Carroll Dunham, *Now and Around Here (3)*, 2015, mixed media on linen, 88⅛ × 68⅛".

bodies, though schematically rendered and viewed from unexpected perspectives, were strong and imposing. Girl power had come to Dunham's painting, and was welcome there.

Dunham stuck with these women in his recent show, but in three paintings they were either accompanied or completely replaced by a male figure, his first that I know of in some time. An oddity of the earlier series reappeared in these works, but with a twist: Those pictures rarely show the women's faces, cropping them out or viewing the figure from the back, or through such devices as the feet-first perspective of Mantegna's *Dead Christ*; the male figure is also faceless, but that is because we see through his eyes. He lies on his back, and we—and the artist, suggesting that the two are alter egos—look down over his chest, knees, and feet to the view beyond: a female bather, perhaps, or dog. As with the women, the setting is an Edenic natural arena, and also as with the women, the man is naked, but where Dunham earlier made penises suggest guns, or vice versa, he now makes them mushroom-like and rhymes them sweetly with acorns and other flora. And whereas the women are wonderfully active, the man appears to be pacifically sunbathing. If Eve has gotten her Adam, he is a harmless one this time around, though something of a voyeur.

These paintings have been on the way for a while; the first of them, *Now and Around Here (1)*, was finished last year but begun in 2011. The sense of a change in direction may be misleading, then, but the show remained surprising for viewers of Dunham's last several exhibitions at this gallery. Also included was a series of three works titled "Big Bang (actual size)," made between 2012 and 2015, showing squooshy biomorphic orbs recalling Dunham's earlier paintings of planets and suns, and *Culture as a Verb*, 2013–15, in which a squooshy biomorphic orb threatens to swallow a tree like those in the garden scenes. It is as if Dunham were showing that imagery coming to an end.

If so, I will miss Dunham's big women, and the splendid and prurient goofiness of those paintings. Their pastoral theme, and their fondness for bathing and swimming, set them in a long tradition going back, in the modern age, to Matisse and Cézanne, a history illuminating their ungainly vitality. But there may be life in them yet: The work that got pride of place in the show, being exhibited with a large suite of the drawings that led to it, was *Horse and Rider (My X)*, 2013–15, in which a woman on horseback raises her arms to the sun. To right and left, the stubby branches of trees poke out in different directions, creating visual depth in the same way as the lances of Uccello's Renaissance knights. (The drawings show that the woman herself once held a lance, though it is gone from the final image.) In *Horse and Rider (My X)* and in these works generally, Dunham likes to spell out such painterly devices, making it clear, for example, how he developed the composition's structure, that the branches and the horse's legs have been formed the same way, and that an airborne scattering of falling leaves is a kind of *repoussoir*. This knowing quality gives worldliness to the painting without undermining its fabulous pagan hedonism.

—David Frankel

Yoko Ono

GALERIE LELONG/ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

To those who wondered why Yoko Ono's "The Riverbed" comprised two separate installations, identical in their components, that were sited in two separate galleries in close proximity in Chelsea, the answer quickly became evident. The show resonated differently in its two locations: In my experience, the installation at Galerie Lelong was more concentrated, silent, and intimate, while the one at Andrea Rosen Gallery was more luminous, open, and social. Others might have felt differently. But that is all to the point, for each visit was unique, affected by its participant's individual memories and perceptions.

Ono made objects available, accompanied by brief instructions, offering each viewer the opportunity to use them creatively. *Stone Piece*, 2015, consisted of river stones—inscribed, like Tibetan prayer stones, with words—that could be collected by the visitor and brought, as objects of contemplation, onto the meditation cushions scattered around the room. *Line Piece*, 2015, invited visitors to draw a line in a book and then expand it three-dimensionally into the space by manipulating strings attached to a wall. Perceptible only at close proximity, the thin cords created an unexpected obstacle to movement in the gallery space, drawing viewers' attention to their own bodies—to the here and now. To similar effect, Ono re-executed *Mend Piece* (1966/2015). For that installation, viewers were able to choose fragments of broken cups and plates, and were invited to recompose them with glue, twine, and tape. Day after day, shelves were filled with these "repaired" objects, all of them different and completely new. They are silent traces of each visitor's Zen-like private activity, an encounter with his or her inner space. Creativity is the flip side of destruction, and both the artist and the public collaborated in this regenerative process.

Ono brings contemplative and emotionally vibrant space into being—space that merges art and life. She transformed the gallery into a container, an intimate place of creative expression, sharing, and meditation. I have no problem meditating with other people around, and I have done so at other times, sitting with eyes open in front of Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art, and blindfolded in her 2014 show at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. I also did it here, on two occasions, noting the differences. Unlike Abramović, who overtly presents herself as a catalyst of experience, Ono more frequently limits herself to providing a neutral field: By letting her own authorial presence fade into the background, she makes it easier for us to perceive our own subjectivity and role in the work. The provisional configuration of these two shows, apparently identical but both subject to continual change,

Yoko Ono, *Mend Piece*, 1966/2015, mixed media, dimensions variable. Galerie Lelong.

indicated the indeterminate quality of experience. And the repetition of gestures in the two separate spaces reminded visitors that every action, no matter how brief or quotidian, is unrepeatably unique.

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Ann Veronica Janssens

BORTOLAMI

A whisper of a show, spare to the point of near-disappearance, Ann Veronica Janssens's recent exhibition at Bortolami—the Belgium-based artist's solo debut at the gallery, timed to coincide with the first American museum survey of her work, at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas—provided a modest glimpse into her range of sculptural, spatial, and atmospheric concerns, and a sense of both the strengths and limitations of her practice. Though obviously a temperamental descendant of the Light and Space artists, Janssens, who has shown widely in Europe, also derives formal strategies from the projected-image work of post-Minimalists such as Anthony McCall. Taken together, the limited selection on view here hinted at the low-key perceptual poetics that underpin her project, but individually the works' effects were often so subtle and ambiguous that their stated ambitions—to activate the space and alter visitors' perceptions—threatened at times to dissolve into the realm of wishful thinking.

The exhibition consisted of six individual pieces showcasing a number of Janssen's approaches, all of which rely on interventions (material or immaterial) into a space in an attempt to create certain experiential moments or perceptual zones. As is characteristic of her program, Janssens took advantage of the range of available surfaces—works were hung at various locations along the walls, while one was set on the floor and another projected into space. This recognition of the possibilities latent in the physical environment was most vivid in *Gambie*, 1995/2015, an eight-foot-long fluorescent tube that passed from the gallery's entrance space into its main room through a cut in the wall made a dozen or more feet above the ground. The only work not conceived in 2015 on view, the piece did suggest an engagement with the existing architectural fabric, but beyond that its impact was essentially negligible amid the other elements of the brightly lit gallery's illumination scheme. Somewhat more convincing gestures awaited in the central gallery, including *Untitled (blue glitter)*, a smear of sparkling electric-turquoise powder drifted across the cracked concrete floor; a pair of corrugated aluminum panels, both titled *Moonlight*, given a platinum-leaf coating, and made to hover uncannily above the viewer at an angle from the walls like little awnings; and *Californian Blinds #2*, a commercial vertical louver hung frontally and decorated with gold leaf. These wall-based pieces suggested one of the more intriguing aspects of Janssens's enterprise—an attempt to coax out a certain kind of phenomenological energy from relatively simple materials (precious metal frostings notwithstanding). However, despite its apparent nod, in both title and form, to Robert Irwin and other first-generation West Coast perceptualists, *Californian Blinds* relied on a fairly predictable lenticular effect, while the *Moonlight* panels produced almost no effect at all aside from a highly localized division of space and a faint cast that only the most generous of readings would connect either perceptually or metaphorically to lunar glow.

The show's final work, and its ostensible centerpiece, was a projection set alone in a separate room. With an array of pinkish spotlights projecting a sort of starburst into a field of artificially produced haze, *Untitled* was a familiar form for those who know Janssens's practice—the artist has produced a number of closely related works over the years, including *Rose*, a strikingly similar piece made in 2007. *Untitled* operated in three zones—the small lights produced a seven-pointed star shape in an indeterminate space away from the wall on which they were placed, lit the vaguely fogged room with a soft magenta radiance, and shone a kind of inverted image on the opposite wall, where seven glowing blush-colored circles surrounded an equivalent seven-sided negative space. Despite its trappings and intent, *Untitled* was finally neither truly immersive like the Light and Space work to which it owes a significant debt, nor apparently interested, à la Dan Flavin, in explicitly foregrounding the material mechanisms of illumination. Instead, like the rest of this show, it felt strangely marooned between artifact and effect, neither fully committed to nor as fully persuasive as either.

—Jeffrey Kastner

Ann Veronica Janssens, *Untitled (blue glitter)*, 2015, glitter, dimensions variable.

Miranda Lichtenstein

ELIZABETH DEE

Plastic bags have fallen on hard times since they stole the show in *American Beauty* (1999), in a scene reminiscent of Nathaniel Dorsky's film *Variations* from a year earlier. No longer the mesmerizing Isadora Duncan of refuse, reminding us of the surprising elegance stirring in the corners of parking lots and our lives, plastic is now understood to represent a growing crisis, leaching toxins and forming garbage continents in the ocean. In New York City, it's one more index of class—Whole Foods no longer uses plastic bags, but your corner bodega does.

Into this mix come Miranda Lichtenstein's alluring 2015 photographs of plastic bags, in her fifth exhibition at Elizabeth Dee. At first glance, this show appeared to take up familiar themes of her practice: the still life as experiment, an interest in surface obfuscations and misaligned systems of representation, and the photograph as a container of enigmatic presence. Lush and mysterious, these images' deep teals and complementary oranges, wet and weathered skins, sutures and flatness, kept reminding me of decoupage and even the stunning textures in the Alberto Burri exhibit simultaneously on view uptown. (The most abstract photographs were found in the side office, shadowy black-and-white prints whose titles—*Bodega [Slash]* and *Bodega [Mirror]*—carried a little heavier portent.) Their subject matter is actually thrice recycled: Over the course of two years, Lichtenstein has been photographing sculptures by New York–based artist Josh Blackwell, in which he's cut, painted, joined together, and hand-stitched, with fabrics and metal, classic takeout and deli bags—vibrant works that reflect the efficient ingenuity with discarded materials found in folk art around the world. Lichtenstein's photographs never show the complete object.

FEATURED INTERVIEWS: *Yoko Ono, Lorraine O'Grady, Archie Rand, Robert Berlind*

GUEST CRITIC: *Suzanne Hudson* | IN REVIEW: *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*

IN CONVERSATION:
Peter Turchi and Christopher Castellani

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE **FEBRUARY** 2016

*in*conversation

Yoko Ono
with Laila Pedro

Over the course of a prolific and inventive career, Yoko Ono has continually challenged the meaning, structure, and limits of art. Since the 1950s, she has been a pioneer of avant-garde and experimental culture, with a multimedia practice that encompasses music, performance, instructions, writing, and film. By turns playful and visceral, violent and witty, Ono's highly conceptual works are also informed by a profound commitment to peace activism. Following a major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (*Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1961 – 1970* (May 17 – September 7, 2015)), Ono's new solo exhibition, *THE RIVERBED*, is now open at Galerie Lelong (through January 29) and Andrea Rosen Gallery (through January 23). Before the openings, Ono spoke with Laila Pedro about the genesis of the exhibition, about healing and mending, and about the powerful ripple effect of small, thoughtful actions.

Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui. From a photo by Matthu Placek.

LAILA PEDRO (RAIL): How did *THE RIVERBED* develop?

YOKO ONO: This particular river is very interesting. All rivers are interesting, but this riverbed is between life and death. There's an Asian story of the river you cross to go to another dimension. And there's a story about somebody carrying something and going through the river, across the river. And of course, you know, you don't carry anything when you are crossing a river. But the person was *thinking* he was carrying something. It's quite conceptual. I wanted to start with a riverbed like that. For *Stone Piece* [2015], there are many stones there. The stones represent something that can help us in our lives. I want you to pick one stone, and there is a meditation rug. So you can sit with the stone and meditate. Give all the anger, the sorrow, the fear—all of those things—to the stone. You can get rid of it that way.

RAIL: So the stone starts to carry the load?

ONO: Yes. Isn't that great?

RAIL: Yes—you can feel all this weight in the stones, beyond their actual mass.

ONO: And we do need something like that. With *Line Piece* [2015], I realized that I wanted to just go to the farthest end of the planet—it extends very far, conceptually. For the audience, the feeling is that I would like to go with you.

RAIL: Did these evolve from other works?

ONO: No, not really. The concept of the riverbed is something that I have used many times, actually. But not in this way.

RAIL: The riverbed is a potent symbol from the natural world. You've often referenced natural elements in your work: flames, the sky, flies. But here the natural images are foregrounded. What is the importance of the river stones? Do they reflect an evolution or a transformation?

ONO: For something to become a stone, there is an incredibly long amount of time and space that goes into it. So, a stone is a very, very powerful being. Much more powerful than we are. And you can say this about the sky or the water, too. We are surrounded by power and wisdom. Without wisdom they could not have become that, you know. It is a very beautiful surrounding that we have. We are very lucky people. And, in that environment, I am trying to get us to be healed.

RAIL: Is that healing connected to *Mend Piece* [1966/2015]?

ONO: *Line Piece* and *Stone Piece* are both very, very new pieces. I've never done that before. But *Mend Piece* I've done a few times. And the reason is because first I started to mend, and I thought about just mending relationships. The imagination stopped there, in a way. But then I realized that actually, in mending a cup, you're mending the planet, mending the universe. It's a great thing. You are *just* mending—but you're mending all those things, as well. And they do get mended. When I first started doing this piece, I think that society was not so incredibly violent. It was very different. And now, there's so much violence and so much destruction. So, we have to mend it.

RAIL: It has a communal element too, right? People work on the broken cups in a collective space, and then actually share coffee in the mended cups. So it's a small action that you're extrapolating into a huge action.

ONO: Exactly. I wrote this thing called *Pebble People*. It tells the story of being near the ocean and putting a pebble in. We throw the pebble, maybe without even thinking about it, and the pebble just falls in. But that—that particular act—changes the whole ocean. Did you notice that? You see, the pebble goes in, like the waves. The waves go, go, go; out, out, out. It doesn't stop.

RAIL: It ripples.

ONO: It ripples, and we create the ripple. You see? And how do we create the ripple? With just a tiny little pebble. And I'm saying we are the pebbles. It's much better that we are pebbles than somebody who's got a big stone trying to change the world. And you shudder—everybody's frightened. But the pebble people, what they're doing is just taking care of their lives in the way that they think it should be done. Just by doing that, the whole world is changing.

Detail: Yoko Ono, *Line Piece* (Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York 2015/2016), 2015. Materials variable. Dimensions variable. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. © Yoko Ono. Photo: Pierre Le Hors.

RAIL: You spoke about including a meditation rug in this installation. Does the practice of mindfulness influence the creation of your work in a direct way?

ONO: It influences all of us. When you're talking with someone, for example: whether you talk very quickly, thoughtlessly or if, when someone asks you a question, you create a little space, and then you answer. There's a big difference. So, all of us are always creating the world. Sometimes in a bad way, sometimes in a good way. And that's what I'm doing. I'm a pebble person.

RAIL: Many of your pieces take or incorporate the form of instructions. Do you think your instructions are like little pebbles?

ONO: Yes. Yes. [*Laughter.*] You got it.

RAIL: *Mend Piece* recalls the tradition of *kintsugi*—of mending broken ceramics with gold or precious substances. It's a powerful concept, to take something fractured and make beauty out of it, without hiding the break. Is the fracture or the feeling of that pain something you were thinking of with this piece?

ONO: Well, I'm feeling the mending. And the healing. [*Laughter.*] And this is so important. And just as we are talking, we are healing something.

RAIL: It feels like we are, doesn't it? I'm also interested in the idea of restraint in your work. I think your works tend to be very precise—

ONO: They're precise, yes.

RAIL: Do you think that having these very precise instructions can be a form of restraint, or constraint?

ONO: No. You see, I was trying to get out of the constraint. And it's not very easy, but I think it started to happen. The first time I thought, "Oh, why don't I make unfinished music?" But it was very painful for me, because I'm just another artist, a musician, who likes to create something in my own way, and if somebody touches it and makes it different, I wouldn't like it. That's sort of like the artist's ego, you know, that we all have—or all had. And I thought, "What am I going to do—am I going to let people touch my art, or my composition? I don't think I like that." But then I realized that if I don't like the feeling, that should be a good thing! [*Laughter.*] And so, let's go with it.

RAIL: You've not only gone with it, but you've taken it very far—the audience is now, and has been for a long time, a crucial part of your work.

ONO: Yes. It's also to wake them up to their own creativity, because they have to create too. And so I see a lot of togetherness and a lot of creativity opening up now.

RAIL: Speaking of compositions, I feel like some of your most visceral work is sound work, is musical work. How do you think about the experience of sound in a context like this, where it's not the main focus, but still part of the experience?

ONO: I think that there are two very, very important vibrations. One is sound, and one is vision. You can't say which is stronger or which is better—I'm interested in letting both vibrations grow.

RAIL: In this current exhibition, you've made it an important point to work with women.

Installation view: *Yoko Ono: The Riverbed,* Galerie Lelong, New York, Dec. 11, 2015 – Jan. 29, 2016. © Yoko Ono, Galerie Lelong New York.

Yoko Ono, *Mend Piece* (Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York 2015/2016), 1966/2015. Ceramic, glue, tape, scissors, and twine. Dimensions variable. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. © Yoko Ono. Photo: Pierre Le Hors.

ONO: I'm glad that you point that out, because I'm interested in bringing out all the problems and what we are dealing with. And one of the things I am dealing with still is a get-together of women. It's very difficult, you know. We just like to work with male curators usually, you know. And women can be sort of suspicious of each other. So instead, I said, "Let's do a show with two galleries—very intelligent, very individual—who have to come together." Would they do that? Would it work? It was a very interesting thing that we did. We did it all with just women, and it worked.

RAIL: I'm curious about your relationship with poetry. I often read the instructional works, and the different pieces—*Line Piece*, for example—as poems. Do they feel like poems to you, or do they feel more like immersive experiences?

ONO: I think that poetry is the highest form of art. And anything that you can say in a short line is something that I think is much better than if you have 5,000 pages of something. What are you going to say, you know? I started as a poet, in a way.

RAIL: How so?

ONO: Well, when I was in high school, all I did was just write poems. And when I was really young people would say, "She's always saying things in poetry."

RAIL: You've always been very confident about approaching a whole range of media. I have a hard time thinking of a medium in which you haven't worked.

ONO: I fall in love with mediums.

RAIL: At different points in your life?

ONO: Not different points in my life, but maybe different days of my life.

RAIL: Is there a medium that's particularly drawing you now?

ONO: I still think that music, which is sound, and art, which is vision, are the most important vibrations. I think that these vibrations go all the way to other planets and universes. And, my feeling is that because we, the human race, have been so careless, we've created many violent situations, and we can create a very, very difficult situation for the universe. And so, we have to start to change our minds—and we will. And all the planets will be open to us.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Two Galleries Share Yoko Ono Show, and a Hometown Return to New York

OCT. 29, 2015
Inside Art
By ROBIN POGREBIN

Why does a particular gallery decide to focus on a particular artist at a particular time? A look behind the scenes at three coming exhibitions offers some of the reasons — to showcase a recent body of work, to rediscover a war horse, to introduce an underrecognized talent.

Mary Sabbatino, Galerie Lelong's vice president and partner, decided to team up for the first time with the dealer Andrea Rosen on a Yoko Ono exhibition that explores the artist's latest thinking (Ms. Ono's one-woman show at the Museum of Modern Art of work from 1960 to 1971 closed last month).

This show, "The Riverbed" — to be installed in both galleries simultaneously — will involve large stones inscribed by Ms. Ono with instructive words like "remember," "wish" and "dream."

Visitors are meant to pick up the stones, releasing fury or fear into them before putting them down again. "We just tell our anger to the stone, which will understand and take it from us," said Ms. Ono, who has worked with stones before.

"I have no separation from animate and inanimate objects," she said. "It's life and it's pulsating. They're not dead, they're whispering some power that we can use."

The show — which runs from Dec. 11 until late January — is particularly suited to the winter, Ms. Sabbatino said. "A lot of people are carrying a lot of psychological weight because of the end of the year, the darkness," she added.

Yoko Ono working on "The Riverbed," which will be installed at Galerie Lelong and the Andrea Rosen Gallery simultaneously. Credit Yoko Ono and Miguel Angel Valero

Ms. Sabbatino's and Ms. Rosen's galleries will house another recurring Ono installation, "Mending Cup," in which visitors repair broken cups with twine, tape and glue. Each cup is then displayed on a shelf. "While you're mending it," Ms. Ono said, "you're mending the world as well."

The exhibition will also include "The Line," in which visitors continue drawing a line started in pencil on paper by Ms. Ono. "I'm saying, 'This is a line I've created,' " Ms. Ono said. " 'Will you please follow it and make a line all the way to the end of the planet? Let's go there together.' "

New York Magazine (nymag.com)
December 28, 2015

The Top 10 Living Artists of 2015

In conducting our annual review, we pulled from a wealth of data sources* and our editors' insight to determine which living artists wielded the greatest influence in 2015. Several are the mainstays of such rankings you might expect. But the list's new additions ring in exciting advancements for the art world and beyond—from a forebear of this year's biggest trend in painting to a figurehead for free expression and a Chicagoan serving as a catalyst for social change.

ARTSY EDITORIAL
DEC 16TH, 2015 3:34 AM

Yoko Ono

YOKO ONO B. 1933, TOKYO, JAPAN. LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK.

Illustration of Yoko Ono by Rebecca Strickson for Artsy, based on a photograph by Michael Lavine. Original photograph © Yoko Ono.

In December 1969, Yoko Ono and John Lennon launched a viral, global campaign, plastering 10 cities with a simple, resounding message: "WAR IS OVER!" and in smaller letters, "IF YOU WANT IT." At a salient moment this December, Ono revived the initiative, turning to social media and her website to once again propel peace. And while the artist's actions for peace have been a persistent force since the death of her husband in 1980, Ono's influence was especially palpable this year, be it through denouncing gun violence via Twitter, organizing thousands of people to form a giant peace sign in Central Park, or inspiring audiences through her art, which saw a much-deserved spotlight at MoMA

this year. “Yoko Ono was so ahead of her time that only now—four or five decades after some of her seminal early pieces—her work seems finally contemporary in a sense that a larger audience can uncover its layers of meaning” explained Klaus Biesenbach, director of MoMA PS1 and chief curator at large at MoMA. “As a pioneer in conceptual, social and performance practices she is one of the most innovative and groundbreaking artists of our time.” “Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960–1971” led us through the artist’s young career, with doses of painting, performance, video, photography, and text in equal measure, all the while enveloping visitors in a sequence of experiential, engaging moments.

The show, and the rich time period it drew from, rejected any doubts around Ono’s visionary practice and her role as an artist in her own right. Performances on view included a recreation of Bag Piece (1964), with a live performer stretching and squirming on a small stage in a black bag, and a screening of Cut Piece (1964), where Ono sat still, solemnly, as audience members took scissors to her outfit. At the center of the space a new commission, a tall, wobbly spiral staircase—much like one on view now at Beijing’s Faurschou Foundation—beckoned viewers to climb upwards, finding at the top a skylight and a moment of respite. The show unwound like a cathartic exercise, delighting as it unfolded, bolstered by the artist’s small instructional tome Grapefruit (1964), its pages lining the walls with contemplative reflections, like “Listen to the sound of the earth turning.” Similarly instructive is “THE RIVERBED,” Ono’s current two-part exhibition, which will evolve over its run at Andrea Rosen Gallery and Galerie Lelong in New York. Again the artist invites meditative experience, this time asking audiences to sit and think on simple terms like “remember” and “wish,” and to contribute their thoughts and actions to the installation’s final form.

HYPERALLERGIC

Yoko Ono Asks Gallery Visitors to Repair the Impossibly Broken

by Allison Meier on December 14, 2015

Yoko Ono, “Mend Piece” at Andrea Rosen Gallery (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Two Chelsea galleries are simultaneously hosting the same audience-activated Yoko Ono pieces, with collaborative mending of shattered ceramic, sketching of an infinite line, and contemplating river rocks. Yoko Ono: The Riverbed opened last Friday at Galerie Lelong and Andrea Rosen Gallery, and until the end of January the spaces will be gradually transformed by visitor actions.

Each work is one of Ono’s instruction pieces, an approach she’s used since the 1960s, as demonstrated in her recent Museum of Modern Art solo show on her 1960 to 1971 art. In “Stone Piece,” a new piece, river rocks are arranged on the gallery floor and you’re asked to “choose a stone and hold it until all your anger and sadness have been let go.” Some of the smooth rocks have words like “imagine” and “remember” written by Ono on their sides to meditate on while you rest atop a floor cushion. Alongside “Line Piece,” another new installation, has a stretch of twine crossing the gallery walls, and low desks with compasses, rulers, and protractors next to large sketchbooks, with the instruction: “Take me to the farthest place in our planet by extending the line.”

In smaller rooms of both Galerie Lelong and Andrea Rosen Gallery, Ono’s 1966

Yoko Ono, “Line Piece” at Galerie Lelong

“Mend Piece” is restaged with long tables cluttered with broken cups and plates, and scissors, tape, rubber cement, and string all available to attempt to reassemble the fragments into a new whole. “Mend with wisdom mend with love. It will mend the earth at the same time,” the wall text states. Curiously, both of these stations are also joined by espresso bars serving coffee in Ono’s Illy collaboration cups, where gold lines represent the mended cracks from catastrophic events, from Hiroshima to Guernica. The coffee is intended as encouragement to linger, and to give the space the sense of community, but it also has an odd commercialism contrast to the anti-material works.

On my Saturday visit, people seemed baffled by the river rocks — if I must carry this until my rage has passed, do I take this rock with me for my lifelong companion? — letting them alone in a neat arch at Lelong, or idly stacking them in cairns at Andrea Rosen. Likewise with “Line Piece,” some were dutifully extending it through the sketchbook, or onto the wall, while others drew freely on the pages.

“Mend Piece” provoked the most interaction and genuine joy from visitors. The completed projects on the shelves were manic melds of materials, like some nightmarish children’s craft room, some delicately suspended with intricate knots, others just garbled together with as much rubber cement as they could hold. Scissors from the table where stuck onto plate pieces, a river rock was confiscated to rebuild a teacup, and even one of the fancy Illy cups was wound with twine into the haphazard repairs. Like much of Ono’s most interesting work, what makes “Mend Piece” a recurring success is it takes her minimalist color and materials palette, here with the cascade of white ceramics, and through some simple direction asks the audience to drop pretension in considering larger ideas of life and death, including its edges of suffering. You’re warned that handling the sharp ceramic parts is at your own risk, and I did get a tiny cut on my finger, a loss of skin I only noticed after I’d stepped out of the gallery and its fragile world of risk and meditation.

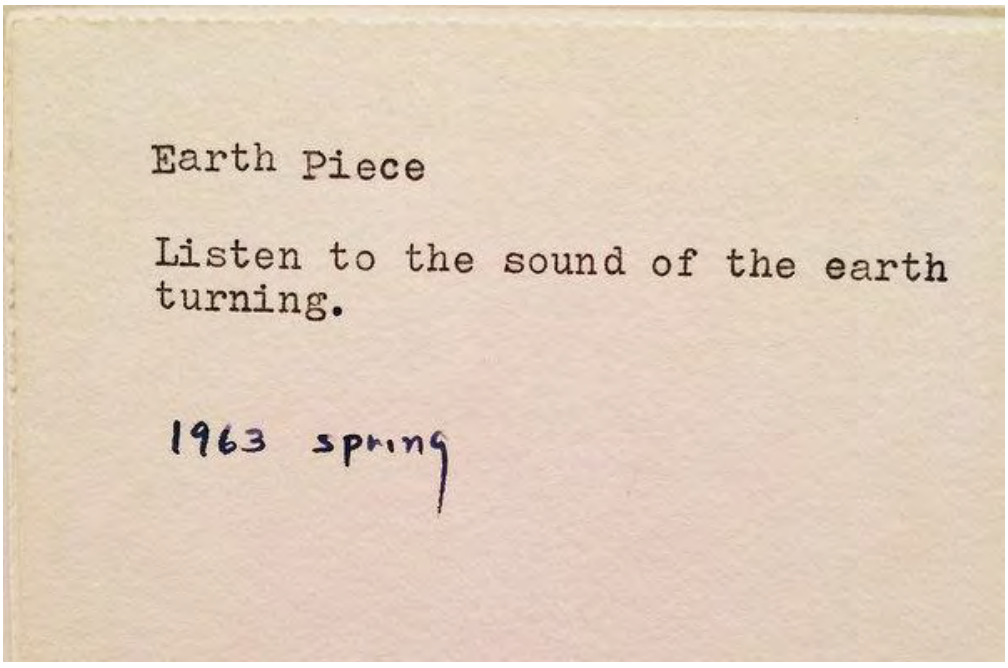
The New York Times

Art and Design
May 14, 2015
by Holland Cotter

Review: In 'Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971,' Text Messages From the Edge

On the principle that imagining something can make it real, Yoko Ono gave herself a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1971. What was the likelihood of the museum's coming up with the idea on its own? Practically zero. Historically, women were rarely shown there; nonwhite women, never. And, most of Ms. Ono's work was on a far-out fringe of art-world orthodoxy where, to her cost and our good fortune, she chose, in her early years at least, to stay.

Tangible evidence of that 1971 MoMA solo exists. There are photographs of Ms. Ono standing with her work in the museum's Sculpture Garden. There are newspaper clippings of advertisements for the show, even a few reviews. But, it turns out, the "reviews" are just quotes collected from visitors. The Sculpture Garden shot is a cut-and-paste job. So is a promotional image of her seen standing outside the museum, under an awning emblazoned with its name. She holds a large shopping bag printed with the letter "F" and positions it near the "A" in Art.



An entry from the book "Grapefruit" (1964). Credit Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

And as to what was in the purported show? There seemed to be just one piece: a bottle holding a swarm of houseflies that Ms. Ono claimed she had doused with her favorite perfume and released in MoMA's garden, from which point they dispersed into the museum and the city beyond. The art lover's task then became to track the flies down, an effort that demanded close, diligent looking at everything, everywhere, at buildings all over town, at people passing by, at trash in the street. And it meant keeping all senses alert: for the telltale sound of a buzz, the whiff of a scent, the tickle of tiny feet on the skin.

So what began as a fiction, a political gesture, a guerrilla gag mocking institutional pretensions and exclusions, became, potentially, something else, and more: a proposal that art is a state of sharpened attention that infiltrates and elevates life. Did the fiction have any effect at the time? Hard to say. But now, more than 40 years on, it's become a reality in "Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971," which opens at MoMA on Sunday.

Organized by three of the museum's curators — Klaus Biesenbach, Christophe Cherix, and Francesca Wilmott — it's essentially an archival display. Filled out with objects and films, and enhanced by a sound track, it consists mainly of works on paper. And most of those carry words, the outstanding example being the 151 hand-typed note cards that, in 1964, became "Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings."

The book, probably Ms. Ono's best known piece, had an inauspicious start. Ms. Ono compiled it from accumulated manuscripts and self-published it in the cheapest possible format. At the time, her reputation was still confined to a small circle of avant-garde artists, writers and musicians in New York and Tokyo. Even though what she was doing in the book with language and ideas was radical, work that would bring fame later to Conceptual artists like Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, she could barely give copies away.

All that changed a few years later. In 1970, "Grapefruit" was reissued by Simon and Schuster, with an introduction by John Lennon, who had married Ms. Ono the previous year. It was a hit, an instant staple of college-kid libraries. It was, however, more often treated as an object to own rather than as a book to read. And when it was read, it was misread. With its haiku-length texts directing readers to perform one gnomic act or another, it was often taken for head-trippy, fake-Zen fluff.

A mistake. It's a fibrous, beautiful, cleareyed document, seriously speculative, diary like in its intimacy. It has a dose of Dada wit, as in its suggestion that the reader "walk all over the city with an empty baby carriage." And there's the lyricism — "Take a tape of the sound of snow" — of a natural poet, which Ms. Ono is. But the overall tone is a light-dark mix, hard to pin down. One entry that begins "Imagine one thousand suns in the sky at the same time" and ends "Make one tunafish sandwich and eat" is like a vision of the apocalypse punctuated by a pratfall. Then comes this:

“When a person hurts you badly

line up 100 panes of glass in

the field and shoot a bullet

through it.

Take a copy of a map made by

The cracks on each glass and

Send a map a day for 100 days

To the person who has hurt you”

And this:

“Hide until everybody goes home.

Hide until everybody forgets about you.

Hide until everybody dies.”

Prickly and pain-laced, (the first work in the MoMA show is an apple placed on a plexiglass stand, where it will stay until it rots), the book can say violent things in an unperturbed way, can sound simultaneously chipper and desolate. To read the entire typescript, installed in sequence across a long museum wall, takes a little time but is well worth doing. It’s an absorbing experience and a useful introduction to the mood of much of the rest of the show.

Ms. Ono was born in Tokyo in 1933. When she was 12, she saw the city firebombed and leveled. She grew up in cosmopolitan comfort: Her father was a banker; her mother was from an aristocratic family. One parent was Buddhist; the other Christian. After the war, she moved with them to the United States, lived in Westchester and went to Sarah Lawrence College, where she wrote poetry and studied philosophy. Temperamentally, she felt herself an odd fit wherever she was.

When she left college to marry the experimental composer Toshi Ichiyanagi, her parents cut her off. The couple settled in Manhattan in a community of downtown avant-gardists. John Cage was the presiding senior figure, George Maciunas an organizational force on the rise. Conceptual Art, which privileged ideas over things, was in the process of being invented. Ms. Ono had a foundational part in that, initially by hosting concerts and dance performances in the Chambers Street loft she shared with Mr. Ichiyanagi, and then through her own cross-disciplinary output.

With her first New York gallery show in 1961, she began chipping away at divisions between art and life, artist and audience, making paintings composed on cast shadows, and others that people

could add to, and walk on. A trip to Japan the next year turned into a long, fertile sojourn. There she developed some of the extraordinary vocal pieces — ululating, keening, infantile, erotic — that play in the exhibition and that would eventually change the sound of pop music, as the careers of contemporary singers like Björk, who has a simultaneous show at MoMA, attest.

In Japan, Ms. Ono presented her first texts-only exhibition, and some of her most radical performances had their debut. One was "Cut Piece," for which she knelt on a bare stage, placed a pair of tailor's scissors in front of her and directed the audience to snip off her clothing. Dating to 1964, it opened a path for younger performance artists like Marina Abramovic to place themselves physically in harm's way at the hands of an audience.

Back in New York, now married to the artist Anthony Cox and loosely affiliated with a network of Conceptualists known as Fluxus, she produced films and objects of only middling interest: interactive things like the hand-held, mirrored "Box of Smile" and poetical "Glass Keys to Open the Skies." With her daring earlier ephemeral art now scattered and half-forgotten, her work gained a reputation for whimsy that it has never quite shaken.

In 1966, came a circumstantial change. John Lennon visited a London show Ms. Ono was preparing and liked what he saw. They became a collaborative couple. Jointly conceived projects like their 1969 peace campaign, with its bed-ins and billboards announcing "War Is Over! (If You Want It)," were very much a product of her sensibility. Mr. Lennon, for his part, encouraged and promoted her vocal work. (A set-aside room devoted to Plastic Ono Band material documents that.)

In a larger way, though, her position as his wife obscured her independent career. Worse, it left her a natural target for the misogyny and racism that she had always battled. Her subsequent roles, honorably assumed, as celebrity-widow and political spokeswoman have tended to blunt the edge and limit the variety of new art she's made in recent decades, and set a '60s aura around it.

This impression is neatly countered by the exhibition's most recent piece, dated 2015. Commissioned by MoMA and titled "To See the Sky," it's a free-standing steel spiral staircase that leads upward toward something I had never noticed before: a clear glass skylight piercing the museum's sixth-floor gallery ceiling. The sky, limitless and shifting, source of nurture and destruction, has been a central image in Ms. Ono's art all along. Viewed through the gallery skylight, it makes an attractive goal for a climb.

But as you reach the top of the staircase, something unnerving happens. The structure starts to wobble and sway, like a ship on a moody sea. Looking skyward becomes hard; your gut tells you to focus on where your feet are. Even when you've come back down, it takes a minute to find your land legs. So, just when you thought you were in for a bit of transcendence, free and clear, you've been given a wake-up poke, a little slap of fear, a reminder that looking for light is perilous; danger is always near; which is the message that this imaginative, tough-minded and still underestimated artist has been delivering for years.

"Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971" runs from Sunday to Sept. 7 at the Museum of Modern Art; 212-708-9400, moma.org.

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by Jonathan Jones

Yoko Ono show at Guggenheim shines light on pioneering conceptual artist

Bilbao exhibition of installations, music and films demonstrates avant-gardiste's true talents, her reach and influence

Yoko Ono with one of her installations at the Guggenheim, Bilbao. Photograph: David Hornback for the Guardian

'The ladder John had to climb up was very high," recalls Yoko Ono as we chat about one of her most famous works. It is called Ceiling Painting or Yes Painting, and it is one of the classics of conceptual art that fill her retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. It consists of a stepladder leading up to a steel-framed panel and a dangling magnifying glass.

When John Lennon climbed up Ono's ladder at the swinging London gallery Indica in 1966, there were more steps, but the word written above his head was the same as in this version: a "yes" so tiny you need the magnifying glass to read it.

The smallness of the yes and the difficulty of reaching it reflected her pain at the time, Ono says. A relationship had just come to an end and she had a vision of a journey into the

heights, "like a cathedral", to be rewarded by some kind of hope, some affirmation "on high".

As it happened, her hopeful artwork was to change her life. The most serious Beatle heard about the amazing artist who had shown up in London, went along for a private viewing and climbed that ladder to read the tiny word. The author of I Am The Walrus and Strawberry Fields recognised a kindred spirit.

So the work is best known nowadays among readers of Beatles biographies for its part in one of the great love stories of modern times. Yet Yoko Ono is much more than her fame.

She has lived in the most lurid and cruel of pop culture spotlights, reviled as the black-clad *avant-gardiste* who "broke up the Beatles", mocked along with Lennon for supposedly naive peace-mongering, and brutally widowed by gun violence.

Now her time has come. The Yes Painting is not here as a piece of Lennonabilia but as one of a hugely impressive array of installations, performance documents, "instructions", music and films that leave no doubt of a true original's influence on the art of this century.

Is there any contemporary art style she did not pioneer? At times this feels like a retrospective of Turner Prize winners: here's a film of a fly crawling on a woman's naked thigh that might be misattributed to Douglas Gordon or Damien Hirst; a cinematic celebration of bottoms Martin Creed might be proud of, a chair wrapped in desiccated fabric that is as poetic as any sculpture by Rachel Whiteread – all made by Ono more than 40 years ago.

White Chess Set, 1966/2013. Photograph: David Hornback

In person, she's charming, authoritative and mysterious. She wears dark glasses and a hat indoors – but any first impression of hauteur is undercut by the way she keeps humorously lowering and raising her shades on her nose as she enthusiastically expounds her philosophy. Nor does she seem aware of my orders to stay clear of her personal life in this exclusive interview – which is just as well as it would be nonsensical. Art and life are the same thing for Ono. Her work is acutely, often shockingly personal. Conceptual art, she tells

me, is "more expressive" than painting: a striking claim that her art proves true – at least when she's providing the concepts.

In 1964 a young woman knelt down before an audience in Tokyo and placed a pair of scissors on the ground in front of her. Members of the audience were invited to come forward, one by one, and cut off pieces of her clothing. In films and photographs of Cut Piece, as it is called, Ono maintains a passive deferential pose and expression as women and, more disturbingly, men cut off more and more of her clothing until she's kneeling in her underwear.

It is surely one of the most powerful of all feminist artworks. But did she think of it, I want to know, as a feminist statement back in 1964? Ono's intelligence flashes. "All powerful art has many layers of drama," she explains. "I was originally thinking of the Buddha and how he gave everything up." That ascetic surrender, she thought then, is what life is like for women, and she conceived Cut Piece as an "acceptance" of that reality. So it's not angry? "No, it's not angry."

Yet violence and pain streak through her art, for all its Buddhist acceptance. When her relationship with her boyfriend Tony Cox was breaking up in London in the late 1960s, she woke up one morning to find he had vanished from their all-white flat.

She responded by bisecting a roomful of their stuff – a chair, a framed painting, a case, a shelf unit, a kettle, a teapot, even shoes. It was not just spite: it was art. Her installation Half-a-Room is one of the most powerful moments in the retrospective. It's like a haunting relic of a tragicomic play, a set for a Samuel Becket monologue or an image from a sad song.

When it was shown at the Lisson Gallery in 1967, it looked to a Britain highly sceptical about conceptual art (to put it mildly) like ultra-hippie craziness. Today it is another Ono creation that seems like the prototype for about a hundred recent works of art.

River Bed, 1996/2014. Photograph: David Hornback

She called that Lisson Gallery show the Half-a-Wind show, and her retrospective is named after it. What did it mean? Like the half-destroyed room at its heart, the title spoke of loss,

absence, incompleteness. "We are all just half a person", she says. In fact, at that moment she was in the process of finding her other half: Lennon helped with the exhibition.

You can't really get away from him at the Guggenheim, because their love was founded on artistic collaboration and he was her as she was him, artistically, in the late 60s and 70s.

Their relationship did not start with physical passion, she explains. Instead it began as artistic collaboration: when Cynthia Lennon finally caught them together, they had been up all night making art. Lennon's face hovers in grainy colour in their film Smile, one of the shared endeavours that sealed their love. There's a little work of art called Box of Smile: you look inside to see your reflection (you provide the smile). In an uncomfortable vintage David Frost interview, the art lovers present Frost with a version of this piece as they try to explain conceptual art to a television studio audience that looks like its average age is 100.

For all the bile unleashed on Ono in 1960s Britain, she got away with one stunt no recent artist has rivalled. "Amazing, isn't it?" she says happily, remembering how in 1967 the police let her wrap one of the lions in Trafalgar Square in a huge piece of cloth. Photographs of the happening look far more subversive, somehow, than today's routinised and respectable artworks on the square's fourth plinth.

The word "revolution" comes as readily to her lips today as it did when she and Lennon put up a poster in Times Square saying War Is Over (If You Want It). The counterculture she did so much to shape, and that she sees today in the internet, "is a revolution but there is no bloodshed; art quietly changed the world."

With such a sense of mission, she never worried about pleasing the public. Back then, "most people didn't want to know and I wasn't about to explain about it. My art was different from what was considered as art. My idea was that maybe one day 50 years later or 100 years later people might discover it."

At 81, she has lived to see that day. Her interactive feminist conceptual art, her films and installations, now look like beacons of what art is now and will be in years to come.

To visit this moving and beautiful show is to see what Lennon saw in her – a visionary he looked up to, an artist whose imagination and intelligence, he insisted, set him free and showed him a better life. He was right and the cynics who satirised her were wrong.