

YAYOI KUSAMA:

Look Now, See Forever



MEDIA KIT

Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
19 November 2011 – 11 March 2012



Rachel Nolan MP
Minister for Finance, Natural Resources and the Arts

Media release

18 November 2011

Exclusive Yayoi Kusama exhibition opens as GoMA celebrates fifth birthday

Yayoi Kusama: Look Now, See Forever, an exclusive exhibition of new work by the internationally renowned Japanese artist, has opened at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) today.

Arts Minister Rachel Nolan said the major solo exhibition will be on display until 11 March 2012 as part of the program to mark the gallery's fifth anniversary.

"Yayoi Kusama is one of the most significant and influential artists working today," Ms Nolan said.

"Now in her 80s, her innovative work with colour, form, space and perception has captivated audiences worldwide since the 1950s.

"This vibrant and playful exhibition is yet another exclusive to GoMA, and transforms the gallery into a series of spectacular immersive rooms, featuring new sculptures and paintings as well as film projection and installation.

"Many Queenslanders will remember Kusama's *Obliteration Room* from the 2002 Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, in which visitors filled a completely white room with a plethora of multi-coloured polka dots."

"I'm delighted to say the *Obliteration Room* has returned bigger and better than ever for this exhibition, and gallery visitors will once again have the chance to take part in Kusama's work."

The exhibition also includes:

- *Flowers that bloom at midnight*, four towering, brightly coloured flower sculptures set alongside a series of new intricate and abstract paintings drawn from a body of 100 works produced over the past 18 months.
- *Dots Obsession*, a colourful installation with an explosion of polka dots over red walls, floors, ceilings and giant balloons."
- *Reach Up to the Universe, Dotted Pumpkin*, features shiny two-metre-tall aluminium pumpkins with reflections distorted by a profusion of convex mirrors.

Queensland Art Gallery Director Tony Ellwood said the exhibition is a major coup for the state.

"We are honoured to be hosting the only current exhibition in the world of Kusama's new work, and the recent developments in the career of this remarkable artist," he said.

"Her work is also the subject of a major retrospective organised by the Tate Modern in Britain that will tour to the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

"*Look Now, See Forever* had come about as a result of the Gallery's long-term engagement with Yayoi Kusama and was developed in direct collaboration with the artist and her studio."

For more information on *Yayoi Kusama: Look Now, See Forever* and GoMA's fifth anniversary celebrations visit www.qag.qld.gov.au

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www.qag.qld.gov.au/kusama/media

FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION



Image: Yayoi Kusama / Courtesy: Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo

This exhibition presents the latest developments in the work of Yayoi Kusama, one of the world's most influential and distinctive living artists. Featuring work produced over the last two years, 'Look Now, See Forever' brings together the major threads of Kusama's current practice in painting, sculpture, video and installation. Now in her 80s, she remains highly prolific and is arguably more of her time now than at any point in her long career.

Kusama's work is characterised by its stunning use of colour and its obsessive repetition of motifs such as dots, nets and organic forms. Her unique style and processes were developed in the 1950s, and have evolved through the constant dialogue she has engendered between painting and an increasingly broad range of media. Her work has extended to experimental film, literature, fashion, music and social protest, and her influence can be seen in pop art, minimalism, concrete painting, institutional critique and performance art.

While close to many tendencies in the art of the past fifty years, Kusama has never been part of any movement. She occupies a unique role as an 'insider-outsider', whether as an Asian woman in male-dominated 1960s New York, or as a liberated, worldly artist in conservative 1970s Japan. Her work has therefore consistently eluded classification, and a serious international reappraisal of her significance only really began in the 1990s.

After more than half a century of art making, Kusama's current work is remarkable for its vibrancy, consistency, and contemporary character. Having anticipated many of the tendencies in recent art, Kusama continues to extend and deepen her unique vision. As the work in this exhibition suggests, her practice keeps numerous contradictions in play—introspection and spectacle, expression and formalism, Asian and Western characteristics—and in the process transcends them, rendering them somehow obsolete.

Over the course of Kusama's career, discussion of the artist's work has undergone a number of shifts. Critical responses in the West initially focused on her formal innovations in relation to artistic modernism, while she was later discussed in the context of her identity as an Asian artist, a woman artist and an artist dealing with mental illness.

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Japanese criticism, on the other hand, has tended to discuss the richness of her practice, her commitment to art making as a way of working through ideas. To these readings might be added her evocation of the traditional aesthetic category of the sublime, describing the enervating feeling of awe produced by raw encounters with nature, and its identification through her work with public spectacle and personal trauma.



Image: Yayoi Kusama / *The obliteration room 2002* / Installation at the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002, Queensland Art Gallery

Kusama has a longstanding relationship with Queensland Art Gallery, having been a significant part of its collection and exhibition history since 1989, when she participated in the groundbreaking survey of Japanese art in the 1980s, 'Japanese Ways, Western Means'. She was one of three senior Asian artists to be profiled with focused showings in the 4th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 2002, while the gallery's significant holdings of her work, including her classic *Narcissus Garden* 1966/2002, remain audience favourites. 'Look Now, See Forever' pays tribute to an artist who occupies the singular position of being of historical and contemporary importance.

A dedicated online resource for 'Look Now, See Forever', featuring curatorial essays, an expanded chronology and more, is available at www.qag.qld.gov.au/looknowseeforever

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ARTIST CHRONOLOGY

Early life: Japan

- 1929** Yayoi Kusama is born on 22 March, in Matsumoto City, Nagano prefecture, Japan; she is the fourth child in a wealthy, but dysfunctional, family.
- c.1939** Around the age of ten, Kusama begins using polka dots and net motifs in her drawings, watercolours, pastels and oils. She later attributes this to a series of hallucinations, the result of family tensions.
- 1948–49** She leaves home to study *Nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) at Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts, graduating the following year.
- 1950** A Nihonga painting entitled *Cat 1947* is selected for the 'First Nagano Prefecture Exhibition'.
- 1952** Kusama produces work at an astonishing rate. Her first solo exhibition, held in March at the First Community Centre, features 250 works, while a second exhibition at the same venue in September includes a further 280.
- 1953** Kusama turns down a place at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris in order to devote time to a solo exhibition in Tokyo.
- 1954** In February, Kusama holds her first Tokyo solo exhibition at Shirokiya Department Store. Her work is featured on the cover of the journal *Mizue*. A second exhibition in Tokyo takes place at Mimatsu Shobo Gallery in August.
- 1955** Kusama's work is included in the 'International Watercolor Exhibition: 18th Biennial' at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. In November, she begins corresponding with American artist Georgia O'Keeffe, sending her 14 watercolours. She also sends work to Kenneth Callahan, a Seattle-based painter.
- 1956** Through Callahan, and with O'Keeffe's encouragement, she secures a solo exhibition at Seattle's Dusanne Gallery. Against her family's wishes, Kusama obtains a visa to allow her to travel to the United States.
- 1957** With news of her American exhibition, Kusama becomes a minor celebrity and the Matsumoto mayor organises a farewell for the artist. Before leaving for the United States, she destroys several thousand of her own works.

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United States

- 1957** In December, Kusama holds her first solo exhibition in the United States at Dusanne Gallery, Seattle.
- 1958** Moves to New York in June and begins working on her 'Infinity Nets' paintings. Her group exhibitions include 'Modern Japanese Paintings' at the important artist-run Brata Gallery.
- 1959** Kusama debuts her net paintings, including *Large White Net* 1958 in a group show at Boston's Nova Gallery in June. Her solo exhibition at Brata Gallery in October, featuring five large monochrome canvases, garners glowing press reviews from artists and critics, including artist and writer Donald Judd. Judd purchases a painting for \$200, paid in four instalments, and the two artists grow close.
- 1960** In March, Kusama begins her association with the European Avant-garde when she and Mark Rothko are the only artists from New York to be represented in 'Monochrome Malerei', an international survey of contemporary abstraction at the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen, Germany. Her work appears alongside artists of the Zero, Azimuth and Nouveau Réaliste groups (collectively known as New Tendencies).
- 1961** Frank Stella purchases a 'Yellow Net' painting from a solo exhibition at Stephen Radich Gallery. She moves her studio into the same building as Donald Judd and sculptor Eva Hesse; Hesse becomes another close friend. Kusama is hospitalised regularly from overwork, and a concerned Georgia O'Keeffe convinces her own dealer Edith Herbert to purchase several works in order to help Kusama stave off financial hardship.
- 1962** Kusama experiments with soft sculpture, often with Judd as an assistant; she produces a series called 'Accumulation' and exhibits at Green Gallery, a hub for the New York avant-garde. She meets artist Joseph Cornell and the two begin a long-term relationship.
- 1963** Kusama is granted permanent residency in the United States. Her exhibitions include 'Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show' at Gertrude Stein Gallery in New York; this is the artist's first installation to use an entire gallery space.
- 1964** Kusama starts to include electric lights and mirrors in her installations. For 'Driving Image Show', she fills New York's Castellane Gallery with 'Infinity Net' paintings, objects from her 'Accumulations' series and most works from the 'Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show', as well as macaroni-encrusted dresses and mannequins; even live dogs are included. Commercial attention is limited and her illness returns.

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- 1965** Kusama's financial circumstances are improved by a Rockefeller Foundation grant and her health improves in the company of artist On Kawara, with whom she shares a studio. Among numerous well-received exhibitions is November's 'Floor Show' at Castellane Gallery, which features her first *Infinity Mirror Room*. Kusama begins to stage her first 'happenings'.
- 1966** 'Driving Image Show' is exhibited at the Galleria d'Arte del Naviglio 2 in Milan, where Kusama spends two months working in Lucio Fontana's studio. Fontana funds the production of *Narcissus Garden* 1966 (1500 silver balls gathered on a lawn) at the Venice Biennale in June. In an attempt to both engage viewers and critique the commercialism of the art world, Kusama sells the balls for 1200 lira (\$2) each; she is stopped by Biennale authorities, who object to the artist selling her work 'like hot dogs or ice-cream cones'. Back in New York, 'Kusama's Peep Show: Endless Love Show' at Castellane Gallery is the first solo multimedia installation for the artist; hexagonal mirrors, flashing coloured lights, rock music and 'Love Forever' badges make up the installation.
- 1967** Kusama stages a happening at Black Gate Theatre in New York. Entitled *Self-Obliteration*, it features an environment of mannequins and walls covered in polka dots, all under black light – participants are encouraged to draw dots on each other in fluorescent paint.
- 1968** The film *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* 1968, documenting the happenings of the previous year, is screened in New York and telecast in Europe. Kusama's happenings grow more radical; featuring public nudity, they are staged throughout New York as protests against the war in Vietnam, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and capitalism generally. Sensational reportage of these events reaches Japan and causes further friction within Kusama's family.
- 1969** The *Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead* happening takes place in the sculpture garden of New York's Museum of Modern Art and receives widespread press coverage; additional happenings and performances are staged throughout the year. Kusama establishes a fashion label, selling dresses and textiles out of a boutique on Sixth Avenue.
- 1970** Returning to Japan for a three-month visit, Kusama is a frequent guest on television programs. She is arrested during a happening in Tsukuji.
- 1971** Kusama stages a series of street happenings and fashion shows throughout Europe.
- 1972** Back in New York, Kusama begins to write about her experiences; this material will form the basis of her later literary production

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Japan

- 1973** Following the death of her partner, Joseph Cornell, in late 1972, Kusama returns to Japan in declining health. She intends to stay there only a short time but by 1975 is living there permanently.
- 1974** Kusama turns her attention to ceramics, watercolours, pastels and collage and begins to write poetry. Kusama's father, Kamon, dies in June.
- 1975** Kusama is hospitalised at Seiwa Hospital in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. She attempts to settle scandalous accounts of her work in an essay entitled 'The struggle and wanderings of my soul' published in *Geijutsu Seikatsu (Art Life)*. In December, Tokyo's Nishimura Gallery hosts an exhibition of new collages, Kusama's first since returning to Japan.
- 1977** From March, Kusama becomes a permanent resident at Seiwa Hospital. She opens a studio nearby.
- 1978–82** Kusama's first novel, *Manhattan Suicide Addict*, is published in March 1978. For the next few years, her only exhibitions of new work are modest showings in Japan; her presence in the United States is limited to collection-based shows.
- 1983–84** Published in January, Kusama's second novel, *The Hustler's Grotto of Christopher Street*, wins *Yasei Jidai* magazine's Tenth Literary Award for New Writers. She devotes the following year to writing. Her mother, Shigeru, dies.
- 1985** In April, the artist conducts a performance at Tokyo's Joshinji Temple and her third novel, *The Burning of St Mark's Church*, appears in May. Her work *Chair 1962* appears in the important 'Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945–1965' at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.
- 1986** A showing at the Musée Municipal, in Dole, France, is the first international exhibition to concentrate on Kusama's output from the 1980s, while *Chair 1962* is included in the Pompidou's extensive survey 'Japon des Avant Gardes 1910–70'. Her book *Yayoi Kusama: Driving Image* appears in June.
- 1987** Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art in Fukuoka launches Kusama's first major retrospective, comprising 79 works from the 1940s to the 1980s.
- 1988** Her novel *Between Heaven and Earth* is quickly followed by *Woodstock Phallus Cutter*, while new three-dimensional works appear in 'Yayoi Kusama: Soul Burning Flashes' at Fuji Television Gallery in Tokyo.

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Reappraisal

- 1989** The Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia, includes Kusama's 1981 installation *Spring Festival* in the exhibition 'Japanese Ways, Western Means', done in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. Kusama's literary output continues with two books appearing in the first half of the year. A major revival of Euro–American interest in the artist's work is marked by 'Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective' at the Center for International Contemporary Arts, New York; and 'In Context: Yayoi Kusama, Soul Burning Flashes' at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. She becomes the first Japanese artist to grace the cover of the major art journal *Art in America*.
- 1990** The novel *Angels in Cape Cod* is published in February.
- 1991** Kusama conducts a *Self-Obliteration* event in front of the Sony Building in Ginza, Tokyo, covering the entire space, including spectators and journalists, with polka dots. She shows new paintings and sculptures at the Fuji Television Gallery, while her ninth novel, *The Foxgloves of Central Park*, is published in April. She finishes the year by starring in the film *Tokyo Decadence*, written and directed by Ryu Murakami.
- 1992** Kusama's tenth novel, *Lost in Swampland*, appears in January.
- 1993** Kusama becomes the first solo artist to show at the Japanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The exhibition brings together important early works from the 1950s, large-scale sculptures and paintings from the 1980s, as well as more recent works. The artist conducts a performance alongside *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* during the exhibition's vernissage in June. The novel *New York Story* appears in the same month.
- 1994** Several 1960s works by Kusama are included alongside Japanese peers in 'Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky'; the exhibition is shown at the Yokohama Museum of Art and major venues in the United States. She publishes another novel called *The Madhouse of Ants*. *Pumpkin* 1994 becomes the first outdoor sculpture to be installed on Naoshima Island in Japan's inland sea.
- 1996** The exhibition 'Yayoi Kusama: The 1950s and 1960s – Paintings, Sculpture, Works on Paper' at Paula Cooper Gallery confirms the reappraisal of the artist as a major figure in the American postwar avant-garde. Kusama's balloon works make their first appearance as a commission for Pittsburgh's The Mattress Factory.
- 1997** Kusama is featured on the cover of the February issue of the major art journal *Artforum*. The artist stages over a dozen exhibitions during the year.

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- 1998** Participation in the São Paulo and Taipei biennales is complemented by solo presentations of new work in New York, Tokyo, London and Paris, and the opening of the survey 'Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–1968' at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the exhibition tours widely. The novel *Violet Obsession* is published in July, and several of her books are translated into English.
- 1999** Kusama publishes the novel *New York '69* and collaborates with Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake. The Tokyo showing of 'Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–1968' at the Museum of Contemporary Art is accompanied by 'In Full Bloom: Yayoi Kusama, Years in Japan', which completes the artist's story by including work produced before and after her years in New York
- 2000** Kusama contributes a balloon work and *Infinity Mirror Room 1965/1998* to the Biennale of Sydney. A major volume on her life and work is published by Phaidon Press.
- 2001** The artist is featured in the first 'Yokohama Triennale', presenting two new works which draw on *Narcissus Garden* – the first is *Endless Narcissus Show*, a mirror room constructed around silver balls; and the second is *Narcissus Sea*, where 2000 balls float in Yokohama Port.
- 2002** Kusama is one of the three senior artists (the others are Nam June Paik and Lee Ufan) featured in 'APT2002: The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' (APT2002) at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. A selection of historical and recent works are included in APT2002, the fourth APT organised by the Gallery – *Narcissus Garden 1966/2000* and a new site-specific installation *Soul Under the Moon 2002* – and the artist's Kids' APT project *The Obliteration Room* is tremendously well received.
- 2003** For the 2nd Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, in the rural hinterlands of Niigata province, Kusama exhibits a ten-metre-wide flower sculpture on a small hill in Matsudai; she also opens a boutique in the same town and stages a fashion show during the exhibition.
- 2004** For the 'Kusamatrix' exhibition, the artist transforms the galleries of the new Mori Art Museum in Tokyo into immersive installations. A major retrospective opens at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo and travels to Kyoto, Hiroshima, Kumamoto and Matsumoto.
- 2005** Kusama collaborates with graf media to design a cafe for the 2nd Yokohama Triennale.
- 2006** Kusama creates a four-metre-tall red pumpkin for the 'Naoshima Standard Exhibition', while her public work for the Singapore Biennale is installed in busy shopping areas.
- 2007** Kusama 'obliterates with dots' the Japanese comedian–actor–director Takeshi Kitano on national television.

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- 2008** The retrospective 'Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years' opens at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, before travelling to Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, and the City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand, in 2009–10. Despite the global financial crisis, *No. 2 1959*, a white net painting formerly owned by Judd, fetches USD\$5 792 000 at auction in New York – the highest ever return for a work by a female artist.
- 2009** Kusama's first 'Flowers That Bloom at Midnight' works are shown at Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles.
- 2010** The video 'Song of a Manhattan Suicide Addict' is shown at the 2010 Biennale of Sydney. Two of Kusama's flowers are included in Japan's Aichi Triennale and the artist is commissioned to design a Town Sneaker-model bus, which she titles *Mizutama Ranbu (Wild Polka Dot Dance)*, whose route travels through her home town of Matsumoto.
- 2011** The retrospective 'Yayoi Kusama' opens at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, travelling to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Tate Modern in London, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. A three-hour special on the artist is broadcast on Japan's NHK in August, and *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama* is published in October. 'Look Now, See Forever' opens at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane in November.

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RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS

Online publication

An in-depth online resource accompanies 'Look Now, See Forever'. Featuring curatorial essays by Reuben Keehan, Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery and others; a detailed illustrated chronology of Kusama's long career; multimedia content and expanded information on all featured works, this unique companion to the exhibition perfectly accompanies a visit to the Gallery.

The online publication is available at www.qag.qld.gov.au/looknowseeforever

Public Programs

Curator's perspective tour

Saturday November 19, 11.30am, Gallery 1.3, GoMA

Reuben Keehan, Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery provides a curator's perspective on the recent works of Kusama presented in the exhibition, and the curatorial processes involved in the project's development.

Yayoi Kusama: Inside the studio

Saturday November 19, 1.30pm, Cinema B, GoMA

Gain a unique insight into the artistic world and studio practice of Yayoi Kusama through this special in-conversation between Ms Yoriko Tsuruta, who has worked closely with the artist for many years, and Suhanya Raffel, Deputy Director, Curatorial and Collection Development, Queensland Art Gallery.

Look Out teacher program

Yayoi Kusama: Look Now, See Forever

Saturday February 4, 2012, 9am, GoMA

This paid program for teachers, incorporating a curatorial talk and artist workshop, provides practical suggestions for teachers to interpret the exhibition for their students and integrate the Gallery into the classroom context. Bookings can be made from January 9 via the Gallery's website.