

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

BEVERLY HILLS, CA

### Yayoi Kusama GAGOSIAN GALLERY

When, in a 1998 interview with Damien Hirst, Yayoi Kusama observed that while cancer is what people fear, flowers are “what people enjoy visually. . . . Ultimately, they are the same. When they die, they [both] become dust . . .” she may well have been forecasting the essence of her most recent series of large-scale sculptures, “Flowers That Bloom at Midnight,” 2007–2009. Recently exhibited with new canvases and an unrelated sculpture at Gagosian Gallery in Beverly

Hills were seven entries to that series from this year, immense blossoms made from fiberglass-reinforced plastic that linger delicately on a threshold between joy and horror with their vibrant immediacy, overwhelming presence, and saccharine, poxlike patterning. At once organic and cartoonlike, each of the basic, five-petal flower forms—handpainted in clownish, multicolored, hard-edged dots (Kusama’s signature)—rested directly on the gallery’s floor; at each bloom’s center, an ominous pupil radiates from an almond-shaped

lines. As with the artist’s famous 1966 piece *Kusama’s Peep Show*, Kusama constructs an environment that the body cannot enter; the boundaries of an otherwise contained space are perceptually erased, negating, or at least leaving behind, the human body. As Kusama has long spoken about her perpetual hallucinations of dots, nets, and flowers as motivating her artistic production, it is problematic (if not negligent) to conceive of her practice without taking such personal history into account. Yet after some fifty years of exhibiting, the artist, in her eightieth year, is still able to surprise us with not just idiosyncratic translations of subjective reality, but straightforward takes on universal ideas. Let this serve as a testament to her remarkable consistency and strength of vision.

—Catherine Taft



Yayoi Kusama,  
*Flowers That Bloom  
at Midnight M1A*,  
2009, fiberglass-  
reinforced plastic,  
metal, urethane  
paint, 85 1/2 x  
71 1/2 x 116 1/2".

capitulum-eye. In effect, these flowers—the smallest stand four and a half feet tall and the largest tower at over fifteen feet—look quite figurative, bowing, twisting, reclining, and balancing on sensually sloping leaf-limbs. And through these sculptures, as in much of her past artwork, from sublime but obsessive painting to performance aimed at the metaphoric obliteration of the self, Kusama shrewdly demonstrates how visual treat might slide into subliminal threat.

Surrounding the flowers were four new Infinity Net canvases that feature large fields of solid color overlaid with a complementary series of curved brushstrokes that aggregate a textured, dotted surface. These works, made between 2008 and 2009, typify those Kusama has been painting since the late 1950s: Two seem to vibrate, laying loopy strokes of green on red or of red on black; another mutes such chromatic pulsation with a net of white over a light gray field; and an expansive triptych titled *Hallucination*, 2008, stuns the eye with tightly woven gold strokes against red. As the dots that emerge from these painted “nets” are given form by the absence of brushstroke (that is, they exist as negative space), we can begin to understand that here Kusama is conceptualizing infinity as an effect of a constructed void. *Death Is Inevitable*, 2008—a flat composition of cardinal red, fringelike (or tonguelike) concentric squares licking inward toward a blank, stark white ground—also hung in the main gallery, further emphasizing Kusama’s practiced attention to negative space.

Negative space, or rather the negation of space, as a “way to infinity” is perhaps best demonstrated by Kusama’s mirrored objects and installations, one of which was exhibited in the rear gallery. *Passing Winter*, 2005, is a roughly two-and-a-half-square-foot mirrored cube set on a glass pedestal; three circular holes (or oculi) are cut out of each side in seemingly random arrangements that offer several interior vantages. Peering inside, the viewer finds her reflection is thrust into a 360-degree *mise en abyme* of fractured light and infinitely repeating