

RALEIGH, N.C. — The [North Carolina Museum of Art](#) has acquired a major work of contemporary art, *[Light of Life](#)*, by one of the most acclaimed contemporary artists in the world, Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. The work debuts at the NCMA on April 7 as part of the exhibition *You Are Here: Light, Color, and Sound Experiences*. After the exhibition closes in late July, the Kusama work will be featured in the Museum's modern and contemporary galleries. *Light of Life* is one of the final major acquisitions of outgoing Director Larry Wheeler, who plans to retire in November.

"This acquisition epitomizes Kusama's brilliance and the impact of her pioneering work as one of the most influential artists working today, and it is a privilege to be the first institution in the Southeast to acquire one of her most important new works," Wheeler said. "Peering into the 'infinity room' is almost a spiritual experience," says Wheeler, who has been a champion of contemporary art during his tenure at the NCMA. "*Light of Life* laces together lights, movement, and perspective for an exclusive experience that's unique to every visitor. You become part of the artwork and share that experience with the other viewers who are there with you."

Light of Life is a mirrored hexagonal box measuring more than seven feet square and seven feet tall, with three portholes at varying heights to allow the viewer to look inside of the enclosed "infinity room." The interior of the work is lined with mirrors and filled with LED lights that are programmed to change patterns and colors in a dazzling two-minute light show. Viewers see a kaleidoscopic play of color and light, along with multiple views of their own reflections and those of the other viewers looking through the portholes, all creating an illusion of infinite space and an extraordinary shared experience.

Described as the most Instagrammed artist in the world (a recent search listed 579,923 posts on Instagram), Kusama provides a uniquely accessible and transformative experience with contemporary art for viewers of all ages and backgrounds. It appears that people universally connect with and delight in her extraordinary work without any need for interpretation or explanation. When the work was featured last fall in a solo show at her New York City gallery, David Zwirner Gallery, visitors stood in line for up to six hours for a chance to spend 60 seconds peering into the dazzling light show Kusama had created inside the sculpture. The piece was included in the New York Times's "The Year in Pictures" review of 2017.

Although Kusama has been working for over 60 years, she has recently become a worldwide phenomenon. A current retrospective of her work, *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* (organized by the Hirshhorn Museum) has had record-breaking attendance at every location and inspired thousands of social media posts of the artist's fantastical experiential works.

Wheeler's dedication to contemporary art such as *Light of Life* has expanded the NCMA's modern and contemporary galleries to include works by Louise Bourgeois, Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Yoan Capote, Nick Cave, Ellsworth Kelly, Sean Scully and more. The special interactive exhibition *You Are Here* features 20 installations by 15 international artists; it is meant to broaden viewer's perspective of art and encourage participation.

"The Kusama acquisition could not come at a more exciting time," says Linda Dougherty, chief curator and curator of contemporary art, who organized *You Are Here* with art by Janet Cardiff, Bill Viola, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Anila Agha, Soo Sunny Park, and others. "It fits perfectly within the immersive experience of *You Are Here* and carries out the mission of our Matrons of the Arts movement to acquire more pieces by female artists. Yayoi Kusama is unquestionably one of the most important artists of the 21st century. An inspiration to artists at any age, at 89, she is still

working six days a week and continuing to experiment with new mediums.”

Kusama was born in Matsumoto, Japan, in 1929. She had little formal training, studying traditional Japanese painting only briefly (1948–49) at the Kyoto City Specialist School of Arts. She came to the United States in 1957 and lived in New York City for 16 years, establishing herself as an avant-garde artist and becoming a major figure in performance, happenings, and pop art and minimalist art movements, along with her peers and friends Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Joseph Cornell, and Donald Judd. She was well known at that time for her infinity net paintings and “dots,” which continue to infiltrate her canvases, sculptures, prints, and clothing, and have even spread beyond into performance and installation. She returned to Japan in 1973 and in 1975 voluntarily committed herself to a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo, where she still lives today, making work in the hospital and in various studio spaces she maintains in the neighborhood.

Tickets to see Light of Life and the rest of the You Are Here exhibition are on sale and available at ncartmuseum.com/here or through the Museum Box Office, (919) 715-5923. Opening night, Saturday, April 7, features an after-hours opening party and silent disco from 8 pm to midnight, and the party continues with an “All-Nighter” of extended exhibition hours and ongoing programming continuing through Sunday. More information about the exhibition can be found at ncartmuseum.org/here.

About the North Carolina Museum of Art:

The North Carolina Museum of Art’s permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum’s collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.

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