

Reflection #1

Intro

Yoko Ono, born on February 18, 1933, in Tokyo, Japan, is a renowned artist and musician. As a prominent figure in the Fluxus movement, Ono's work spans various mediums, including performance art, visual art, and filmmaking. (Bernstein, 2025) Her innovative approach has significantly influenced contemporary art and culture. I know her the most for her performance pieces that are still used as examples to this day.

She attended Gakushuin University in Tokyo before moving to the United States, where she enrolled at Sarah Lawrence College. Immersing herself in New York City's vibrant art scene during the 1950s and 1960s, she became associated with the Fluxus movement, collaborating with artists like George Maciunas and John Cage. (Bernstein, 2025) Her "Instruction Paintings," which provided viewers with conceptual art experiences through written instructions, exemplify her innovative contributions to the art world. She had a love for how sound only the sound of mind and body are effective. Even utilizing her voice, from sexual moaning to breathing.

In 1969, Ono married John Lennon of The Beatles, and their partnership became a focal point for artistic collaboration and peace activism. Together, they staged events such as the "Bed-In for Peace," using their celebrity status to advocate for social change. Ono's influence extended into music, where she pioneered experimental sounds and techniques, contributing to the development of genres like punk and new wave. (Bernstein, 2025)

Throughout her career, Ono has faced both acclaim and criticism, often challenging traditional boundaries in art and society. That is why I chose her. She has created many works with many deeper meanings, never fearing to touch on topics such as feminism, power dynamics, politics, and even sexuality. This is what made her a very impactful and still renowned performance artist, with the way she involved the audience and certain psychological approaches. Her resilience and commitment to artistic expression and activism have solidified her legacy as a transformative figure in contemporary culture.

Artwork

The artwork that I will be talking about is the performance art "Cut Piece" from 1964. This is a performance where the artist herself is sitting on the floor fully clothed with a pair of scissors in front. Ono sitting on a bare stage wearing dark stockings, a dress, and a cardigan. The audience is informed that they can come one at a time to her and cut a small piece of her clothes for them to keep. She needed to stay motionless and straight-faced. (MOMA) This piece touches on a lot of concepts of power differences.

There were no rules, about the amount, or placement. It was left open. In the started people were uncertain in the beginning, being shy as the action itself has negative or embarrassing connotations, as the understanding message of being the reason a woman becomes undressed. An observation from the video was that women were more careful and nice, they would cut a small amount, usually. however with time man became more bold, cutting bigger pieces, usually in more revealing places. I am familiar with this piece as I took a performance art history class.

This piece brings themes of authority and influence. In the environment of an art exhibit, and being allowed to do these actions, makes people forget compassion and the emotions of the artist itself. However this concept appears seven minutes into the video “ ‘This is very delicate,’ he says. ‘It might take some time.’ He proceeds to cut Ono’s brassiere between her breasts while an unseen woman laughs. Then others begin laughing.”(Murray,2021). The audience started to get the power to their heads when they saw that she didnt respond to it. Even going as far as cutting up to show her necked chest and making comments to heighten this superiority complex rush that they were going through. In the beginning, Yoko Ono tried not to connect a gender label to the pieces, as she says that she willingly victimized herself to be the performer, but then years later she mentioned the feminist connotation to the piece, understanding that she was being objectified and even mentioned themes of rape. (Concannon,2008)

It is a very strong and impactful piece that has so many meanings and interpretations. One of the main focuses is on power dynamics and revealing the hidden lurking attitudes that all audience members have within themselves keenly playing on those power dynamics “ Who actually has the power here? Ono is asking people to cut off her clothes, which gives her the power. But then people actually do it, which renders her powerless” (Teen World Arts) in addition Yoko Ono is the one to decides when the piece finishes which brings it back to her decision even if she is vulnerable. Yoko Ono creates a space where she is then subjugated, while at the same time inviting her audience to revel in such extreme discomfort: complicity, arousal, and shame.

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Bianca Gauthier

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