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**MUSEUM  
LUDWIG**

## **Yayoi Kusama**

### **Index**

Press Release

Press images

Wall texts

Supporting Program

Information about Sponsors

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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).

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THE MUSEUM LUDWIG FOR THE EXHIBITION **Yayoi Kusama**

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# MUSEUM LUDWIG

## PRESS IMAGES

### Yayoi Kusama

March 14 – August 2, 2026



**kusama\_bls\_archive0133\_option\_d**  
Yayoi Kusama working on *My Eternal Soul*  
(2009–21), 2017  
© YAYOI KUSAMA  
Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, David Zwirner



**TH\_KusamaFashion\_1971**  
Yayoi Kusama poses in *Untitled (Dress)* with  
her phallic sculptures in her New York studio,  
1971  
Photo: Tom Haar  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_151\_SelfPortrait\_SK**  
Yayoi Kusama  
*Self-Portrait*, 1972  
Collage, pastel, ballpoint pen, and ink on paper  
74.4 × 44 cm  
Collection of the artist  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



**0D4A7583**

Yayoi Kusama

*Infinity Mirrored Room—The Hope of the Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally Cover the Universe*, 2025, detail

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts



**kusama\_bls\_archive2\_0008**

Yayoi Kusama amid her installation *Narcissus Garden* at the 33rd Venice Biennale, 1966

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**kusama\_bls\_archive0033**

Yayoi Kusama with *No. N2* on Park Avenue, New York, 1961

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**GRI\_NYHappening\_01**

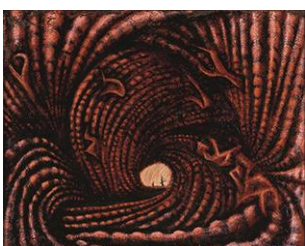
Yayoi Kusama

*Anatomic Explosion*

Happening on the Brooklyn Bridge, New York, August 14, 1968

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in Memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender / Photo: Shunk-Kender

© J. Paul Getty Trust



**YK\_012\_AccumulationCorpses\_NMMAT**

Yayoi Kusama

*Accumulation of the Corpses (Prisoner Surrounded by the Curtain of Depersonalization)*, 1950

Oil and enamel paint on seed sack  
72.3 × 91.5 cm  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



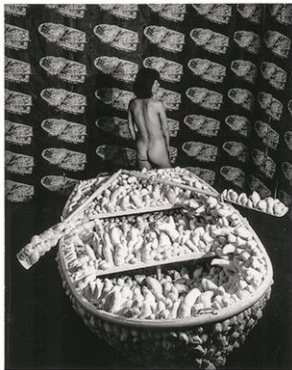
**NEU\_YK\_32\_ScreamingGirl\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama  
*Screaming Girl*, 1952  
Ink and pastel on paper  
25 × 18 cm  
Oketa Collection, Tokyo  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_057\_AtomicBomb\_MCMA**

Yayoi Kusama  
*Atomic Bomb*, 1954  
Gouache, ink, and pastel on paper  
25 × 17.6 cm  
Matsumoto City Museum of Art  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



**kusama\_bls\_archive0038\_rudy\_burckhardt**

Yayoi Kusama in her installation *Aggregation:  
One Thousand Boats*  
*Show* (1963), Gertrude Stein Gallery,  
New York, 1963  
Photographed by Rudy Burckhardt  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025/ProLitteris,  
Zurich/Pictoright, Amsterdam



**YK\_076\_NoN2\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama  
*No. N2*, 1961  
Oil on canvas  
125 × 178 cm  
Private collection, deposit  
YAYOI KUSAMA MUSEUM  
© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_103\_CompulsionFurniture\_MLK**

Yayoi Kusama

*Compulsion Furniture*, 1966

Mixed media

33 × 207 × 57 cm

Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Donation Ludwig Collection, 1976

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, rba\_c000186



**YK\_130\_SelfOblit2\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

*Self-Obliteration #2*, 1967

Gouache, pen, pastel, and photo collage on  
paper

40.4 × 50.4 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_259\_WP\_16\_EH**

Yayoi Kusama

*Walking Piece*, ca. 1966

Photographed by Eikō Hosoe

24 color slides

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**kusama\_bls\_archive0064**

Yayoi Kusama and models pose in dresses  
designed by the artist, New York, 1968

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_167\_BeginingSummer\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

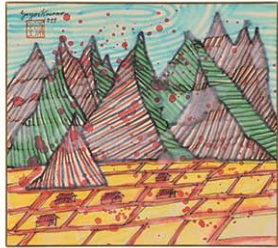
*Beginning of Summer*, 1978

Collage and acrylic on paper

54.3 × 39.7 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_175\_RainFalls\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

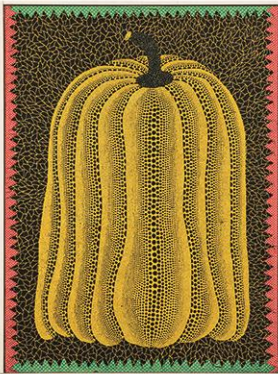
*Rain Falls in Mountainous Country*, 1979

Ink and water-based ink on paper (*shikishi*)

24.2 × 27.2 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_191\_Pumpkin\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

*Pumpkin*, 1981

Acrylic and fabric on canvas

130.3 × 97 cm

Collection of Daisuke Miyatsu,  
Chiba, Japan

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_230\_Airship\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

*Airship to the Cosmos*, 1987

Acrylic on canvas

45.5 × 38 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA



**YK\_323\_EDIPFL\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

*Every Day I Pray for Love*, 2022

Acrylic and marker pen on canvas

100 × 100 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts



**YK\_245\_HeartBuried\_SK**

Yayoi Kusama

*The Heart Buried in a Flower Garden*,  
2009

Acrylic on canvas

194 × 194 cm

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

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# MUSEUM LUDWIG

## PRESS IMAGES

### **Yayoi Kusama**

March 14 – August 2, 2026

Installation views



#### **rba\_d066643\_01**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Flowers That Speak All about My Heart  
Given to the Sky, 2018*

Painted bronze

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy Ota Fine Arts and David Zwirner

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Tobias Kreuzler



#### **rba\_d066644\_02**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Infinity Mirrored Room—The Hope of the  
Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally  
Cover the Universe, 2025, detail*

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Tobias Kreuzler



**rba\_d066644\_02**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Infinity Mirrored Room—The Hope of the  
Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally  
Cover the Universe*, 2025, detail

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Tobias Kreuzler



**rba\_d066680\_08**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Infinity Mirrored Room—The Hope of the  
Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally  
Cover the Universe*, 2025, detail

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber



**rba\_d066680\_23**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Pumpkin*, 2009

Fiber-reinforced plastic and polyurethane  
paint

Collection of the Museum Voorlinden,  
Wassenaar, the Netherlands

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber



**rba\_d066680\_24**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*Flower of Basara*, 1985

Collection of the artist

*Narcissus Garden*, 1966/2026

2,000 stainless steel balls

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts and David  
Zwirner

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber



**rba\_d066680\_30**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber



**rba\_d066680\_11**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*My Eternal Soul series*, 2009-2021

Acrylic on canvas

*The Universe as Seen from the Stairway to  
Heaven*, 2021

Mirror, glass, and acrylic sheet

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber



**rba\_d066680\_15**

Installation view

Yayoi Kusama, Museum Ludwig Cologne,  
2026

*I'm Here, but Nothing*, 2000/2026

fluorescent stickers, ultraviolet fluorescent  
lights, and household objects

dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts

© YAYOI KUSAMA

Photo: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln  
mit Rheinischem Bildarchiv, Marc Weber

## Kusamas Universum

Yayoi Kusama zählt zu den bekanntesten Künstler\*innen unserer Zeit. Ihr vielfältiges, acht Jahrzehnte umfassendes Schaffen veranschaulicht das Museum Ludwig mit mehr als dreihundert Arbeiten von den Anfängen bis heute. Im Zentrum ihres Werks stehen die Natur in ihrem ständigen Wandel, Werden und Vergehen sowie die Unendlichkeit des Universums, in der sich letztlich alles Existierende auflöst. Ihre ikonischen Punktmuster (Polka Dots), mit denen sie Gegenstände, Menschen und ganze Räume überzieht, sind ebenso Ausdruck dieser Weltsicht wie ihre Unendlichkeits-Spiegelräume.

Kusama wurde 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan, geboren. Mit circa zehn Jahren traten bei ihr erste Halluzinationen auf. Sie nahm wahr, wie Punkte, Blüten und andere Muster ihren Körper und ihre Umgebung überwucherten. Die damit verbundenen Erfahrungen von Zerbrechlichkeit und Auslöschung, aber zugleich auch der Verschmelzung mit einem großen Ganzen durchziehen Kusamas gesamtes Schaffen bis heute. Ihre Kunst ist für sie lebensnotwendig, in jedem Werk setzt sie sich auch mit sich selbst auseinander.

Die Ausstellung zeichnet die Stationen im Leben der ebenso vielschichtigen wie konsequenten Künstlerin nach. Diese führten sie Ende der 1950er Jahre aus dem ländlichen, patriarchalisch geprägten Japan der Nachkriegszeit in die lebendige Metropole New York. 1973 kehrte Kusama nach Japan zurück, wo sie seit Jahrzehnten in einer Klinik in Tokio lebt und aus ihrem Atelier ihre Botschaften in die Welt sendet.

Kusama beschreibt ihre Inspiration wie folgt: „In meinen mehr als siebzig Jahren als Künstlerin habe ich immer Ehrfurcht vor dem Wunder des Lebens gehabt. Mehr als alles andere hat mich dieser starke Sinn für die Lebenskraft im künstlerischen Ausdruck unterstützt und mir die Kraft gegeben, Gefühle von Depression, Hoffnungslosigkeit und Traurigkeit zu überwinden. Ich habe mich von meinem Glauben an diese Kraft leiten lassen.“

## Kusama's Universe

Yayoi Kusama is one of today's best-known artists. In this exhibition, the Museum Ludwig showcases her diverse output with more than three hundred works from all phases of her eight-decade career. Her oeuvre centers on nature, with its endlessly recurring cycles of growth and decay, and on the infinite nature of the universe, in which all that exists eventually dissolves. This worldview is reflected in her *Infinity Mirror Rooms* and her iconic use of polka dots, with which she covers objects, people, and spaces.

Kusama was born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan. At around the age of ten, she experienced her first hallucination, where she saw dots, flowers, and other patterns spreading across her body and her surroundings. A sense of fragility and obliteration, yet of merging with a greater whole, runs through the entirety of her oeuvre up to the present. For Kusama, making art is vital; in each of her works, she is also dealing with herself.

The exhibition traces the different stages in the life of this complex and uncompromising artist—a life that took her from the rural, patriarchal Japan of the postwar years to the vibrant metropolis of New York, where she moved in the late 1950s. In 1973, Kusama returned to Japan, where for decades she has lived in a hospital in Tokyo, sending her messages from her studio out into the world.

Kusama describes her inspiration as follows: “In my more than 70 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 supported me and gave me power to overcome feelings of depression, hopelessness, and sadness. I have been guided by my belief in this power.”

# Frühe Jahre in Japan

Yayoi Kusama wuchs in einer wohlhabenden, konservativen Familie auf, die im von Bergen umgebenen Matsumoto eine große Samengärtnerei betrieb. Botanische Motive wie Blüten, Samen und Ranken durchziehen von Jugend an ihr gesamtes Werk; für sie sind es die interessantesten Objekte überhaupt. Das Verhältnis der Eltern untereinander und zu ihrer Tochter war schwierig. Die seit ihrer Kindheit auftretenden Halluzinationen jagten Kusama Angst ein, und sie versuchte sie zu bändigen, indem sie sie zeichnete. Prägend waren ebenso die langen Kriegsjahre, die mit dem Abwurf der Atombomben auf Hiroshima und Nagasaki durch die USA ihren traumatischen Höhepunkt erreichten.

Ende der 1940er Jahre studierte Kusama kurzzeitig traditionelle japanische Malerei in Kyoto, bevor sie nach Matsumoto zurückkehrte. Obwohl ihr seelischer Zustand bisweilen labil war, verarbeitete sie in ihrem Zimmer Tag und Nacht ihre Eindrücke und Emotionen zu Kunst und erfuhr zunehmende Anerkennung. 1952 präsentierte sie in ihrer ersten Einzelausstellung in Matsumoto über zweihundert Arbeiten. Im selben Jahr folgte eine noch größere Schau, und auch in Tokio wurden ihre Arbeiten gezeigt. Kusamas Psychiater bestärkte sie in ihrem Kunstschaffen. Er ermutigte die Künstlerin, sich von ihrem problematischen Elternhaus zu lösen, was sie dazu führte, zunehmend einen Umzug ins Ausland in Betracht zu ziehen.

## Early years in Japan

Yayoi Kusama grew up in a wealthy, conservative family that ran a large seed farm in Matsumoto, a city surrounded by mountains. Since her youth, botanical motifs, such as flowers, seeds, and tendrils, have featured in her work; for the artist, these are the most interesting objects of all. The relationship between her parents was troubled, creating a dysfunctional family environment. The hallucinations Kusama began experiencing as a young girl frightened her, and she sought to manage them through drawing. The long years of War, culminating in the traumatic atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States, also had a profound impact.

In the late 1940s, Kusama briefly studied traditional Japanese painting in Kyoto before returning to Matsumoto. While sometimes struggling with her mental health, she worked day and night in her room, transforming her impressions and emotions into art. Around this time, her work began to gain recognition. In 1952, her first solo exhibition in Matsumoto, featuring more than two hundred works, was followed by an even larger show, and her work was also exhibited in Tokyo. Kusama's psychiatrist played a supportive role in her artistic journey, encouraging the artist to distance herself from her dysfunctional parents, making her increasingly consider moving abroad.

## Herausforderung New York

Yayoi Kusamas Entschluss, Japan zu verlassen, festigte sich durch einen Briefwechsel mit der US-amerikanischen Malerin Georgia O’Keeffe, deren Bilder Kusama sehr bewunderte. O’Keeffe bestärkte sie in ihrem Vorhaben. Im November 1957 brach Kusama schließlich in die USA auf, wo sie zunächst einige Monate in Seattle verbrachte. Ziel ihrer Sehnsüchte aber war New York. Dort angekommen lebte sie in prekären Umständen. Ateliermiete, Arbeitsmaterialien und Lebenshaltungskosten konnte sie sich kaum leisten, und vielfach folgten auf intensive Schaffensphasen Halluzinationen und Panikattacken.

Dennoch stürzte sie sich fieberhaft in die Arbeit und schuf obsessiv fast monochrome Gemälde in teils monumentalen Formaten, die sie mit Tausenden winziger Bögen füllte. Während des Flugs von Japan in die USA hatte sie der endlos unter ihr ausgebreitete Ozean inspiriert. Es war die Geburtsstunde der *Infinity Net*-Gemälde – mit unendlichen Netzstrukturen überzogenen Bildern. Als fünf dieser Arbeiten 1959 in der Brata Gallery gezeigt wurden, erkannte die New Yorker Kunstwelt ihre Bedeutung. Kunstkritiker\*innen verfassten begeisterte Rezensionen, darunter Donald Judd, der später zum Wegbereiter der Minimal Art werden und für viele Jahre ein enger Freund Kusamas bleiben sollte.

1962 erweiterte Kusama das Prinzip der sich ausbreitenden Muster von der Leinwand in den Raum. Sie bedeckte Alltagsgegenstände mit Hunderten phallusartiger Formen, die sie aus Stoff genäht hatte. So entstanden ihre ersten *Soft Sculptures* und *Accumulations* – weiche Skulpturen und Anhäufungen. Auf diese Weise stellte sie sich ihrer Abneigung gegen Sex. Die Ursprünge dieser Phobie sah sie in den Erfahrungen, die sie in jungen Jahren in ihrer Familie und in der erstarrten, auf Männer zugeschnittenen japanischen Gesellschaft gemacht hatte. Eine weitere Abscheu betraf die übermäßige Verfügbarkeit von Essen in den wirtschaftlich florierenden USA. Dies brachte Kusama mit Kleidungsstücken und Environments zum Ausdruck, die sie mit unzähligen getrockneten Makkaroni übersäte.

## The challenge of New York

Yayoi Kusama moved to the United States in November 1957. Her decision to leave Japan had been strengthened by her correspondence with the American painter Georgia O’Keeffe, whom she deeply admired. O’Keeffe supported her plan to relocate, offering valuable advice. Upon arriving in the US, she spent several months in Seattle. However, New York was where she longed to be. When Kusama finally arrived in the city, her living conditions were precarious. She struggled to afford studio rent, art materials, and basic living expenses, and periods of intense creativity were often followed by hallucinations and panic attacks.

Despite these challenges, Kusama worked feverishly, obsessively producing paintings that were almost monochromatic, sometimes monumental in scale, and filled with thousands of tiny arcs. On her flight from Japan to the United States, she had been inspired by the endless ocean spread out beneath her. This was the beginning of her *Infinity Nets*—paintings covered in endlessly repeating net-like structures. When five of these works were shown at Brata Gallery in 1959, the New York art scene recognized her importance. The work received enthusiastic reviews from critics, including Donald Judd, who would later become a pioneer of Minimal Art and who remained a close friend of Kusama’s for many years.

In 1962 Kusama expanded her motif of repeating patterns from individual canvases to entire rooms, covering everyday objects with hundreds of phallic shapes sewed from fabric. She called the resulting works *Soft Sculptures* and *Accumulations*. Through these works, Kusama confronted her aversion to sex, a phobia rooted in childhood trauma and her experiences growing up in Japan’s strict, patriarchal society. Another aversion focused on the superabundance of food in the economically booming United States, which she addressed by covering items of clothing and environments with dried macaroni.

## Protest mit Polka Dots

Um 1967 engagierte sich Kusama in der New Yorker Underground-Kunstszene und Hippiebewegung. Die von ihr angeregten Events wurden zu kollektiven Ereignissen. In Bodypainting-Sessions bemalte sie nackte Körper mit Punkten und ließ sie so untereinander und zugleich mit dem umgebenden Raum verschmelzen. Kusama begann, mit einer festen Gruppe von Tänzer\*innen zu arbeiten. Sie nannte sich selbst „Königin der Liebe und Polka Dots“ und veranstaltete sogenannte *Anatomic Explosions*. Dabei handelte es sich um Happenings mit gesellschaftspolitischer Ausrichtung, die beispielsweise im Kontext von Anti-Kriegs-Protesten oder sexueller Befreiung stattfanden. In einer Zeit, in der die Vereinigten Staaten in den Vietnamkrieg verstrickt waren, wollte Kusama die Aufmerksamkeit auf junge Menschen richten, die mit ihren nackten Körpern dem Wahnsinn des Krieges die Stirn boten.

Zwischen 1967 und 1969 realisierte sie über siebzig Happenings an öffentlichen Orten, wie dem Central Park, der Wall Street oder der Brooklyn Bridge. Die vorab informierte Presse sorgte dafür, dass diese Events allgemein bekannt wurden. Bei solchen Anlässen trug Kusama selbst entworfene Outfits. Für den Verkauf produzierte sie exzentrisch-freizügige Kleidung, zum Teil mit handgemalten Netzstrukturen oder strategisch platzierten lochförmigen Ausschnitten, die Teile des Körpers enthüllten. Sie eröffnete eine Modeboutique und gab eine Zeitschrift mit dem Titel *Kusama Presents an Orgy of Nudity, Love, Sex & Beauty* heraus.

## Protest with Polka Dots

Around 1967, Yayoi Kusama became actively involved in New York's underground art scene and the hippie movement. She organized collective happenings during which she painted polka dots onto naked bodies, causing them to merge with one another and the surrounding environment. Calling herself the “Queen of Love and Polka Dots,” she began working with a steady troupe of dancers and organized happenings called *Anatomic Explosions*. These events took on a sociopolitical dimension as a form of activism against war or in favor of sexual liberation. At a time when the United States was entangled in the Vietnam War, Kusama wanted to draw attention to young people who were using their naked bodies to defy the insanity of war.

Between 1967 and 1969, Kusama realized more than seventy happenings in public locations, including Central Park, Wall Street, and the Brooklyn Bridge. Coverage from the press, who were always informed in advance, ensured these events gained widespread attention. During these happenings, Kusama wore outfits of her own design, and she produced eccentric items of clothing for sale, often featuring hand-painted net structures or strategically placed holes that exposed parts of the body. She also opened a fashion boutique and published a magazine entitled *Kusama Presents an Orgy of Nudity, Love, Sex & Beauty*.

## Zurück in Japan

Nach über fünfzehn Jahren in New York kehrte Kusama 1973 nach Japan zurück und beschloss, dauerhaft dort zu bleiben. In diese Zeit fielen der Tod ihres engen Künstlerfreundes Joseph Cornell und später der ihres Vaters. Nach wiederholten psychischen Zusammenbrüchen entschied sich die Künstlerin 1977 für ein Leben in einer psychiatrischen Klinik in Tokio. In dieser schwierigen Lebensphase schuf sie in einem kleinen Atelierraum intime Werke, Keramikskulpturen und Collagen.

Insbesondere widmete sich Kusama dem Schreiben, das sie bereits in ihrer Jugend in Japan zur Selbstfindung genutzt hatte. 1978 erschien ihr erster Roman, *Manhattan Suicide Addict*, eine fikionalisierte Autobiografie über ihre Zeit in New York. Darin heißt es: „Ich kann meine Existenz nicht aufgeben. Ich kann aber auch dem Tod nicht entkommen. Diese apathische Schwere des Lebens.“ Es folgten mehr als zehn weitere Romane und Kurzgeschichten sowie zahlreiche Gedichte. Viele der Charaktere in diesen Texten kämpfen mit Situationen und Seelenzuständen, die denen von Kusama selbst ähneln, etwa zwanghaften Verhaltensweisen, halluzinatorischen Visionen und Verlust. Erneut verleiht die intensive kreative Arbeit Kusama in diesen Jahren Lebenskraft und weist ihr den Weg nach vorn.

## Back in Japan

In 1973, after more than fifteen years in New York, Yayoi Kusama returned to Japan, where she decided to remain. Around this time, she experienced the loss of her close friend, the artist Joseph Cornell, and of her father. In 1977, following several mental breakdowns, Kusama made the decision to live at a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo. During this challenging period, she retained a small studio where she made intimate-sized works, ceramic sculptures, and collages.

Writing became a new focus for the artist, an activity she had previously explored as a path to self-discovery during her youth in Japan. In 1978 she published her first novel, *Manhattan Suicide Addict*, a fictionalized account of her time in New York, where she wrote, “I can not give up my existence. Also I cannot escape from death. This languid weight of life!” More than ten novels and short stories, as well as many poems, followed. The characters in these texts often struggle with situations and mental states that resemble Kusama’s own, including obsessive behaviors, hallucinatory visions, and loss. In these years, Kusama’s prolific creative output once again provided her with strength and offered a way forward.

## Weltkünstlerin Kusama

Nachdem Yayoi Kusama einige Zeit zurückgezogen gelebt hatte, begann sie wieder auszustellen. 1982 zeigte die Fuji Television Gallery in Tokio ihre Einzelausstellung *Obsession Yayoi Kusama*, was ihre Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne einleitete. 1989 fand in New York ihre erste internationale Retrospektive statt, und 1993 vertrat sie als erste zeitgenössische Künstlerin Japan offiziell auf der Biennale von Venedig.

In dieser Zeit verbanden sich die botanischen und zellartigen Motive ihrer frühen, in Japan entstandenen Werke mit der Technik der Wiederholung, die sie bei ihren *Infinity Nets* und *Accumulations* in New York angewendet hatte, zu Gemälden in leuchtenden Acrylfarben. Auf aneinandergereihten Leinwänden entfalten die Muster eine geradezu psychedelische Wirkung. Die Lebendigkeit der Formen erinnert an den Blick durch ein Mikroskop oder an Strukturen des grenzenlosen Universums.

Das Motiv des Kürbis, das bereits in ihrer Kindheit wurzelt, erlangte einen besonderen Stellenwert. Kusama betrachtet ihn als eines der wundersamsten Gebilde der Natur, und er nimmt einen zentralen Platz in ihrer ganzheitlichen, biologisch-kosmischen Weltsicht ein.

Die Unendlichkeits-Spiegelräume, Ballon-Installationen und monumentalen Skulpturen für den Außenraum erinnern an die Geschichte von *Alice im Wunderland*. Mit ihnen hat Kusama in den sozialen Medien endgültig ikonischen Status erlangt. Dabei bleibt sie ihrer zutiefst persönlichen Kunst immer treu. Dies zeigt sich auch in ihrer umfangreichen Gemäldeserie *My Eternal Soul* und der Werkgruppe *Every Day I Pray for Love*, an der die Künstlerin weiterhin täglich arbeitet. Als lebendige Botschaften erzählen sie von Kusamas Liebe zum Universum und von ihrem Bestreben, eins mit seiner Unendlichkeit zu werden.

## Kusama as a global artist

After a period of seclusion, Yayoi Kusama began exhibiting her work again. In 1982, her solo show *Obsession Yayoi Kusama* was exhibited at Fuji Television Gallery in Tokyo, marking her return to the world stage. In 1989, her first international retrospective took place in New York, and in 1993 she became the first woman to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale.

During this time, the botanical and cellular motifs from Kusama's earliest works in Japan merged with the use of repetition found in the *Infinity Nets* and *Accumulations* from her New York years, creating brightly colored acrylics. Displayed in rows, these paintings have a positively psychedelic impact, their animated forms recalling structures seen through a microscope or the boundlessness of the universe.

Rooted in her childhood, the pumpkin, which has become a central motif, holds special significance for Kusama. The artist considers it one of the most wondrous life forms, and it occupies a central place in her holistic, biological-cosmic worldview.

Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms*, balloon installations, and monumental outdoor sculptures recall the story of *Alice in Wonderland*. With these works, the artist achieved iconic status on social media while remaining true to the deeply personal nature of her art. This is also true of the paintings in her extensive series *My Eternal Soul* and in her ongoing series *Every Day I Pray for Love*, which she continues to work on daily. As living messages, they speak of Kusama's love for the universe and of her attempt to become one with its infinity.

# Programm / Program

17.3.2026, 18h

**Filmscreening & Talk** (auf Deutsch / in German)  
in der Reihe KunstBewusst der Freunde des Wallraf-  
Richartz-Museum und des Museum Ludwig

*Kusama's Self-Obliteration* (Jud Yalkut, USA 1967, 23 Min.)  
mit anschließendem thematischem Input von Daniel  
Kothenschulte

Museum Ludwig, Filmforum

2.4.2026, ab / from 17.30h

**Langer Donnerstag – LADO Spotlight Kusama**  
17.30–21.30h Kunst:Dialoge

Für einen garantierten Einlass in die Kusama-Ausstellung ist  
der Kauf eines Tickets mit Einlasszeit im Onlineshop notwendig.

To guarantee admission to the Kusama exhibition, it is essen-  
tial to purchase a ticket with an admission time slot from the  
online ticket shop.

11.6.2026, 18.30h

**Filmscreening** (OmU / English with subtitles)  
*KUSAMA: INFINITY* (Heather Lenz, USA 2018, 76 Min.)  
Japanisches Kulturinstitut, Köln

23.6.2026, 18h

**Vortrag / Lecture** (auf Englisch / in English)  
in der Reihe KunstBewusst der Freunde des Wallraf-  
Richartz-Museum und des Museum Ludwig

*Yayoi Kusama fusing with her artworks in her posed  
photographs to support her worldview*, Dr. Helen Westgeest

Museum Ludwig, Filmforum

2.7.2026, ab / from 17.30h

**Langer Donnerstag – LADO Kusama connects!**  
17.30–21.30h Kunst:Dialoge, Drop-In-Workshops & Panel-Talk  
„Wege zur Kunst!“

Für einen garantierten Einlass in die Kusama-Ausstellung ist  
der Kauf eines Tickets mit Einlasszeit im Onlineshop notwendig.

To guarantee admission to the Kusama exhibition, it is essen-  
tial to purchase a ticket with an admission time slot from the  
online ticket shop.

Wir danken / Thanks to  
Peter und Irene Ludwig Stiftung (Leading Partner)  
Mazda (Excellence Partner)  
Landschaftsverband Rheinland (LVR)  
Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig e. V.  
Japan Foundation  
Sparkasse KölnBonn  
RIMOWA (Superior Partner)  
OSMAB (Zukunftspartner)  
Stadt Köln

Eine Ausstellung von / An exhibition by: Museum Ludwig, Köln;  
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam  
Kurator / Curator: Stephan Diederich

Exhibition support

**Museum Ludwig, Cologne: Yayoi Kusama, March 14–August 2, 2026**

To mark its 50th anniversary, Museum Ludwig is dedicating a comprehensive retrospective to Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (born 1929, Matsumoto) featuring over 300 works—from early drawings dating back to 1934 to current sculptures, installations, and immersive spatial concepts—thus providing insights into her multifaceted oeuvre.

The Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation is delighted to support this special exhibition. With their donation in 1976, Irene and Peter Ludwig laid the foundation for the Museum Ludwig and had a lasting impact on its profile. Even then, an early work by Kusama, *Compulsion Furniture* (1966), found its way into the collection—a sign of the foresight that continues to characterize the museum to this day.

**Carla Cugini**, Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation: "We warmly congratulate the Museum Ludwig on its anniversary. Since its founding, the museum has stood for visionary collecting decisions and international appeal. The Yayoi Kusama retrospective impressively demonstrates how closely the history of the museum is linked to groundbreaking artistic positions. As the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, we are delighted to support this exhibition: firstly, because it is the first major retrospective in West Germany to show Kusama's significant work of the last 70 years in this form; secondly, because the foundation has been closely associated with the museum's collection since its founding; and thirdly, because Kusama's works are simply a great joy to behold. We wish all visitors much enjoyment at the exhibition."

**More about the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation and Museum Ludwig, Cologne:**

The foundation has close ties to Museum Ludwig: in 1976, Irene and Peter Ludwig made a lasting impact on the museum by donating their significant Pop Art collection and other works of art. Their passion for 20th and 21st century art and their close connection to Cologne are reflected in the museum. The foundation continues to support the expansion of the collection, exhibitions, and the long-term development of the museum.

The Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation promotes acquisitions, exhibitions, publications, and research projects—primarily within its international network, often in connection with the Ludwig Collection. Thirty public institutions in seven countries on three continents belong to the Ludwig network. The foundation is headed by Executive Director Carla Cugini, and Carolin Scharpff-Striebich is Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Ludwig Collection comprises over 14,000 objects from antiquity to the present day. Its focus is on contemporary art—from Pop Art and Picasso to art from the German Democratic Republic and contemporary Chinese and Cuban art—as well as 18th-century porcelain, medieval sculpture, and ancient art from Europe, East Asia, and South America. The works are held as donations or permanent loans in public museums belonging to the Ludwig network.

In addition to its funding priorities, the foundation attaches great importance to research into the collection and to projects that promote international understanding.

**For further information about the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, see:**



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# Company Profile OSMAB Holding AG

## Company and Activities

OSMAB Holding AG is a privately owned project developer and long-term real estate investor with a focus on high-quality office and logistics properties in the greater Cologne region. The company has been active in the real estate industry for more than three decades and is firmly rooted in the region. Today, more than 70 experts work together in an interdisciplinary team. OSMAB manages the entire life cycle of a property – from land acquisition and development to construction, leasing and long-term property management.



## Sustainability

Sustainability is an integral part of the company's strategy. OSMAB focuses on resource-efficient new developments as well as the ongoing enhancement of existing properties. For more than fifteen years, the company has been generating solar power on the rooftops of its buildings and currently operates 48 photovoltaic systems across its portfolio.

## Art in the Public Realm

Beyond this, OSMAB regards real estate development as part of a broader social and urban context. A visible expression of this approach is the company's commitment to art in architecture. In collaboration with artists, large-scale murals and geometric artworks have been created at several OSMAB properties, contributing to the identity of these

locations, enhancing the quality of public spaces and making art directly accessible in the urban environment.

## Social Engagement

In addition to this commitment, OSMAB supports numerous social institutions as well as cultural and sports initiatives with a strong regional focus. These range from smaller local associations at the company's development locations to well-known events and initiatives such as the Kölner Lichter and the Neue Mitte Köln e. V., as well as the football clubs 1. FC Köln and Viktoria Köln. OSMAB has also supported the Förderverein für krebskranke Kinder Köln for many years.

## Partnership

Through its long-term partnership with the Museum Ludwig, the company further emphasizes its commitment to cultural diversity and to the important role of art and culture in a vibrant urban society.





MAZDA MOTORS DEUTSCHLAND – PRESSE-INFORMATION

## Mazda Supports Yayoi Kusama Exhibition at Museum Ludwig

- Mazda as Excellence Partner of the exhibition from March 14 to August 2, 2026 in Cologne
- The new Mazda CX-6e (combined energy consumption 18.9–19.4 kWh/100 km, combined CO<sub>2</sub> emissions 0 g/km, CO<sub>2</sub> class: A) and the new Mazda CX-5 symbolize Japanese tradition and craftsmanship perfected
- German premiere of the new fully electric crossover Mazda CX-6e on March 16, 2026 at Museum Ludwig

**Leverkusen, March 2026:** Through an exceptional partnership, Mazda will bring together automotive innovation and internationally renowned contemporary art in spring 2026. To mark its 50th anniversary, Museum Ludwig in Cologne is dedicating a major exhibition to the legendary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, supported by Mazda as Excellence Partner. At the same time, the museum will serve as the location for the German premiere of the new Mazda CX-6e on March 16, 2026. The Mazda CX-6e represents the essence of Mazda's Kodo design: reduction, precision, and a calm, cultivated energy combined with Japanese craftsmanship perfected. Through its clear design language and interplay of light and shadow, the Mazda CX-6e becomes an aesthetic object that makes mobility tangible through clarity and character.

Its Japanese origins and deep-rooted tradition of craftsmanship and mindfulness make Mazda an authentic partner for the Kusama exhibition. The brand is thus presenting itself not only as an automobile manufacturer, but also as an aesthetic and cultural force. A series of other events and activities within the framework of the Excellence Partnership are important building blocks for an attention-grabbing presentation of the brand in a design-oriented environment.

In addition, vehicles such as the all-electric mid-size sedan Mazda6e and Mazda's most successful model series, the crossover Mazda CX-5, which will soon be launched in its third generation, symbolize the innovative strength of the Japanese brand and also represent its origins. As an important part of Japanese culture, they embody the craftsmanship of Japanese Takumi, master craftsmen who invest many years in their training to achieve perfection in their work.

Mazda is further expanding its electric vehicle lineup in Europe with the new Mazda CX-6e. The all-electric crossover embodies the most artful form of Mazda's design language to date, striking an ideal balance between versatility, dynamism, and craftsmanship. Its "Soulful Futuristic Modern" design theme reflects the combination of cutting-edge technology and sculptural elegance. With its sleek silhouette and athletic proportions, the Mazda CX-6e appeals to customers who are looking for something individual and special in a segment often dominated by convention. Designed in a futuristic interpretation of Japanese aesthetics, its exterior is uniquely elegant, stylish, and dynamic, while the high-quality interior design is inspired by the Japanese concept of "ma," the beauty of empty space.

The new Mazda CX-6e will roll into the showrooms of Mazda's German partners in summer 2026 at a price starting at 49,990 Euro. Pre-sales began a few weeks ago.



MAZDA MOTORS DEUTSCHLAND – PRESSE-INFORMATION

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## **On the commitment of the Rhineland Regional Council**

The **Rhineland Regional Council is supporting Yayoi Kusama's exhibition** because it firmly believes that art is an essential element of an open, vibrant society. Art sharpens the eye, enables a change of perspective and opens up spaces for dialogue. In this sense, the Rhineland Regional Council's funding is much more than financial support – it is a conscious commitment to cultural diversity in the region.

Internationally renowned artist Yayoi Kusama brings perspectives from around the world to the Rhineland. It creates connections between cultures, generations and realities of life. Her works tell stories, pose questions and open up spaces for thought. And that is what society needs today more than ever: places where people can marvel together, discuss, even controversially – but above all, engage in conversation with one another.

The Rhineland Regional Council stands for culture and at the same time bears responsibility for the people in the region. As the operator of clinics and healthcare facilities, the Rhineland Regional Council understands how closely cultural participation and mental well-being are linked. And this is precisely where this exhibition touches us in a special way.

The artist herself sees artistic creation as a form of therapy – as a process of processing, self-assurance and healing. Her works demonstrate that creativity can be empowering, that art creates spaces in which vulnerability is not a weakness but a starting point for strength.

This attitude ties in wonderfully with the Rhineland Regional Council's mission. The Rhineland Regional Council is supporting this exhibition as it is socially relevant and, moreover, aesthetically outstanding. As it shows that culture and health are not separate worlds. Both have to do with dignity, with participation, with the question of how we care for one another as a community.

When we as a region demonstrate that we present international art of the highest calibre and at the same time place it in a social context, we send out a strong signal: the Rhineland is a place where art, responsibility and humanity belong together.

Through its regional cultural promotion programme, the Rhineland Regional Council supports cultural projects in the Rhineland that sustainably preserve and strengthen the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Rhineland, its cultural diversity and infrastructure and make them visible and tangible.

To this end, the Rhineland Regional Council provides project-related funding to cultural institutions and actors from all sectors on an annual basis.