

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

“I’ve never installed my work in such an exotic environment”

Japanese octogenarian Yayoi Kusama on her Miami exhibition

By Helen Stoilas | From Art Basel Miami Beach daily edition, 5 Dec 09

Published online 5 Dec 09



Guidepost to the New Space, 2009, installed at Fairchild

Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama has been covering the world in dots for six decades now. Installations, walls, ceilings, bulbous sculptures and even her own body are painted in endless, dizzying patterns of circles. The artist, who lives by choice in a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo, says her work is inspired by her own hallucinations. In Miami, Kusama has installed new works, including a series of monumental, vibrantly coloured flower sculptures, in the lush setting of the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden (until 30 May 2010). She speaks to us about how art is the driving force in her life.

***The Art Newspaper.* Many of your works feature organic forms, such as pumpkins, which fit perfectly with the botanical gardens. Have you ever installed a show of works on this scale in a public garden before?**

Yayoi Kusama: No, although I have shown my work in public places all over the world from Japan to China, South Korea, Holland and France. I have installed much larger works than these in other permanent locations, so it is a familiar process to plan and work on such a grand scale. Installed are three groups of work on three adjacent sites in the garden, including a pond. They call the sites “galleries” although in reality these are grassy areas surrounded by tropical vegetation.

TAN: What is the ideal setting for your work?

YK: Places where people from all over the world gather, especially indoors and outdoors at art museums or outdoor sites, such as Naoshima Island in Japan. Many sites where my exhibitions have been held have become famous tourist spots!

TAN: Why do you like creating art for places where people gather? Is there a social element to your work?

YK: People and their enthusiasm help to animate, and thus complete, my work.

TAN: Can you tell me about the inspiration behind the work *Guidepost to the New Space*, installed in one of the garden’s ponds?

YK: The inspiration comes from my pursuit of the truth, which has been fundamental to my artistic creation over the past several decades.

There are ten large, hump-like sculptural elements installed in one large pond. Each element is a bright colour and is covered with white dots. The surface of the pond will reflect the sculptures in it, making them look like floating balloons of my work. Thus *Guidepost* is a work that acts on the environment itself.

TAN: Other works on view include your “Flower” series—how do you think these will fit in with the living flowers of the garden?

YK: These huge, brightly coloured sculptures come from my illusions. It will be spectacular to place the illusory flowers among the real plants and flowers.

TAN: Are there any other new works that will be premiered in Miami?

YK: All the works on view are my latest. All of them have been produced expressly for Miami, although they belong to ongoing bodies of work. Through this project I would like to help create new culture together with the people involved.

TAN: Is nature important to your work? What subjects influence your work the most?

YK: I derive a lot of inspiration from the mystery of the universe that lies in nature, as well as the way that we live on this planet.

TAN: How did you become involved in the project?

YK: By invitation. As I had never installed my work in such an exotic environment before, I was intrigued to do so at the gardens.

TAN: You’ve been very busy over the past few years, with shows in New York and Los Angeles and an internationally touring exhibition now in Australia. What are you working on now?

YK: The Fairchild project is an important step forward, showing my outdoor sculpture in a new kind of environment with a different public. At the same time, there is a major survey of my work—recent paintings, sculptures, installations, as well as some historical drawings and videos—at PAC [Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea] in Milan, Italy (until 14 February 2010). In the longer term, I have begun talks with Tate Modern in London to prepare a possible travelling retrospective of my work. I continue working on all aspects of my art and looking for new opportunities.

TAN: You turned 80 this year—do you have any plans to slow down?

YK: My production pace is not slowing down at all! I spend all day every day creating art. The body of work entitled “The Place for My Soul” is a powerful message about life, world peace and praise for the soul. I will keep struggling for my art until the end of my life as a human being.