

# 95-Year-Old Yayoi Kusama: The Best-Selling Woman Artist in the World

Get inside Yayoi Kusama's world of polka dots, pumpkins and infinity rooms

By [Elizabeth Fishel](#) | August 9, 2024 | [Arts and Entertainment](#)



Yayoi Kusama; courtesy the artist, David Zwirner, Ota Fine Arts, and Victoria Miro; © YAYOI KUSAMA; photo: Yusuke Miyaza

If William Blake believed you could find a universe in a grain of sand, Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama believes you can find it in a polka dot. This remarkable 95-year-old multimedia creator is the top-selling woman artist in the world. In 2024 alone her polka-dotted work can be seen from San Francisco to Rochester to Miami, from London to Barcelona, and on permanent display in the Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

The polka dot is Kusama's signature, from a single spot that represents her own life to multiple dots strewn over brightly colored surfaces that create

what she calls "infinity nets." "Dots are symbols of the world, the cosmos," she has said. "The Earth is a dot, the moon, sun, the stars are all made up of dots. You and me, we are dots."

**"Dots are symbols of the world, the cosmos"**

As Kusama writes in her 2002 autobiography, "Infinity Net," her favorite image was inspired by the "hundreds of millions of white pebbles" in the riverbed behind her house where she played as a "disconsolate" child. Now her dots

parade triumphantly over canvases, art installations, sculptures, even her own clothing that looks like an art piece itself, as she wears, for example, lipstick red dresses and egg-yolk yellow socks, all decorated with jaunty black dots. Her neon red bob and razor-straight bangs complete her look and make her instantly recognizable in photographs.

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## The Princess of Polka Dots

I had the joy of seeing several of Kusama's dazzling works earlier this year at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Christopher Bedford, the museum's director, commented in an interview that the attendance for the exhibit exceeded the museum's expectations at 170,000 visitors. "Many expressed how much they enjoyed the intricacy, immersive quality, and

joyful nature of the work," he said.



Yayoi Kusama, LOVE IS CALLING, 2013, installed in the exhibition Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Love, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 2023; © YAYOI KUSAMA; photo: Matthew Millman | Credit: courtesy SFMOMA

Known as the "Princess of Polka Dots," Kusama has had an illustrious career spanning seven decades. Her childhood in Tokyo was difficult, under the dark shadow of World War II and an abusive mother. From the age of ten, she started experiencing hallucinations that she described as "flashes of light, auras, or dense fields of dots." These became the source both of her explosive creativity and her later mental illness.

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In 1957 at age 28, she moved to the U.S. to be free to make art the way she chose. Before she left her country, she burned one thousand of her artworks, a radical act to prepare for an entirely fresh start. She felt the art world in