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MUSEUM LUDWIG

PRESS RELEASE

March 14 – August 2, 2026

Yayoi Kusama

Press conference: Thursday, March 12, 2026, 11 am. Preview starts at 10 am

Opening: Friday, March 13, 2026, 7 pm

To mark its fiftieth anniversary, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne is dedicating a major exhibition to the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama in 2026.

Kusama (*1929, Matsumoto) is one of the most renowned artists of our time. Her iconic polka dots, pumpkin sculptures, and Infinity Mirror Rooms have become a kind of trademark, appearing millions of times over on social media. The exhibition takes visitors on a fascinating journey through Kusama's entire oeuvre, from her first drawing, dating back to ca.1934, to a newly commissioned installation. More than three hundred works will be featured, spanning a wide range of media that includes painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, fashion, performance, and literature.

This comprehensive show will extend beyond the Museum Ludwig's temporary exhibition spaces and into other areas of the building, including its two rooftop terraces. An immersive installation developed especially for the show, featuring an integrated Infinity Mirror Room, will fill the museum's largest hall. Additionally, a number of early iconic works, such as Kusama's first installation, *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* from 1963, will be on display.

Kusama's practice revolves around nature and its state of constant transformation, of becoming and decay, and the boundlessness of the universe, in which everything that exists eventually perishes. The polka dot pattern used by the artist to cover objects and people is as much an expression of this worldview as her Infinity Mirror Rooms.

Experiences from Kusama's childhood, including hallucinations in which she perceived dots, flowers, and other repeating patterns that engulfed her entire body, run like a thread through the artist's oeuvre. A sense of fragility and obliteration accompanied these experiences, along with the impression of becoming inseparable from and merging with a greater whole. For Kusama, art is an expression of her life, and the macrocosm's intimate connection with the microcosm is revealed through her works' engagement with the personal.

After growing up in the confines of rural, patriarchal postwar Japan, Kusama fled to New York City in the 1960s, finding herself in the midst of the Flower Power movement and anti-Vietnam War protests. Using art as a means of activism, she hit the headlines with provocative happenings. Returning to Japan in 1973, Kusama began to work through her existential anxieties, often in visceral novels and poems. Her powerful mature work, in turn, contains vibrant, richly colored cycles of paintings.

Describing the common thread that runs through her work, Kusama says, “In my more than seventy years as an artist, I have always been in awe of the wonder of life. More than anything, this strong sense of the life force in artistic expression is what has supported me and gave me power to overcome feelings of depression, hopelessness and sadness. I have been guided by my belief in this power.”

Yayoi Kusama is being presented by the Museum Ludwig in collaboration with the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel (October 12, 2025 – January 25, 2026) and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (September 12 2026 – January 17, 2027).

The Cologne venue of the exhibition features several large-scale installations that are not part of the exhibition in Basel, such as Kusama's first installation, *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show*, created in 1963; the environment *I'm Here but Nothing* (2000 to present), a living space bathed in black light with countless fluorescent adhesive dots; and the imposing, colorfully painted bronze *Flowers*, which will be installed on the roof terrace of the Museum Ludwig.

The exhibition in Cologne has been made possible thanks to the commitment of the leading partner of the Museum Ludwig, the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, the excellence partner Mazda, the Landschaftverband Rheinland (LVR), and the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig e.V.. The Museum Ludwig would also like to thank the Japan Foundation, the Sparkasse KölnBonn, the museum's Superior Partner, RIMOWA, its Partner for Tomorrow, OSMAB, and the City of Cologne for their generous support of the exhibition.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog: *Yayoi Kusama*, ed. Leontine Coelewijn, Stephan Diederich, and Mouna Mekouar, with texts by Emanuele Coccia, Leontine Coelewijn, Stephan Diederich, Soojin Lee, Katie Mack, Stefano Mancuso, Ralph McCarthy, Mouna Mekouar, Charlotte Sarrazin, Agata Marta Soccini, and Helen Westgeest, 20.5 x 26 cm, paperback with dust jacket, 268 pages, 280 ill., Hatje Cantz, ISBN 978-3-906053-87-5, Euro 38.00 (English museum edition), ISBN 978-3-7757-6033-1, Euro 48.00 (English publisher's edition).