

Will **** for Peace began as a three-day performance in February, 2002, in Minneapolis at the Mezzanine Gallery at the University of Minnesota. It was a recreation of John and Yoko's original bed-in. Whereas theirs was a protest against the Vietnam War, we used ours as a way to focus attention on the then-recent bombing of Afghanistan.

In May 2003, we re-performed the bed-in at Oboro Gallery in Montreal, following the invasion of Iraq and on the anniversary of John and Yoko's bed-in, also in Montreal, in 1969. We knew that what had been difficult for an American audience would be almost reassuring to a Canadian one, and consequently decided to pose a different challenge to our audience, namely, what did it mean to be "at peace," in its widest sense. Again, the focus was individual exchanges with gallery visitors, but within a highly mediated environment. Sound and installation elements occupied the front areas of the gallery, while the bed was situated at the back and round a corner so it was not immediately visible. The bed was backed by a large mirrored wall and the space and interactions were digitally recorded and simultaneously projected on to the opposite gallery wall, creating a constant "feedback loop" as the mirror reflected the actual and projected space, and the projection recorded the actual and reflected space.

In effect, the piece was the setting up of certain conditions for an exchange to take place, with both artist and viewer being transformed by that exchange. The first of two "editions" of a newspaper-type documentation of the piece had already been distributed and was also available in the gallery. Visitors were asked to cut out a dialogue bubble from the newspaper and complete the phrase "Will ____ for Peace." In exchange, they could cut a lock of hair from both "Yoko" and "John."

Just before the opening, the arrival of three-dozen white roses sent by (the real) Yoko Ono eased any remaining anxieties about the piece. The opening itself began with the two of us being interviewed by a radio reporter. Afterwards, we asked her to fill in a "commitment bubble." She wrote that she would sing for peace. When asked, without much expectation on our parts, if she would sing something right there, she thought for a moment and broke into a beautiful rendition of a Canadian folk song. It was probably that moment that we realized that although we might be holding

court from our spot-lit bed, we were also privileged to be part of the intimate exchanges over the next three days. We were catalysts perhaps, but we were also enormously touched, and amazed by the openness of visitors to the gallery. That reporter was only the first of five people who would sing, not just for us, but as a gesture of peace and generosity sent out into the world.

While in bed, we tried to remain in character as much as possible, though when pushed, we had to occasionally refer to the “other” Yoko, or to our “good friends” Yong Soon and Allan. Some people joined in enthusiastically, others tried gamely while still others couldn’t suspend disbelief, and our refusal to admit that we were anyone but John and Yoko led to convoluted and hilarious exchanges.

We had long, complex discussions, about U.S. policies, about organizing for peace, about spirituality, about art, about performance, about activism, about “our” previous bed-in in Montreal in 1969. We also raised issues around the intersections of race and gender, about of a white man (John) and an Asian woman (Yoko), being played by an Indian man (Allan) and a differently-Asian woman (Yong Soon).

One woman had been a friend of the “other” Yoko’s sister in New York in 1957, and playfully shared memories with “Yoko.” A four-year-old boy approached the bed with his mother, but was shy and clearly confused by why two adults were in their pyjamas, in bed in a public place and furthermore, were inviting people to cut their hair. When he was able to name our teddy bear after himself, Henri, he broke into a grin of pure joy and enthusiastically cut a lock of hair from both of us and from his mother to attach to the bear.

A thirteen year-old boy came into the gallery with his parents and stood safely behind them while they talked to us. Just as they were leaving, he turned back and said he would sing for us. In an angelic alto voice, he sang about a rose. In return, all we could do was offer him one of Yoko’s roses. As they left, we wondered what he might tell his friends: that he had serenaded a “fake” John and Yoko, but had received a rose from the “real” Yoko?

A few people wrote that they would “breathe” for peace. A heavily pregnant woman wrote that she would “make babies” for peace; others would vote, fight, dance, plant flowers, teach, make art. Whatever the act, writing it down as a commitment to do it for peace seemed to be a transformative gesture, giving extra

meaning and resonance to otherwise ordinary acts. But it was this transformation of the ordinary and the everyday that seemed the most profound, and the most hopeful.

What began as a collaboration between two of us, rippled outwards to become a collaboration with the staff of the gallery, and also with our many visitors. They enthusiastically entered the social (and highly socialized) process of art-making and extended it into everyday life in ways that we would never have anticipated.

Collaboration involves negotiation, sometimes compromise, but it can also be a joint exploration that can lead in different directions that we, working individually, would not otherwise take.