17 In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the museum—MoMA in particular—was a charged and contentious site of political activism, understood as one of the front lines of leftist organizing against racism, sexism, classism, and the war in Vietnam. Critic Hilton Kramer summarized the situation in 1974, saying: “Of all the institutions that currently preside over the conduct of our cultural affairs, none confronts more vexing problems than our major cultural institutions. The museum has more and more become ‘one of the crucial battlegrounds upon which the problems of democratic culture are being decided.’”18

At various moments during this era, the sidewalk outside MoMA seethed with demonstrators, including women artists marching for greater gender inclusion; members of the Black and Puerto Rican Emergency Cultural Coalition, railing against the whitewashed walls of the museum; and protesters wanting nonwhite artists be built; participants in the first strike of the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA-MoMA); and members of the Art Workers’ Coalition protesting against the role played by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a Museum board member, in the brutal suppression of the Attica prison riots (fig. 5). Some change of the rhetoric is wanted representation, but they also wanted to change the entire system of valuation upon which the Museum rested (and many went on to form alternative art organizations).

To what extent Ono, an antiwar, nonwhite feminist, might have sensed affinity or sympathy with these various causes is an open question, but it is nonetheless notable that her sandwich-board man came on the heels of this intense period of agitation at the foot of the Museum’s door, and thus the work is in dialogue with the visual rhetoric not only of advertising but also of dissent. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Ono made a number of bold feminist statements in a variety of mediums, including her 1969 film “Rape” (a collaboration with Lennon); her song “Sisters, O Sisters” (performed in December 1971 at a benefit concert for the Attica uprising); and her 1972 text: “The Feminization of Society,” serves—the audience’s comment as much as the artist’s intervention, were the work—with Ono suggesting that the line between artist and audience is arbitrary, and attempting to level the discrepant valuations it produces. “Democratization was a goal as well as a starting point for Ono’s art,” observes Midori Yoshimoto.13

Indeed, Ono’s exhibition, read as a guerilla insertion by a woman of color with a white man standing in as her paid surrogate to deflect blows and absorb complaints, a vulgar, odorous eruption that violates standard practices of museum respectability. With her Museum Of Modern (F)art project, Ono, as matter “out of place” in the institution, harks back to the assas of Postentry Show, reveling in the base, messy, embarrassing, and personal, and demonstrating the opposite of prim art-world comportment. Ono’s interest in low bodily functions has been linked to Fluxus impresario George Maciunas’s own scatological inclinations, as seen in his design for her thirteen-day dance festival in 1966 (pl. 59). This grid of images includes, among other vignettes, a man either farting or shaking the words “DO IT YOURSELF FLUXFEST PRESENTS” and a finger inserted into an anus. However, Ono’s embrace of leaking, inappropriate bodies can also be placed in dialogue with other explicitly feminist practices of the same time that were concerned with excretions, such as Judy Chicago’s *Red Flag* of 1971, a photolithograph of a woman pulling a red-hued tampon out of her vagina. Though farting is gender-neutral (and prohibitions about passing gas in public apply to all), menstruation is not, and Chicago’s work startlingly exposes a ritual that is constantly performed by women but very rarely depicted. “Menstruation has been so concealed as to invite the violation of the taboo,” notes feminist critic Lisa Tickner.21

The polluting cloud of gaseous bad air proposed by Ono’s “fart” is riffed on, and inverted, by photographs taken by Iain Macmillan and the artist and compiled in the accompanying catalogue, which claim to document the performed flies that Ono has released in the Museum’s Sculpture Garden. An image constructed by photomontage depicts Ono standing in the garden beside a large glass container dense with inserts. (The photograph component of this image had been cut out of the samehesive for her 1968 exhibition at Indica Gallery, London [pp. 158–63].) In the next image, she is nowhere to be found, and the container is almost empty, with flies trickling out of its thin neck (pl. 96). Instead of carrying associations of waste and bad smells, the flies Ono magines releasing are sweetly scented with Ma Griffe (the perfume bottle is shown nearly half-full in one photograph and closer to empty in another, as if to constitute proof that it was used to anoint the flies), as they alight within and beyond the museum building. Flight, flying, and the wordplay possible between the noun and verb forms of “fly” had long fascinated Ono, as evidenced by works including her 1963 instruction that states, simply, “fly” and her 1970 film *Fly* (pp. 204–7), which shows flies landing on and navigating a woman’s body.

In the *Museum Of Modern (F)art* catalogue, she uses flies as a narrative device for a series of 138 photographs that acts as a rambling travelogue through the city, with the fly in each frame pointed out with a crisp white or black arrow (pl. 97). (That they are in the photographs at all is as much a matter of faith as the rest of the project; purporting to release something that is unseen in the final images, Ono’s piece can be compared to Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* from 1969.) The flies meander through the galleries, flitting near works by Picasso and Matisse, and
eventually head out to the street, making appearances at public parks, churches, office buildings, bridges, empty lots, artists’ studios, and construction sites. Some of the images are off-liner postcard views of New York, showing familiar sites, such as the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the skating rink at Rockefeller Center, the twin towers of the World Trade Center near completion. Others portray less “picture perfect” aspects of city life, with men sleeping on benches, graffiti, firefighters gathering at a crisis, and crowded shop windows on Canal Street and in Chinatown. One exceptional sequence of five photos focuses on a group of young boys posing with full awareness of the camera as they cluster around a wooden cross and mug for the lens (arrows directing us to the files appear only in the last frame), but most pictures seem to have been taken candidly, unknown to the people in them.

Each photo with an arrow is adjacent to a postcard that shows a detail of a fly (numbered), so that the viewer might send the file even further beyond the bounds of the book. As Ono put it, “All the pages are postcards that you could mail, so the catalogue and Fly piece could fly all over the place.”22 Given its varied affective tone, its persistent return to some locations, and its hybrid inclusion of everything from considered landscapes to intimate interiors to street snapshots, the photo book might be situated somewhat uneasily within what has been perceived to be the central rubric of conceptual photography, such as that of Douglas Huebler or Hans Haacke, in which the camera is used to record in “straightforward” a manner as possible.23 Yet now-dated assertions of the ostensible neutrality of the documentary image in conceptual photography have been challenged on multiple fronts (as if any image could be neutral), and Ono’s book, with its focus on mapping and spatiality, its pursuit of an arbitrary structure, and its inclusion of the graphic elements of the arrow and the postcard format, in fact enunciates many of the themes and aesthetics of conceptual photography. Museum Of Modern (F)art calls to mind 100 Boots, the mail-art project begun by Eleanor Antin in 1971, in which a troupe of boots carried out an epic journey across the country. They went to work, went to war, went shopping, and more, and their adventures were documented in a series of postcards mailed to about a thousand recipients, culminating in 1973 when, en masse, the boots entered the front doors of—where else?—the Museum of Modern Art.

The overall tenor of Ono’s book is one of high and low mixing, in which the most refined sites are juxtaposed with some of the most ordinary, all of them marked by the presence of the common irritant, the fly. Not unlike farts, flies are often perceived as unhygienic; they are hallmarks of unsanitary conditions, swarming around refuse and transmitting disease. Yet Ono suggests that flies, with their compound eyes that see many perspectives at once, might be model viewers, offering a different scopic regime for confronting multifaceted art. In addition, the photos follow flies as they take a welcome, unpredictable path through the Museum—seeing paintings, yes, but also wandering through corridors. As the flies easily traverse the inside and the outsides, they reveal the porosity of the Museum and the city.

The penultimate photo (taken by Ono herself) is of a sleeping John Lennon, an arrow pointing to an invisible fly near his ear. The book concludes with a picture of the Museum’s ticket counter, where the Village Voice ad has been displayed with a handwritten addendum—“THIS IS NOT HERE”—presumably affixed to the glass to set straight confused visitors coming to purchase admission for a show that was not on view (fig. 5). As Kevin Conlan comments, the statement itself could have contributed to the confusion, as the wording of Art echoes exactly the title of her then-recent retrospective at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse.24 Ono’s exhibition—as-proposition forced the Museum into the awkward position of having to clarify what was not on view. Her assertion that she belonged, and that her show could and should be in the Museum, resonated beyond New York and shared affinities with strategies pursued by other underrepresented artists, as when the Chicano collective Asco signed their names to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,

Photograph: Tony Corrent

Photograph: Jan van Rasye
effectively appropriating the entire building as their own ready-made Conceptual art piece, in *Spray Paint LACMA (Project Pie in DelFace)* (1972).

**FEMINISMS**

Ono was not alone in conceiving a feminist critique of art-world conventions and enacting it within the museum space itself. Mie Le Lederer Ukeles carried out her *Harford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance* performance in 1973, laboring publicly to clean the floors and vitrines of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, and thus drawing attention to the invisibility of women's work both in the domestic sphere and elsewhere. That same year, Argentine artist Marta Minujin orchestrated her *Kidnapping*, in which preselected visitors at a Museum of Modern Art cocktail party were kidnapped by conspirators—whose faces were made-up to resemble those of Picasso's Cubist figures—and taken to different locations (fig. 7).

Ono has long been recognized as an important figure in both feminist and Conceptual art. Her work was included in the film program and catalogue for *Information*, the early survey of Conceptual art held at MoMA in 1970, and in the pioneering 1979 show *Global Conceptualism*, organized by the Queens Museum of Art.29 The catalogue for the latter show mentions Ono as a forerunner in both Japan and the United States.30 Ono moved between London, Japan, and the United States for decades (though she has been settled in New York since 1971); she is thus an interesting test case for Terry Smith’s proposition that “conceptualism was an outcome of some artists’ increased global mobility.”31 However, though her work was formally and conceptually groundbreaking, she continues to be under-recognized as a significant influence on her contemporaries. Unlike most other artists, Ono had to contend with and respond to the special scrutiny of being thrust onto an international stage and subject to the harsh glare of the media spotlight. She was watched, admired, and despised in her many roles as artist, performer, musician, mother, and wife.32 Art historian Joan Kee writes that “for women artists from Asia who exhibit in the US and Europe, the emphasis on the individual . . . results in the subordination of the work to a host of other concerns.”33 In Ono’s case, the prominence of her personal story continues to cut off attention to the work itself.

Yet there is always something about Ono’s oeuvre that has not sat easily within canonical tales of contemporary art; perhaps it is her persistent interest in the unmentionable aspects of bodies, with their excesses and strangeness. In some of the most profound images of her at work, she is sheathed in a bag, a shapeless and uncanny lump. First performed in 1964, it is *Bag Piece* (fig. 8, pp. 110–13) in all its iterations to which she has returned most frequently (its earliest incarnation was as a related work seen at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1961). *Bag Piece* presents body as stuff, as matter, as a heap of meat that emerges from a sac and from then on must be tended to and cared for, that shits and laugs and cries until the end, when, in some instances (including, notably, war casualties), it ends up in a bag. It is here that her conception of the body as a permeable bag is at its most evident.

By focusing on rear ends, flas, and farts within the decorous space of the art institution, and asserting that her actions serve as a call for peace, Ono links her interest in sexual freedom and “body innocence” with larger issues of liberation.34 She also scrambles temporarities by moving between a backward look to the what has been (the literally behind) and the potential of the what could be. In some respects, museums act as guarantors of history while also addressing themselves to and securing the future, holding a carefully selected narrative of the past within their walls to lend shape and meaning to the present. In the early 1970s, Ono and others sought to expose how flawed and incomplete such accounts of history are. Marrying the temporality of posterity with the materiality of the posterior, Ono created her own version of institutional critique informed by feminism, at a moment when both of these contested categories were being consolidated within the art world.
NOTES

1. These sketches are found in her unpublished booklet "Yoko Ono: Title Wanted, One-Woman Show, guest artist—John Lennon" (c. 1971), Lenono Archive, New York.

2. Though not a radical avant-garde, UNICEF was widely respected for its humanitarian aid efforts, and Plastic Ono Band (pp. 194–97) had played at their Peace for Christmas benefit concert at the Lyceum Ballroom, London, in 1969. In 1971, George Harrison and Ravi Shankar partnered with UNICEF to organize the high-profile Concert for Bangladesh, held in August at Madison Square Garden, New York, benefiting refugee children and families fleeing the Bangladesh Liberation War. (Ono and John Lennon were not involved in the concert.) Attended by over forty thousand people, it is considered one of the most successful and influential benefits of its kind. The concert serves as a reminder that activist efforts for peace in the early 1970s were not focused solely on the war in Vietnam, but also on other conflicts around the globe.


7. Julia Kristeva, "Les Tempes des Femmes," 34/4: Cahiers de recherche Sciences des textes et documents, no. 5 (Winter 1979): 5–19. Kristeva notes at the outset of her essay that her thoughts on different conceptions of temporality within several generations of the feminist movement are specific to European women, but they also resonate beyond her expressed purview.


9. As recently as 1992, Ono "couldn't sell the book anywhere," and so had "piles of..." of them still lying around. Yoko Ono, quoted in Scott MacDonald, "Yoko Ono," A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 154. Ono's book has since become a sought-after collector's item; as of this writing, it retains an online presence for around $1,000 per copy.


24. Kevin Concannon, "Museum of Modern [Fart]" in Munroe and Hendricks, Yes Yoko Ono, p. 194.


30. For more on Ono's "body innocence," see Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt, Yoko Ono: Aries and Objects (Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith Books, 1991), pp. 98–105.