



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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## From polka dots to pumpkins and more: Australia's largest Yayoi Kusama retrospective exhibition opens exclusively in Melbourne with new, world-premiere work

NGV International | 15 December 2024 to 21 April 2025 | Ticketed



**13 December 2024:** From 15 December 2024, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia celebrates the illustrious career of iconic contemporary artist **Yayoi Kusama** with a world-premiere blockbuster exhibition spanning her eight-decade practice, including the global unveiling of the artist's most recent immersive infinity mirror room work. Curated by the NGV especially for Australian audiences, the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama* features 200 works, including many never-before-seen in Australia and a record-breaking number of the artist's showstopping immersive artworks.

Displayed across the entire ground floor of NGV International, *Yayoi Kusama* is one of the most comprehensive retrospective exhibitions of the artist's work ever presented globally and the largest ever mounted in Australia. The exhibition traces her entire career – from her childhood in the 1930s through to the present-day – through a rich selection of works drawn from the artist's personal collection, private collections and premier institutions across Japan, Southeast Asia and Australia. Featuring painting, sculpture, collage, fashion, video and installation, the exhibition reveals the astonishing breadth of Kusama's multidisciplinary practice.

Born in Japan in 1929, Kusama is one of the world's most important and recognised artists working today. She is renowned globally for her singular and idiosyncratic use of pattern, colour and symbols to create immersive, thought-provoking and intensely personal works of art that transcend cultural contexts. She has made indelible contributions to key art movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including minimalism, pop art and feminist art.

*Yayoi Kusama*, and accompanying children's exhibition *Kusama for Kids*, together feature ten of the artist's signature immersive artworks – the most ever assembled in a single location. A major highlight is the world-premiere work, *Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart is Filled to the Brim with Sparkling Light*, 2024, which invites visitors into a spectacular space that opens into a seemingly infinite celestial universe. The never-before-seen new work is the latest infinity mirror room by Kusama, a format that ingeniously uses mirrors to create the optical illusion of infinity within a confined space. Since debuting her first mirrored environments in the 1960s, Kusama has continued to craft immersive installations that invite visitors to experience her boundless vision. Kusama's infinity mirror rooms have been staged the world over and are among the most celebrated works in her oeuvre.

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The exhibition also includes the Australian debut of *Dancing Pumpkin*, a towering 5-metre-tall yellow-and-black polka-dotted bronze sculpture newly acquired by the NGV. Conceived by the artist in 2020, *Dancing Pumpkin* takes her iconic motif to new heights, allowing audiences to walk under the towering sculpture. The exhibition also features the Australian premiere of *The Hope of the Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally Cover the Universe*, 2019, which visually entangles viewers within 6-metre-high tentacular forms covered in yellow-and-black polka dots.

Another highlight is *Narcissus Garden*, 1966/2024, a new iteration of the installation Kusama first presented unofficially at the Venice Biennale in 1966. This installation comprises of 1400 stainless silver balls, each 30cm in diameter and presented en masse as visitors enter the Gallery. As the metallic spheres reflect one another, they create an infinitely recurring landscape that envelops the spectator. Referencing the Greek myth of Narcissus, who was so captivated by his own reflection in a body of water that he drowned, the installation offers the viewer a multitude of reflections in which to be visually absorbed. The NGV will have an opportunity to acquire this work for its Collection through the 2024 Annual Appeal, which invites philanthropic donations of any size.

NGV International's public spaces have also been transformed by Kusama's signature polka dots, extending the sensory experience of Kusama's work beyond the exhibition galleries to include a site-specific artwork for the NGV's iconic waterwall, and *Dots Obsession*, an installation of enormous inflated spheres that will float playfully over visitors' heads in the Great Hall. Extending Kusama's kaleidoscopic worldview beyond the walls of the NGV, *Ascension of Polka Dots on the Trees* envelops more than 60 plane trees along Melbourne's iconic grand boulevard St Kilda Road in a pink-and-white polka-dotted artwork.

Through rarely seen materials drawn from the artist's own archive, including photographs, film, letters, magazines, posters and other ephemera, the exhibition also draws attention to Kusama's radical performance art, fashion designs and activism of the late-1960s. The presentation reveals how Kusama's performances, photoshoots, protests and other events – known as “happenings” – became vehicles for the exploration of radical ideas, such as sexual liberation. Also on display are experimental fashion designs first created by Kusama during this period.

**Steve Dimopoulos, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, said:** 'Time and time again the NGV hosts major, globally-recognised exhibitions, from Pharaoh earlier this year to Kusama over summer and *French Impressionism* next winter – this gallery continues to be a world leader and we're so proud to be supporting these events. This exhibition is going to be a massive drawcard for tourists from interstate and around the world, who will not only flock to the NGV but fill our hotels, restaurants and bars – providing a huge boost for our economy.'

**The Hon. Colin Brooks, Minister for Creative Industries, said:** 'Crowds at the NGV are going to be awestruck by Kusama's works and securing this exhibition is yet another example of why the NGV is Australia's most popular gallery and why Melbourne is Australia's cultural capital. This exhibition will be a hot ticket and it's fantastic that there are also many free, family-friendly ways to experience Kusama's work, by checking out major sculptures across the NGV foyer or visiting the free children's gallery.'

**Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said:** 'There are few artists working today with the global presence of Yayoi Kusama. This world-premiere NGV-exclusive exhibition allows local audiences and visitors alike the chance to experience Kusama's practice in deeper and more profound ways than ever before. We are indebted to Kusama for allowing us to share her worldview and creativity with Australian audiences.'

Following a thematic chronology, the exhibition begins by showcasing Kusama's early works, including sketches, drawings and paintings produced during the late 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s in her hometown of Matsumoto. The exhibition follows her move to the United States in 1957, highlighting her contributions to New York's avant-garde throughout the 1960s. These works are presented alongside archival ephemera, studio photographs and personal correspondence, offering a candid insight into the artist's early practice and socially engaged and politically charged performance and activism of the late 1960s. A selection of the artist's renowned *Infinity Net* paintings of the late 1950s and 60s, and her *Accumulation* sculptures and fashion of the 1960s and 1970s are highlights of the first half of the exhibition.

The second half of the exhibition highlights Kusama's iconic pumpkin-inspired works, large-scale paintings and sculptures made over the past four decades, and an extensive presentation of the artist's celebrated room installations, which invite viewers to immerse themselves within spaces created by the artist as portals to existential reflection and the infinite.

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Also, on display in the NGV's FREE children's gallery is *The Obliteration Room*, 2002–present, a large-scale, interactive installation that invites audiences of all ages to cover a stark white domestic interior in a kaleidoscope of coloured dots. Throughout her career, Kusama has used dots and other repetitive forms to cover many different surfaces and fill entire rooms. She calls this process 'obliteration', a concept that underpins much of the artist's practice, and involves fragmenting something in order to return it to the universe. In this work, Kusama invites kids and their families to take part in this process of obliteration by adding bright, colourful dots to the white furniture, objects and surfaces.

The NGV will also present a suite of public programs throughout the exhibition's duration, including NGV Friday Nights from 20 December – 18 April, as well as a new partnership with Asia TOPA, Australia's major triennial festival of Asia Pacific performance. As part of the festival, NGV and Asia TOPA, Arts Centre Melbourne will present *Pulau (Island)* – a response to Yayoi Kusama's iconic body of work by choreographer Melanie Lane, to be performed in the Great Hall across two evenings on 22 and 23 Feb 2025.

Alongside works drawn from the artist's collection, significant loans have come from Ota Fine Arts, as well as major Japanese and Australian museums including The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; Chiba City Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Iwami Art Museum; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art and private collections, including collection of Lito and Kim Camacho and the collection of Daisuke Miyatsu.

*Yayoi Kusama* is on display from 15 December 2024 to 21 April 2025 at NGV International, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Entry fees apply. Further information and tickets are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au).

The exhibition opening coincides with the NGV Gala, an annual event, on Saturday 14 December 2024. NGV Gala information is available [here](#).

@ngvmelbourne #NGV #NGVKusama

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#### IMAGES:

[https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/860vqysp221xbvy5ljxu4/ABO2leJ18ttfcpVe\\_YdVw\\_s?rlkey=xmia0vtnjloa9g8t83tbw6aly&st=y4wfkdf&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/860vqysp221xbvy5ljxu4/ABO2leJ18ttfcpVe_YdVw_s?rlkey=xmia0vtnjloa9g8t83tbw6aly&st=y4wfkdf&dl=0)

**IMAGE CAPTION:** Installation view of *Yayoi Kusama* at NGV International, Melbourne, until 21 April 2025. © YAYOI KUSAMA. Photo 1-5, 7-8, Sean Fennessy; Photo 6, Kate Shanasy

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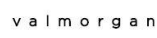


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