

YAYOI KUSAMA

NGV INTERNATIONAL
15 DECEMBER 2024 – 21 APRIL 2025

NGV

Installation view of Yayoi Kusama's *The Hope of the Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally Cover the Universe 2019* at Kusama's solo exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: All About Love Speaks Forever* at Fosun Foundation, Shanghai. Collection of the artist ©YAYOI KUSAMA



EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to *Yayoi Kusama* to support the following Learning Outcomes of VCE Art Making and Exhibiting – Exhibiting Artworks:

Unit 2: Understand, develop and resolve, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

Unit 3: Collect, extend and connect, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

Unit 4: Consolidate, present and conserve, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation and conservation at the NGV refer to **Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV.**





ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition traces Yayoi Kusama's entire career – from her childhood in the 1930s to the present-day – through a rich selection of works drawn from the artist's collection and Ota Fine Arts, as well as major Japanese and Australian museums, and several private collections.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

Comprising two hundred works presented across the ground floor galleries of the NGV International Building, the exhibition features painting, sculpture, collage, fashion, video and installation revealing the astonishing breadth of Kusama's multidisciplinary practice.

The exhibition also includes ten of Kusama's iconic immersive installations, including several 'infinity mirror rooms', which use mirrors to create the visual illusion of infinite space. A new kaleidoscopic infinity mirror room was also created especially for the NGV's exhibition.

Displayed across the entire ground floor of the NGV International, the exhibition extends into the NGV's public spaces and the surrounding Melbourne Arts Precinct. More than sixty plane trees along St Kilda Road are wrapped in a pink-and-white polka-dot design for a new iteration of the artwork, *Ascension of Polka-Dots on the Trees* (2002/2024). The NGV's iconic waterwall is also covered in Kusama's signature polka dots. In front of this site-specific artwork, you will discover hundreds of stainless-steel mirrored spheres, which comprise a new version of Kusama's 1966 sculptural installation, *Narcissus Garden*. This artwork extends into Federation Court, where you will also encounter a monumental sculpture titled *Dancing Pumpkin*, which is discussed further in this fact sheet. *Dots Obsession* is on display in the Great Hall, featuring a series of yellow and black inflatable balls suspended from the ceiling.

ABOUT YAYOI KUSAMA

Born in Japan in 1929, Kusama is one of the world's most important and recognised practitioners 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. Kusama has made significant contributions to key art movements of the twentieth and twenty-first

centuries, including minimalism, pop art, performance and feminist art, and is celebrated today for her instantly recognisable works of art incorporating pumpkin and polka-dot motifs.

KEY TEAM MEMBERS

CURATORIAL

Wayne Crothers – Senior Curator, Asian Art
 Miranda Wallace – Senior Curator, International Exhibitions
 Meg Slater – Curator, International Exhibitions Projects

EXHIBITION DESIGN:

Ingrid Rhule – Head of Design
 Thom Mccarthy – Senior Designer
 Jenny Kan – Exhibition Designer
 Jessica Brent – Exhibition Designer
 James Oates – Graphic Design

CONSERVATION:

Michael Varcoe-Cocks – Associate Director of Conservation
 Catherine Earley – Senior Conservator for Exhibitions
 Janelle Borig – Conservator, Exhibitions and Loans
 Camielle Fitzmaurice – Conservator of Exhibitions

CURATORIAL RATIONALE

Prolifically active for close to nine decades, Yayoi Kusama's work has been at the forefront of key art movements, transcending borders and establishing her global presence in and beyond the art world.

Yayoi Kusama is the largest ever exhibition of the artist's work in Australia and one of the most comprehensive retrospectives of the artist ever presented globally. Curated by the NGV, the exhibition includes many works never-before-seen by local audiences as well as a diverse display of the artist's popular immersive rooms. It also features the global unveiling of the artist's most recent immersive infinity mirror room work.

Installation view of *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition at NGV International, Melbourne until 21 April 2025. © YAYOI KUSAMA. Photo: Sean Fennessy



Installation view of Yayoi Kusama's *Dots Obsession* 1996/2015 at Kusama's solo exhibition *YAYOI KUSAMA: IN INFINITY*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark.
YAYOI KUSAMA Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts © YAYOI KUSAMA

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Yayoi Kusama is displayed across the entire ground floor of NGV International and extends into NGV's public spaces and the surrounding Melbourne Arts Precinct, including NGV's iconic Waterwall, Great Hall, and Federation Court.

The overall exhibition design uses colour and form to evoke shifts in Kusama's practice and to complement the displayed works, including many vibrantly coloured works. Some walls are painted in specific colours, for example a rich brown colour (Dulux Bruno Brown) represents her early years in Japan; white walls in Lexicon® Quarter mark her arrival in New York and Dulux Black highlights her radical works of the late 1960s. Some areas are left pristine in Dulux Lexicon Quarter to emphasise the artwork. This thoughtful variation enhances the bold visual impact of Kusama's immersive environments.

The exhibition's title wall is strategically placed at the ground-floor entry. Kusama's handwritten signature is integrated into the title of the exhibition, providing a personalised touch. Paired with the bold, capitalised and elongated presentation of the artist's surname, this aptly signals the beginning of a comprehensive retrospective exhibition.



CONSERVATION

The Yayoi Kusama exhibition features two hundred artworks made from a diverse array of materials including objects, paintings, fashion and textiles, paper and photography, and contemporary and variable media art. Some of the more contemporary works challenge traditional methods of preservation by pushing artistic boundaries and inviting audience interaction and engagement.

Conservators approach each artwork individually, carefully assessing potential safety concerns and mitigating associated risks to both the visitor and the artwork. Their primary responsibility is to preserve each piece and ensure it is returned in the same condition as when it arrived. Throughout the exhibition, conservation teams will closely monitor the artworks, performing regular cleaning and maintenance.



SELECTED WORK

DANCING PUMPKIN

ABOUT

Since her first sighting of a pumpkin as a child in Japan, Kusama has been fascinated by the fruit. Over the past eight decades, she has expressed her admiration for the pumpkin across multiple media. *Dancing Pumpkin*, 2020, is Kusama's largest and most ambitious imagining of her beloved pumpkin to date. Whereas her earlier pumpkin sculptures have a typically static, solid base, *Dancing Pumpkin* has eleven tentacle-like legs. All but three hover above the ground, frozen – as the work's title implies in joyous movement, animating the yellow and black polka-dotted form.



Yayoi Kusama *Dancing Pumpkin* 2020. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
Purchased with funds donated by Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2025
© YAYOI KUSAMA

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The installation of this five-meter bronze sculpture, finished with urethane paint, was a complex engineering feat. *Dancing Pumpkin* was made in the USA at one of the largest contemporary art fabricators in the world.

The artwork features three points of contact with the ground, while its eight other tentacles appear to levitate, creating a striking visual effect. The sculpture was transported to Melbourne from Washington wrapped in protective plastic and meticulously packed into twelve crates. It was assembled on-site over five days using a crane. This intricate process ensured both the safety of the artwork and its successful installation in Federation Court.

Dancing Pumpkin weighs approximately nine thousand kilograms, and its dimensions are 490.2 cm H x 777.2 cm L x 744.2cm W. The sculpture is prominently displayed in Federation Court, positioned directly above a subterranean

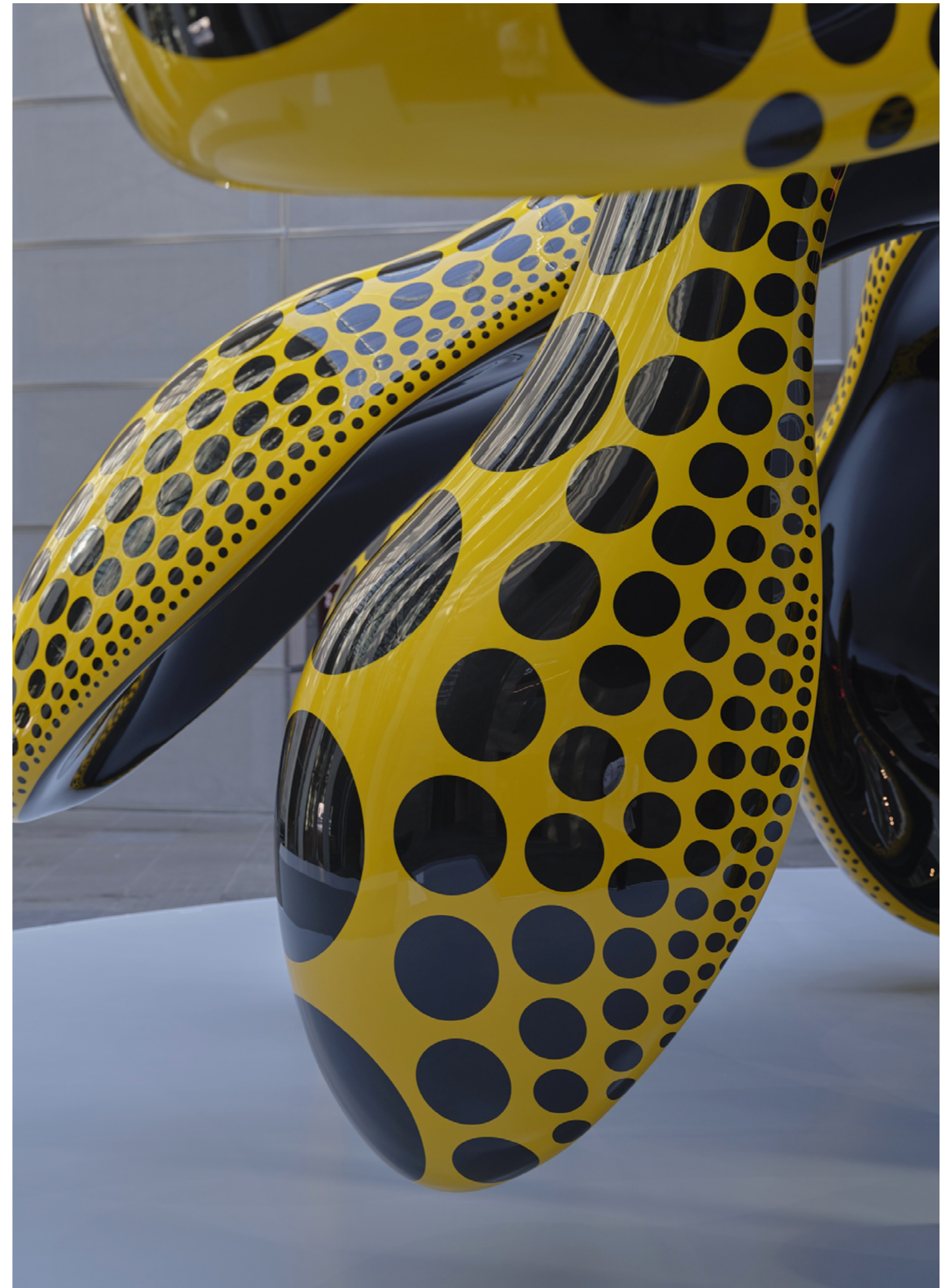
carpark. To accommodate its immense weight, the sculpture was strategically aligned with the underground columns for structural support.

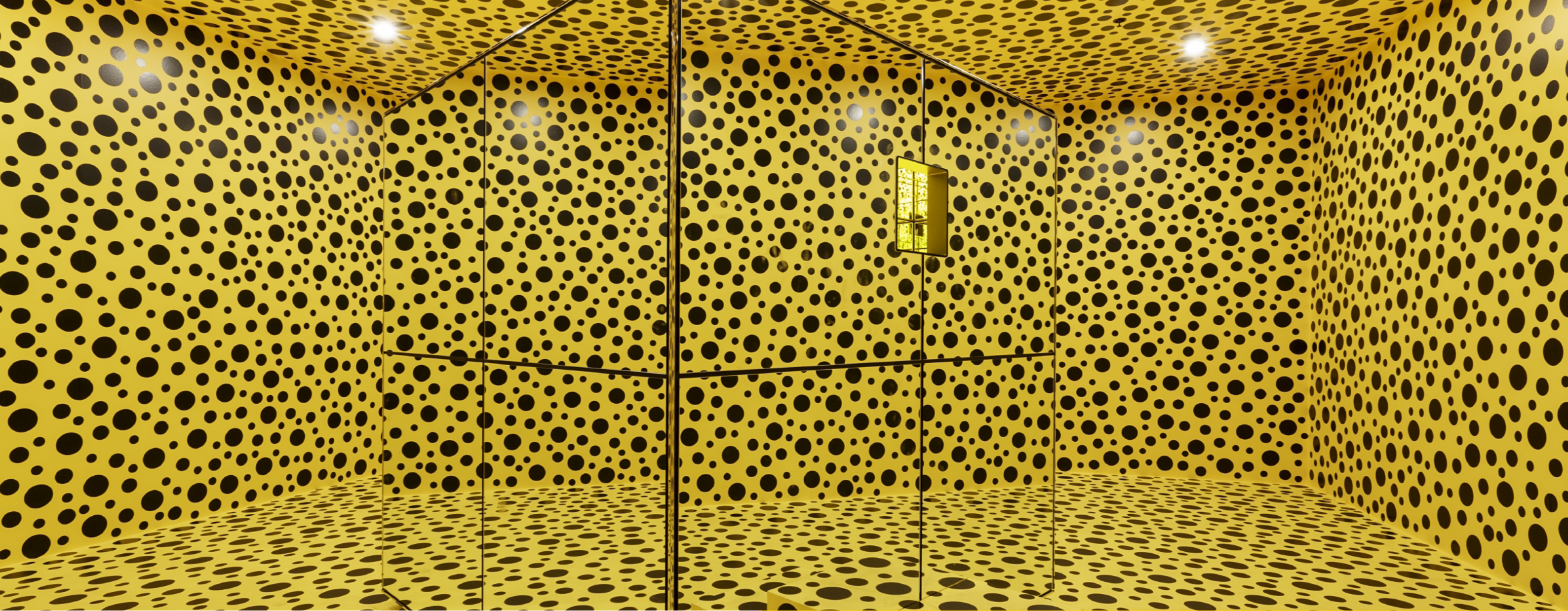
A large round plinth (1150.0 cm diameter) was built to conceal the footings supporting the sculpture, while creating the illusion that the work is sitting directly on the gallery floor. To encourage interaction with the sculpture and ensure equitable access, a plinth with both steps and a ramp was integrated into the design. The plinth was painted grey to match the bluestone floor, while a lighter grey strip highlights the steps to minimise tripping.

The *Dancing Pumpkin* is dusted and cleaned from fingerprints daily as is the plinth itself. Once a week an extendable feathered microfiber duster is used to clean the entire sculpture.



Installation of *Dancing Pumpkin* in Federation Court.





ABOUT

In 1991, Kusama created *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, her first immersive mirror room in over two decades. Exhibited at the 1993 Venice Biennale, a mysterious cube sat at the centre of a yellow and black polka-dotted room. Visitors were invited to look through a small opening in the cube's exterior to see the scene hidden within – a fantastical mirrored landscape of pumpkin sculptures. *The Spirits of the Pumpkins Descended into the Heavens* is a reprisal of this early pumpkin room. Inside the cube, the original hand-painted pumpkins have been replaced by glowing pumpkin lanterns.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Spirits of the Pumpkins Descended into the Heavens has been loaned for this exhibition from the National Gallery of Australia (NGA).

The room consists of two rooms. The outer room is a yellow and black polka-dotted cube. At the centre of this outer room is a mirrored cube containing illuminated pumpkins. The glowing pumpkins can be viewed through a small aperture on one of the walls of the mirrored cube, using a step. The viewing platform has been reduced from two steps to one to comply with Victorian accessibility standards, eliminating the need for handrails or tactile indicators. In the hallway outside the installation, yellow floors and black walls create a striking visual contrast that complements the colour scheme in the installation. In this hallway, there are also a number of other yellow and black pumpkin artworks and pumpkin reliefs.

Visitors who are unable to step onto the viewing platform to access the artwork will be able to see 360-degree views of the glowing pumpkins on an iPad. This iPad is discreetly stored in a nearby cupboard and distributed by Front of House staff as required.

Daily checks and a strict cleaning routine are followed to ensure the mirrors and surrounding spaces are kept clean. The mirrors are cleaned with microfiber cloths and glass cleaner, while feather dusters and soft-brush vacuums are used to clean the surrounding space.



ABOUT

From a young age, Kusama began to experience hallucinations, a formative experience described by the artist: 'One day, after gazing at a pattern of red flowers on the tablecloth, I looked up to see that the ceiling, the windows, and the columns seemed to be plastered with the same red floral pattern. I saw the entire room, my entire body, and the entire universe covered with red flowers, and in that instant my soul was obliterated.'

(Y. Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, London 2011, n.p.).

Flower Obsession re-creates a furnished domestic space. Visitors are invited to apply red flowers to the walls, furniture and objects. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, the flowers will proliferate, gradually covering all surfaces to 'obliterate' and transform the space into a spectacular environment.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Flower Obsession was first exhibited in the inaugural NGV Triennial in 2017 and was subsequently acquired for the NGV's permanent collection. It is the final artwork in the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition. This is the second presentation of *Flower Obsession* at the NGV, and the size and design of the gallery space required for this work has changed, however, the concept remains the same.

The exhibition design team have built a 96 square meter residential space within the exhibition that includes a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom as well as small details such as power-points, skirting boards and windows. Furniture and accessories that are typically found in an apartment fill the space, all of which have neutral tones to emphasise the red flowers, which are gradually applied to the many surfaces of the domestic space over the course of the exhibition. Props are fixed in place with glue to secure the installation and to ensure visitor safety.

The walls have been painted Lexicon® Quarter, so that the addition of red flowers creates a striking contrast. Warm lighting has been used in the space to enhance its residential quality.

Flower Obsession is a participatory work. Upon entering the space, visitors are given a flat sticker of a red flower to adhere to the apartment, subsequently creating a base layer of red flowers. Throughout the exhibition NGV staff will monitor and maintain the space, regulating sticker usage. Three-dimensional artificial flowers are distributed to visitors once the walls, furniture and accessories have been reasonably covered.

IN THE GALLERY



FURTHER RESOURCES

- This resource is designed to support VCE Art Making and Exhibiting **Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV.**
- **VCE Art Exhibiting and Making Study Design** and **VCAA support materials for implementation 2023** National Gallery of Victoria, **Explore Conservation**

NGV SCHOOLS
PROGRAM PARTNERS



The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support of the NGV School Support Program.