

ARTSY

## The Top 10 Living Artists of 2015

In conducting our annual review, we pulled from a wealth of data sources\* and our editors' insight to determine which living artists wielded the greatest influence in 2015. Several are the mainstays of such rankings you might expect. But the list's new additions ring in exciting advancements for the art world and beyond—from a forebear of this year's biggest trend in painting to a figurehead for free expression and a Chicagoan serving as a catalyst for social change.

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### Yoko Ono

YOKO ONO B. 1933, TOKYO, JAPAN. LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK.



Illustration of Yoko Ono by Rebecca Strickson for Artsy, based on a photograph by Michael Lavine. Original photograph © Yoko Ono.

In December 1969, Yoko Ono and John Lennon launched a viral, global campaign, plastering 10 cities with a simple, resounding message: “WAR IS OVER!” and in smaller letters, “IF YOU WANT IT.” At a salient moment this December, Ono revived the initiative, turning to social media and her website to once again propel peace. And while the artist’s actions for peace have been a persistent force since the death of her husband in 1980, Ono’s influence was especially palpable this year, be it through denouncing gun violence via Twitter, organizing thousands of people to form a giant peace sign in Central Park, or inspiring audiences through her art, which saw a much-deserved spotlight at MoMA

this year. “Yoko Ono was so ahead of her time that only now—four or five decades after some of her seminal early pieces—her work seems finally contemporary in a sense that a larger audience can uncover its layers of meaning” explained Klaus Biesenbach, director of MoMA PS1 and chief curator at large at MoMA. “As a pioneer in conceptual, social and performance practices she is one of the most innovative and groundbreaking artists of our time.” “Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960–1971” led us through the artist’s young career, with doses of painting, performance, video, photography, and text in equal measure, all the while enveloping visitors in a sequence of experiential, engaging moments.

The show, and the rich time period it drew from, rejected any doubts around Ono’s visionary practice and her role as an artist in her own right. Performances on view included a recreation of *Bag Piece* (1964), with a live performer stretching and squirming on a small stage in a black bag, and a screening of *Cut Piece* (1964), where Ono sat still, solemnly, as audience members took scissors to her outfit. At the center of the space a new commission, a tall, wobbly spiral staircase—much like one on view now at Beijing’s Faurshou Foundation—beckoned viewers to climb upwards, finding at the top a skylight and a moment of respite. The show unwound like a cathartic exercise, delighting as it unfolded, bolstered by the artist’s small instructional tome *Grapefruit* (1964), its pages lining the walls with contemplative reflections, like “Listen to the sound of the earth turning.” Similarly instructive is “THE RIVERBED,” Ono’s current two-part exhibition, which will evolve over its run at Andrea Rosen Gallery and Galerie Lelong in New York. Again the artist invites meditative experience, this time asking audiences to sit and think on simple terms like “remember” and “wish,” and to contribute their thoughts and actions to the installation’s final form.