**Welcome to Yayoyi Kusama's world.**

Yayoi Kusama, born in 1929, was a Japanese artist who was a self-described “obsessional artist,” known for her extensive use of polka dots and for her infinity installations. She employed painting, sculpture, performance art, and installations in a variety of styles, including Pop art and Minimalism.

Kusama was raised in Matsumoto, and trained at the Kyoto City University of Arts in a traditional Japanese painting style called nihonga.Kusama was inspired, however, by American Abstract impressionism. She moved to New York City in 1958 and was a part of the New York avant-garde scene throughout the 1960s, especially in the pop-art movement. Embracing the rise of the hippie counterculture of the late 1960s, she came to public attention when she organized a series of happenings in which naked participants were painted with brightly coloured polka dots.Since the 1970s, Kusama has continued to create art, most notably installations in various museums around the world.

Kusama has been open about her mental health. She says that art has become her way to express her mental problems.She reported in the interview she did with Infinity Net "I fight pain, anxiety, and fear every day, and the only method I have found that relieved my illness is to keep creating art. I followed the thread of art and somehow discovered a path that would allow me to live."

Kusama has received many awards, including the Asahi Prize (2001); Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2003); the National Lifetime Achievement Award from the Order of the Rising Sun (2006); and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art. In October 2006, Kusama became the first Japanese woman to receive the Praemium Imperiale, one of Japan's highest honors for internationally recognized artists. She also received the Person of Cultural Merit (2009) and Ango awards (2014).In 2014, Kusama was ranked the most popular artist of the year after a record-breaking number of visitors flooded her Latin American tour, Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Obsession. Venues from Buenos Aires to Mexico City received more than 8,500 visitors each day.

**Lifestory**

Born in Matsumoto, Nagano, Japan, on March 22nd, 1929, Yayoi Kusama is one of the most well-known contemporary Japanese artists around the world today. Kusama’s art spans many mediums, including painting, performance, film, fashion, poetry, fiction, but she mainly works in sculpture and installation. Based mostly in conceptual art, Kusama explores themes of feminism, pop art, abstract expressionism, minimalism, Art Brut, and surrealism. Much of her work delves into her world view, exploring psychological and sexual subjects as well as her mental illness. Kusama describes seeing vivid hallucinations of light flashes, auras or fields of dots as early as ten years old. She also describes seeing flowers that would speak to her, patterns in fabrics that she stared at would come to life, multiply and engulf her. This process of engulfing she calls “self-obliteration,” and would become an important influence on her art throughout her life. Kusama cites smooth white stones that covered the riverbed near her family home as a cause for her fascination with polka dots which became an integral part of her artwork.

Kusama moved to New York City in 1958 after studying nihonga, traditional Japanese painting, at the Kyoto School of Arts and Crafts. She was frustrated with the experience of being a woman in Japan, stating she considered Japanese society “too small, too servile, too feudalistic, and too scornful of women” (Frank, HuffPost). She was interested in the American Abstract impressionism and she became part of the pop-art movement and the hippie counterculture that dominated the art scene in New York throughout the 1960s. In the later years of the decade, Kusama gained notoriety for her series of “happenings” that featured naked people who were painted with brightly colored polka dots.

In 1963, Kusama began creating her series of Mirror/Infinity rooms. The rooms are created through the use of walls lined with mirrored glass and scores of various illuminated hanging objects, from neon-colored balls and little colored lights to larger hanging lanterns and glowing pumpkins. The viewer stands on a small platform and the effect creates a feeling of infinity as the objects are reflected a million times over in the mirrors. Throughout the rest of the 1960s, Kusama was extremely productive, landing in the hospital multiple times from overworking herself. Her work was plagiarized by many male artists in New York City during this time, who gained fame while she remained relatively unknown. This combined with financial stress and insecurity led her to attempt suicide. Kusama would later attempt again after facing severe shame from her family for her nudity in her art and lifestyle.

Kusama returned to Japan in 1973, where she voluntarily checked herself into a hospital for the mentally ill in Tokyo. She still lives there today by choice. Her studio is a short distance from the hospital and this is where she continues to work in a variety of artistic mediums, as well as exploring her literary career through novels, poetry and an autobiography. Kusama has long been considered one of Japan’s most important living artists and it is clear when looking at Kusama’s monumental and influential oeuvre why. She is an artist who is unapologetically original and exploratory who creates larger than life installations that immerse the viewer in her fantastic creative vision.

**Artwork**

By her own account, Kusama began painting as a child, at about the time she began experiencing hallucinations that often involved fields of dots. Those hallucinations and the theme of dots would continue to inform her art throughout her career. She had little formal training, studying art only briefly (1948–49) at the Kyōto City Specialist School of Arts. Family conflict and the desire to become an artist drove her to move in 1957 to the United States, where she settled in New York City. Before leaving Japan, she destroyed many of her early paintings. Her early work in New York City included what she called “infinity net” paintings. Those consisted of thousands of tiny marks obsessively repeated across large canvases without regard for the edges of the canvas, as if they continued into infinity. Such works explored the physical and psychological boundaries of painting, with the seemingly endless repetition of the marks creating an almost hypnotic sensation for both the viewer and the artist. Her paintings from that period anticipated the emerging Minimalist movement, but her work soon transitioned to Pop art and performance art. She became a central figure in the New York avant-garde, and her work was exhibited alongside that of such artists as Donald Judd, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol.

Obsessive repetition continued to be a theme in Kusama’s sculpture and installation art, which she began to exhibit in the early 1960s. The theme of sexual anxiety linked much of that work, in which Kusama covered the surface of objects, such as an armchair in Accumulation No. 1 (1962), with small soft phallic sculptures constructed from white fabric. Installations from that time included Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli’s Field (1965), a mirrored room whose floors were covered with hundreds of stuffed phalli that had been painted with red dots. Mirrors gave her the opportunity to create infinite planes in her installations, and she would continue to use them in later pieces. Mirroring the times, Kusama’s performance art explored antiwar, antiestablishment, and free-love ideas. Those Happenings often involved public nudity, with the stated intention of disassembling boundaries of identity, sexuality, and the body. In Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead (1969), Kusama painted dots on participants’ naked bodies in an unauthorized performance in the fountain of the sculpture garden of New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Critics accused her of intense self-promotion, and her work was regularly covered in the press; Grand Orgy appeared on the front page of the New York Daily News.

Except for visual arts, Kusama also wrote many books. In 1977, Kusama published a book of poems and paintings entitled 7. One year later, her first novel Manhattan Suicide Addict appeared. Between 1983 and 1990, she finished the novels The Hustler's Grotto of Christopher Street (1983), The Burning of St Mark's Church (1985), Between Heaven and Earth (1988), Woodstock Phallus Cutter (1988), Aching Chandelier (1989), Double Suicide at Sakuragazuka (1989), and Angels in Cape Cod (1990), alongside several issues of the magazine S&M Sniper in collaboration with photographer Nobuyoshi Araki. Her most recent writing endeavor includes her autobiography Infinity Net published in 2003 that depicts her life from growing up in Japan, her departure to the United States, and her return to her home country, where she now resides. Infinity Net also includes some of the artist's poetry and photos of her exhibitions.

In her most personal book to date, Yayoi Kusama brings us into her private world through poetic recollections, giving insight into her creative process and the essential role language plays in her paintings, sculptures, and daily life. With a new focus on Yayoi Kusama’s use of language, this book features an impressive overview of her poetry, which the artist creates alongside her work in other mediums. Highlighting the importance of words to the artist, the book draws special attention to the captivating, poetic titles of her paintings, such as in I WOULD LIKE TO SHOW YOU THE INFINITE SPLENDOR OF STARDUST IN THE UNIVERSE and FIGURE OF THE MIDNIGHT DARKNESS OF THE UNIVERSE THAT I DEDICATED ALL MY HEART. These visionary titles are a quintessential part of Kusama’s eye-catching artworks, but also hold their own as unique aphorisms and appealing statements of cosmic spirituality. The poetry also collected here touches on Kusama’s personal trials, her human ideals, and her heroic pursuit of art above all else.