

YAYOI KUSAMA

YOU, ME AND THE BALLOONS

EDUCATION RESOURCES

factory
international

YAYOI KUSAMA

YOU, ME AND THE BALLOONS

EDUCATION RESOURCES

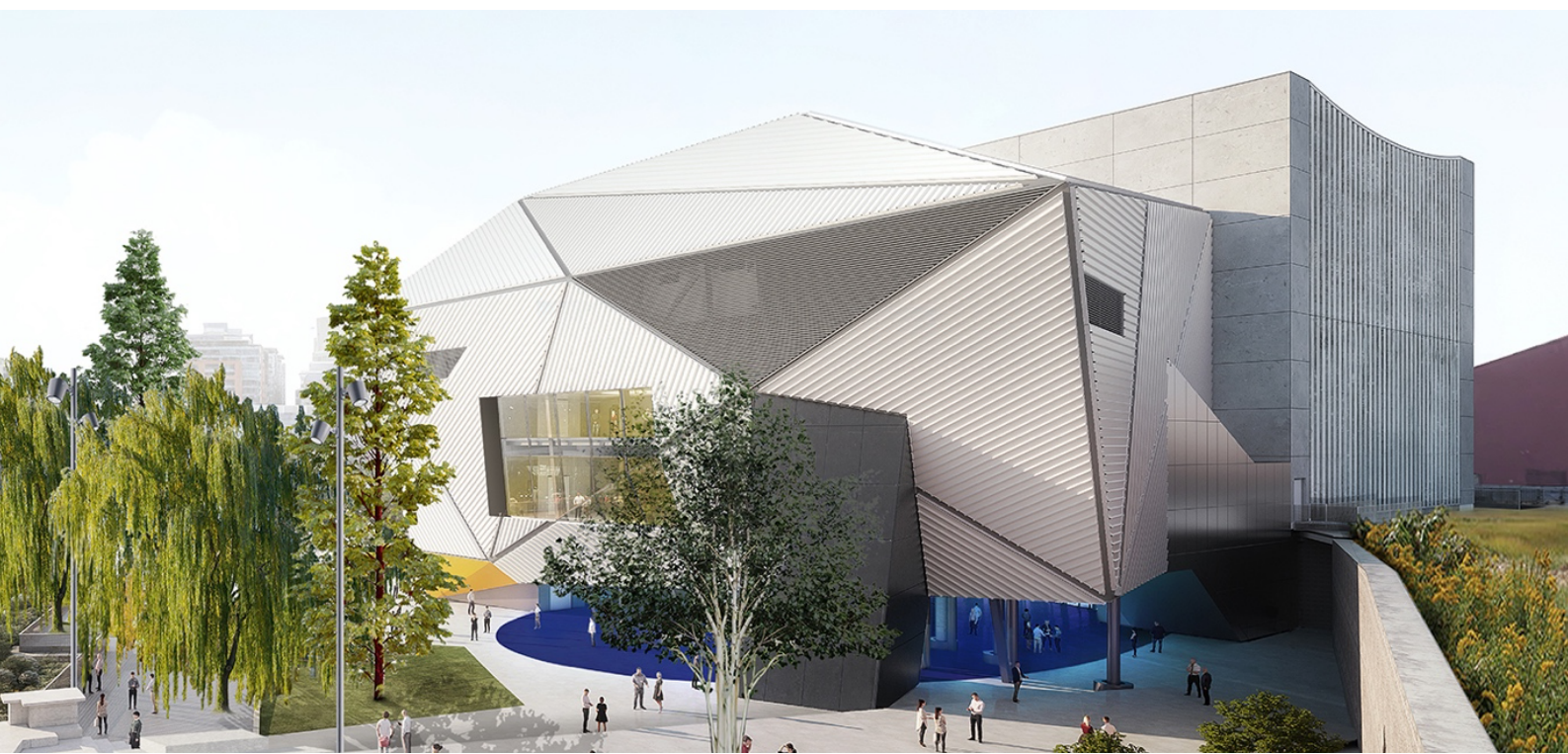
This summer in 2023, Yayoi Kusama is bringing her largest ever immersive environment to Manchester. Conceived especially for the soaring spaces of Factory International's new building, *Yayoi Kusama – You, Me and the Balloons* celebrates three decades of the pioneering Japanese artist's inflatable artworks, which are brought together for the first time in this major exhibition.

Her psychedelic creations – many over 10m tall – include giant dolls, spectacular tendrilled landscapes and a vast constellation of polka dot spheres. Kusama's career spans eight decades and she is now a global phenomenon. *In Yayoi Kusama – You, Me and the Balloons* you will experience the vastness of her playful and kaleidoscopic universe.

To celebrate Kusama's new exhibition, Factory International has invited two local artists, Princess Arinola Adegbite and Venessa Scott, to share some creative activities that highlight how Kusama's themes and ways of working have inspired them as artists.

These resources are designed as a starting point for exploring Kusama's creative practice and can be developed into a scheme of work, using the different perspectives and ideas of Venessa and Princess. Activities are designed to cover cross-curricular programmes of study across the National Curriculum including Maths, English, PSHE, Art and Design and Science. Each activity encourages observation and discussion, offering new ways of exploring artworks and sharing ideas in response. These activities can be created at home or in the classroom and are suitable for families and students to do together or independently.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND LINKS TO KUSAMA'S EXTENSIVE WORK CAN BE FOUND AT THE BACK OF THIS RESOURCE KIT.





YAYOI KUSAMA IS A JAPANESE ARTIST. SHE MAKES ALL KINDS OF ART: COLOURFUL PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES, DAZZLING ROOM ENVIRONMENTS AND PLAYFUL INFLATABLE ARTWORKS.

She is famous for her *Infinity Mirror Rooms* – rooms made entirely of mirrors that are like being in a kaleidoscope. She is also known as ‘the princess of polka dots’ because she likes to cover everything – her art, herself – in polka dots. She likes polka dots because they express in a simple way the complex idea that as humans we are one among many and we live on a round planet floating in space in an infinite universe.

‘Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos. Polka dots are a way to infinity. When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka dots, we become part of the unity of our environment’
– Yayoi Kusama

The polka dots are also something Kusama sometimes actually sees all around her. Since she was a child, she has experienced visual hallucinations and she has explained that creating art that captures what she sees is her way of coping with these overwhelming experiences. We’ve highlighted three broad and significant themes for the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama – You, Me and the Balloons* that share Kusama’s approach to working and her distinct style.

INFINITY

This is a recurring theme throughout Kusama’s career. She is renowned and adored for her surreal world of dots and pumpkins among other artistic motifs. Her hallucinatory paintings, sculptures and immersive environments, such as her *Infinity Mirror Rooms*, take us beyond ourselves and make us feel part of something greater. Unique in her ability to conjure wonder while also asking bigger questions about human existence, Kusama draws millions of people to queue for hours to spend just a minute in her cosmos.

PERCEPTION

Kusama also writes poetry and books. Like her art, her poetry is often about her investigations into life, asking questions like ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Why are we here?’ Her poetry invites us to think ‘cosmically’, to slow down and pay attention to the small things such as a flower or a pumpkin. To enjoy their beauty and notice the complexity of the patterns in a leaf cell. And to reflect on how these cells help the leaf create the oxygen we breathe. What a miraculous process that is. She invites us to think about the big things such as existing on a planet in an expanding solar system. And to think about each other and how best we should use the time we have together to get along in peace.

JOY

As a child Kusama took comfort in being amongst nature and making art. Though her family disapproved, she persevered, and being able to express herself through her art has helped Kusama overcome many difficulties. Her radical ideas meant she was often ahead of her time and after initial success as a young artist living in 1960s New York, she was sidelined by an art world dominated by white men. Today, aged 94, Kusama continues to spend all day painting and making art. Her lifelong commitment to creative expression as a way to bring joy and to inspire people to value beauty, freedom and love has made her very popular all around the world. Our local artists Venessa Scott and Princess Arinola Adegbite have used these themes to design activities you can do in the classroom or at home.

PRINCESS ARINOLA ADEGBITE

Professionally known as P.A.BITEZ, Princess is a multi-award-winning artist from Manchester who works in poetry, film, music and performance art. Her work illuminates underrepresented narratives around identity, ecology and disability. Princess's lyric verses employ sound patterning and surrealism to explore perception and the subconscious mind. Micro and macro moments are examined in her art from poems inspired by personal conversations to films highlighting stereotyping and discrimination. As an artist with a long-term health condition, she is also interested in writing about the complexities of the human body.

'Kusama's work excites me due to her acute attention to detail and her reverence for nature. She creates work that is both powerful and vulnerable. It's colorful and displays a childlike creativity and joy.'

Princess has created a warm up activity *Poetry Image Bank* that showcases one of her techniques for gathering visual options to help write poems.

Collaborative Collage Poems is an activity Princess has devised for the exhibition inspired by Yayoi Kusama's use of repetition and love of writing and performing poetry.

WATCH THE VIDEOS AND USE THE RESOURCES BELOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN COLLABORATIVE CONTINUOUS POEMS.

POETRY IMAGE BANK

You will need:

- Pencils and paper
- A selection of images from magazines or the internet (or use our examples as a starting point)

AN IMAGE BANK IS A LIST OF IMAGES TO INSPIRE YOU DURING THE WRITING PROCESS. IT ALLOWS YOU TO HAVE VISUAL OPTIONS E.G. CHERRY BLOSSOMS WAVING IN SPRING AIR.

Find some images that remind you of Yayoi Kusama's work or use the examples in our video

What can you see in these images?

What shapes, patterns and colours do you notice?

Have a discussion in pairs or small groups about what you can see.

Imagine you've jumped into one of the images.

What would it smell like?

What would it feel like being among the imagery in the picture?

What would you hear if you were in the middle of it?

Use your senses to describe what the picture might feel like.

CREATE A CONTINUOUS POEM USING YOUR IMAGE BANK AS A STARTING POINT.

Write for three minutes, nonstop, everything you can think of that reminds you of your images. Any time you feel stuck, have a look at your favourite image for inspiration.

SHARE YOUR POEM WITH YOUR CLASS.

DISCUSS

- How did it feel writing continuously without stopping?
- Kusama liked to write poetry to the world that would bring joy and value beauty and freedom. What does your poem creatively express to the world?

COLLABORATIVE COLLAGE POEMS

You will need:

- Large pieces of paper
- Pencils

IN SMALL GROUPS, TAKE IT IN TURNS TO SHARE WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ENJOY DOING.

- Each person talks for two minutes, continuously without stopping.
- Everyone else writes down words that stand out for them while the speaker is talking.
- Without taking your pen off the paper, have a go at writing continuously as the person is talking.

We call this technique Free Write, and it's how poets and artists generate ideas to create content. At this moment don't worry about punctuation or grammar and instead let the pen flow across the page.

ONCE EVERYONE HAS FINISHED, SWAP YOUR SHEETS AROUND.

Look at everyone's writings.

Select words that stand out and feel important to you and cut them out.

Working in pairs, arrange your words onto a separate piece of paper.

Think about how you might group your words together to create your poem.

Introduce joining words in between to create sentences and structure to your cut up words.

Glue your words down.

Share your poem as a whole group.

In small groups, facing each other, take it in turns reading out your poem.

As soon as one student stops, the next person starts, creating one continuous poem like a river of language.

Or when one student is halfway through theirs, the next person starts.

Continue starting this way, in the round, creating a never ending poem.

DISCUSS

- Yayoi Kusama has written and performed many poems including a special message during the Covid-19 pandemic. How do you think writing and sharing poems in this way is important?
- How does it feel performing a poem in a group in the round instead of individually?
- Why do you think Kusama makes art that feels never-ending and that can go on for ever and ever? What do you think she is trying to say by making artworks that express this?
- Writing continuously is a great way to generate ideas. What other ways can you create content for your poems?

VENESSA SCOTT

Venessa Scott is a prolific public artist and specialist in Creative Education. Recognised widely for her contribution to the arts and cultural sector in the North, she delivers creative projects, workshops and interventions to a range of audiences. Venessa has been commissioned by leading cultural, corporate and community organisations across the North West and Yorkshire. Venessa designed and painted one of the UK's tallest murals. The design was created to reflect the principle of unity and it linked directly to the pioneering work of Sylvia Pankhurst. You can also find Venessa on the popular CBBC series *Colours*, where she helps children discover and explore colour through art.

'I love Kusama's use of colour and scale. The fact you can walk around her installations and experience all that colour bigger than you is amazing and something you can never get bored of'

Venessa has created a warm up activity *Nature Observations* that demonstrates how we can create patterns and shapes by looking closely at plants and flowers.

Drawing With Scissors is an activity Venessa has designed for the exhibition, inspired by Yayoi Kusama's use of colour as a communicator. Create a bold collage that explores contrasting and complimentary colours.

Never-Ending Patterns explores Kusama's theme of infinity and use of repetition to create large scale installations and immersive environments.

Use the resources below and watch Venessa share how she makes these different artworks.

NATURE OBSERVATIONS

You will need:

- A4 paper
- Something to draw with
- A selection of objects from nature, e.g. leaf, pine cone, flowers, branches etc.

DIVIDE YOUR PAPER INTO FOUR OR SIX RECTANGLES, AS YOU WILL BE DRAWING IN EACH BOX.

Go outside, explore and find interesting shapes in nature to bring back into the classroom.

Don't pick flower heads or anything alive. Gather what you can find on the ground on your nature walk.

Select one of your nature items and study it. Look really close. What can you see?

Taking your time, draw what you can see slowly.

Continue filling up your paper with different lines inspired by the shapes you can see in your plants.

Choose a different plant for each space on your paper or draw the same leaf or plant from different angles.

DISCUSS

- Why do you think it's important to slow down sometimes when we're making art?
- Kusama loved using nature as her inspiration to make many of her artworks. What inspires you about nature?

DRAWING WITH SCISSORS

You will need:

- Different coloured paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- A selection of objects from nature, e.g. leaf, pine cone, flowers, branches etc.



WHAT DO YOU NOTICE WHEN YOU LOOK OUTSIDE?

What's your favorite colour in nature?

How does this colour make you feel?

Observe the colours and shapes on your chosen plants.

Choose some coloured paper that represent the colours you can see.

Harmonious colours sit next to each other on the colour wheel. Use a selection of harmonious colours to create your image with.

Instead of using pencils to draw the shapes on the paper, cut straight into the paper, inspired by the shapes in your plants you have seen.

Use your drawings from the warm up activity to help guide you.

Once you've cut all your shapes out, choose a background colour that contrasts with these colours.

Contrasting colours sit far apart on the colour wheel – for example, a bold blue and bright yellow.

Arrange your shapes on the background paper. Once you are happy with the layout, glue everything down.

Share your collage in small groups. What are the similarities and differences between your artworks?

DISCUSS

How did it feel cutting straight into the paper and not drawing out your shapes first using pencils?

What do you notice about your shapes working in this way?

Yayoi Kusama is world renowned for her use of bold bright colours. Why do you think she chooses to use vibrant colours to make her artworks?

How different would your artwork look if you only used black and white or completely different colours to create it?

NEVER-ENDING PATTERNS

You will need:

- Some paper, ideally square size
- Something to draw with
- A selection of objects from nature, e.g. leaf, pine cone, flowers, branches etc.

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT YOUR ITEM FROM NATURE.

What shapes do you notice?

Draw an outline of a shape as a repeating pattern across the middle of your paper.

Don't go too close to the edge of your page; leave a gap of about 5cm all the way around.

Find the middle of your paper by gently folding it in half and pressing it gently on the fold.

Turn your paper over so the pattern is facing the table.

Fold each side into the middle of your paper where you've created a crease.

Take your nature inspiration and draw another repeating pattern across the page.

Avoid 5cm from the top and bottom again.

Open up your paper to its original size. Turn your paper 90 degrees and fold each edge into the centre.

Draw your final shapes and patterns across the page.

Unfold and open out your paper again. Look at your seamless repeating pattern.

Share your pattern in a group and discuss the similarities and differences between your designs.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- Colour in your never-ending pattern.
- Think about the colours Yayoi Kusama uses in her work that makes her patterns stand out.

PLACE ALL THE PATTERNS TOGETHER IN A DISPLAY TO CREATE A LARGE-SCALE COLLABORATIVE NEVER-ENDING PATTERN!

DISCUSS

- How does a pattern change the bigger and more repetitive it gets?
- Why do you think Yayoi Kusama creates large-scale artworks that surround the viewer?
- How would the viewer feel being able to walk through their artworks on a giant scale?

LINKS TO OTHER KUSAMA RESOURCES

[BECOMING AN ARTIST: YAYOI KUSAMA | TATE KIDS - YOUTUBE](#)

[HOW TO CREATE DOTS LIKE KUSAMA | TATE KIDS - YOUTUBE](#)

[HIGH. YAYOI KUSAMA INFINITY MIRRORS TEACHER RESOURCE.PDF](#)

[CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON \(2008\). YAYOI KUSAMA MIRRORED YEARS SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION RESOURCE KIT.PDF](#)

[YAYOI KUSAMA | VICTORIA MIRO \(VICTORIA-MIRO.COM\)](#)

