YAYOI KUSAMA
Yayoi Kusama underwent childhood experiences as the youngest daughter in a Japanese family, which in turn led her to become the artist she is today. Growing up, Kusama’s family discouraged her desire in making art, as her mother even tore up some of her drawings and instead wanted her to become a traditional Japanese housewife. However, she did not give up painting and at the same time, she experienced hallucinations that usually involved a field of dots, flowers, or nets. Due to the result of World War II, Kusama and many other school-age children in her hometown were mandated to work in a parachute factory. Kusama took advantage of this punishing work and used the time to find resources to continue drawing and painting. Kusama’s early drawings and paintings influenced the burgeoning Pop Art movement, which used the repetitions of images and forms to delve into consumerism and mass production.

Kusama’s use of dots is a manifestation of her hallucinogenic visions on account of her later discovered psychological distress. The artist’s achievements after coming from a very traditional background in a conservative part of Japan in the twentieth century illustrates her passion and confidence that guided her to a successful career.
Yayoi Kusama gained recognition for her work as a result of her transformative experiences as well as her compelling personal narrative. This popularity for herself and her artwork not only stayed in Japan, but this major reputation made its way to the United States when her art emerged here in 1959. In greater specifics, she revolutionized New York’s male-dominated art scene. Today, she is the world’s top-selling female artist. Part of her audience that was intrigued by her work were two well-known male artists, Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg.

Although these two artists had already made a name for themselves, there is major discussion over whether both male artists adopted some of Kusama’s techniques within their works. In the early ‘60s, Kusama began working with soft-sculptures which was a way for her to channel her mental illness. She created hundreds of these soft sculptures, and in June of 1962, she released Accumulation No. 1, an armchair covered in white sewn-and-stuffed protrusions.

It was then in September of that same year where Claes Oldenburg exhibited a soft-sculpture piece in the same exhibition where Kusama’s work was displayed. In another case, Andy Warhol was perhaps inspired by her work because he produced an exhibition with repeated images on a wall, similar to an exhibition Yayoi Kusama created years prior. After not receiving the proper recognition Kusama deserved, she retreated to her studio, covering all of her studio windows so that no one could “steal” her designs.
When Yayoi Kusama was a young woman living in New York, she analyzed troubling issues of sex through a feminist lens. Kusama embraced her sexuality by participating in the “Free Love” movement, which was a social movement that accepts all forms of love. The movement began around the 19th century but progressed into the Sixties as its goal was to separate the state from sexual matters such as marriage, birth control, and adultery. Kusama strongly believed that “the body is art,” which is why she created a series of out-of-door naked “happenings” throughout New York City to protest institutional corruption, sexism, and racism. These performances and protest arts revealed naked bodies and were intended to overthrow the oppressive male gaze, dematerialize female and male bodies, destigmatize sex, and promote peace and love through self-oblation. Due to these events taking place in the 1960s in a very populated city, Kusama was considered to be a major social and political critic. She even wrote in a poster that prompted that event that “Homosexuality is a normal physical and psychological reaction, neither to be extolled or decried. It is the normal reaction of many people to homosexuality that makes homosexuality abnormal.”
Technology has a critical impact on both the production of art and how it is viewed. Within the past decade, social media has taken off, with the ability to access and gain information on various online platforms. Social media has made it possible for more audiences to become in touch with Yayoi Kusama’s art through a digital lens and art immersing in museum exhibitions. Both Instagram and Facebook platforms promote knowledge and information surrounding Kusama’s work as well as her visuals.

The ability for viewers to see Kusama’s art through technology creates an environment that showcases her work outside of museums and galleries. Museums and galleries that do promote Kusama’s art work are likely to include ticket sales to prompt audiences to experience her work in person. Social media has been an impressive component of Kusama’s work spanning more and more across communities of people. These communities have the ability to engage with her exhibits on social media through sharing videos, photos, blog posts, and news. In 2018, the documentary, Kusama-Infinity, was released and tells he story of Kusama’s battle to overcome sexism, racism, metal illness, and how she became the world’s top-selling female artist. This film allows the audience to create a deeper connection and respect for Kusama.