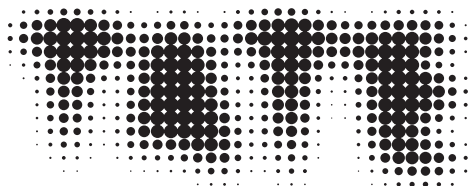


YAYOI KUSAMA

LARGE PRINT GUIDE



1 INTRODUCTION

Yayoi Kusama is a Japanese artist and writer. Across her career, she has made paintings, sculptures, performances and installations. For Kusama, the experience of art is about more than just looking. It can also be about stepping into the artwork and being immersed in it, as in her Infinity Mirror Rooms.

Kusama was born in Matsumoto, Japan, in 1929. This was a time of economic crisis and growing nationalism, when Japanese traditions and social conservatism were strongly promoted. She started making art as a child. Although her family discouraged her, she went on to study painting in Kyoto. Looking for 'unlimited freedom, and a wider world', she moved to the United States in 1957. She spent the 1960s in New York, immersing herself in the fast-moving art scene there.

She returned to Japan in 1973. Kusama has experienced mental health problems throughout her life and around this time she began to have acute hallucinations. In response, she admitted herself to a Tokyo hospital in 1977. She still lives there to this day, with her studio close by. 'I write novels and poems, and I also paint in the hospital. They are my saviours,' she reflects.

The images in this room chart key moments in Kusama's life and career. She has regularly had herself photographed with her works. Carefully staged images place her at the centre of her creative universe.

'It would be futile and meaningless to focus on the shrinking time-frame before me, or to think of my limitations. I shall never stop striving to make works that will shine on after my death.'

All artworks and quotations in the exhibition are by Yayoi Kusama unless otherwise stated.

TIMELINE IMAGE CREDITS

All images are courtesy of Yayoi Kusama Inc.
unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION WALL

[undated]: Nakatsutaya, the Kusama family farm

1930s: Kusama family portrait (Yayoi is second from the right)

c1939: Aged around ten

c1951: Surrounded by her drawings at her parents' home
in Matsumoto

1957: [right] At Matsumoto station, before departing
for United States

1957: [left] In Seattle with gallerist Zoë Dusanne

c1958–9: In her New York Studio

c1961: Posing in front of an Infinity Net painting with the
Manhattan skyline in the background

SHORT WALL

1961: First solo exhibition in New York at Stephen Radich Gallery

1963: **Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show**, Gertrude Stein Gallery, New York

c1965: Lying on the base of **My Flower Bed** (1962) Photo: Peter Moore

1965: Among her sculptures in her New York studio

1965: **Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli’s Field**, installation view in the exhibition **Floor Show**, Richard Castellane Gallery, New York

1966: **Kusama’s Peep Show (or Endless Love Show)**

mid-1960s: With models wearing her fashion designs

LONG WALL

1966: Staging **Narcissus Garden**, a performative intervention at the international art exhibition, the 33rd Venice Biennale

1976: In a Tokyo cemetery, for **Yomiuri Newspaper**.

Photo: Yukio Hijikata

1986: Performing in the exhibition **Art: A Dialogue on Peace**, Ohkurayama Memorial Hall, Yokohama, Kanagawa

1989 and 1993: In her Tokyo studio

1994: **Flower Obsession** at Museum City Tenjin '94, Super Suburb, Nokoshima, Fukuoka

1996: **Dots Obsession**, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh

1996–7: Solo exhibition, Yayoi Kusama Repetition, Mitsubishi Estate Artium, Fukuoka City

1998: Solo exhibition, **Yayoi Kusama Self Obliteration**, at MoMA Contemporary, Fukuoka. Photo: Mitsunobu Nakamura

2000: **I'm Here, but Nothing**, at Maison de la culture du Japon, Paris

2001: **Fireflies on the Water**, Maison de la culture du Japon, Paris. Photo: Alain Nogues

2010: Official portrait

2012: At the press launch of her Tate Modern retrospective exhibition

2016: In her Tokyo studio

2 THE UNIVERSE AS SEEN FROM THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Peep through one of the windows into this mirrored sculpture. The space inside the cube seems to go on forever. Faces peering in – including our own – are reflected infinitely alongside multicoloured circles.

From early in her life, Kusama has experienced visual hallucinations. She recalls a childhood memory: 'One day after gazing at a pattern of red flowers on the tablecloth I looked up to see that the ceiling, the windows, and the columns seemed to be plastered with the same red floral pattern. I saw the entire room, my entire body, and the entire universe covered with red flowers'. She felt as if she was disappearing or dissolving. She describes this as 'self-obliteration'. Using experiences like this in her art is a way for her to make sense of them and share them with others.

Mirrors, dots and repetition have long been important aspects of Kusama's work. This is one of her most recent sculptures, made specially for this exhibition. It recalls her first mirror installation, **Kusama's Peep Show or Endless Love Show** 1966.

The sculpture is balanced on its plinth. Please take care of this delicate work and do not touch.

The Universe as Seen from the Stairway to Heaven 2021

Mirror, glass, coloured glass, lens sheet

Courtesy the artist, Ota Fine Arts and Victoria Miro

X82596

3 CHANDELIER OF GRIEF

You're about to enter the first Infinity Mirror Room in this exhibition. Its white exterior blends into the gallery environment. But inside, the reflected space goes on forever. An ornate chandelier with flickering lights rotates from the ceiling. A never-ending field of lights surrounds you. Our reflections form part of the experience. This means every visit is unique.

Kusama called this work **Chandelier of Grief**. It suggests that we can experience beauty and sadness at the same time.

Chandelier of Grief 2016/2018

Chandelier, steel, aluminium, mirrored glass, acrylic, motor, plastic and LEDs

Tate. Presented by a private collector, New York 2019

T15202

'Forget yourself. Become one with eternity. Become part of your environment.'

4 WALKING PIECE

Kusama moved from Japan to the United States, settling in New York City in 1958. In this performance, she walks around its empty, industrial streets. She wears a pink kimono and carries a parasol. The slide-show format presents her journey through the city in a sequence of images.

Kusama's childhood had been overshadowed by the Second World War, in which the US and Japan were on opposing sides. Racist anti-Japanese propaganda had been circulated in the US during the war. This continued to influence depictions of Japanese people and culture in the years that followed. These attitudes affected how Kusama's work was received. Critics often focused on her nationality and gender. Here she responds ironically by performing a US stereotype of a Japanese woman.

New York appears hard and unwelcoming to the character Kusama plays in this work. **Walking Piece** draws attention to the sometimes lonely experience of city living. The photographer Eikoh Hosoe documented the performance in a way which captures the feeling of being out of place. He uses a distorting fish-eye camera lens to heighten the sense of isolation within the work.

Walking Piece 1966

Digitised slide projection

Running time: 4 mins

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Z75684

5 INFINITY MIRRORED ROOM – FILLED WITH THE BRILLIANCE OF LIFE

In this work, you'll move along a reflective walkway over a shallow pool. Around you, tiny dots of light are repeated endlessly in the mirrors and water. The lights pulse, like a heartbeat or a ticking clock. Even while we experience Kusama's infinite space, we are made aware of time passing. Kusama created this work for her 2012 retrospective exhibition at Tate Modern.

In Kusama's visual hallucinations, she becomes 'obliterated' by repeated dots. Here she invites us to share this 'self-obliteration'. The dots surround and engulf you, making it hard to tell where you end and where the rest of the room begins. Usually, when we experience art, there's a clear distinction between us and the artwork. But Kusama confuses this on purpose. To experience her mirror rooms, she asks us to become part of them.

Infinity Mirrored Room - Filled with the Brilliance of Life

2011/2017

Mirrored glass, wood, aluminium, plastic, ceramic and LEDs
Tate. Presented by the artist, Ota Fine Arts and Victoria Miro
2015, accessioned 2019

T15206

'Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos... When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka dots, we become part of the unity of our environment.'

6 MIRROR PERFORMANCE

The photographs and film in this section give a glimpse into how Kusama was working in 1960s New York. This is when she started making mirror environments. Today, tens of thousands of people around the world queue for hours for a chance to experience Kusama's mirrored rooms. But when she started creating them, she struggled for recognition – and even to make a living.

These photographs show Kusama combining performance, painting and mirror installation. They document her live art event, **Mirror Performance**, which took place in New York in September 1968. This was a turbulent year in the United States. The country was at war in Vietnam, a conflict many opposed. Moral values were also changing. Women asserted their right to equality, seeking freedom to pursue careers and sexual relationships.

In **Mirror Performance**, Kusama reflects on US society at the time. Its visual excess is not an escape from reality. Instead, it's a way of understanding a culture focused on consumption and spectacle.

This series of photographs was created by Harry Shunk and János Kender. Together they recorded the work of some of the best-known artists and choreographers in the United States and Western Europe in the decades following the Second World War.

Harry Shunk 1924–2006

János Kender 1937–2009

Yayoi Kusama's Mirror Performance, September 1968 1968,
reprinted 2021

Photographs, C-type print on paper (exhibition copies)

Courtesy of Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Z75685–Z75710

'I, Kusama, (who have lived for years in my famous, specially-built room entirely covered by mirrors), have opened up a world of fantasy and freedom.'

7 PORTRAITS BY EIKOH HOSOE

These portraits of Kusama were taken by Eikoh Hosoe, who also documented her performance **Walking Piece**. Hosoe often photographed experimental artists and choreographers in his native Japan. He aimed to capture people's inner worlds as well as their outer appearance. To do this, he used distortion and dramatic contrasts between black and white. In some of the images here, he also used double exposure, layering two images on top of one another. This could be a reference to the theme of repetition in Kusama's artworks.

Eikoh Hosoe born 1933

From left to right:

Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in her Studio, New York, circa 1964

Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in her Studio, New York, circa 1964

Portrait of Yayoi Kusama, circa 1966

Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in her Studio, New York, circa 1966

Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in New York, circa 1964

**Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in Washington Square Park,
New York, circa 1964**

Each reprinted 2021

Photographs, gelatin silver print on paper (exhibition copies)

Courtesy of the artist

Z75677-82

8 IN THE STUDIO

This film shows Kusama in her New York studio in the mid-1960s. She is surrounded by the soft sculptures and collages she was making at the time. Faces cut from magazines become a polka dot environment. She uses domestic objects, including furniture and mirrors, even pasta. Making these familiar things strange or unsettling, Kusama's approach is akin to surrealist artists working earlier in the century.

The artist, filmmaker and lecturer John Jones made this film. He interviewed and filmed over one hundred US and UK-based artists in the 1960s. This unique archive, which Jones used in his lectures, is in the Tate Library & Archive collection.

As with other film and photography in this exhibition, the footage is clearly staged. Kusama has always carefully constructed her own image, posing in her exhibitions wearing outfits that matched her paintings and sculptures. Creating a distinct persona as an artist was particularly important for her as a Japanese woman experiencing sexist and racist discrimination. Refusing to be defined by others, she maintains a unique personal style, which contributes to her successful artistic 'brand'. She has said: 'I would stand up to them all with a single polka dot.'

John Jones 1926–2010

Yayoi Kusama in her studio in New York c.1965

Digitised 16mm film

Running time: 8 mins 27 secs

Tate Library & Archive

Z75683

'...no matter how I may suffer for my art, I will have no regrets. This is the way I have lived my life, and it is the way I shall go on living.'

QUIET ROOM

A quiet room is available for neurodiverse people, families or anyone who would like to spend some time away from the gallery environment. It's on this floor of Tate Modern, over the bridge in the Natalie Bell Building, in the Materials and Objects display. Please ask a colleague for more information.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Yayoi Kusama's experience of mental illness has been an important influence on her art. The following organisations can provide support if you are experiencing problems with your mental health.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice and Information Service

provides practical advice and information on a wide range of mental health topics.

www.rethink.org

Hearing Voices Network offers support if you hear voices, see visions or have other unusual perceptions.

www.hearing-voices.org

Samaritans will face it with you, whatever you're going through.

Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

www.samaritans.org

Your local NHS mental health helpline can help you if you need urgent mental health support. www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

NHS 111 can provide you with information and advice about your options for support with mental health issues.

<https://111.nhs.uk> or call NHS 111

FIND OUT MORE

An Introduction to Yayoi Kusama

Explore the artist's childhood, activism and unique fashion sense:

tate.org.uk/kusama-introduction

Tate Kids: Who is Yayoi Kusama?

Welcome to the weird and wonderful world of Yayoi Kusama:

tate.org.uk/kusama-kids

An exciting programme of events and activities also accompanies this exhibition.

For more information, please visit the exhibition pages at tate.org.uk

YAYOI KUSAMA

INFINITY MIRROR ROOMS

Curated by Frances Morris, Director, Tate Modern
and Katy Wan, Assistant Curator, Tate Modern

In partnership with

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Rethink Mental Illness

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Bank of America's Statement

At Bank of America, we believe in the power of the arts to help economies thrive, educate and enrich societies, and create greater cultural understanding. That's why we are a leader in helping the arts flourish across the globe, providing steadfast support to cultural institutions through exhibitions, art conservation, education, and loan of our art collection.

We are honoured to partner with Tate Modern on **Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms**. Support of this landmark exhibition marks our eighth partnership with the gallery.

Bank of America's arts and culture programme is part of the company's commitment to grow responsibly while bringing value to economies, society and the communities we serve.

Tate is an important partner and we are proud to work with them once again.

Bernard Mensah
President, International
Bank of America

UNIQLO's Statement

UNIQLO is honored to continue its support of Tate Modern and allow more people to experience and appreciate the universal beauty of modern art.

Sponsorship of the **Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms** is the next proud step in our partnership with Tate and our longstanding commitment to supporting the arts globally.