

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****The Museum of Modern Art****YAYOI KUSAMA'S DEFINING DECADE OF WORK--HER NEW YORK YEARS--EXAMINED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART****Many Paintings, Sculptures, Photographs, Collages, and Installations On View for the First Time since Their Creation****Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968**

On View from July 9 through September 22, 1998

The first in-depth survey of the work of the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama opens at The Museum of Modern Art on July 9, 1998. *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* will focus on the full scope of the artist's activities during the years she lived and worked in New York. A largely unsung figure in the Pop, Minimalist, and Performance Art movements, Kusama can now, by means of the material in this exhibition, be seen as an original force with a wide-ranging influence on contemporary artists. The 70-plus works in the exhibition, many of them on view for the first time since their creation in the 1950s and 1960s, include paintings, drawings, photographs, collages, and sculptures; a 30-minute experimental film by the artist; three precedent-setting environmental installations; and slide documentation of her provocative performance pieces.

From the time that Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) arrived in New York in 1958 until performance began to dominate her oeuvre a decade later, she produced a body of work that was both powerful and prophetic of artistic developments in the United States. Kusama showed in museums and galleries, in this country and in Europe, along with her contemporaries Claes Oldenburg, Robert Morris, and Andy Warhol. Although she was often praised in art journals and personally well connected in the art world, Kusama never received the long-term critical or financial support that might have allowed her to achieve lasting success in New York. After her return to her native Tokyo in 1972, she was largely forgotten. *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* looks back at Kusama's New York years in order to re-establish her significance and legacy.

*Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Japan Foundation in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art. It was supported by a generous grant from the Nippon Foundation. Transportation assistance was provided by Japan Airlines. The New York showing is made possible by a generous grant from the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Additional support is provided by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Laura Hoptman, Assistant Curator of Drawings at MoMA, and Lynn Zelevansky, Associate Curator, Department of Twentieth-Century Painting at LACMA, served as co-curators. The exhibition remains on view at MoMA until September 22, followed by travel to The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (see page 5).

Kusama first came to prominence in New York with her Infinity Nets, a

series of large-scale monochromatic paintings. These canvases were covered edge to edge with an interlacing pattern made up of a single, repeated circle, as in the nearly fourteen-foot-long painting No. A.B. (White) (1959).

In the early 1960s Kusama began to express her penchant for repetitive physical labor and obsessive bit-by-bit accumulations in different mediums, as in her collages of airmail and price stickers, file-folder labels, gummed reinforcements, and dollar bills. Kusama's sculptures from this period--household items covered with stuffed phallus-like protrusions, forecasting a preoccupation with the body--drew considerable critical attention. Her first sculpture, *Accumulation No. 1* (1962), used the frame of an old armchair as a base, and was covered with hand-stuffed phallic shapes sewn from canvas. In *Ironing Board* (1963), a steam iron sits, face down, threatening to scorch a sea of phalluses covering the surface. The phallic forms serve as an absurd contrast to the mundane domestic articles supporting them, resulting in sculpture that dares to be laughable, ugly, and threatening.

By 1965 Kusama had introduced a profusion of color into her sculpture through the use of dotted and striped fabrics. *Red Stripes* (1965) consists of phallic forms sewn from red-and-white-striped fabric, stuffed and mounted on a wood backing. In her Food Obsession sculptures, Kusama expressed terror at the thought of the vast quantities of food a person consumes in a lifetime. She applied dried macaroni to the surfaces of clothing and accessories, as in *Macaroni Suitcase* (1965), a simple suitcase covered with pasta and painted gold.

The exhibition will include three reconstructions of Kusama's installations: *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* (1964), *Infinity Mirror Room* (1965), and *Narcissus Garden* (1966). In *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show*, a protrusion-covered rowboat sits against wallpaper of thousands of black-and-white reproductions of the same boat. *Infinity Mirror Room*, a four-sided mirrored room with its floor covered by red polka-dotted phalluses, multiplies an endless reflection of the viewer implicated in its dramatic scene. Kusama's *Narcissus Garden*, created at the Venice Biennale in 1966, marks the artist's transition from installation to performance. Kusama was neither invited to show nor given permission to present at the Biennale, but her outdoor "garden" of 1500 identical mirrored balls, spread across the lawns of the Italian pavilion, caused quite a stir. Kusama performed in this setting, barefoot, wearing a gold kimono, tossing the balls in the air, until she was stopped by the Biennale authorities for selling the spheres, at two dollars apiece.

As a young woman, Kusama was diagnosed with an obsessive-compulsive disorder, and since 1977 she has chosen to live in a psychiatric institution in Tokyo. Her obsession with veils of nets and dots stemmed, in her opinion, from a recurring childhood hallucination. As she recounted in 1975, "One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows and the walls, and finally all over the room, my body and the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothingness."

When Kusama returned to Japan in the 1970s, she left a legacy that affected her own generation and resonates today. Her conviction that the body is the vehicle for artistic expression provided significant precedent for the obsessive, repetitive, body-oriented sculpture of Eva

Hesse and Louise Bourgeois, and prefigured work by Robert Gober, Cindy Sherman, and Kiki Smith, among others. Kusama's grapplings with issues of cultural identity--sexuality, gender and race--anticipate work by artists such as Janine Antoni, Matthew Barney, and Yasumasa Morimura. Kusama's regained prominence has much to do with this new generation of artists, whose explorations echo hers: examining the connections between the personal and the formal, the organic and the mechanical, the physical and the intellectual. As Ms. Hoptman notes, "History has the ability to tame art that might once have been considered shocking, but 30 years after its production, Kusama's work remains every bit as bizarre as when she first made it. It's this formal audacity, coupled with an equally gutsy determination not only not to disappear, but to 'obliterate the world' with her vision that makes Kusama a role model, if not a hero, for younger artists today."

#### **PUBLICATION**

*Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* features essays by Ms. Hoptman and Ms. Zelevansky; Alexandra Munroe, Director of the Japan Society Gallery; and Akira Tatehata, Professor of Art History at Tama University in Tokyo. Published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 196 pages, 187 illustrations, including 121 in full color. Paperbound \$29.95, available in The MoMA Book Store.

#### **TRAVEL**

*Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in March 1998. After its showing at The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition will travel to The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (December 13, 1998-March 7, 1999), and to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (April 29-July 4, 1999).

#### **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

A panel discussion featuring artists and critics active in New York during the 1960s will be held on Tuesday, September 15 at 6:30 p.m.

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