

Unit 9: Infinity Artist

Narrator: Known for her use of polka-dots, Yayoi Kusama is one of the most renowned artists in the world.

She is also the first Japanese woman to receive the Praemium Imperiale, one of Japan's highest honors for internationally recognized artists.

Kusama's iconic polka dots are inspired by a recurring hallucination from her childhood—she described herself as standing in the middle of a vast field of flowers, akin to millions of polka dots that went on for as far as she could see—into infinity.

She recalled, "I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space."

Born in 1929, in Matsumoto, Japan, Kusama moved to Seattle at the age of 27, feeling stifled by the expectations from her family and the cultural censorship at the time.

There, she became increasingly political and quickly gained a reputation in the avant-garde movement, becoming close friends with artist Donald Judd and sculptor Eva Hesse.

Kusama experimented with various mediums such as drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, fashion, writing, and installation. She would sometimes work up to 50 hours without rest, and once had to be hospitalized from overwork.

One of her most popular installations is her infinity mirror room, a room filled with mirrors and neon lights.

In 1973, she eventually moved back to Japan in ill health and checked herself into the Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill.

There, Kusama continues to produce hundreds of new pieces for exhibitions around the world.