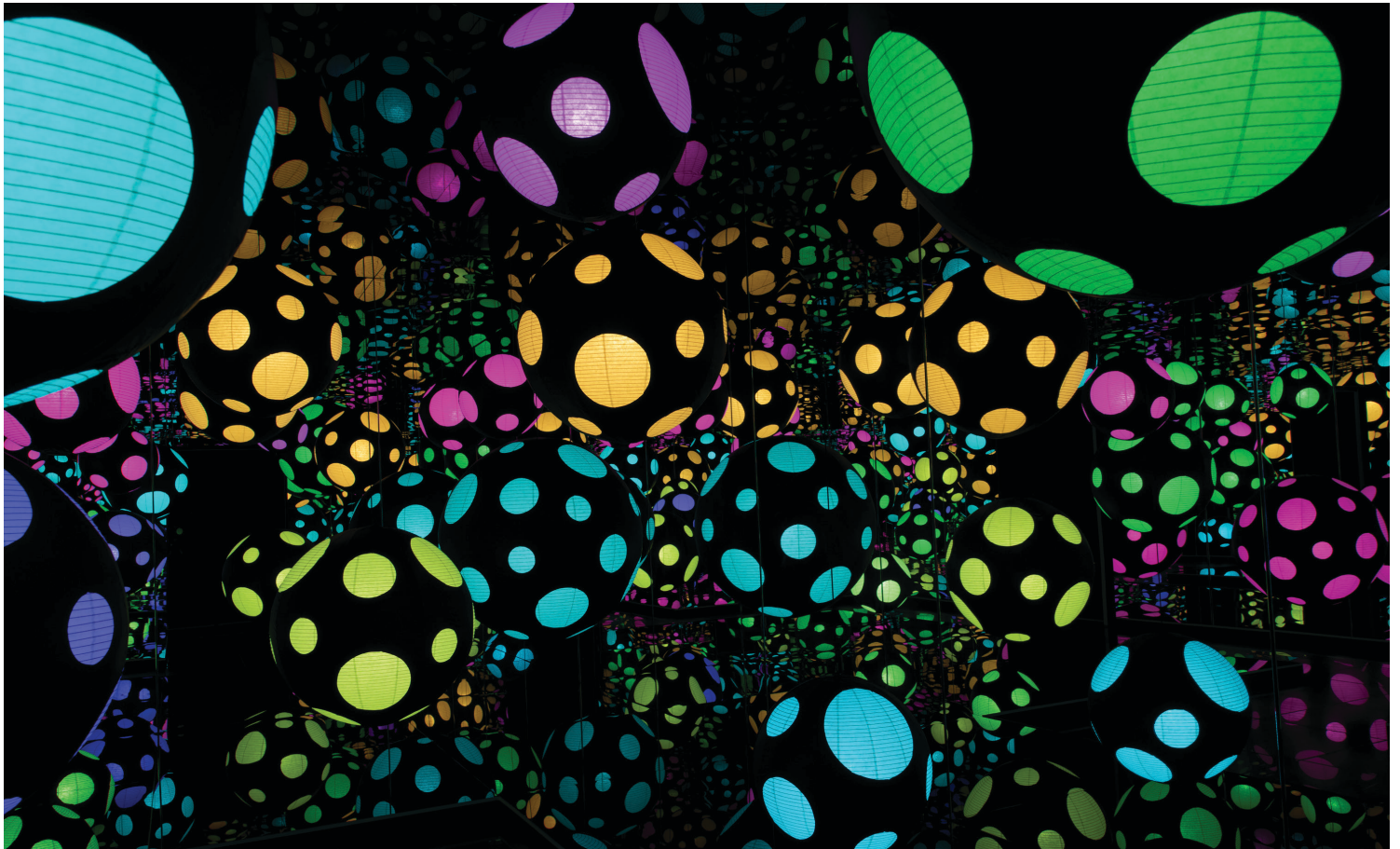


BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM

Lesson Plan: Exploring Yayoi Kusama— Art, Identity, and Infinity



Infinity Mirrored Room - My Heart Is Dancing Into The Universe Yayoi Kusama (2018) Wood and glass mirror room with paper lanterns. 119 5/8 × 245 1/8 × 245 1/8 in. (303.8 × 622.6 × 622.6 cm) Purchased jointly by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden with funds provided by the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Purchase Fund and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum with funds from the George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund, by exchange, 2021. Photo credit: Ron Blunt. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner ©YAYOI KUSAMA

Artist: Yayoi Kusama

Artwork: *Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart is Dancing Into the Universe*, 2018

Grade Level: K-12

Duration: 1-2 class periods (45-90 minutes)

Subject: Visual Arts / Art History

Note to Teachers:

This lesson is inspired by *One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama* at the Buffalo AKG Art Museum. For more information about the exhibition please visit buffaloakg.org/kusama.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify signature elements of Yayoi Kusama's art (e.g., polka dots, repetition, organic forms, mirror rooms).
2. Explain how Kusama uses pattern, color, and repetition to express emotions, identity, and her experience of the world.
3. Analyze at least one artwork for meaning, materials, and artistic intention.
4. Create an artwork inspired by Kusama's visual language.
5. Reflect on how personal experiences can influence an artist's style.

MATERIALS

- Examples of Kusama's works (see below)
- Projector or printouts
- Chart paper
- Paper or cardstock
- Markers, paint, or colored pencils
- **Optional:** sticky dots or dot stickers
- **Optional for installation activity:** cardboard boxes, mirrors, LED string lights

1. WARM-UP (5 MINUTES)

Prompt:

“Think about a pattern you see in everyday life—on clothes, in nature, in architecture. How does repetition make you feel?”

Students share brief responses. If desired, write responses on the board to reflect upon at the end of the lesson.

Connect to Kusama’s obsession with patterns and repetition, without going into detail about her life. If needed, share link to the Buffalo AKG Art Museum’s Collection: <https://buffaloakg.org/artworks/201917-infinity-mirrored-room—my-heart-dancing-universe>

2. ARTIST INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

Teacher provides an overview:

Yayoi Kusama is a famous Japanese artist known for her bright colors, repeating patterns, and lots of polka dots. She was born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan. From a young age, she loved art and used it as a way to express her feelings and imagination.

Kusama creates many kinds of art, including paintings, sculptures, installations, and performances. One of her most well-known ideas is repetition—she often covers entire rooms, objects, or canvases with dots or patterns. Her Infinity Mirror Rooms, which use mirrors and lights to make spaces look endless, are especially popular around the world.

Art has also helped Kusama cope with mental health challenges. She has spoken openly about experiencing hallucinations, and she turns what she sees and feels into art. This makes her work very personal and meaningful.

Today, Yayoi Kusama is one of the most influential living artists. Her art encourages people to think about infinity, nature, and their place in the universe, while also showing how creativity can be a powerful way to express emotions.

Show images included at the end of the lesson plan:

“What similarities and differences do you notice between these artworks?”

3. ARTWORK ANALYSIS (10–15 MINUTES)

Choose either or both activities based on your allotted time or choose to do both activities over two class periods.

Select one artwork for deeper study from the provided images.

Use the **See-Think-Wonder** method:

- **See:** What do you observe?
- **Think:** What is the artist trying to communicate?
- **Wonder:** What questions does this raise for you?

Record answers on the board, or on a worksheet divided into three parts.

4. MINI-LESSON: KUSAMA'S VISUAL LANGUAGE (10 MINUTES)

Select one of Kusama's artworks for deeper study from the images below. Choose as many topics as possible in the class period. Depending on the grade level, break up the students into five small groups and give each group one of the topics. After they are done answering all the questions, have each group share what they discussed with the whole group.

Dots & repetition as symbols of infinity, connection, and personal experience:

1. Why do you think repeating the same shape (like dots) can make something feel infinite?
2. How do dots change when you see just a few versus thousands of them together?
3. Do the repeated dots feel calm, overwhelming, playful, or something else? Why?
4. How might repetition represent connection—between people, ideas, or moments in time?
5. Can repetition ever feel uncomfortable? What might that tell us about the artwork?

Color choices and their emotional impact:

1. How do the colors in Kusama's work affect your mood or emotions?
2. What feelings do you associate with specific colors you see (red, yellow, black, white)?
3. How would the artwork feel different if the colors were changed?
4. Do the colors feel joyful, intense, anxious, or balanced? What makes you think so?
5. Can color communicate feelings without showing people or faces? How?

Scale (tiny spots → massive installations):

1. How does your experience change when you look at tiny dots versus a room-sized installation?
2. Why do you think Kusama works on such a large scale?
3. How does your body feel when you are surrounded by artwork instead of just looking at it?
4. Does large-scale art make you feel powerful, small, curious, or something else?

Infinity created through mirrors and reflections:

1. What happens to your sense of space when mirrors create endless reflections?
2. How do mirrors make you part of the artwork?
3. Do reflections make the artwork feel more personal or more distant? Why?
4. What might infinity created by mirrors symbolize about time or existence?

How Kusama uses art to cope with her inner experiences:

1. How can making art help someone cope with strong emotions or inner thoughts?
2. Why do you think Kusama turns her personal experiences into something viewers can enter?
3. Can art be both beautiful and a way to work through difficult feelings?
4. Have you ever used creativity (drawing, writing, music) to process emotions? How?

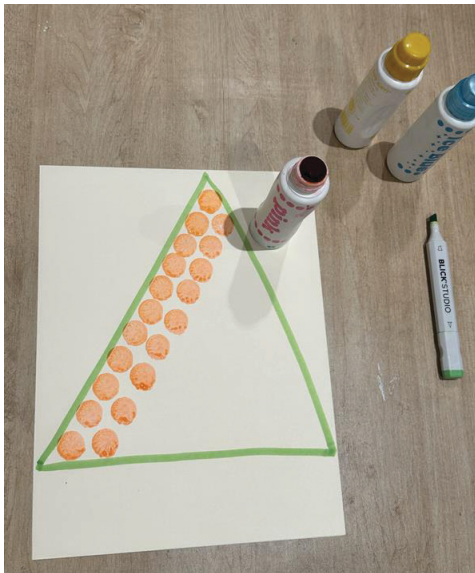
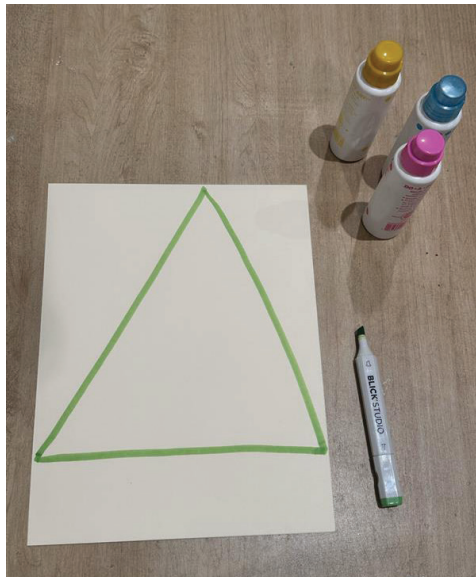
Record answers on the board or answer questions in groups using chart paper or other method of notetaking.

5. ARTMAKING ACTIVITY: “MY OWN INFINITY PATTERN” (20–30 MINUTES)

Option A — Dot Art on Paper (SIMPLE):

Students create a composition inspired by Kusama on paper. Any size and color of paper can be used. If doing this activity in small groups, a large sheet of chart paper is suggested.

1. Choose a geometric shape or an organic form.
 - **Geometric shape**- precise, two-dimensional or three-dimensional forms defined by mathematical principles, straight lines, or specific curves.
 - **Organic form**- irregular, free-flowing, and unpredictable forms that emulate those found in nature, such as leaves, clouds, or human figures.
2. Draw the shape or organic form on paper.
3. Fill in the shape or organic form with repeated dots or other shapes, and/ or bold colors.
 - **Suggested materials:** markers, paint markers, geometric stamps, precut shapes, stencils, dot stickers.
4. When completed, give the artwork a title.

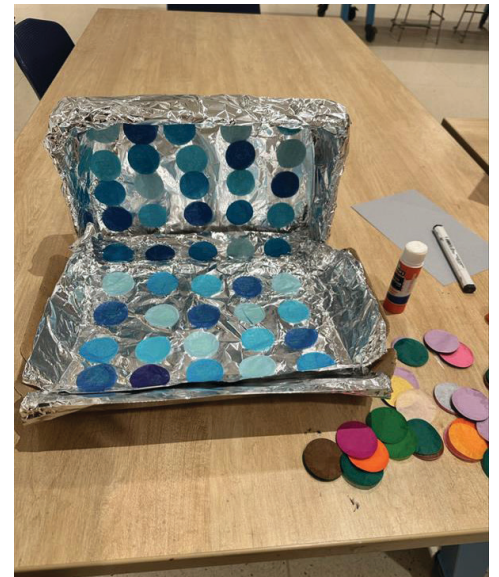
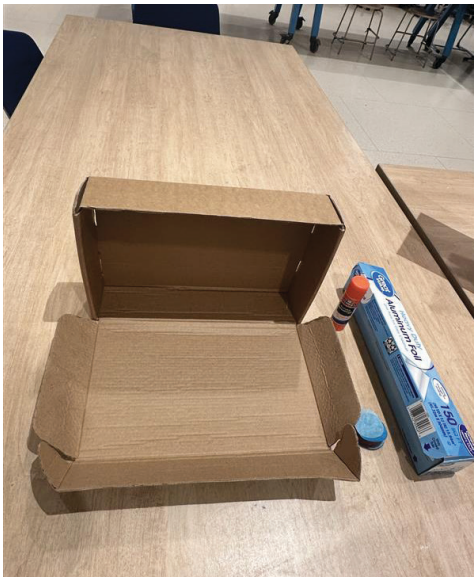


Option B — Infinity-Inspired 3D Installation (ADVANCED):

In small groups, students transform a box interior into a “mini-infinity room.” Use a cardboard or plastic box and add various materials inside. When completed, each group will create a wall label for their artwork.

Here are some suggested materials to use:

- Repeating shapes (e.g., printed and cut, stickers, stenciled, foam shapes, etc.)
- Reflective foil or mirrors
- LED lights (e.g., sting lights, or “fairy lights”)
- Patterned surfaces (e.g., washi tape, wallpaper strips, different textured materials, tissue paper, small mosaic tiles, etc.)



Option C — “Obliteration Wall” Collaboration:

1. Post a blank poster or wall.
2. Students add colored stickers or drawn dots one at a time, slowly “obliterating” the surface into a collective artwork.

6. REFLECTION & DISCUSSION (5–10 MINUTES)

Prompt questions:

- What emotions did you want to express in your artwork?
- How did repetition change your artwork?
- What do you think Kusama wants viewers to feel inside her installations? Is it the same or different from your own artwork and/or mini-installation?
- How does her personal experience influence your understanding of her art?

Optional: Short written reflection.

ASSESSMENT

Formative:

- Participation in discussion and reflection
- Observations during the artmaking process
- Responses to **See-Think-Wonder**

Summative:

- Final artwork- showing knowledge and demonstrating:
 - Use of patterns and color
 - Clear connection and inspiration to Yayoi Kusama's work
- Written or verbal reflection explaining artistic choices
 - Identify patterns
 - Describe color choices
 - Reflect on artmaking process

CROSS-CURRICULAR EXTENSIONS

- **Math connection:** Explore tessellations, pattern sequences, or symmetry
- **ELA connection:** Write a poem inspired by infinity or repetition
- **ELA Book Suggestions:** *Kusama: The Graphic Novel* by Elisa Macellari, *Yayoi Kusama: Covered Everything in Dots and Wasn't Sorry* by Fausto Gillberti, *Yayoi Kusama: From Here to Infinity!* By Sarah Suzuki, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*.
- **Digital art:** Create animated polka-dot patterns
- **Art history comparison:** Compare Kusama to other pattern-based artists (Larry Poons, Andy Warhol, Bridget Riley)
 - **Bridget Riley:** <https://buffaloakg.org/artworks/k19675-drift-2>
 - **Larry Poons:** <https://buffaloakg.org/artworks/k19642-orange-crush>
 - **Andy Warhol:** <https://buffaloakg.org/artworks/k196326-100-cans>

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (NEW YORK STATE P-12 VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS)

Standards are selected at an 8th Grade level but can be adapted and/or changed to meet standards for various other grade levels.

Creating:

- **VA:Cr1.2.8a/** Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life by using a contemporary practice of art and design.
- **VA:Cr2.1.8a/** Experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge in the process of artmaking or designing.

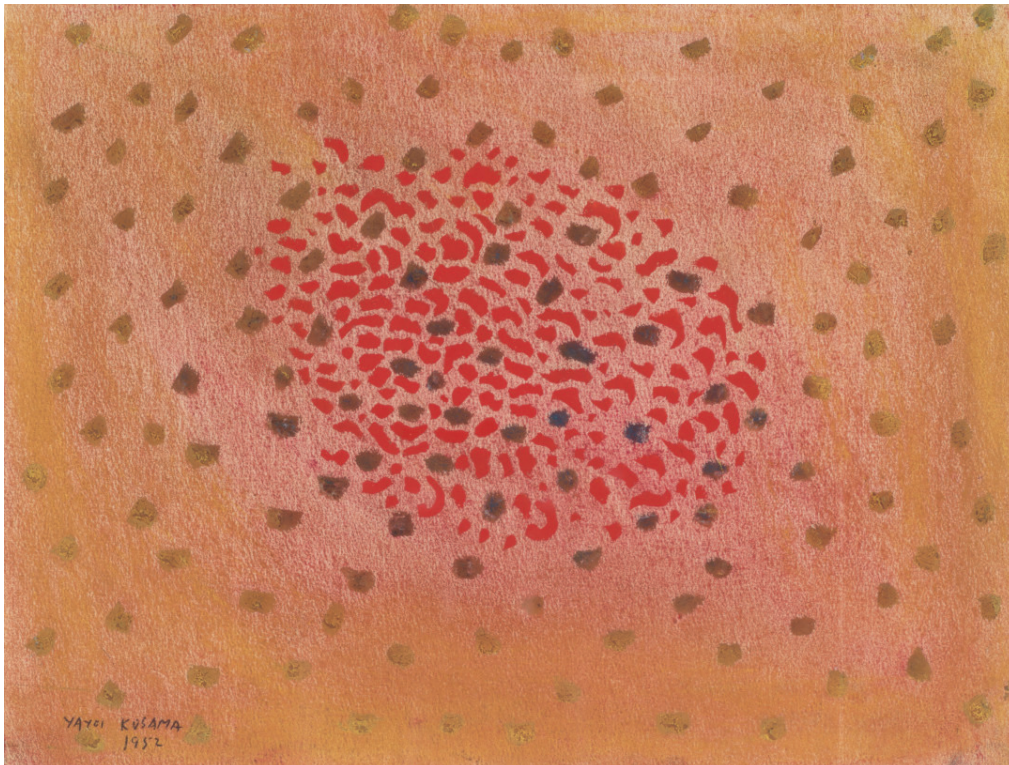
Responding:

- **VA:Re8.1.8a/** Analyze how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

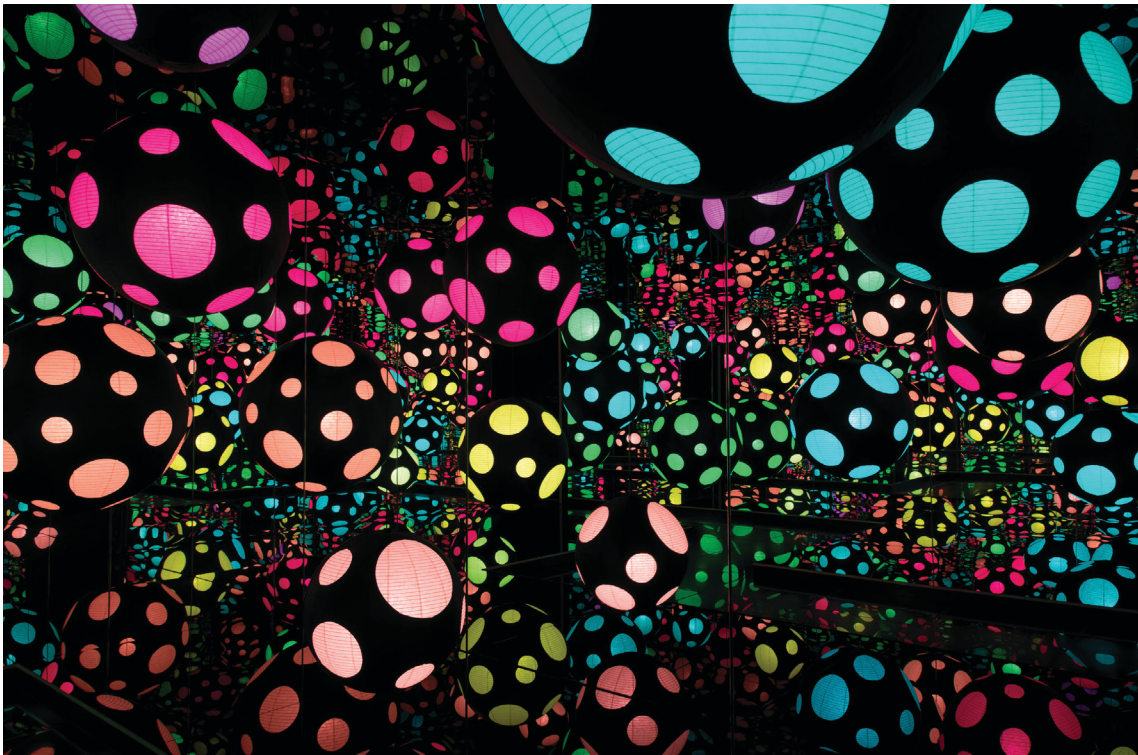
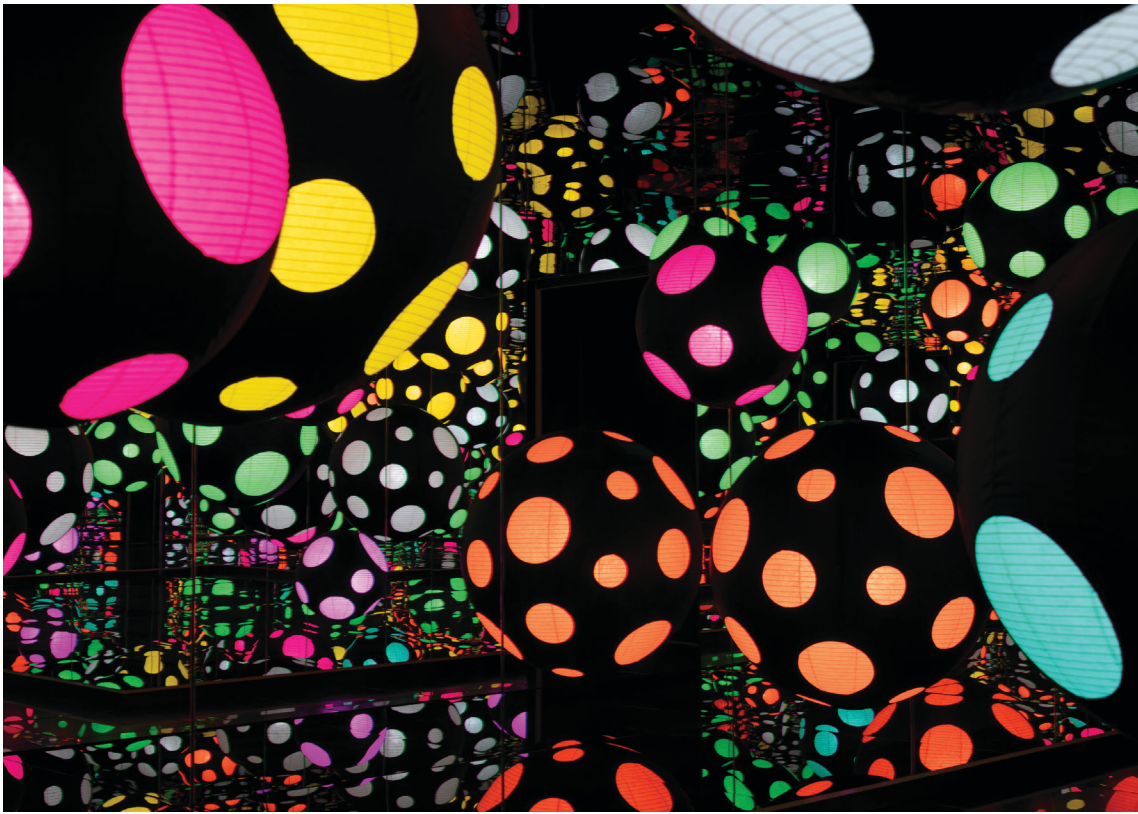
Connecting:

- **VA:Cn10.1.8a/** Make art collaboratively to reflect on and reinforce positive aspects of group identity.
- **VA:Cn11.1.8a/** Through observation, infer information about the time, place, and culture in which a work of art or design was created.

EXAMPLE OF YAYOI KUSAMA'S WORK



Yayoi Kusama (Japanese, born 1929). *The Ground*, 1952. Mixed media on paper. 8 x 10 3/8 inches (20.32 x 26.35cm). Collection Buffalo AKG Art Museum. Sarah Norton Goodyear Fund, 1998 (1998:5). © YAYOI KUSAMA. Photo: Brenda Bieger, Buffalo AKG Art Museum.



Infinity Mirrored Room - My Heart Is Dancing Into The Universe Yayoi Kusama (2018) Wood and glass mirror room with paper lanterns. 119 5/8 × 245 1/8 × 245 1/8 in. (303.8 × 622.6 × 622.6 cm) Purchased jointly by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden with funds provided by the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Purchase Fund and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum with funds from the George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund, by exchange, 2021. Photo: Brenda Bieger, Buffalo AKG Art Museum. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner ©YAYOI KUSAMA