



Setsuko Ono | Classes of 1966 & 1972

Setsuko Ono transitioned to a career in art after retiring from a 28-year tenure at the World Bank in 2003. Inspired by John Cage’s philosophy of spontaneity, she creates her pieces with minimal planning, guided by emotion. Her paintings often address political themes, focusing on international relations and human rights, reflecting her deep concern for global injustices. Exhibiting internationally, Setsuko Ono’s art blends her professional and personal experiences, creating a dialogue between cultures. Her work embodies a commitment to artistry and activism, engaging with the pressing issues of our time.



© Chan Chao – *Aleppo*, 2016. Pastel and collage on canvas, 76 × 101 cm.

Setsuko Ono’s background and international experiences influence her art, which reflects her fierce sense of justice and her deep sorrow for the victims of wars, poverty, and the destruction of nature. Global conflicts like civil war but also migration and nature are the subjects of her creation.



© Ken Shimizu – *Dreams*, 2012, Stainless steel, 4.1 × 5.2 × 4.6 m.

Setsuko Ono’s sculptures, made from welded steel, are known for intricate cut-out designs that allow light and nature to interact with the art. These delicate works transform rigid material into fluid, expressive shapes, reflecting her belief in spontaneous artistic expression.



© Setsuko Ono.

As a teenager, Setsuko Ono was deeply influenced by John Cage’s “4’33”, shaping her approach to art. She embraced spontaneity and freedom, rejecting detailed plans. Her method reflects the belief that creativity thrives when allowed to unfold naturally, both artistically and emotionally.

