



ARTS & CULTURE

Japanese Cosmic Show Meets American Garden

April 16, 2021

The large, brightly colored circles and pumpkins at the New York Botanical Garden are part of a new show called "Kusama: **Cosmic** Nature." They are the works of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.

Tired of staying home during the year-long pandemic, people are quickly buying tickets for the show. It will remain on view through the end of October.

Most of the artworks are outdoors and are big enough to enjoy while remaining socially distanced. Visitors will want to wear good walking shoes because the show spreads over the 100-hectare garden in New York City.

The **garden** fits well with Kusama's complex works which are all related to nature. Kusama grew up in the **greenhouses** and fields of her family's large seed company in Matsumoto, Japan.

When Kusama was young, she began seeing colorful images that seemed real to her. In some of them, flowers and pumpkins talked to her. They also involved polka dots or flowers spreading around her.

Mika Yoshitake is the curator, the person who selects and sets up artworks for the show. "For Kusama, cosmic nature is a life force," Yoshitake said. She explains that Kusama's work brings together things on the Earth and in the stars.

Karen Daubmann oversees shows at the garden. Beyond the polka dots, she said Kusama's work combines sadness and **joy**, "which really speaks to the current moment."

Works appearing at the Kusama show include the nearly 5 meter-high painted **bronze** "Dancing Pumpkin" (2020). It appears to jump around happily.

"I Want to Fly the Universe" (2020) is a brightly colored 4 meter-high flower with a face to greet visitors at arrival. "Infinity Mirrored Room - Illusion Inside the Heart" (2020) is an outdoor piece that **mirrors** its surroundings.

Inside the Conservatory, or the greenhouse, there is the polka-dotted flowers "My Soul Blooms Forever" (2019) greeting visitors in one room. Nearby, the pink and gold "Starry Pumpkin" (2015) sits among real woodland flowers and leaves in different colors.

In a body of water, visitors can see "Narcissus Garden" (1966/2021) with 1,400 floating steel balls. In 1966, at the Venice Biennale, Kusama got into trouble for trying to sell the balls for \$2 each.

And tall trees are **wrapped** in bright red cloth with white polka dots called "Ascension of the Polka Dots on the Trees" (2002/2021).

Visitors can also view a book of **drawings** she made in 1945, at age 16. It is full of careful, realistic drawings of plants. Also on view is her "Infinity Net" painting, which she made after seeing the Pacific Ocean from an airplane.

A small collection of images shows Kusama's life in New York, where she lived from around 1958 to 1973. She was known for doing performance art pieces and leading protests against the Vietnam War.

Kusama, 92, has lived voluntarily in a Japanese mental hospital for over 40 years. Six days a week, she works in a studio next to the hospital. She has not traveled to the United States since 2012.

I'm Jill Robbins.

Katherine Roth wrote this story for the Associated Press. Jill Robbins adapted the story for Learning English. Hai Do was the editor.

Words in This Story

cosmic – *adj.* of or relating to the universe or outer space

garden – *n.* an area of ground where plants (such as flowers or vegetables) are grown

greenhouse – *n.* a building or part of a building that has glass walls and a glass roof and that is used for growing plants

joy – *n.* a feeling of great happiness

drawing – *n.* a picture, image, etc., that is made by making lines on a surface with a pencil, pen, marker, chalk, etc., but usually not with paint

bronze – *adj.* a metal that is made by combining copper and tin

mirror – *v.* to be very similar to (something): to show (something) in a very clear and accurate way

wrap – *v.* to cover (something) by winding or folding a piece of cloth or other material around it
