



ARTIST AND ACTIVIST

YOKO ONO

The one and only Yoko Ono, 81, reveals all about creating art and fighting the good fight – and why she'll never give up dancing in hotpants

Your new book, *Yoko Ono: Infinite Universe at Dawn*, charts the evolution of your work as an artist and activist across many media. I was watching your clip of *Bad Dancer* [the first single from the Yoko Ono Plastic Ono Band album *Take Me to the Land of Hell*]....

Oh, *Bad Dancer*. You like that?

It was fantastic. You dance in it in tiny black shorts and a top hat – so it seems you're not planning to put your feet up any time soon. Does the retrospective book feel a bit premature to you?

Well, you see, I have an objective observation of the past, but at the same time, I don't believe in the difference between past, present and future. I think it's all now.

Is that philosophy something that keeps you engaged as you grow older?

That makes it easier for me to deal with things, to know that, actually, it's not all different, it's all the same.

So, you don't find that you have to settle into a certain stage of life and give up the way you were? No. Definitely not. And you know, like the logo 'War Is Over! (if you want it)', that works now as well [in 1969 John Lennon and Ono bought a large billboard declaring this in

New York's Times Square], so I don't really feel there is a difference.

Are people these days more cynical about your messages of love and peace than they were in the '60s and '70s?

Well, people were cynical before [laughs]. Now they are not that cynical, because the reality speaks that there is a big demand of thinking about world peace, otherwise we will not survive as a race.

In *Bad Dancer*, I was admiring the fact that you bravely got out your pins. Have you had a good response to it?

By how I'm active, energetic?

Yeah! I think we are all active and energetic people, but we do hide a lot for many reasons and we feel that if we stick out, it's dangerous or something. There is that, too... just believing that you cannot be that active or energetic when you are 80, for instance, and I don't have that feeling. It's all in the mind and the mind actually tells us what to do. Our body just responds to the mind's instructions.

The book features a number of different works, including a composition of film stills from the *Imagine* documentary of you and John playing chess and also a series

of images of John breaking into a smile. It seems generous to share these moments with the world. What compels you to do that and, conversely, is there a lot that you keep private?

Well, I am an artist and an artist is there to communicate and share their ideas. It's as simple as that.

Are you reliving a time you don't want to relive, or have you made peace with the past? I don't think repetition is that important, and so I am just going forward.

Does that tie into the fact that you still live in the New York apartment you shared with John [outside which he was shot and killed in 1980]?

It is a place now, so I don't live there thinking about the past, because of course the past is in the present as well, so I am living with John as well as my son [Sean], who left and who has his independent situation. But I feel that they are all there with me.

For most people, you're such an icon.

Can you tell me something ordinary about you? Well, I don't know...

When you get up in the morning, what's your ritual? Well, I go to the kitchen and make coffee and read some newspapers.

How do you have your coffee? I like a double espresso.

That's a good way to start the day. It certainly is.

As an activist, what do you feel most angry about at the moment? What's the one issue you want people to focus on?

People who are so scared of the reality that they try to sweep it under the rug and not think about it. Because even when they are not thinking about it, it is going to happen, whatever it is that's going to happen, so I would like people to start to wake up. **ALICE WASLEY**

Yoko Ono: Infinite Universe at Dawn, by Yoko Ono (Genesis Publications, \$750) can be pre-ordered from Mossgreen Gallery, mossgreen.com.au.

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