

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2025

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Yoko Ono with *Glass Hammer*, 1967, from *Half-A-Wind Show*, Lisson Gallery, London, UK, 1967. Artwork © Yoko Ono. Photo © Clay Perry.

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MCA Chicago will become the exclusive US venue for *Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind*

CHICAGO—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago is thrilled to announce *Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind*, opening October 2025. The MCA is the exclusive US venue for this comprehensive solo exhibition dedicated to artist, musician, and activist Yoko Ono (b. 1933, Tokyo, Japan; lives in New York, NY). Traveling from Tate Modern in London, where it enjoyed record attendance, and in close collaboration with Ono's studio, this groundbreaking retrospective covers seventy years of Ono's trailblazing career, with over 200 works including participatory instruction pieces and scores, installations, a curated music room, films, music and photography, and archival materials. The exhibition reveals Ono's innovative approach to language, art and

participation that continues to speak to the present moment.

Participation is an important feature of Yoko Ono's vision as an artist, which is why visitors will be able to partake in several interactive, instruction-based artworks throughout *Music of the Mind*. This exhibition underscores Ono's legacy of radical performance and her significant and influential contributions to visual art, including Fluxus and Conceptualism; music; film, and activism. The MCA is proud to welcome this timely exhibition, spotlighting Ono's revelatory art from the last seven decades.

"We are thrilled to present *Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind* here at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago—a celebration of Ono's expansive practice which continues to challenge the boundaries of artist and audience," Pritzker Director Madeleine Grynsztejn said. "This exhibition underscores the avant-garde and interdisciplinary roots that made the MCA what it is today—our first performance in 1967 featured Fluxus artists. We're overjoyed to bring Ono's work to the MCA, a museum that so truly aligns with her practice and overlaps with her history."

Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind documents the artist's career starting with the mid-1950s, exploring her pivotal role in avant-garde circles in New York, Tokyo, and London, including the development of her 'instruction pieces', and the active role she played in the formation of Fluxus, the loose art collective and movement founded in New York in the early 1960s. The exhibition highlights key works from across her decades-long career, including her performance *Cut Piece* (1964), considered a landmark in performance and feminist art; her collaborations with notable musicians such as John Cage, Ornette Coleman, and her late husband, John Lennon; selected activations of instruction-based art from her influential book *Grapefruit* (1964); her innovative films of the 1960s and 70s including *FLY* (1970–71) and her banned *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* (1966–67) which she created as a 'petition for peace'; recent works such as her ongoing *Wish Tree* installation, (1996-present); and public artworks that are emblematic of Ono's commitment to peace activism.

The exhibition features several participatory artworks, such as *Painting to Hammer a Nail* (1961/1966), *Bag Piece* (1964), and *White Chess Set* (1966), among others. Later works like *Add Color (Refugee Boat)* (1960/2016) encourage guests to write their hopes and beliefs on a white boat and its surroundings, while the installation *My Mommy Is Beautiful* (2004) gives the public an opportunity to share thoughts about their relationship to their mothers and motherhood and attach photographs of their mother. Additionally, there will be public activations of Ono's peace-driven artworks on billboards throughout the city of Chicago and on the MCA's premises.

"Yoko Ono is a wildly influential and significant figure in performance, conceptualism, music, and activism. She has inspired generations of audiences to think differently about the everyday and seeing art," said Manilow Senior Curator Jamillah James. "It is an honor to host this wide-ranging exhibition, which is a critical opportunity that invites the public to deeply engage with Ono's many important contributions to visual art in new and exciting ways."

Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind is organized by Tate Modern, London in collaboration with Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf and Gropius Bau, Berlin and curated by Juliet Bingham, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern with Andrew de Brún, Assistant Curator, International Art, Tate Modern. The MCA presentation is organized (curated) by Jamillah James, Manilow Senior Curator with Korina Hernandez, Curatorial Assistant.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yoko Ono is an artist, musician, and activist.

Born in Tokyo, 1933, Ono grew up in Japan, with periods spent abroad in San Francisco and New York. She was the first woman admitted to the philosophy program at Gakushuin University in Tokyo, where she studied before moving to New York in 1953 to attend Sarah Lawrence College.

In 1956, she settled in Manhattan with her then husband, composer Toshi Ichiyanagi. Immersed in a community of artists and composers, Ono began to develop her own art practice, often in the form of instructions that invited the viewer's participation. In 1960, she rented a loft on Chambers Street in Lower Manhattan and began organizing performances and events in the space with La Monte Young, becoming a vital part of the New York art and music scene.

In 1961, Ono's first solo exhibition was held at George Maciunas' AG Gallery in New York. *Painting to Be Stepped On*, a work of canvas placed on the floor with a card inviting the viewer to step on it, was one of several *Instruction Paintings* exhibited. Later that year, she gave a performance at Carnegie Recital Hall that included works involving movement, sound, and voice, such as, *AOS – To David Tudor*, and *A Grapefruit in the World of Park*.

In March 1962, Ono returned to Tokyo, where she debuted new performances at the Sogetsu Art Center, including *The Pulse*, and exhibited her *Instructions for Paintings*, a progression from works shown at AG Gallery. These works, comprised only of written instructions, marked a key moment in the history of conceptual art. Later that year, she performed with John Cage and David Tudor on a concert tour throughout Japan. In 1964, Ono performed *Cut Piece* and *Bag Piece* in Kyoto and Tokyo, and self-published *Grapefruit*, her foundational book of instructions.

In the fall of 1964, Ono returned to New York, continuing to perform and stage events, and pioneering new ways of disseminating her art through advertising and postcard events. She also began making her own films, including *Film No. 4, Match* and *Eyeblink*.

In September 1966, Ono was invited to London to perform and lecture in the *Destruction in Art Symposium*. Remaining in London, she had a solo exhibition at Indica Gallery and Lisson Gallery the following year, showing new conceptual object-based works such as *White Chess Set*, *Apple*, and *Half-A-Room*. During this period, she continued to make films, including a new version of *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, and presented a series of performances on her concert tour *Music of the Mind*.

At her Indica Gallery exhibition, Ono met John Lennon, beginning a personal and artistic relationship in art, music, and activism. By 1969 their conceptual events to promote peace had become world-wide news, including the *WAR IS OVER! If you want it* campaign, and *Bed-In for Peace*, held in an Amsterdam hotel room during their honeymoon in 1969 and later in Montreal.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Ono and Lennon's activities centered primarily on music, film, and activism. Ono released four solo albums and four collaborative albums with Lennon over just five years, while also making multiple films, including *FLY*, *Freedom*, *"RAPE"*, *Apotheosis*, and *Imagine*.

In 1971 Ono had her first retrospective exhibition, *This Is Not Here*, at the Everson Art Museum. Later that year, her unofficial conceptual exhibition, *Museum of Modern [F]art* at the Museum of Modern Art was advertised in the Village Voice and documented as a new film.

In 1973, Ono and Lennon announced the birth of a new conceptual country, Nutopia, with “no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people.” In 1975 the birth of their son, Sean Ono Lennon, influenced the couple’s decision to take a break from public life.

In August 1980, Ono and Lennon returned to the studio to record their first album together since 1972. *Double Fantasy* was released in November and went on to win the 1981 Grammy Award for Album of the Year. Less than a month after its release, Lennon was shot and killed by an assassin outside their home in New York.

Emerging from the tragedy of Lennon’s death, Ono immersed herself in making music, releasing several albums during the decade. “It was the music that made me survive,” Ono said. After a long absence from exhibiting her art in museums and galleries, her 1989 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Yoko Ono: Objects, Film*, signaled a renewed interest in her art. She continued to exhibit extensively around the world.

In 2000 *Yes Yoko Ono*, a retrospective exhibition originating at the Japan Society Gallery in New York toured to thirteen international venues over four years. In 2007, Ono unveiled the *IMAGINE PEACE TOWER* on Videy, an island off the coast of Reykjavik, Iceland, giving a permanent home to her and Lennon’s long-standing commitment to world peace. In 2009, she was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 53rd Venice Biennale. That same year, Ono released *Between My Head and the Sky*, her first studio album as Plastic Ono Band since 1973. In 2018, Ono released her thirteenth solo studio album, *Warzone*.

Ono’s work has continued to be honored with numerous exhibitions at some of the world’s most prestigious venues, including The Museum of Modern Art in New York (2015) and Tate Modern in London (2024).

In a career spanning more than seventy years, Ono’s work as an artist and activist remains singularly relevant and continues to challenge the boundaries of artist and audience.

SUPPORT

Lead support is provided by the Harris Family Foundation in memory of Bette and Neison Harris, the Zell Family Foundation, Cari and Michael Sacks, and R. H. Defares.

Major support is provided by Bank of America; Christie’s; Lugano; Robin Loewenberg Tebbe and Mark Tebbe; Charlotte R. Cramer Wagner and Herbert S. Wagner III of Wagner Foundation; and the Walter and Karla Goldschmidt Foundation.

Generous support is provided by The Francis L. Lederer Foundation.

This exhibition is supported by the MCA’s Women Artists Initiative, a philanthropic commitment to further equity across gender lines and promote the work and ideas of women artists.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The MCA interweaves exhibitions, performances, collections, and educational programs while providing a place for audiences to contemplate and discuss contemporary art in pursuit of a creative and diverse future. The MCA believes in the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) as a platform to enact structural change. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies. The MCA acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

[The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue](#) and is open 10 am to 5 pm Wednesday to Sunday and Tuesdays from 10 am to 9 pm. Tuesday evenings (5-9 pm) are free for Illinois residents. The museum is closed on Mondays. Admission is free for all youth 18 and under, members of the military and veterans, and MCA members. Free admission for anyone 18 and under is generously provided by Liz and Eric Lefkofsky, and Northern Trust. Find more information about MCA's exhibitions, programs, and special events at mcachicago.org or at 312.280.2660.

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