

## *Manhattan Salvation Addict*

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### **Abstract**

Kusama Yayoi is a world famous Japanese artist who has worked in a wide variety of media. Since the 90's we can observe growing fascination with Kusama's works, as well as its recognition and rediscovering. The phenomenon is better known as "The Kusama Renaissance".

As a still living and creating artist, she constantly tries to advance forward, despite living in isolated world of mental institution. Nowadays, "The Kusama Renaissance" transcends borders of Japan and USA, where the artist was mainly working.

This article explains the circumstances in which Kusama in 60's and 70's years in USA stir up cultural revolution. Her actions became a mirror reflecting social anxieties and opposition to the war in Vietnam and the government. She found her mission in proclaiming free love, peace and tolerance to the society. In attempt of finding out the relationship between those subversive activities and her literature I will examine her literary activity after she came back to Japan in the mid 70's and try to describe the world in which – like Jean Genet – "she makes the filth shine." I will also show, how she saves her characters – social outcasts, underdogs – from the hardships of existence and the entire universe by the concept of *self-obliteration*.

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Kusama Yayoi (b. 1929) is a Japanese artist and writer who, on the one hand, lets the references to the traditions of Japanese art seep into her work subtly – and at times almost imperceptibly - while on the other hand, she still subscribes to the mainstream of the western transavantgarde of the 1960s and 1970s.

Kusama distinguishes herself among other artists with her particular approach to the act of creation: her concentration often verges on a meditative state, during which the immediate temporal presence is abolished or dispersed; one may be tempted to claim that the artist herself might have wished for such a result. Consequently, she created a vast majority of her work in this spirit and in this vein, which is why, in turn, her pieces are characterized by a simplicity of the means employed and a semblant schematic structure; according to a master of the traditional school of Japanese *tosa*<sup>1</sup> painting, this last trait is a singular advantage, as it has the power to reach and touch the depths of the human heart. In an eclectic communion, Kusama combines this approach to work with the condition expressed “in the metaphor of the labyrinth, in the dispersion of entity, or in nomadism”<sup>2</sup> – basically, in a great confusion of the transavantgarde. In the experience of which, art manifests itself with a holistic completeness that is difficult to maintain and which occurs most often in a fragmentarized and acentric form. At the same time, this art possesses a certain capacity to simultaneously depict the many paths of entry and exit, while "enabling one to live a life in the world" devoid of great stories and history that would solder the infinite number of narratives into one solid wholeness. Nomadism - as understood by Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Felix Guattari (1930-1992), and as described by Achillo Bonito Oliva (born 1939) - serves to perfectly depict the nature of the artist's work: “In nomadic works, the art of the 1970s comes across its own excellent movement coupled with the ability to traverse all territories freely without any hindrance, while following the guidelines which keep opening them up in all directions.”<sup>3</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that for years the works of Yayoi Kusama - fell into a virtual oblivion outside of Japan; however, 1990s marked the beginning of a continual process of rediscovering her as an artiste, as an icon of social and cultural transformations, as the "Queen of the hippies" and even as the progenitor of such schools of art as pop art and minimalism. This process, referred to as the "Renaissance of Kusama's art", further contributes to a "redefinition of the significance of the work of the author of *Infinity Nets*, as viewed in the context of art history”.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, this process brings about an increasing number of retrospective exhibitions of her work, as well as shows of her latest productions which are held in major galleries and museums around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tosa* - actually Tosaha (The Tosa School); this term refers to a traditional school of Japanese painting. Its origins date back to the Muromachi period (1337-1573). One of the main objectives of the school was the eradication of Chinese influences and a renewal of Japanese painting, as well as engendering a move towards its ancient heritage of the Heian period (794-1185).

<sup>2</sup> K. Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm*, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> A statement made by the President of the Japan Foundation, Asaho Shinichirō, during the preparations for a retrospective exhibition of Yayoi Kusama's works held at London's Tate Modern in 2012.

It is my wish to dedicate this article to the pursuit of the following three objectives: firstly, to present the circumstances in which Kusama unceasingly tried to kindle the flame of revolution in the minds and hearts of the Americans all throughout the 1960s and 1970s; secondly – to elucidate how she turned the concept of self-obliteration into her main tool of creation; and thirdly – to expound on how these activities affected her literary works, for which she was, first and foremost, highly appraised in Japan, following her many years of residence in the United States. It is Kusama's literary work - almost completely "unchartered" outside her home country, which serves to show us a whole new aspect of the universe in which the "I" of each and every one of us can become subject to dispersion.

The year 1957 saw Kusama arrive in the United States, where she settled for almost twenty years. In 1958, she moved permanently to New York. The first years were for her a mere struggle for survival, as she would spend all her financial resources on painting materials, thus living on the brink of poverty; this was also a period, in which her mental health deteriorated. However, it was during those tough days that she created one of her most famous series, entitled *Infinity Nets*. This painting cycle soon brought her recognition and appreciation among the New York art enthusiasts and critics.

Within ten years of coming to the U.S.A., Kusama strengthened her position in the art milieu primarily as a painter. In the late 1960's, the artist began to venture beyond the narrow field of classically defined arts and she chose to express herself in a wider range of activities, such as live art happenings. Although she was, already experimenting with performance art as early as in 1965 when she presented the *Narcissus Garden* environment during the Venice Biennale, it was only in 1967 that the fascination with this field of artistic activity urged her to organise one event after another. This coincided in time with the happenings parallel to the development of the hippie movement in Greenwich Village which began to increasingly affect many young Americans.

When, during the second half of the 60's of the past century, Kusama goes out into a public space with her happening actions and presents them on the streets of New York, it is the very dots which become her main weapon in a battle with a widely understood systematism and are to carry with them a power able to make revolutionary social changes at their basis, which included message of love, peace and tolerance.

Kusama is holding a series of "naked happenings", during the event, different color dot designs were painted on the bodies of the present participants. This act according to the artist's intentions then becomes a symbolic road towards experiencing the quality of the infinite universe. By painting dots on our bodies, we are able to experience – return to – being one with the universe, vanish from the multitude and become a potential force in subsequent transformations.

Polka dots can't stay alone, like communicative life of people, two and three and more polka dots become movement. 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. I become part of the eternal, and we obliterate ourselves in Love.<sup>5</sup>

The term inseparably tied with the dot, for Kusama is a process of *self-obliteration*. It is a type of a spiritual enlightenment leading towards a renewed connection with infinity. This process is to make it possible for us to achieve salvation by freeing ourselves from shackles tying us with humanity. Shackles such as history, our ego or imposed on us social roles. In *self-obliteration*, we will find a reflection of the most significant slogans propagated by the American counter-culture at the turn of the 60's and 70's of the past century. Arising free love, anti-military social movements, newly created sects and religions as well as the drawn from the eastern philosophical and religious thought may be related to the ideas of *self-obliteration*. As noted by Midori Yoshimoto Associate Professor of Art History z New Jersey City University:

In essence, Kusama's Self-Obliteration is a creative hybrid of Buddhist thought inflected with New Age spiritualism, the rhetoric of sexual liberation, and her semi-autobiographical narrative.<sup>6</sup>

### **Literature**

The mid 1970s witnessed a drastic deterioration of Kusama's health. Consequently, in February 1975, the artist returned temporarily to Japan in order to undergo a surgery at a hospital in Tokyo. Making the best of her stay in the fatherland, she decided to go to her hometown of Matsumoto to find some tranquility and "peace of mind". She was planning to return to New York immediately upon recovery. However, she began to experience ever intensifying hallucinations. The doctors were unable to help her, as they could not conclude a definite diagnosis. Thus, due to the need to conduct detailed examinations and in fear of a further aggravation of her mental condition, she resolved to stay in Japan.

Kusama found it impossible to get readjusted to the Japanese way of life. She wrote about the great gulf that divides the United States and her country. Japanese conformism disillusioned her greatly:

"Everyone would act and look exactly the same way. They had the same expressionless faces. When someone would stand out from the crowd, it's only because they imitated something they had seen in a magazine on the American or French fashion. Upon exiting the station, they would all head off through the crowded streets to their small residential buildings. Sitting in their tiny rooms, they would watch the same old commercials on TV. The Japanese lifestyle and mentality became uniform. I couldn't stop thinking that unlike the times I remembered so well, everybody around was characterized by a lack of individualization."<sup>7</sup>

"What is this country?"<sup>8</sup> - Kusama asked herself. It seems that the progressive modernization and economic success of Japan is perceived by the artist as a source of

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<sup>5</sup> Kusama Y., quoted from Jud Yalkut, "Polka Dot Way of Life (Conversations with Yayoi Kusama)," *New York Free Press* 1, no. 8 (1968), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Yoshimoto M., *Kusama Saves the World through Self-Obliteration*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Kusama Y., *Infinity Net*, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

the destructive forces that transformed the country of a rich and varied tradition into a country "without character" or identity - a country whose citizens engage in mindless consumption while and reproducing foreign unfamiliar values. Having lived over seventeen years in the United States, once on the Japanese ground, Kusama is relegated to marginal sphere "that-which-is-left-unpondered". In other words, Kusama's activities failed to induce active aggression, nor do they provoke any controversy; instead, they cause her to be ignored as an artist and an intellectual. Japanese marginalize the importance of her thought and maintain it firmly beyond the framework of what is considered to represent the official, acceptable standards of social philosophy. According to Kusama's own admission, the Japanese society was not prepared to engage in an unbridled unfettered discussion on matters of the body, sexuality, gender and civil liberties - issues of the greatest important to the artist, ones that would determine the life of being human. Describing the then Japan, Kusama writes as follows:

„I was in my motherland for a little over two months, but all my stay did was confirm for me what a corrupt and bogus, fourth-rate country it was. In the end, the concept of free sex was something the Japanese simply could not grasp. [...] But when all was said and done, my pro-sex and anti-war ideas, and the Happenings that expressed them, went down like lead balloons in Japan. The mass media, the journalists, and the intellectuals all exhibited absolutely no comprehension of what I was about.”<sup>9</sup>

However, Kusama could not suffer the world to throw her into oblivion, and so soon after she revealed to it her previously unrecognized literary talent.

“I was able to shed light onto a different sphere of my own existence – one that I would not be able to fathom with the visual arts alone.”<sup>10</sup>

Upon her return to Japan, Kusama could no longer count on the tremendous popularity she once enjoyed during her years spent in New York. Although her first two retrospective exhibitions organized at that time in Tokyo helped attract new enthusiasts of her work, they become ventures of low media appeal, which failed to affect either the new currents in art or the wider Japanese audience. The summer of 1977 introduced a possibility to change this state of affairs and remind the world of one of the most important stages of the artist's life. Art critic by the name of Kazue Kobata (b. 1946) - then a young editor - asked Kusama for a brief write-down of her memories of Yoko Ono.

„She okayed my request by saying: „Well I can talk about her (instead of writing).”<sup>11</sup> So I went to see her for the first time, where she talked about Yoko Ono and also her days in New York, by mixing in some English words in the conversation, which I found so fascinating. I also liked the way she interpreted contemporary art, so I encouraged her to write a book about her own story.”<sup>12</sup>

After just three weeks, Kusama submitted a text of over 200 pages, which also constituted her first novel. The book was published the following year. Setting her

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from Shinakawa T., “Bungaku ni mo Hana Hiraku, Hirui Naki Sōzō no Chikara”, [in:] Pen Henshūbu (ed.), *Yappari Suki Da! Kusama Yayoi*, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Sonoda S., *Locus of the Avant-garde*, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

works in New York, Kusama scrutinizes the phenomena occurring in the changing cultural image of the city panorama, subjecting them to a detailed clinical analysis. Owing to this approach, the background of her novel, which is formed by meticulous descriptions of the world depicted, of nature or social phenomena, gains an equal importance as the main layer of the narrative, with which they are intertwined as its integral elements. According to Kobata:

She writes in a striking way, expressing her emotions freely with straightforward words, that you could feel how seriously she was living her life. I'm not quite sure if it's correct to state this as an objective fact, but considering that it is a memoir of what she had gone through, you could definitely call it a documentary of those days."<sup>13</sup>

*Manhattan Suicide Addict* is sometimes classified as an autobiographical novel; however, it differs from a typical documentalist narrative, which is characterized, for instance, by a fixed chronological framework of the events described and an inflexible formal structure – so much so, in fact, that it would not be completely unjustified to classify it as a work of fiction. Realistic events are interspersed here with phantasmagoric visions of a dark world imbued with secret forces, the true picture of which escapes one's grasp.

Determining the boundaries between its real and the fantastic realm seems unfeasible, because it becomes completely inseparable from the surrealist sphere, in which an attempt at separation or detachment of even one constituent fragment could result in the complete destruction of its intricate design. This structure is primarily a record of magical realism being simultaneously the result of Kusama's real-life experience and her artistic construct. In adopting such a perspective for the specification of the literary form - as long as we assume that this fantastical world, in which Kusama lives and acts, is not only a created vision, but also a part of her reality which she is in fact experiencing - we can state that we are indeed dealing here with a form of an autobiographical novel. When writing the afterword for this book, Poet Shūzō Takiguchi (1903-1979), compares Kusama to a fairy – a creature out of this world, suspended or trapped somewhere between the realm of objectivity and subjectivity. The uncertain and vague existence of the fairy also engenders a metaphor of art that escapes any concepts and definitions<sup>14</sup>.

"The squirrel began to gradually transform into one of the leaves. From all that staring at it, my eyes started to turn green. The squirrel's eyes met my gaze. It is summoning my spirit. I'm afraid. Leave me alone! Oh, actually wait, my body is turning into a green tree. Help! The tree is bursting into an unknown area of gender. How is that even possible? The trunk, thick as a penis pierced the gray soil. Dignity, which breathes heavily in the midst of cruel summer, is now trying to stand on an unfamiliar terrain of a grassy field. I have been crushed. I want to become a young man ... in secret."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the dichotomous image of a dual reality that supports the entire narrative structure of the song, we can also differentiate other elements of the work

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Sonoda S., *Locus of the Avant-garde*, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from Kusama Y., *Mugen no Ami*, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup> Kusama Y., *Manhattan jisatsu misui jōshūhan*, p. 18.

which serve to show that it is based on the category of difference as well as the category of repetition, alike Kusama's entire artistic output. Next to the dichotomy of the world depicted, which constitutes the narrative of the novel, Kusama's writings are also embedded on the aspects of divergence. On the one hand, we are confronted with descriptions of ruthless violence and brutality, while on the other hand, we are presented with sublime contrasting scenes depicting the richness and beauty of nature, which are often imbued with lyricism. The dramatic story of a romantic love is complemented by a description of a sexual act performed by animals and the recurrent castration theme with the penis marinated in a jar represents sexual slavery and the dominance of heteronormativity, while on the one hand, referring to a *sui generis* archeology of the sources of pleasure and satisfaction. It seems that the grotesque form employed by Kusama makes for great means to portray the wildly changing socio-cultural situation of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. The introduction of stylistic diversity enables the pronunciation of the inherent differences separating the citizens of the USA. Consistent juxtaposition allows Kusama to reveal the common mental platitudes, such as those pertaining to the issues of fundamental human rights, the citizens' attitude towards military actions (war waging), views on racial diversity and gender or sexual orientation. The slogans which accompanied her subversive activities of the New York era keep on living through her literary works and can provide proof of her unwavering determination to instigate a revolution in the world designed to rearrange the world according to the principle of universal understanding based on tolerance and respect and non-exclusion from society. Her commitment to the issues of morality is evident in the many descriptions of homosexual community which emerge "here and there" throughout her work; as Kusama herself recalls, some of the most faithful supporters of her avant-garde activities would recruit themselves this specific social group – ones on whom she could always rely. An example thereto might be the following excerpt:

**"I who have become myself**

Once, the old fag Jerome,  
when walking down the street, saw a white kitten  
who was busking in the sun.  
He was terribly dirty.  
So he took it home with him to give it a good scrub.

If you aren't able to clean yourself up,  
Then you'll never become a proper tomcat.  
I, who can never sit still,  
Am only looking at Bob licking a corn cob.

One day, I became a real tomcat.  
There's a lot of stuff to wash, leave it all for now.  
From dusk till dawn I'm humping Bob's butt.  
Even burnt bread or spilled milk won't phase me.  
I'm happy – I who dream the dream of a painter's brush." <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 14-15

The publicity Kusama gained owing to *Manhattan Suicide Addict*, meant that for a time in Japan she would be seen mostly as a writer. Shūzō Takiguchi notes the irony of the fact that only her first literary success and international recognition urged the Japanese to appreciate the value of their compatriot's work.

Kusama's second novel, published directly after the *Manhattan Suicide Addict*, which is entitled *The Hustlers Grotto of Christopher Street* proved to be an equally involved piece of writing. Also set in New York, this book became the most important among all her literary works, for which she received the prize of the "Yasei Jidai" literary magazine in the category of the best literary debut. The jury awarding the prize comprised, *inter alios*, of Ryū Murakami (b. 1952), Teru Miyamoto (b. 1947) and Kenji Nakgami (1946-1992), writers younger by almost two generations than the Japanese post-war school. In their rejection of Abe Kobo's existentialism, Yukio Mishima's romanticism and Kenzaburo Oe's political ideology, these writers and thinkers set a new direction for the modern Japanese writing, which shows a real fascination in supernatural forces, fantastical tales, occult ceremonies and dark sides of human nature. To a large extent, they were drawn in this direction by the works of Izumi Kyōka (1873-1939), a writer excluded from the mainstream of modern Japanese literature, which was back then dominated by naturalism. His surreal works imbued with magical elements, dark gothic aesthetics and a ubiquitous mystery affected the young intellectuals and avant-garde artists in the 1970s and 1980s in Japan, so much more strongly than they did the author's contemporaries. Kyōka is also one of the writers most respected by Kusama, and his "The Saint of Mt. Koya" is her favorite novel. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise to anyone that the publication of *The Hustlers Grotto* – a book permeated with camp aesthetics, depicting a narcotic vision of a sexually awakened New York, including elements of a bloody macabre - that coincided with the period of "Kyōka Boom" in Japan, was so positively received by other writers and literary critics. Nakagami admires the work of Kusama, in particular for her involvement to fathom such areas of social taboo as "violence, discrimination, incest and bisexuality"<sup>17</sup>. This exposing of the world became her principal method to fight human prejudices, bigotry and signallments of false morality. Seeking answers to the most basic ontological questions, Kusama tirelessly strives to unravel all the mysteries.

“What does living a life mean?  
Holding my hands firmly, and smashing the emptiness of my heart,  
though I want to climb up to the summit of life,  
how mysterious everything is.  
I know I should simply run and run through its course.  
I will discard every mystery!  
Good-bye, my mysteries.”<sup>18</sup>

Ryū Murakami, in speaking about the literary talent of the artist compared them to the talent of Jean Genet saying, “...both make filth shine.”<sup>19</sup> And so the main character in

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Munroe A “Afterword” [in:] Kusama Y. *Hustlers grotto: three novellas*, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Kusama Y., *I Like Myself*, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> Munroe A., “Between Heaven and Earth: The Literary Art of Yayoi Kusama,” in *Love Forever*, Munroe. Interview with Ryū Murakami, Tōkyō, May 21, 1996.

„Hustlers Grotto” – Henry, is a downright caricatural character, an African American, drug addicted male prostitute.

„Henry was, yes, an insatiable soul, a vagabond of the night who roamed the pleasure quarters seeking dissipation and oblivion. He used money to ransom food and drugs, and in order to obtain that money he begrudgingly sold his flash and his anus. The fact that business on the corners was so affected by the weather put him in the same level as a street artist.”<sup>20</sup>

Henry, just as a typical character from Kusama’s literary world, is a reject of the society, not accepting the surrounding him reality, for whom the only way out – salvation can be the very physical *self-obliteration* ending with the main character’s transmutation into a new being. In the final scene of this book, Henry suddenly vanishes:

But the black figure of Henry is no longer there where it’s supposed to be, in the corner of the void... His body has vanished from the space... In the milk-colored, mist a black spot. Falling. The spot grows smaller and smaller, until it’s just a dark speck dissolving into the mist.<sup>21</sup>

The characters appearing in Kusama’s writings are most often faced with dramatic events and thus forced to make decisions of absolute nature – they are confronted with the most basic questions about the quintessence of life and death. The collection of short stories entitled *Nyūyōku monogatari* shows the pain and suffering of people with AIDS and their determination to fight this incurable disease. In contrast, the novel entitled *Sento marukusu kyōkai enjō*, which has been defined as a mixture of "sex, death and hallucinations"<sup>22</sup>, the protagonists are struggling with recurrent hallucinations, uncontrollable obsessive behaviors and an unceasing feeling of a continuous disintegration and depersonalization.

Yet another example of the writer's characteristic literary figure is a women scorned and despised by men who is trying to find her own place in the brutal and unjust "phallic" world that surrounds her – for which appurtenance she is prepared to fight. The main character of *Sumire Kyōhaku* is a young girl who is afraid of her hysterical mother who can talk with flowers and communicate with the universe. This state of specific perception of the world is best captured in the following excerpt from this book:

Youth is hard to hold on to  
O violets, little flowers – don’t talk to me  
Give me back the voice that became a violet’s voice  
I don’t want to be an adult – not yet  
All I ask is one more year  
Please let me be till then<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kusama Y., *Hustlers Grotto: Three Novellas*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from Shinakawa T., “Bungaku ni mo Hana Hiraku, Hirui Naki Sōzō no Chikara”, [in:] Pen Henshūbu (ed.), *Yappari Suki Da! Kusama Yayoi*, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> Kusama Y., Kusama Yayoi, *Violet Obsession: Poems*, p. 40.

The unwavering and unfalteringly keen interest in Kusama's writing has undoubtedly been fueled by the author's literary aspirations, which she herself notes shortly after being awarded the "Yasei Jidai" prize:

„My fever for writing only increased, and I wrote and published novels and poems in rapid succession”.<sup>24</sup>

In the period from 1985 to 2002 Kusama created twelve novels, a collection of poetry and an autobiography.

Many autobiographical references allow themselves to be traced in Kusama's works, which turns this literature into something of a personal confession. However, the author herself evades any clear indications as to which fragments were intended as literary fiction. One would assume that it is directly linked to the visions she is experiencing, for is it not true that the fact of their very experience corroborates their transition from the realm of imagination to the real world, at least in the eyes of the author herself? Transgressing this thin threshold of illusion thus leads to classifying the fictional events in the precinct of the artist's own truths. At this point it should also be noted that the nascent temptation to treat representational layer depicted as a classic *milieu* Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), ie. as a meaningful and real environment in which Kusama lived her life – such an understanding ought to be supplemented by a post-structuralist reading of this category effectuated by Michel Serres (b. 1930). This will, therefore, present a perspective in which these places also contain many transcendences devoid of hierarchy, which possess the ability to unleash magic and create art, while depicting a life story of a single man.

Kusama's fictional output is completed by a considerable body of *feuilleton* work. It often happened that she drafted the descriptions of her own exhibitions and published press articles relating to both her own work and art in general. She frequently entered into polemics with other artists and critics. By far, what can be considered as the most interesting area of this activity are the different forms of her literary manifestos.

One example of her literary manifesto is the spontaneously arranged public reading of a letter addressed to Richard Nixon – which took place in November 1968, in front of the New York headquarters of the election committee. It was only a week after the end of the tumultuous USA presidential elections conducted in the shadow of the war that Kusama arranged this public reading of a letter addressed to the winning candidate of the Republican Party. In her famous piece of correspondence entitled *An Open Letter to My Hero, Richard M. Nixon*, the artist moves for an immediate end to the war in Vietnam, where the act of self-obliteration is to be the best way for the President to tame his "male, fighting spirit" and understand the often repeated "naked truth": „You can't eradicate violence by using more violence”.<sup>25</sup>

“Our earth is like one little polka-dot, among millions of other celestial bodies, one orb gull of hatred and strife amid the peaceful, silent spheres. Let's you and I change all of that and make this world a new Garden of Eden.

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<sup>24</sup> Kusama Y. *Infinity Net*, p. 209.

<sup>25</sup> Kusama Y., *Open Letter to My Hero, Richard M. Nixon*, 11 November 1968.

Let's forget ourselves, dearest Richard, and become one with the Absolute, all together in the altogether. As we soar through the heavens, we'll paint each other with polka dots, lose our egos in timeless eternity, and finally discover the naked truth: You can't eradicate violence by using more violence."<sup>26</sup>

The above description of the variety of activities in which Kusama would engage paints a picture of a socially involved artist, who turns her art into a weapon to fight against all forms of social inequality and for whom establishing universal understanding and peace in the world is the most important message to convey. You can also see that, although she often employs various means of expression, they still serve the same mission, which is to include in the sphere of her actions all people and to release them from the worldly hardships of existence by way of self-obliteration and to lead them directly to the ultimate salvation.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

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