

# Yoko Ono A Kind of Meeting Point

This episode focuses on Yoko Ono (b. 1933). Joining host Helen Molesworth are artists Catherine Lord and Sanford Biggers. In an interview from 1990, Ono reflects on her childhood in Japan, her years on the international avant-garde scene, and how her marriage to John Lennon affected the reception of her work.

## Additional Resources

- ◆ Barbara Rose Papers Finding Aid (<http://archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/930100/930100.xml>)

## Transcript

Episode transcripts are provided to make this podcast accessible to a wider audience. Please note that interviews featured in this episode have been edited for concision and clarity.

Original interview: Barbara Rose interview with Yoko Ono, 1990, box 11, C104, Barbara Rose papers, 930100, Getty Research Institute.

**YOKO ONO:** I don't make plans so much, so— [she chuckles] My plan now is to do this show, and then something will inspire me.

**HELEN MOLESWORTH:** This is Recording Artists, a podcast from the Getty dedicated to exploring art and artists through the archives of the Getty Research Institute. I'm your host Helen Molesworth.

In this season we focus on audio interviews with six women artists whose lives span the twentieth century. These recordings were made by the New York-based art critic Cindy Nemser and art historian Barbara Rose. Most of these interviews come from the 1960s and '70s, in the midst of the civil rights movement and the feminist revolution. Hearing these artists in their own words talk about their work and about their experiences as women making art is a revelation.

This episode focuses on Yoko Ono. Barbara Rose interviewed her in 1990. Ono was 57 years old. I've invited the artists Catherine Lord and Sanford Biggers to listen to these tapes with me. Catherine once performed Ono's famous work *Cut Piece*, and Sanford

has always been interested in incorporating music and performance into his work.

Yoko Ono was born in Tokyo in 1933 to an affluent banking family. The war years in Japan were difficult ones and Ono and her younger brother were sent to live in the countryside to avoid the Allied bombing of major Japanese cities. War time deprivation took its toll; food shortages affected everyone. Her recollections of this period are marked by extreme hunger. Her response was to imagine meals with her brother. Ono recalls it as follows: "Lying on our backs, looking up at the sky through an opening in the roof, we exchanged menus in the air and used our powers of imagination to survive."

Ono was 12 when the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and fire-bombed Tokyo. The post-war American occupation of Japan would have a transformative effect on Japanese culture. It installed a democratic system of government, as well as an American education system. It loosened cultural restrictions on women and their sexual expression. But it was also a period of intense deprivation and continued starvation. American soldiers raped thousands of Japanese women in the southern islands of the archipelago. And there was a ban on all images that showed the horrific effects of the atomic bombs on human beings—images of people with melted flesh, their clothing hanging off their bodies in tattered strips from the intensity of the explosion. This censorship was lifted only after the Americans left in 1952.

In 1953, after Ono had completed two years of study in one of Tokyo's most prestigious universities, she left Japan for New York, where she continued her studies at Sarah Lawrence College. Interested in music from a young age, she was soon introduced to the work of avant-garde composers Arnold Schonberg and Anton Webern. But the energy of New York City prompted her to leave school. As she tells Barbara Rose:

**ONO:** I was a dropout from Sarah Lawrence. I went three years of Sarah Lawrence. So usually you don't drop out after three years, but I just couldn't stand the next full year. I just thought that was so crazy to stay there, because exciting things were happening.

I was very influenced with twelve-tone music when I was writing songs in Sarah Lawrence. And my teacher Andre Singer was saying, "You know, your stuff is getting very far out and all that, and there's some very experimental group of people in New York who are doing things." And that's when I first heard John Cage's name. He was saying, "John Cage and those people. And maybe you'd like to be with those people, because my teaching is more classical," kind of.

**MOLESWORTH:** With her clear interest in twelve-tone and experimental music at Sarah Lawrence, Ono was already avant-garde as a student. Her professor Andre Singer understood that New York's experimental composers, and John Cage in particular, would help her grow. She met Cage not long after through her first husband, Toshi Ichiyanagi.

**ONO:** And then there was a concert in Carnegie Recital Hall, of Stefan Wolpe, and I think Toshi, my first husband, played his work, I think. And it was a joint concert with John Cage. That's how I met John Cage.

**MOLESWORTH:** John Cage had an enormous influence in the art scene of downtown New York. Barbara Rose pressed Ono about it.

**BARBARA ROSE:** What effect did he have on you?

**ONO:** There was a Zen Buddhist, a very advanced Zen Buddhist called Dr. Suzuki. And he was doing a lecture in Columbia University, and we went to that. And of course, Cage was there, too, and we were sort of talking about things. And then I started to understand Cage's music theory, and I was very startled. Because I was a philosophy student in a Japanese university before I went to Sarah Lawrence. So just from a logical, philosophical point of view, I thought his philosophy underneath it was very interesting.

**MOLESWORTH:** Ono's status as a Japanese national, combined with the popularity of Zen Buddhism among her avant-garde friends in New York—many of whom were processing the teachings of Dr. Suzuki—meant that her work was frequently understood within the framework of Buddhism. Although she tended to complicate such an easy narrative of cause and effect.

**ROSE:** Do you feel that your perceptions or your point of view and your art is still very influenced by Japanese culture?

**ONO:** Oh, definitely. Well, but I mean, the same thing goes for when I'm interviewed in Japan. [Rose: Mm-hm] They naturally assume that I'm influenced by Western culture. So it's a happy medium, I think. [she chuckles] You know?

**ROSE:** Well, it's— Yeah. I mean, [inaudible]—

**ONO:** The world is getting smaller and smaller.

**ROSE:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**ONO:** And I really think that we're all influenced by each other, in that sense.

**MOLESWORTH:** I asked artist and writer Catherine Lord about this clip.

**CATHERINE LORD:** What was the question that Rose asks first?

**MOLESWORTH:** Rose asks, "Do you feel that your perceptions or your point of view in your art is still very influenced by Japanese culture?" [Lord laughs] Why'd you laugh?

**LORD:** Oh, boy. It's as if the whole sort of weight, the burden of global conflict and structural racism just descends on the conversation. Like, why would she have to choose?

**MOLESWORTH:** Right. And I love Ono's, you know, "The world is getting smaller and smaller."

**LORD:** Yes. And I love her politeness. I mean, she doesn't say anything that I've just said; she just answers deftly.

**MOLESWORTH:** Ono's notion that everyone was being "influenced by each other" was born of her peripatetic life. She had been moving back and forth between Japan and the United States since she was a child. When she joined up with the avant-garde music and performance scene in New York, she connected with a group of artists who were moving somewhat effortlessly around the globe. Indeed, Ono's cosmopolitan outlook was highly regarded, because the vanguardism of these artists meant they wanted to be citizens of the world. Even though her artistic milieu was small, Ono was at the center of it. By 1960 she and the composer La Monte Young were hosting concerts and performances in Ono's downtown loft. According to John Cage, "Yoko

became an important person in the New York avant-garde. People came from long distances to attend the performances. They were the most interesting things going on.”

One reason Ono’s loft became such a focal point of the downtown New York scene was her early embrace of ideas that could later be identified with Fluxus. Generally speaking, Fluxus was a group of artists, musicians, and performers interested in breaking down the boundary between performer and audience. They tended to be interested in the process of making an event rather than the production of a discrete art object. Ono was one of the first artists to use an instruction-based method of making art. These works troubled the boundary between artist and viewer by offering prompts for viewers to perform various activities, essentially asking the viewer to perform some of the labor typically reserved for the artist. Her two most important forays into this realm occurred in 1964 with her book *Grapefruit* and her performance *Cut Piece*.

*Grapefruit* was published first in Japan 1964, and then again in a radically different form, with a mainstream press in the United States and England in 1970. The 1970 edition is a small book, in the shape of a square, with a bright lemon-yellow cover. It is filled with short haiku-like instructions, often called event scores. Borrowing the logic of musical composition, where notes are arranged as part of a score and are then played by members of the orchestra, an event score is a set of instructions designed to be read and ultimately performed by anyone. I find Ono’s instructions to tend toward the deeply lyrical and largely impossible.

I asked artist Sanford Biggers to read me some of his favorites:

**SANFORD BIGGERS:** Two that stuck out to me were the tape pieces. I was particularly interested in *Tape Piece 1* and *Tape Piece 3*. *Tape Piece 1*, very simple. “Stone piece. Take the sound of a stone aging.” And then *Tape Piece 3*, “Snow piece. Take a tape of the sound of the snow falling. This should be done in the evening. Do not listen to the tape. Cut it and use it as strings to tie gifts with. Make a gift wrapper, if you wish, using the same process with a phono sheet.”

**MOLESWORTH:** I asked him why he chose these pieces.

**BIGGERS:** All these are about stillness and perception and being in the moment. And we’re not going to hear or perceive the same thing. We’re not gonna receive the same thing. Particularly in *Tape Piece 3*, it’s about the person who is recording the sound never even really listening to it, and then giving it to someone else who can’t listen to it, and not even explaining what that transaction is about. So it leaves nothing but possibilities. There’s action, there’s inaction, there’s receiving, there’s giving; but there’s no desired goal from that. And something about that, to me, resonates as deeply profound.

**MOLESWORTH:** The instructions in *Grapefruit* have a relation to zen koans. Koans are typically a statement or question designed to foil linear or rational thought. They often take the form of riddles or paradoxes and are used as an aid for meditation. The most famous koan is to imagine the sound of one hand clapping. Such exercises are not meant to fortify the impossibility of the activity, but rather to cast the thinker into a state of intense self-doubt, a doubt designed to question the all-mighty confidence of the ego.

If *Grapefruit*’s instructions happened largely privately in the mind of the reader, then *Cut Piece* was explicitly designed to engage a public audience. In one of the most

infamous pieces of performance art, Ono, dressed in a very beautiful and conservative ensemble, sat silently on the stage with a pair of scissors next to her. The instructions were that any member of the audience could cut off a piece of her clothing. In the film of the 1965 performance at Carnegie Hall, we watch as audience members began by taking small memento-like pieces. Others became more demonstrably aggressive, cutting deeply into her garment. One member slices her bra straps, causing Ono to raise her hands and cover her bare chest.

I asked Sanford Biggers what his thoughts were about *Cut Piece*.

**BIGGERS:** I definitely feel that it's a feminist statement; but it's also a pacifist statement. And we have to remember this was 1964.<sup>1</sup> (#fn:1) So the civil rights movement is already happening in the West. So for her to do that in Carnegie Hall, as a pacifist gesture, is actually echoed culturally when you think about MLK and the civil rights movement, which under his direction, was largely sort of a pacifist venture. Which also is a tradition from Gandhi, from the earlier part of the twentieth century. So I think it also plugs into a much larger zeitgeist of the moment.

**MOLESWORTH:** It's fascinating to me that Sanford links *Cut Piece* to the civil rights movement, particularly to that movement's deep roots in pacifism. For one of the most consistent qualities of Ono's thought is her ongoing desire for world peace.

**ONO:** Who said it? That if we were to really create world peace, that we will have to think in terms of unity. We will have to be able to shake hands with people we don't like. Or ideas that we don't approve, you know? To the point of shaking hands with Ku Klux Klan. I mean, I draw a line there. I don't think I can shake hands with Ku Klux Klan at this point.

**MOLESWORTH:** It's interesting to hear Ono falter, it's as if she knows true peace means being able to shake hands with a member of the KKK, and she knows that she can't do it. However, to hear her struggle reminds me of how she herself, as a Japanese citizen, perhaps had to learn how to shake hands with her American victors. When I talked with Catherine Lord about *Cut Piece* we ultimately ended up talking about the long shadow of World War II and its resonances in Ono's work. Here's Catherine describing *Cut Piece* in her own words:

**LORD:** It's probably the most complicated piece in the world. Let's say it's a piece that she herself staged in Japan, in New York, in London, in Europe. And a piece that then various other people have engaged in reperforming.

To me, it gets projected upon by American and European critics as a piece that has something to do with passive femininity and violence against that femininity and a disempowerment of the figure of The Woman, et cetera, et cetera.

The only version of it that I've seen is the Carnegie Hall performance. I find her composure and her centeredness in herself, I find it a very sort of generous piece. I find it a piece that forefronts the audience, that sort of gives them a kind of private space between them and her, in front of a whole lot of other people.

And I think it's Julia Bryan-Wilson who's made this argument really powerfully. It's a piece that bears the traces and the memories and the images of war and refugees, and people wandering about gravely injured, with shredded clothes, in a state of poverty.

**MOLESWORTH:** How do you think about *Cut Piece* in relation to the censoring of a certain kind of profoundly traumatic image, and the emergence of *Cut Piece* in 1964 in

Tokyo?<sup>2</sup> (#fn:2)

**LORD:** Well— I’m projecting here, but that would have allowed in Tokyo and in Kyoto, people who were survivors, who were directly survivors of the war, I think of it as a way to cause them and to allow them to experience the everydayness of what happens to bodies in war. I mean, the proximity, the intimacy, the callousness, the kind of gang nature. In other words, what you do in war, what one person would do to another person’s body in war, is presumably wit— often witnessed by other people, but it’s their own act. And there’s this kind of doubling that she does, where in my interpretation, you can tell that people come up to the stage, some of them, most of them, believing that they’re sort of doing something to her. But she’s also putting them onstage in front of other people, for other people to witness whatever they’re doing, in terms of cutting, to witness that unfolding. It’s both extremely private and excruciatingly public.

**MOLESWORTH:** For all of Ono’s bravery on stage, she remained completely silent, which shifted the focus of the piece from the performer to the audience.

Catherine Lord:

**LORD:** I think that what her silence does is foreground the audience’s and the actors’ perception of themselves. You see them sort of creating this kind of animal, which is an audience. And her silence foregrounds not only their few verbal remarks, but the choreography of their anxiety and their fluttering and whether they walk on or off the stage very quickly or not.

I mean, I’m really fascinated by audiences being a sort of live creature, a collective creature that invent themselves before your eyes, by the fact of their own desires to sort of be in this collective, and to be an individual in this collective. So that’s what disconcerts me watching that footage.

**MOLESWORTH:** The relationship between artists and their publics was one of the central concerns of conceptual art. And more than any other artist, Ono was interested in entering conceptual art into mainstream culture. She was ultimately able to do this because of her relationship with John Lennon. Just as we can’t discuss Lee Krasner without talking about Jackson Pollock, there is truly no way to talk about Ono without talking about her very famous husband.

Lennon certainly needed no introduction when he and Ono met in 1966. As a member of the Beatles, he was one of the most prominent people on the planet. And yet they met because Lennon went to see one of Ono’s exhibitions in London. It contained a work called *Ceiling Painting* which consisted of a ladder and some text written on the ceiling. When you climbed the ladder to read the text, which you did with a magnifying glass, what you encountered was a single word: YES. The clarity of this optimistic gesture deeply impressed Lennon. He said “the YES made me stay” and the two soon became a couple.

Ono’s proximity to Lennon thrust her into the public eye. In retrospect, I think it’s fair to say that Ono decided to use the spotlight of her new-found celebrity to highlight her avant-garde and conceptual art gestures. And she did so consistently in the name of peace. While *Grapefruit* and *Cut Piece* are largely known to art world insiders, Lennon and Ono’s *Bed-In for Peace* was explicitly made for the mass media of the late 1960s. The couple understood that their honeymoon would make them targets for reporters and paparazzi. They decided to use the media attention as an opportunity to stage a “bed-in” (meant to riff on the then popular activist strategy of sit-ins). At

height of the Vietnam War, they spent a week of their honeymoon in bed in a hotel room in Amsterdam and then again in Montreal. During this time, they agreed to answer all media requests for interviews and photos. Lennon and Ono challenged the reporters, and by extension their audience, to commit to the power of their own imagination as intrinsic to societal revolution. They believed a revolution of the mind could bring about peace. When I asked Sanford Biggers about the *Bed-In for Peace*, he placed it firmly within the context of 1969.

**BIGGERS:** The same year as Yoko and John did the bed piece, there was the assassination of Fred Hampton, from the Black Panthers Party. And all the pictures of that that literally still exist online, of the bloodied mattress and the dead body in the doorway as he's fleeing. Literally, that's all happening at the same time. That's sorta crazy.

**MOLESWORTH:** Sanford's associations allow us to think about Ono as a fellow-traveler of the civil rights movement, rather than the more popular misogynistic account of her as the woman who broke up the Beatles. I find this reorientation of Ono's work and status quite liberating. It allows us to see her more as an activist artist and a citizen of the world. In this narrative she uses her relationship with Lennon, and the new reality that it gives her, as a force for good. However, her attempt to marry the avant-garde event score to a full-on publicity machine was not without its pitfalls. Here's Catherine Lord's account of what she thought Ono's new struggle was.

**LORD:** Her hooking up with Lennon and then realizing that what she's interested in can be conducted on a global scale— But she has two things to manage there. I mean, one is to understand what a global audience might be, and the other is not to vanish into Lennon's fame.

**MOLESWORTH:** Ironically, when Ono started to perform with Lennon on stage as part of the Plastic Ono Band, she frequently performed a work called *Bag Piece* in which she writhed around on stage in a large cloth bag, essentially disappearing herself from view. I used to think it was a gesture of complete nonsense, but Catherine's admonition that Ono had to protect herself from Lennon's fame made me rethink that.

**LORD:** She is interested in nonsense and in withholding herself from the spectacle that she appears to be offering.

**MOLESWORTH:** Sanford Biggers sees Ono's *Bag Piece* from the perspective of being in his own rock band.

**BIGGERS:** I call it a black boy band, even though we're not always all men. It's sometimes women. And one day I might call it an all-women's band. But we're in masks, so you'll never know. The point is just sort of to rest in that space of mystery and ephemerality, which I think is something that is very akin to Ono's practice.

Right now, in contemporary times, the real form of rebelliousness or the avant-garde is actually anonymity, and not to claim your name and not to project yourself and present yourself and, quote/unquote, "brand" yourself. And I think to be contrarian to that, at least in a musical sense, in a band sense, is that you are part of a whole; you are not the whole itself.

**MOLESWORTH:** Biggers calls out Ono's anonymity, while Lord stresses her silence and composure. Both see her as introducing avant-garde strategies to a popular

audience. And, in many instances Ono was derided for them, both by the art world and the broader public.

Rose is skeptical about the shift from a small audience of mostly artists to a large audience that she sees as voyeuristic. And Ono, ever the gentle contrarian, speaks directly about the commonality between her avant-garde aims and those of the world's most successful rock group.

**ROSE:** The point is, they became sort of voyeurs. And once the audience was separated from the creators, who used to be just their own audience, it began to change.

**ONO:** Yeah, but also, the other side is that I think that the world is definitely going in a different direction. Or maybe it's a kind of unification that's happening, a unity that's happening. People like the Beatles were doing something that was to sort of communicate a simple message directly. You know, it was totally different from messages that were so far out that it could not communicate with a wide audience, et cetera. So from both directions, something started to happen and there was a kind of meeting point.

**MOLESWORTH:** Ono's equanimity, her nearly constant refusal to be negative, is a hallmark of this interview. Even as Rose laments the increasing commercialization of the art world, and the voyeurism of the popular audience, Ono redirects the conversation toward the positive.

Sanford Biggers takes what I see as Ono's contrarian politeness to a whole other level.

**BIGGERS:** To me, honestly, I mean, as feminist as these things are, this is sort of beyond feminism. It's sort of like uber-humanitarianism that she was expressing. It's huge. Because I mean, she had to have been the only one in the room for so many times. Not just woman, but Asian woman, but Asian person. I mean, she had to be that solitary figure for so many times. And it must've been, you know, to her credit that she never thought of herself—I mean, I don't know her, so I can't speak for her. But it seems to me that she is an example of someone who already had transcended her physical existence and was sort of like, "I'm a spirit in the world. I have agency, I have a voice, I have ideas. And I don't give a fuck. I'm talking to everyone in the room. I'm making myself known. I'm here with the avant-garde. I am the avant-garde."

**MOLESWORTH:** I find Sanford's sense of Ono's complex agency thrilling. And her tacit "I am the avant-garde" was in total effect in early '70s, the time during which Ono felt there was a "meeting point" between her different audiences. I'm referring specifically to the release of John Lennon's album *Imagine*. The song itself would become Lennon's biggest hit and is one of the most played songs in rock and roll history. Like innumerable female artists before her, Ono did not receive the credit owed to her for her participation in this work. Even though Ono was an avowed feminist, going so far as to write an op-ed for *The New York Times* that called for the feminization of society as a way to reduce violence, Lennon's personal evolution as a feminist was not yet complete. This would change shortly before Lennon's untimely death, when he said of the song: "A lot of it—the lyric and the concept—came from Yoko. But those days I was a bit more selfish, a bit more macho, and I sort of omitted to mention her contribution. But it was right out of *Grapefruit*, her book. There's a whole pile of pieces about 'Imagine this' and 'Imagine that.'"



Even though Lennon did eventually acknowledge Ono's effect on his work, I think it's fair to say that her artistic career suffered as a result of her marriage to him. In 1990, when Rose was interviewing her, Ono was in the process of being reinstated as an artist by an art world in the throes of rewriting the history of global conceptualism. Ono, ever gracious, offered her understanding of the art world's fickle relationship to her work:

**ONO:** When I was doing these things in the early days, very few people understood it and it was a dialog between me and a few friends [Rose: Mm-hm] who appreciated it or something. And I'm just amazed that it's interesting to a different kind of audience. It's very interesting.

**ROSE:** Let's hope it's the art that they're interested in.

**ONO:** I don't think that's a problem. I really think that that would have been a problem if John was alive now. And some people thinking maybe John is going to appear or whatever. But the art world is a pretty sort of— They have their own standards and own pride and all that. And they were not very accepting of John or me, at the time that we were together. And one of the reasons why [Rose: Yeah] I think I lost that thread that I had in the art world was because I teamed up with somebody that was— [Rose: Right] And it just sort of made the art world feel like, they didn't want to know about it, because of that sort of confused feeling about it, you know.

**MOLESWORTH:** Ono, it appeared, had grown too large, too popular for the art world. For years, her celebrity, followed by her tragedy, overshadowed her primary identity as an artist. But when Rose remarks that she hopes the crowds are there for the art, implying that they might only be interested in Ono for her connections to fame and tragedy, Ono brushes it off. She even suggests that Lennon's fame hindered her art career. But by the late 1980s the art world was growing more and more interested in conceptualism, feminist art, and performance art. This meant that Ono's work from the 1960s came back into the public eye through a variety of museum exhibitions.

At that same time, when confronted by the radical immateriality of her work, and a new political and aesthetic landscape, Ono engaged in a profound rethinking and remade her previously ephemeral objects in bronze.

Here is how she describes this transformation:

**ONO:** I was having lunch with a friend. And this friend just sort of said, "Well, why don't you do something in bronze?" And it just was so objectionable that this man said that. And I really felt like, oh, this guy doesn't know anything about my work and how dare he say that? I felt as though he said, why don't you stuff yourself in bronze, you know? [she chuckles] And I was totally upset. And to my surprise, I was crying almost. I was in tears. And I thought, what kind of reaction is this? This guy just said, "Why don't you do it in bronze?" And it had to do with a mixture of things. Maybe the fact that my piece always had a very transient quality and delicate quality.

And then I thought, well, but that's my prejudice then. I said to myself, why am I so upset? And it suddenly flashed to me about the sixties, about the days that I was making glass keys, you know? So then the me who I thought was so daring and always leaving the past and moving into the future is actually holding onto the glass key of the sixties, you know. And suddenly I realized that there was this little girl in me that never moved on from the sixties.

**MOLESWORTH:** I asked Sanford Biggers what he heard in Ono's revelation.

**BIGGERS:** Well, she comes across to me as deeply self-reflective. And to be deeply self-reflective, when your first inclination is some type of visceral reaction to something, you have to then search: why am I feeling that way about it? Why is it affecting me this way? Now, what is gonna make me hold my position? Is it ego? Or is it a true belief that this is where I exist? And at that moment, she has the capacity to say, "You know what? Maybe this is a challenge for me" as she says, "to grow up, to evolve, to maybe not hold onto what she did thirty years prior," and say, "Maybe this is a time for me to experiment with something new and try something new. I'm the Yoko Ono of the nineties. What does this mean? How does that look?"

**MOLESWORTH:** Catherine Lord:

**LORD:** It is staggering. It's really interesting, the way that she lets her tears teach her. The extremity of her reaction causes her to literalize what he said. I mean, she has to have known that to translate something that was very ephemeral into a sort of modestly monumental, completely static object is going to upset her audience.

It's like saying, "Okay, that is so over. You wanted it? You have it. You wanted to be able to sort of look at motion stopped? Here's motion stopped." It's like a fuck you to nostalgia, right?

**MOLESWORTH:** In both Biggers and Lord, I think you can feel the awe, the admiration that comes from Ono's being such a bad ass, such a feminist, such a visionary.

Catherine Lord:

**LORD:** She is very, very, very smart.

**MOLESWORTH:** She is very, very, very smart. But her intelligence is really deceptive. 'Cause she won't perform her intelligence as intelligence. I mean, she's letting people cut her clothes off and she's putting a great big bag over herself onstage, and she's produced a book of instructions for things that can be misconstrued as humorous or impossible or a kind of foolishness.

**LORD:** She's stripped away all the pretention, all the jargon. She never uses jargon. She writes in the simplest possible language.

**LORD:** I mean, Yoko Ono would never say intersectionality, would she?

**MOLESWORTH:** No. No, I don't think she would. Though in fact, she may have one of the most devastating intersectional identities we could describe

**LORD:** Absolutely.

**MOLESWORTH:** In addition to her stripped-down accessible language the other quality that makes Ono so remarkable is her optimism, particularly how her joie de vivre leads her to question herself. Her consistent drive toward the word YES means that she was able to rethink her own prejudices. In the 1960s she turned the logic of art's permanence into impermanence, and as time worked its cyclical magic, she turned her immaterial ideas into lasting objects. I like to think that this capacity for change is shared by the world at large.

In June 2017, the National Music Publishers Association awarded "Imagine" a Centennial Song Award and when they did so they also recognized Lennon's desire to

add Yoko Ono as a co-author of the song 47 years after it first appeared. Not too long ago I heard a street performer singing “Imagine,” and when I did I turned to my companion and said “Did you know that Yoko Ono wrote those lyrics?”

**ONO:** [music and lyrics to “Imagine,” sung by Ono] Imagine all the people, sharing all the world. You may say I’m a dreamer. I’m not the only one. I hope someday you’ll join us, and the world will be as one.

**MOLESWORTH:** For episode transcripts, images, and additional resources, visit our website at [getty.edu/recordingartists](http://getty.edu/recordingartists).

This season was produced by Zoe Goldman with audio production by Gideon Brower.

Our theme music comes from Bryn Bliska.

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1. The Carnegie Hall performance took place in 1965.
2. Ono first performed *Cut Piece* in Kyoto.



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