

WHITNEY

Press Release

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CAREER RETROSPECTIVE OF YAYOI KUSAMA TO OPEN AT THE WHITNEY

July 12-September 30, 2012



Kusama with latest paintings at Tokyo 2011, Musashi University, Tokyo. Collection Yayoi Kusama.
Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagosian Gallery New York

NEW YORK, May 30, 2012 – Yayoi Kusama—whose work spans more than six decades of intense productivity in Japan and the United States—is the subject of a retrospective opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on July 12, 2012. Legendary, semi-reclusive, and still

vibrant, Kusama, who turned 83 in March, has created an extensive body of work since the 1940s. Ranging from her earliest explorations in painting to new works made in the past few years, this survey—the artist’s first major exhibition in New York in fifteen years—celebrates a career of exceptional duration and distinction, tracing the development of Kusama into one of the most respected and influential artists of her time.

On view at the Whitney through September 30, the traveling exhibition is organized in collaboration with Tate Modern and has been seen over the past year in Madrid, Paris, and London; the Whitney is its final stop. It was curated by Frances Morris, Tate’s Head of Collections (International Art). The Whitney installation is overseen by curator David Kiehl. Both Tate and Whitney presentations are supported by Louis Vuitton.

In 1989, Kusama was given important solo exhibitions at the Center for International Contemporary Arts, New York, and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, England. In 1993, she participated in the 45th Venice Biennale. As Chris Dercon, director of Tate Modern, notes in his foreword to the catalogue, “This is the first large-scale museum retrospective of Kusama’s career to be staged in the west since *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama 1958-1968*, the seminal survey of her work organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Japan Foundation in 1998...*Love Forever* focused exclusively on Kusama’s production during her years in the United States. This exhibition, by contrast, seeks to show the full breadth of the artist’s output throughout her lengthy and varied career, contextualizing Kusama’s American sojourn with representations of her early and late career in Japan.”

Yayoi Kusama’s art encompasses an astonishing array of media, including painting, drawing, sculpture, film, performance, and immersive installation. It ranges from works on paper featuring semi-abstract imagery, to soft sculptures known as *Accumulations*, to her *Infinity Net* paintings, made up of carefully repeated arcs of paint built up into large patterns, to the dense patterns of polka dots for which she is perhaps best known. Like her near contemporaries Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, and Nancy Spero, Kusama’s work has gained over time the recognition it deserves,

following periods in which her work was received with acclaim and other periods in which she was almost completely overlooked.

The exhibition unfolds chronologically, in a sequence of rooms, each devoted to the emergence of a new artistic phase. Much of Kusama's art has an almost hallucinatory intensity that reflects her unique vision of the world, whether through obsessively recurring imagery, a teeming accumulation of detail, or the dense patterns of nets and polka dots that have become her signature.

Kusama is also renowned for her environments, immersive, large-scale installations of dazzling power. The Whitney's installation includes her extraordinary *Fireflies on the Water* (2002), shown here in our 2004 Biennial and now part of the Whitney's collection. As described by Christian Rattemeyer in the 2004 Biennial catalogue: "The reflective interior environment consists of a small room lined with mirrors on all sides, a pool in the center of the space, and 150 small lights hanging from the ceiling, creating a dazzling effect of direct and reflected light emanating from both the mirrors and the water's surface. *Fireflies* embodies an almost hallucinatory approach to reality, while shifting the mood from her earlier, more unsettling installations toward a more ethereal, almost spiritual experience."

Yayoi Kusama was born in Matsumoto, Japan, in 1929. In her early career she immersed herself in the study of art, integrating a wide range of Eastern and Western influences, training in traditional Japanese painting while also exploring the European and American avant-garde. Kusama arrived in New York in 1958, where she worked hard to gain recognition. In the 1960s and early 1970s she became a major figure in the New York avant-garde, associated with key developments in Pop, Minimalism, and performance art, and exhibiting alongside artists she came to know well, including Donald Judd (her downtown loft neighbor), Andy Warhol, Joseph Cornell, and Claes Oldenburg. The exhibition includes a group of Kusama's first *Infinity Net* paintings from her early years in New York, canvases covered in unceasing, scalloped brushstrokes of a single color. Kusama forged her own direction in sculpture and installation,

adopting techniques of montage and soft sculpture. The exhibition includes a significant selection of her classic *Accumulation Sculptures* dating from 1962 to 1968.

As the 1960s progressed, Kusama moved from painting, sculpture, and collage to installations, films, performances, and happenings as well as political actions, counter-cultural events, fashion design, and publishing. The exhibition includes Kusama's iconic film *Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (1968), capturing this period of performative experimentation, and an extensive selection of archival material revealing the ways in which Kusama's artistic activity extended beyond the boundaries of the gallery.

After achieving fame and a certain prominence in New York through her groundbreaking and prescient art happenings and events, she returned to her country of birth in 1973. The exhibition includes a selection of the vibrant and evocative collages she created on her return, during a period in which she was also forging a parallel career as a poet and novelist. Major sculptural installations include *The Clouds* (1984), comprising one hundred unique black and white sprayed sewed stuffed cushions, and *Heaven and Earth* (1991), which features snake-like forms emerging from forty boxes. The exhibition concludes with a series of works from the last decade.

The exhibition is accompanied by a major new catalogue (published by D.A.P.) and the first English translation of Kusama's autobiography *Infinity Net* (University of Chicago Press).

Yayoi Kusama is curated by Frances Morris, Head of Collections, International Art, Tate, with Rachel Taylor, Assistant Curator, Tate Modern. The exhibition has been organized by Tate Modern in collaboration with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Exhibition Support

Supported by

LOUIS VUITTON

Additional support for the Whitney's presentation of *Yayoi Kusama* is provided by The Gage Fund, the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation, and Linda and Andrew Safran.

About Louis Vuitton and Art

A symbol of elegance and style throughout the world, Louis Vuitton has cultivated a close relationship with the world of art since its founding in 1854. Inventing the art of travel, Louis Vuitton and his successors kept pace with a rapidly changing age, working with the most accomplished engineers, decorators, painters, photographers and designers of the day. This fascination with ever-new forms of expression grew through the subsequent decades and continues today under the guidance of its Artistic Director, Marc Jacobs. Following on from Louis Vuitton's previous collaborations in the 1980s with painters such as César, Sol LeWitt and Olivier Debré, Marc Jacobs has since invited some of the world's most renowned contemporary artists to join forces with Louis Vuitton, increasing the points of exchange between art and fashion to an unprecedented degree. Among these artistic partnerships, Takashi Murakami, Richard Prince, and the late Stephen Sprouse interacted directly with the Maison's iconic Monogram, freely appropriating its forms and visual identity. Collaborations between Louis Vuitton and other artists have taken a variety of forms such as "Louis Vuitton Art Talks" organized worldwide with various artists, contemporary art exhibitions in cultural spaces named "Espace Louis Vuitton" in Paris, Tokyo or Singapore, and commissions for site-specific installations in Louis Vuitton stores and windows.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the

Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Whitney Biennial	Through May 27, 2012
Singular Visions	Through July 15, 2012
Sharon Hayes	June 21-September 9, 2012
Signs & Symbols	June 28-October 28, 2012
Oskar Fischinger	June 28-October 28, 2012
Yayoi Kusama	July 12-September 30, 2012

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.