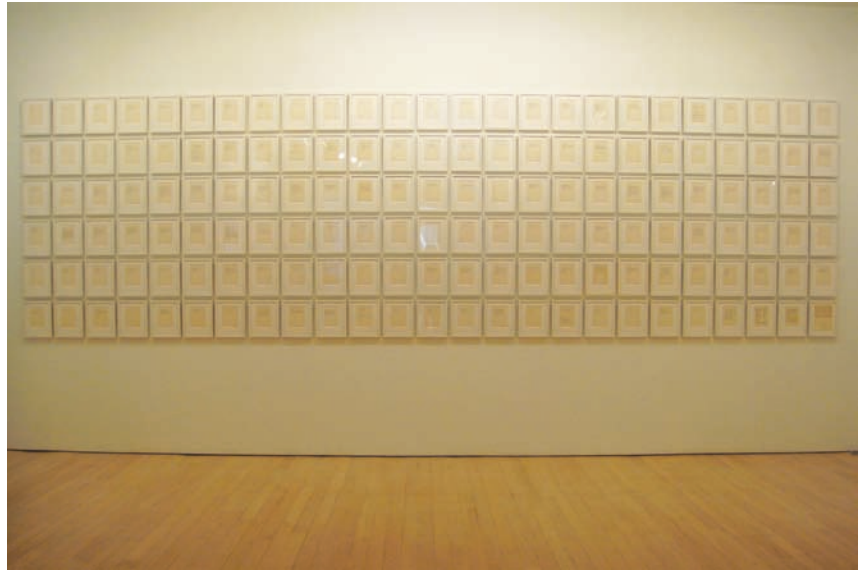


YOKO ONO “GRAPEFRUIT” AT STENDHAL GALLERY

THE BRAIN is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside.

- Emily Dickinson, 632

With the emergence of relational art in the 1990's and so much contemporary artwork that flirts with the idea of the creation of new societies, this art has sometimes enthusiastically, often critically, and always creatively begged the question of how it can be used towards the realization of a better world. Yoko Ono's Instruction Pieces have often been discussed in relation to the Fluxus scores created by artists such as George Brecht and La Monte Young, and they certainly contain an element of the latter's playful Dadaistic character. Yet Ono's whimsical and poetic scores seem to emerge from a place of greater spirituality, one that celebrates the power of the human imagination to construct beautiful and transcendent situations. This intercon-

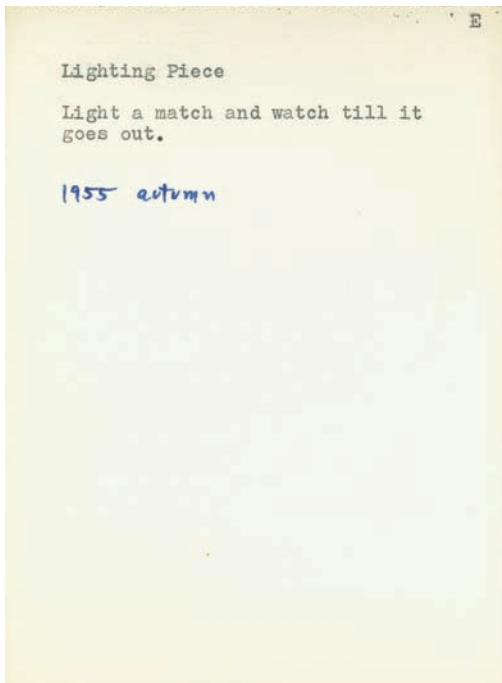


Yoko Ono "Grapefruit", 1964 Collection of 150 Works
Courtesy of George Maciunas Foundation Inc.

nectivity between imaginative play and the physical manifestation of ideas is embodied in Ono's pivotal work, Grapefruit, a collection of the "Instruction Pieces" she composed in the early 60's, and speaks in significant ways to artists today trying to negotiate an effective relationship between ideas and praxis.

Like Brecht and Young, Ono was influenced by the teachings of John Cage, whose ideas about indeterminacy and chance performance inspired many avant-garde artists working at the time. She was married briefly to Toshi Ichiyanagi, a student of Cage's in his famed Experimental Compositions classes at the New School. In 1961, Ono and La Monte Young hosted events featuring young artists experimenting with new notions of art and performance in Ono's Chambers St. loft. A burgeoning scene began to emerge surrounding avant-garde events and artistic collaborations, and it is around this time that Ono most likely met George Maciunas, the man who would become the central organizer and visionary behind the Fluxus movement. Ono and Maciunas developed an intimate friendship and a professionally productive relationship and, in 1961, Maciunas held a show of Ono's "Instruction Paintings" at the AG Gallery, which he co-owned. Ono also contributed event scores to the seminal Fluxus collection Maciunas published a few years later, *An Anthology*. Maciunas published a series of absurd images printed on cardstock, accompanied by captions written by Ono entitled *Do It Yourself Fluxfest*. Ono continued to create scores during this time. Her instruction and performance pieces explored the limits of "painting," and toyed with the notion that thoughts can act as art objects in themselves. The theme of "Do It Yourself" would continue to be central to Ono's work, work in which Ono relinquishes control to of the artwork to the viewer, often seeking to instigate creative mental activity in the minds of others. In 1962 she presented a series of performances at the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo centralized around asking the audience to construct "paintings" in their heads.

In the mid-sixties, Ono compiled many of her scores. Grapefruit was initially published in Tokyo in 1964 as a limited edition of 500 copies and has been widely published multiple times since by Simon and Schuster and other major publishing houses around the world. The scores contained in Grapefruit are short, simply written



Yoko Ono "Grapefruit", 1964

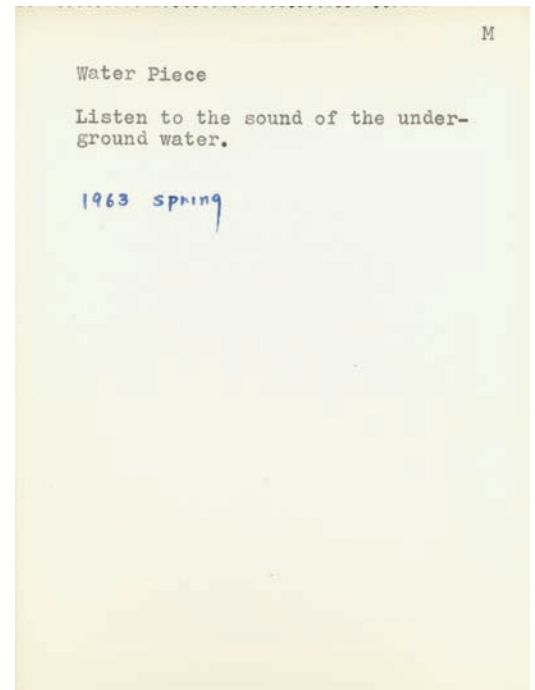
on multiple levels. Their brevity likens them to a haiku. Their ambiguity is reminiscent of Buddhist sayings meant to induce meditative thought. They cause the reader to conjure imagery that is whimsical and painterly. Yet despite their seeming abstractness, they can also operate somewhat literally, referring to the reflection of the moon on the surface of water. Yet even this "literal" interpretation confuses the real and the illusory, conflating the reflection of the moon with the moon itself. Ono even realized some of her scores in different media, further illustrating how amorphous her instruction pieces are as artworks. For example, she manifests *Lighting Piece*, which instructs the reader to light a match and watch until it goes out, as the film *One* (1966). Filmed by Peter Moore using a camera that captured two thousand frames per second, the film is a beautiful document of Ono's instructions being carried out.

In contrast to many of the *Grapefruit* instruction pieces that target readers' thoughts and imaginations *Do It Yourself Fluxfest*, underscores the physical body as the originary site at which thought and action are merged. The cards call attention to actions such as breathing, farting, and dancing. The cards are more historically situated in the material world, some including specific dates and locations in which events like "Disappear", which calls for its performer to boil water, took place. In contrast to *Grapefruit's* more cerebral emphasis, the often humorous instructions in *Do it Yourself* are viscerally corporeal, accentuating how integral our bodies are to our thoughts.

The event scores of George Brecht confound the boundaries between text and performance and beg the question of where the event is realized (in the artist's head? On the card on which it's printed? In the viewer's mind? When the action is consciously performed?). While these questions are at the core of Brecht's *Word Events*, Ono's *Instruction Pieces* exist more comfortably as indeterminate entities. The reason for this might be found in the transcription of a conversation between Ono and artist Rikirit Tirivanjia published in a recent issue of *Artforum*. In it Ono discusses the possibility for a new society, or "Nutopia", explaining that "to say that it exists on a conceptual level is to say that the country exists in all of our minds, and in our hearts, and that's very important to understand. Be-

directives, unassumingly printed using a typewriter on small, rectangular cards. Each is dated with the year in which it was conceived. The *Stendhal Gallery* is pleased to have the original manuscript of *Grapefruit* on display. The original cards are displayed magnificently and occupy an entire gallery wall. They contain Ono's handwritten notes are also hand-dated by Ono in blue pen. The cards ask their readers to follow instructions like imagine snow falling on people they converse with until that person is completely covered with imaginary snow, or draw a map of an imaginary place, follow that map to a specific point, and introduce themselves to the people they meet there. These *Instruction Cards* are reminiscent of Ono's *Ceiling Paining (Yes Painting)* created in 1966, in which viewers climbed up a ladder to arrive at a suspended magnifying glass that reveals the word YES painted on a canvas mounted on the ceiling. Each discrete card is a ladder to a place of affirmation, one that connects the imaginary and the real and asserts the power of the mind to create forms that occupy a liminal space between the material and the immaterial.

Take Water Piece, for example. Conceived in 1964, the card reads "Steal a moon on the water with a bucket. Keep stealing until no moon is seen on the water." These instructions can be understood



Yoko Ono "Grapefruit", 1964

P - Instructions for Painting 40 cards
 Po - Instructions for Poetry 8 cards
 M - Instructions for Music 52 cards
 E - Instructions for Event 42 cards
 O - Instructions for Object 8 cards

The pieces here are works and information of works of 1952 - 1964. There are more pieces of this period that I can send you by next mail which I would like to include in the book.

Poetry was instructionalized in 1960 winter.

Painting was instructionalized in 1961 summer.

After 1961 fall, many of my music pieces are meant to spread by word of mouth, therefore, do not have scores or written instructions. This method is essential of the pieces since the gradual change which occurs in the piece by word-spreading is also part of the piece. If you want to know of these pieces, please ask people who already know of them.

- turn -

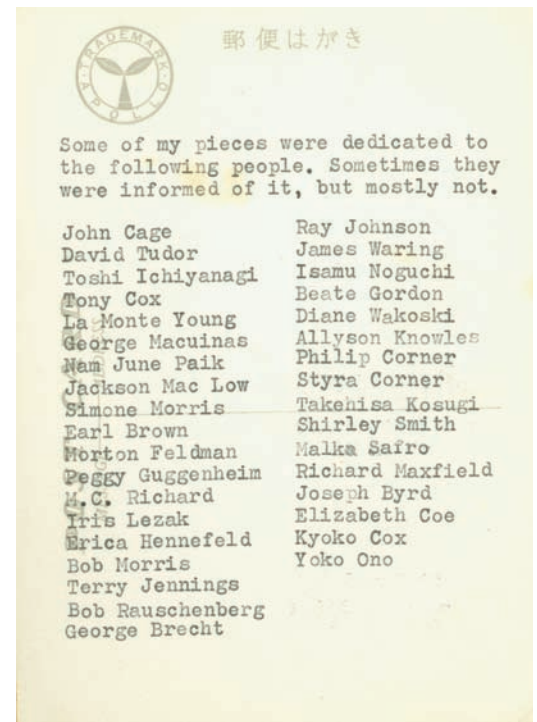
Yoko Ono "Grapefruit", 1964

ing so, she imparts the wisdom of the creative capacity of the imagination to many. Her instructions are similarly social, such as when, in Shadow Piece, she asks two people to put their "shadows together until they become one." Often her pieces ask the viewer to engage with those around her and to instigate meaningful interpersonal exchanges in the process. It is not so much in the action itself, but in the expansion of a kind of network of community, the playful dissemination of a profound optimism in the power of the human mind, that the ideas that Ono seeks to communicate take on weight and begin to define a kind of weltanschauung.

In a June 21 post on her Twitter feed she instructed her readers to "Imagine a peaceful world: that's something we can all do, even when we have different opinions about how to get there." Though she doesn't overshadow the importance of action or discussions of particular political strategies, Ono is concerned with spreading the conviction that the world must change, effecting change in people's minds as a prerequisite to any discussions about how that change should look. Within Grapefruit one can see the linguistic and theoretical mechanisms that Ono uses to instigate and thus affirm the performativity of the imagination, the notion at the heart of her belief that people can change the world through thought and action.

cause there's first an idea, and then we imagine that idea as a reality. Through the imagination, things do become reality—a physical reality. So it's not just a belief, but it's a recipe for creating reality." For Ono, the boundary between the idea and the object is a flimsy one and ideas can approach reality when they are in the heads of many.

It is this emphasis on communication, both the desire for the conveyance of an accurate message from the artist to her audience, and the scale on which this message is conveyed, that might be the most profound insight Ono's Instruction Pieces have to offer to younger artists looking to create a reality different from the one they see as containing so many ills. In the same interview, Ono talks about her work as a "total giving", a complete transaction in which she places what she creates entirely in the hands of its perceivers. This completeness is about depth and scale, as Ono disseminates her ideas widely through, in the case of Grapefruit, a published book, and today through mediums such as her widely attended performances and her Twitter feed.



Yoko Ono "Grapefruit", 1964

STENDHAL | GALLERY
 545 WEST 20TH STREET | NEW YORK, NY 10011