

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Yayoi Kusama at Gagosian Gallery

By Christopher Miles

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A memorable 1968 photo shows Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama ringmastering a troupe of masked, naked, polka dot-painted revelers in New York's Central Park surrounding José de Creeft's 1959 *Alice in Wonderland* bronze sculpture, which, in larger-than-life scale, and in a style reminiscent of John Tenniel's illustrations for the first edition of Lewis Carroll's tale, depicts another troupe — the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit, Dinah the cat, the Dormouse, and Alice herself — among giant mushrooms. A document of a happening from early in Kusama's career, it's an encapsulation of her predilections for patterns, gardens, organic forms, flower power, unapologetic frivolity and psychedelia. As evident in Kusama's just-opened exhibition at Gagosian Gallery — her first major outing in Los Angeles since her amazing retrospective at LACMA in 1998, and a bookend to another Kusama show currently at Gagosian's 24th Street Manhattan outpost in celebration of the artist's 80th birthday — her predilections hold strong. Gagosian's freshly white-on-red, polka-dotted entry corridor leads into a main space dominated by Kusama's just-completed *Flowers That Bloom at Midnight*, a garden that surely would have left Carroll tripping with an ensemble of monumental flowers reminiscent of the venomous flora in John Wyndham's 1951 novel *The Day of the Triffids*, or Audrey II, the carnivorous plant at the center of Roger Corman's *Little Shop of Horrors*, all sporting watchful eyes. With their massive, fiberglass-reinforced plastic forms done up in high impact-hued urethane, they also

resonate with any number of imaginary plants cooked up by Dr. Seuss or Peter Max, as well as the work of Stockholm-based neotrip artist Carsten Höller. And they are the direct kin of another of Kusama's sculptural works, *Hymn of Life: Tulips*, permanently installed a few blocks from Gagosian at the intersection of Santa Monica Boulevard and Rodeo Drive. Some accompanying works reflect Kusama's interest in the infinite and sublime as located in pattern and repetition, dating back to her paintings from the '50s, but it is her more recently developed works, which encapsulate the surreal and the visceral within the pop and the decorative, that suggest an extension of Kusama's practice into her ninth decade, fresh and provocative as when she was frolicking in Central Park.

Gagosian Gallery, 456 Camden Dr., Beverly Hills; Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; through July 17. (310) 271-9400 or www.gagosian.com.