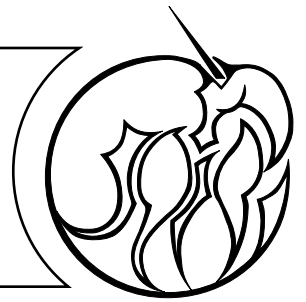


# { the avant-garde }

Katherine N. Crowley Fine Art & Design



PERIODIC JOURNAL VOLUME XV No.3 MARCH 2023

Introduction by Katherine N. Crowley

The Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is a giant concrete doughnut on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. I have been to the city on multiple occasions, but never to this museum. That is until this January. You see, it is the circular home to America's modern art collection, and the term "modern art" has always frightened anyone I happened to be with while visiting the Capitol. One fine afternoon I had some time to myself, so I made a solo trip and spent a few hours walking in circles (literally and figuratively – it can be a little disorienting). The following pages chronicle my viewing of three exhibits: "Put It This Way: Revisions of the Hirshhorn Collection" featuring the work of 49 women and nonbinary artists from the 20th and 21st centuries; "Barbara Kruger: Belief + Doubt" who uses the power of the written word to immerse her viewers in conflicting ideas; and "Yayoi Kusama: One With Eternity", who at age 94 can still create psychedelic illusions out of smoke and mirrors.

"Gee, Joan  
if only you were  
French,  
Male, & Dead"



Joan Mitchell had already garnered critical acclaim as a seminal gestural painter when she began to split her time between New York and Paris in the mid-1950s, and she would live primarily in France for the rest of her life while producing one of the twentieth century's most celebrated bodies of work. The almost overwhelming **Field for Skyes** was one of several triptychs Mitchell painted in 1973, and it was shown at the artist's landmark one woman retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1974. An immense and magnetic convergence of color, movement, and feeling, the work seems to suggest not only the enormity of landscape, but also the smallness one feels when subsumed by an expanse of sky or a field disappearing into the distance. The sublime, as traditionally understood through the historical genre of landscape painting, aimed to tap sensations too vast to fully quantify or articulate, and Mitchell describes a similar attempt to grasp at something ephemeral: "I paint from remembered landscapes I carry with me—and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would more like to paint what it leaves with me."



**HIRSHHORN**  
Smithsonian

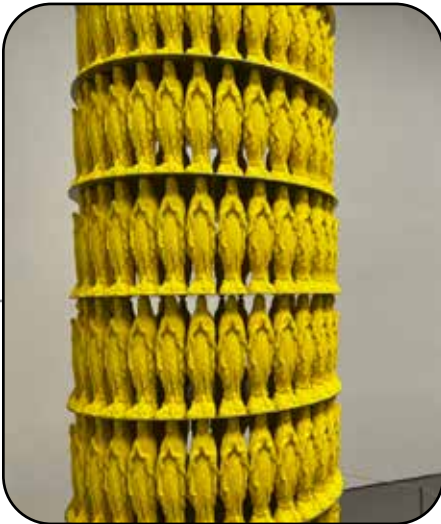
Above quote: Art dealer Julius Carlebach to Joan Mitchell. Source: "In Monet's Light", by Deborah Solomon, *The New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1991.

## {put it this way: (re)visions of the hirshhorn collection}



This exhibition unites almost a century of work by 49 women and nonbinary artists in a range of media drawn exclusively from the Hirshhorn's permanent collection. One-quarter of the artworks have been made in the past decade by the likes of Loie Hollowell, Rachel Jones, Deana Lawson, Sondra Perry and Kiyan Williams. One-third have never been on view at the Hirshhorn. Recent acquisitions, including pieces by Dana Awartani, Zanele Muholi and Billie Zangewa, reflect the museum's mission to acquire and highlight global voices.

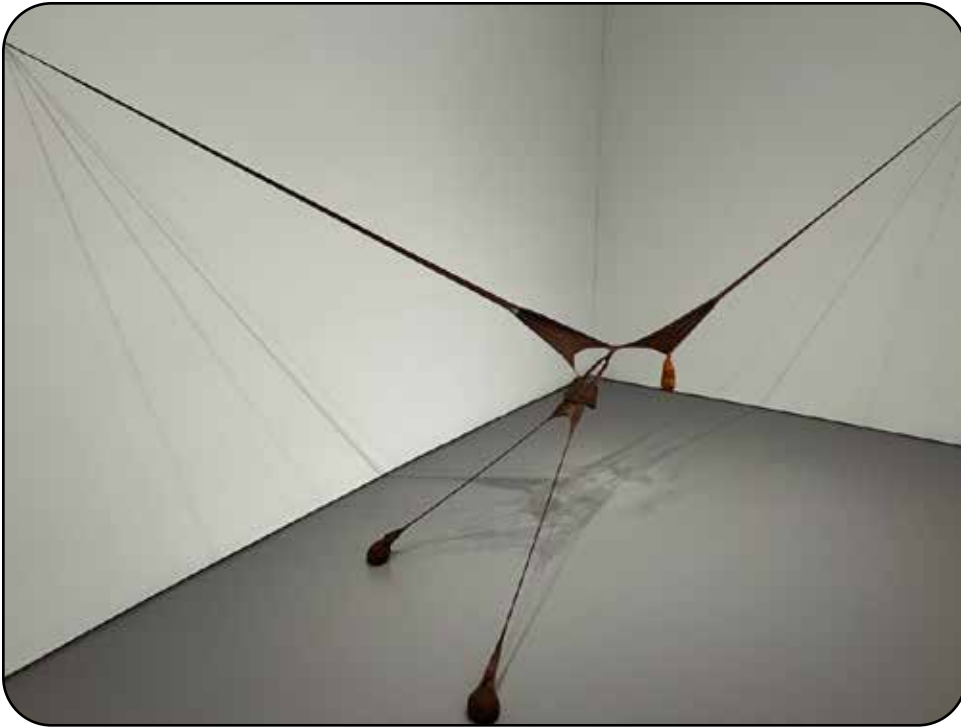
Titled after a 1963 painting by American pop artist Rosalyn Drexler, whose work is featured in the first gallery, "Put It This Way" is organized by Hirshhorn Associate Curator Anne Reeve. The exhibition speaks to traditionally marginalized artists' decisive and virtuosic achievements, and investigates a wide array of aesthetic, political and historical concerns. The full-floor presentation is intended to encourage conversations around the significance of gender in creating and perceiving an artwork, the effects of categorizing artists by gender as well as the museum's role and responsibilities in stewarding the national collection of modern and contemporary art.



Artist **Katharina Fritsch** has often worked with mass produced objects from consumer culture, removing them from their original contexts and altering their scale, texture, and/or color to conjure both the familiar and the fantastical. The Virgin Mary has been a recurring figure in Fritsch's art since the early 1980s, and in this case the "original" source is itself a multiple: a souvenir of Our Lady of Lourdes sold at a pilgrimage site in France. For **Display Stand with Madonnas**, the artist created 288 identical plaster reproductions of the statuette, stacking them as if set out for sale in a department store. Painted an almost hallucinogenic yellow, the work becomes a mesmerizing shrine to the enduring iconography of the pure and selfless Virgin figure, and to its perpetual salability as commodified image. The work's overlapping associations call to the complex value systems that underpin our ideal versions of self and suggest how an image of femininity can be codified, packaged, and sold.

Born in Malawi and now based in South Africa, **Billie Zangewa** uses silk to create collaged portraits of scenes from her daily life, describing a kind of "everyday feminism" in the sharing of intimate moments that women usually experience at home. **A Vivid Imagination** was made early in the 2020 pandemic lockdown as the artist navigated feelings of isolation and containment by staging a mini-"vacation" in her sun-soaked garden, putting on a swimsuit and using "my childlike imagination to transport myself to a place of rest." The fact that the edges are frayed and irregular is deliberate: a condition the artist relates to entropy and the passage of time, as well as to the scars we gather as individuals in our ever-unfinished process of becoming whole. Here Zangewa manages to convey, through fabric, the warm, full sun of midday and the comfortable and composed resting enjoyment of a Black female subject—its own quiet demonstration of power.





Part of an influential Black avant-garde that coalesced in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, **Senga Nengudi** operates at a generative artistic nexus among the conceptual, formal, performative, and political. Process and participation are especially significant in her approach, and her best-known series of works, *R.S.V.P.* (*Répondez s'il vous plaît*, or "Respond, please"), reflects upon the sense of perpetual call-and-response between an artwork and viewer (at times these works are also activated through movement by the artist Maren Hassinger, a longtime collaborator). Nengudi developed this series at the time of her first pregnancy, as she considered the body's ability to stretch, retract, and adapt. Everyday nylon pantyhose—associated with traditional expectations of femininity—act as a type of skin and are filled with sand and rose petals. The material creates a structure that is both pliable and taut, a sagging and stretching creature strangely anthropomorphized and abstracted. **R.S.V.P. X** calls to a female physicality that is both precarious and resilient, shouldering burden with tenderness and strength.



**Barbara Hepworth** approached the medium of sculpture as both a physical and metaphysical practice, and her works—often made by direct carving in wood or stone—are explorations of the symbiotic interrelationships between surface and core and objects and surrounding space. **Reclining Figure** shows the artist transitioning fully into abstraction and demonstrates her evocation of the sensuousness of material.

**Carlotta Corpron** produced a number of experimental black-and-white photographs that study light including **Light Follows Form** and **White Paper Shapes against White Background—Light from a Venetian Blind**.



**Pendour**, which was named for a cove near the artist's home in St. Ives, Cornwall. **Barbara Hepworth** had moved with her family in 1939 to escape wartime destruction in London, and the dramatic Cornish landscape would become a significant presence within her subsequent work. **Pendour's** contours create their own almost cosmic geology, conjuring windswept cliffs and the ebb and flow of cresting waves. This evocation of continuum and reciprocity is furthered throughout Hepworth's oeuvre, as in the stringed **Head (Elegy)**, which synthesizes surreal, Constructivist, and geometric elements into a single elegant abstraction. **Untitled (Cocoon)** dates from a period when **Lee Bontecou** was experimenting with balsa wood and transitioning into forms more tied to the natural world. Her practice has often explored the connections between technology and environment, in particular the phenomenon of flight; here the suspended form evokes both a cocoon and an aerial machine, calling forth the myriad intricacies, mysteries, and powers at play within our natural and industrial worlds.





**I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I'd forgotten you. I was dreaming** is an artwork in two parts. The first is a floor mosaic rendered in red, yellow, green, brown, and white sand in a pattern that recalls Islamic tiles. The second is a silent video of the artist, **Dana Awartani**, a young Saudi woman with long dark hair wearing a long black dress, sweeping away an identically colored sand pattern to expose a simple floor. The video is projected on the gallery wall, behind the patterned sand installation on the floor.



The life of American artist **Rosalyn Drexler** reads like fiction: completely self-taught, she has been a powerlifter and wrestler (the latter under the pseudonym "Rosa Carlo, the Mexican Spitfire"), a lauded playwright and novelist, and a singular artist embedded within New York's postwar avant-garde. In **Put It This Way**, artist Rosalyn Drexler excerpts a harrowing, if magnetic, scene of a film star hitting a young starlet, taken from a poster for the film *Toys in the Attic* (1963). That same year's *Where Is the Loot!* captures a similarly disturbing moment of Technicolor aggression. In both, Drexler insists on playing critically with gender and genre stereotypes and wryly points to the ways in which media toys with our understanding of identity and the world. She toys with it right back, reminding us that these glossy ideals can be as sinister as they are seductive.



Beginning in 2012, **Zanele Muholi** embarked upon the multiyear photography project *Somnyama Ngonyama* (*Hail the Dark Lioness*). Created in response to high-profile personal and public incidents tied to race, identity, violence, and history, the series features the artist in dozens of stylized self-portraits. The elaborate dollar-bill headdress of **Thandiwe, Roanoke, Virginia, 2018** shrouds the artist in overflowing capitalist abundance or, rather, the bills of low-wage commerce.



**Liz Deschenes** is fascinated by the metaphors and materials of photography, not only such elements as photosensitive papers, chemistry, and light reactions and exposure, but also the evolving life of a photograph over time and the almost instinctual desire—especially in an age of iPhones—to stop or "fix" time in an image. **Untitled (LeWitt) #1** is part of a series that responds directly to the work of Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt. The freestanding acrylic monochrome is made without a camera, using digital pigment printing, and is a photo-sculpture hybrid meant to be viewed in the round. The magenta shade recalls a hue from LeWitt's faded photographs, emitting an elegiac rosy glow that clouds our view, and which we can never fully grasp.



Since 1985, the **Guerrilla Girls**, an anonymous group of activist feminist artists, have donned identity-obscuring gorilla masks while staging public interventions and acts of resistance. They are best known for their poster campaigns, which use bold graphics, thoroughly researched data, and humor to expose corruption, gender and ethnic inequalities, and class biases in art, pop culture, and politics. The works on view in this room all come from the artists' *Portfolio Compleat: 1985–2012*, a multi-decade collection of diverse materials and the culmination of years of investigation and social commentary. The initial 1989 iteration of **Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?** is perhaps the Girls' best-known work and was first designed as a billboard for the Public Art Fund, though it was ultimately reformulated as an advertisement on New York City buses. This adaptation of different media is typical of their approach, which has included renegade wheat-pasted posters, strategically placed billboards, and public projections such as **The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist** and **Horror on the National Mall!**, both from *Portfolio Compleat: 1985–2012*. The Guerrilla Girls' ongoing collective projects continue to call the art world to attention via accessible forms of thoughtful resistance and a reasoned insistence upon self-reflection and critique.



# THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success  
 Not having to be in shows with men  
 Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs  
 Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty  
 Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine  
 Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position  
 Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others  
 Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood  
 Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits  
 Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger  
 Being included in revised versions of art history  
 Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius  
 Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

**IF YOU'RE SHOCKED BY THESE STATS, JOIN US!**  
**DEMAND THAT MUSEUMS USE OUR TAX DOLLARS TO TELL THE WHOLE STORY OF OUR CULTURE.**

Statistics are based on information supplied by the museums or found on their websites.



{barbara kruger: belief + doubt}

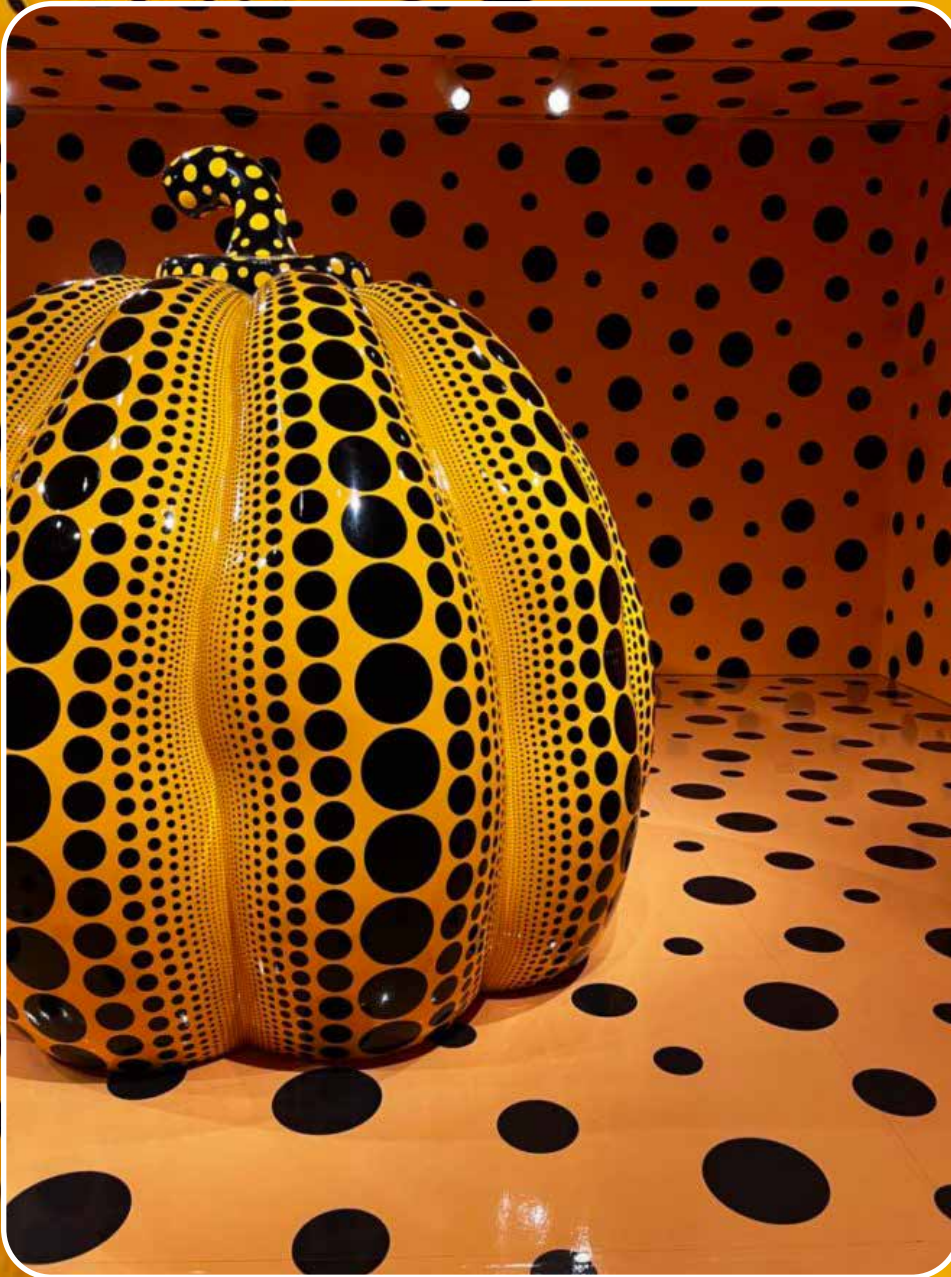


Part of an initiative to bring art to new sites within and around the building, this installation by Barbara Kruger fills the Lower Level lobby and extends into the newly relocated Museum bookstore. Famous for her incisive photomontages, Kruger has focused increasingly over the past two decades on creating environments that surround the viewer with language. The entire space—walls, floor, escalator sides—is wrapped in text-printed vinyl, immersing visitors in a spectacular hall of voices, where words either crafted by the artist or borrowed from the popular lexicon address conflicting perceptions of democracy, power, and belief.

At a moment when ideological certitude and purity seem especially valued, Kruger says she's "interested in introducing doubt." Large areas of the installation are devoted to open-ended questions ("WHO IS BEYOND THE LAW? WHO IS FREE TO CHOOSE? WHO SPEAKS? WHO IS SILENT?"), while the section occupying the bookstore explores themes of desire and consumption. At once addressing the individual, the museum, and, symbolically, the country, Kruger's penetrating examination of the public sphere transforms one of the Hirshhorn's key public spaces.



{yayoi kusama: one with eternity}



Yayoi Kusama (b. Matsumoto, Japan, 1929) is arguably one of the most well-known and beloved artists working today. Driven by a vision that is at once intensely personal and undeniably universal, Kusama has deftly worked across a wide range of media—from intimate works on paper and poetry to large-scale paintings, public events, and immersive sculptural installations. Affectionately known by her fans as the “Priestess of Polka Dots,” Kusama has created a body of work that has captivated the public imagination and forever changed the history of art.

One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama in the Hirshhorn Collection demonstrates the Museum’s dedication to the life and work of this visionary artist. From its first acquisition of her work in 1996 to the most recent—made in the wake of the Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors exhibition, which toured North America from 2017 to 2019—the Hirshhorn has put together a collection that encapsulates the highlights of Kusama’s impressive seven-decade career.

*Pumpkin*, by Yayoi Kusama, fiber-reinforced plastic, 2016.



**My Experience**

Ms. Kusama's infinity mirror rooms require timed tickets. The viewer is given between 30 seconds and 2 minutes to experience the illusionary environments she has created. That's just enough time to get your bearings and snap digital photos to share on your Instagram feed. But then you wonder, "Am I allowing myself to fully experience this deceptive space for such a limited time?" And just when you begin to get comfortable, and feel like you are standing in a field a endless (and really weird) corn – your time is up.

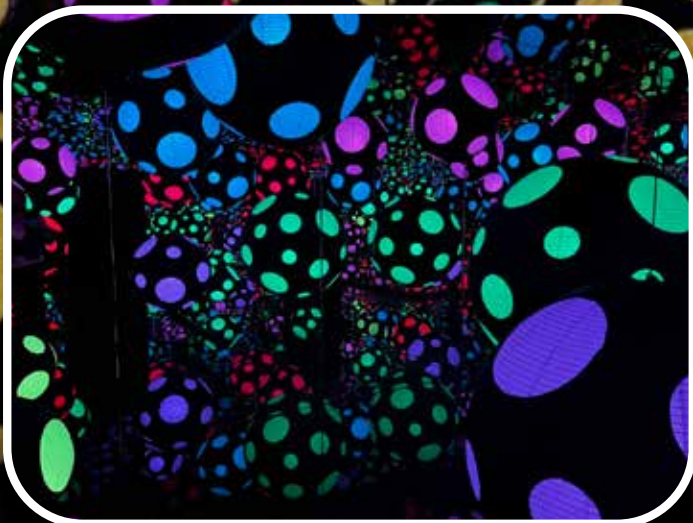
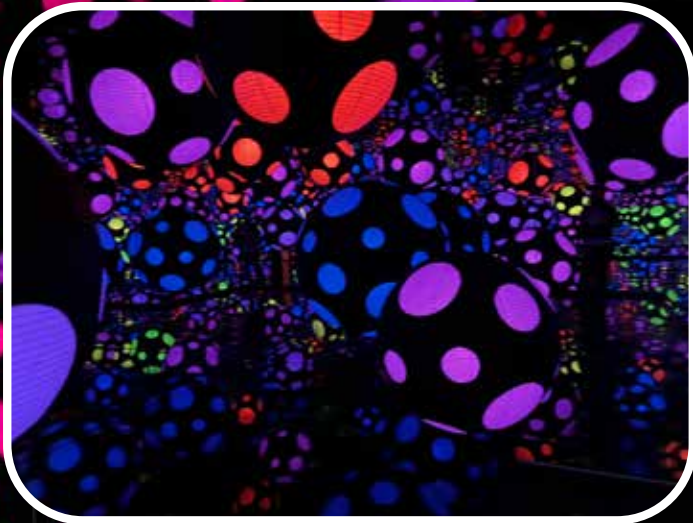
–Katherine N. Crowley

**Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field**

Soon after moving to New York in 1968, Kusama began to create work on a much larger scale than she had previously, stretching her expansive vision of self-obliteration across large canvases, and by the end of 1963, into room-sized installations. An important step along this path was the development of soft, phallic forms that she painstakingly hand-sewed and attached to found objects, creating what are known today as her *Accumulation* sculptures. The labor needed to construct these sculptures was physically and mentally taxing, and she soon began to employ mirrors to visually transform a contained sculptural panel into a seemingly endless field of phalli. First shown in the 1966 exhibition *Floor Show*, held at Castellana Gallery in New York, *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* constitutes a watershed moment in Kusama's practice, leading to explorations with mirrors that have allowed her to come closer to representing infinity. In 1966, Kusama took a panel from *Phalli's Field* into the street near her studio for the performance of *14th Street Happening*, disrupting a busy Manhattan sidewalk while she lay upon the artwork staring up at the sky. The red-and-white polka dot panels from *Phalli's Field* hold iconic significance today, having reappeared in multiple portraits. Happenings, and performances throughout the rest of the '60s.

*Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field*, by Yayoi Kusama, stuffed cotton, board, and mirrors, 1965/2017.



***A Message from Yayoi Kusama to the Whole World***

Though it glistens just out of reach, I continue to pray for  
hope to shine through  
Its glimmer lighting our way  
This long awaited great cosmic glow  
Now that we find ourselves on the dark side of the world  
The gods will be there to strengthen the hope we have  
spread throughout the universe  
For those left behind, each person's story and that of  
their loved ones  
It is time to seek a hymn of love for our souls  
In the midst of this historic menace, a brief burst of light  
points to the future  
Let us joyfully sing this song of a splendid future  
Let's go  
Embraced in deep love and the efforts of people all over  
the world  
Now is the time to overcome, to bring peace  
We gathered for love and I hope to fulfil that desire  
The time has come to fight and overcome our  
unhappiness  
To COVID-19 that stands in our way  
I say Disappear from this earth  
We shall fight  
We shall fight this terrible monster  
Now is the time for people all over the world to stand up  
My deep gratitude goes to all those who are already  
fighting.  
Revolutionist of the world by the Art  
From Yayoi Kusama

*Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart Is Dancing Into The Universe*, by Yayoi  
Kusama, wood and glass mirror room with paper lanterns, 2018.

## {all around the town}

*The Columbus Cultural Arts Center* (<http://www.culturalartscenteronline.org>)  
 "Ohio Art League Spring Juried Exhibition" MAIN GALLERY March 10–April 12  
 "Oleksii Kosal" MAIN GALLERY April 21–May 27  
 "Clyde V. Berry: Rediscovery" LOFT GALLERY March 10–April 15  
 "Pandemic Body Language" LOFT GALLERY April 21–May 27

*The Columbus Museum of Art* (<http://www.columbusmuseum.org>)  
 "Gina Osterloh: Mirror Shadow Shape", Through October 8  
 "Basic Matters: Substance in Contemporary Art" Through May 21

*COSI* (<http://www.cosi.org>)  
 "Tutankhamun – His Tomb and his Treasures below" Through Sept. 4

*The Decorative Arts Center of Ohio* (<http://www.decartsOhio.org/>)  
 "Flower Power: Flora in Fashion" & "Botany in Buttons", Through April 23

*Dublin Arts Council* (<http://www.dublinarts.org>)  
 "Fractals: Patterns in Nature", March 7–June 2  
 "Mini-Exhibitions", Dublin Area Art League ARTbox takeovers, May 1–31

*The High Road Gallery and Studios* (<http://www.highroadgallery.com>)  
 "Divergent Views: The Art of Nature", March 17–April 22

*The King Arts Complex* (<https://kingartscomplex.com>)  
 "36th Anniversary Dream Awards", April 4, 6:00pm  
 "Breaking the Mold: A Survey of Women's Work", April–June 23

*McConnell Arts Center* (<http://www.mcconnellarts.org>)  
 "2023 Ohio Governor's Youth Art Exhibition" March 2–April 29

*Ohio Craft Museum* (<https://ohiocraft.org>)  
 "Best of 2023", May 7–July 8

*OSU Urban Arts Space* (<http://www.uas.osu.edu>)  
 "Beyond Guilt", February 28–April 29

*Pizzuti Collection* (<http://www.columbusmuseum.org>)  
 "2023 GCAC Visual Arts Awards Exhibition", February 17–August 6  
 "Was It Your Trigger Finger?", February 17–August 6

*The Riffe Gallery* (<http://www.oac.ohio.gov/Riffe-Gallery/Exhibitions>)  
 "Arts Beacon of Light", January 31–April 7  
 "Interwoven: The Many Voices of Fiber", April 29–July 7

*The Wexner Center* (<http://www.wexarts.org>)  
 "Meditation Ocean Constellation: Meditation Ocean", "Sa'dia Rehman",  
 "A.K. Burns: Of space we are...", "The Native Guide Project: Columbus"  
 February 3–July 9

## {performing arts}

*BalletMet* (<https://www.balletmet.org>)  
 "Swan Lake", April 28–30, Ohio Theater

*CAPA* (<https://www.capa.com>)  
 "Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations", April 18–23,  
 Ohio Theater  
 "22nd Thurber Prize for American Humor", April 28, Southern Theater

*CATCO* (<http://www.catco.org>)  
 "...but you could've held my hand", March 23–April 8, Riffe Center

*Columbus Symphony Orchestra* (<http://www.columbussymphony.com>)  
 ALL PERFORMANCES AT THE OHIO THEATER UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED  
 "Carmen Suite", April 14–15

## {and beyond}

*The Akron Art Museum* (<http://www.akronartmuseum.org>)  
 "Keith Haring: Against All Odds", April 15–September 24

*The Museum of Fine Arts Boston* (<http://www.mfa.org>)  
 "Hokusai: Inspiration and Influence", March 26–May 16

*ICA Boston* (<http://www.icaboston.org>)  
 "Maria Berrio: The Children's Crusade", Through August 6

*The Cincinnati Art Museum* (<http://www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org>)  
 "Georgia O'Keefe, Photographer", February 3–May 7

*Contemporary Arts Center* (<http://www.contemporaryartscenter.org>)  
 "Ecologies of Elsewhere", Through August 6

*Mint Museum, Charlotte NC* (<https://www.mintmuseum.org>)  
 "Picasso Landscapes: Out of Bounds", Through May 21

*The Cleveland Museum of Art* (<http://www.clevelandart.org>)  
 "The Tudors: Art & Majesty in Renaissance England" Through May 14

*The Art Institute of Chicago* (<http://www.artic.edu>)  
 "Salvador Dalí: The Image Disappears", Through June 12

*Dayton Art Institute* (<http://www.daytonartinstitute.org>)  
 "New Beginnings: An American Story of Romantics and Modernists in the West", Through May 21

*Detroit Institute of Art* (<http://www.dia.org>)  
 "Off-Site | Vitality and Continuity", January 21–January 6, 2024

*Indianapolis Museum of Art* (<http://www.imamuseum.org>)  
 "We. The Culture: Works by The Eighteen Art Collective", Through September 24

*Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (<http://www.lacma.org>)  
 "Another World", Through June 19

*Minneapolis Institute of Art* (<http://www.artsmia.org>)  
 "Eternal Offerings: Chinese Ritual Bronzes", March 4–May 21

*Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC* (<http://www.metmuseum.org>)  
 "Richard Avedon: MURALS", THE MET 5TH AVE Through October 1  
 "Rich Man, Poor Man: Art, Class, and Commerce in a Late Medieval Town", THE MET CLOISTERS Through August 20

*Museum of Modern Art, New York* (<http://www.moma.org>)  
 "Ellsworth Kelly: A Centennial Celebration", Through June 11

*New Orleans Museum of Art* (<http://www.noma.org>)  
 "Black Orpheus: Jacob Lawrence and the Mbari Club", Through May 7

*Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh* (<http://www.cmoa.org>)  
 "Lyndon Barrois Jr.: Rosette", May 5–August 27

*The Warhol, Pittsburgh* (<http://www.warhol.org>)  
 "The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards", April 14–June 19

*San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* (<http://www.sfmoma.org>)  
 "Afterimages: Echoes of the 1960s", Ongoing

*The Toledo Museum of Art* (<http://www.toledomuseum.org>)  
 "Seeing Stars, Divining Futures", Through June 18

*The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.* (<http://www.nga.gov>)  
 "Philip Guston Now", Through August 27

*The Smithsonian American Art Museum & The Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C.* (<https://americanart.si.edu>)  
 "This Present Moment: Crafting a Better World", Through April 2  
 "Artist to Artist", Through September 3

## SUBSCRIBE TO THE AVANT-GARDE

If you have not been receiving email notifications about the latest issue of *The Avant-Garde*, become a subscriber at:  
<http://www.KatherineCrowley.com/The-Avant-Garde> to sign up. You will receive an email that requires you to confirm your request.

Click here  
to Visit,  
Friend  
& Follow

