

Infinity in the Universe of

**Yayoi**  
**KUSAMA**

OPERA GALLERY  
HONG KONG



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## Infinity in the Universe of **Yayoi KUSAMA**

"I gradually feel myself under the spell of the accumulation and repetition in my nets which expand beyond myself, and over the limited space of canvas, covering the floor, desks and everywhere."

Yayoi Kusama, Yayoi kusama: Early Drawings, from the Collection of Richard Castellane.

The infamous Japanese master Yayoi Kusama has won an unprecedented and well-deserved recognition this year being honored with major Museum retrospective show travelling from the Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, via its current display in The Tate Modern in London. The show will finish in the Whitney Museum in New York later this year.

Kusama is one of Japan's best-known living artists and her pioneering work spans over six decades spreading from Japan to the United States and Europe. Her prolific portfolio includes drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, installation art, movie directing, novel and poem writing. Considered by some members of the New York scene to be "too beautiful, too crazy, too powerful", Kusama became an art force not to be ignored.

Celebrating her international success and everlasting popularity, we are proud to present you a collection of Kusama's works with various pieces including paintings and limited edition prints highlighted by a 2.6 meter sculpture of polka dot girl titled Kei-Chan.

Chosen as an associated project of Le French May Arts Festival supported by the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, the exhibition celebrates an exceptional timing of arts and culture blossoming in Hong Kong.

We invite you to indulge in the infinity that is the universe of Kusama.

**Shirley YABLONSKY**  
Director  
Opera Gallery Hong Kong

**Gilles DYAN**  
Founder and Chairman  
Opera Gallery Group

AN ASSOCIATED  
PROJECT OF

LE  
FRENCH  
MAY  
法國  
五月

20<sup>th</sup>  
EDITION 十年  
12 APRIL - 23 JUNE 2012  
FRENCHMAY.COM



# Yayoi KUSAMA

## Follow the vision

Born in 1929 in the historic city of Matsuyama, Japan, Yayoi Kusama showed signs of a powerful artistic personality from a very young age. Following her studies at the Kyoto Municipal School of Arts & Crafts, Kusama exhibited her first Nihonga paintings ("Cat") which were selected for the First Nagano Prefecture Art Exhibition. She was just 19 years old.

In 1952, after a successful exhibition at the First Community Center, while being treated for obsessive neurosis, her paintings caught the eye of some of her psychiatrists. Dr. Nishimaru recognized her talent and proposed to organize an exhibition in the USA, but Kusama's family was unfortunately against such a project.

In 1954, at the age of 25, Kusama's first solo exhibition in Shirokiya Department Store, Tokyo, met with great success.

One year and three additional solo exhibitions later (all in Tokyo), Kusama's works finally made it to America as part of the International Watercolor Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, New York.

In 1958, Kusama settled down in New York and started exploring what she would call her "Infinity Nets" paintings: large canvases covered with a hypnotic array of little dots.

These works were part of a major exhibition, Modern Japanese Paintings, organized by the influential Bratart Gallery, New York.

Kusama's work at that time was strongly influenced by the experimental mood that reigned in the city during the post-war years.

During her time in New York, Kusama met and collaborated with many famous artists like Mark Rothko, sculptor Eva Hesse (who later became a close friend) and, of course, with partner and friend Donald Judd, who would assist her in so many artistic projects for years to come. Judd bought "Infinity Nets" (1959), an iconic, ground-breaking piece that would later sell at auction in 2008 for more than 5.7M USD\$ (and this, despite the global economic crisis). The sale positioned Kusama as the world's most expensive female artist to date.

As of 1960, both Kusama and Mark Rothko showed growing interest in the European avant-garde movement. Indeed, they were the only two artists residing in the US to be included in Monochrome Malerei, an international collection of contemporary abstract art at Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen, Germany. This exhibition greatly influenced the artistic careers of friends such as Franck Stella, Lucio Fontana and the Dutch Nul Group.



### Pumpkin

1998

Bronze, edition of 100, 28 x 27 x 27 cm

Her European travels and exhibitions inspired the artist's "Accumulation" series: with touches of absurdity and exuberance covering ordinary objects and furniture with phallic protuberances. This series was acclaimed by famous artists like Oldenburg, Morris, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Wesselmann, or feminist culture critic Lucy Lippard (who proclaimed Kusama as the precursor of Eccentric Abstraction).



**Flames 1990**, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45,5 cm

Her encounter with the American sculptor and experimental filmmaker Joseph Cornell would strongly influence her creative process. Cornell's fantastic imagination can be characterized by the assembly of lost and found objects, making him a pioneer in this type of artistic expression. André Breton would say: "he enjoys an experience that upsets the conventions of how we use objects". Their relationship illuminated and enriched Kusama's private life, and continued until Cornell's death in 1973.

From 1965, Kusama shared a studio with well-known Japanese artist On Kawara, who would become one of the most important conceptual artists in Asia. In the same year, Kusama produced her famous "Infinity Mirror Room - Phalli's Field" (or "Floor Show").

Towards the end of the 60s, Kusama began her first "happenings" (public theater):

***"Obliterate your personality with polka dots***

***Become one with eternity***

***Become part of your environment...***

***Take off your clothes***

***Forget yourself***

***Make love***

***Self-distraction is the only way to peace."***

These slogans perfectly illustrate Kusama's artistic spirit of the period.

Kusama was often invited to appear on Japanese television. Such moments promoted her fame, while leaving impressions that would play an important role in her future literary works.

The 70s were, however, a dark period in Kusama's creative life. Following the death of her partner Joseph Cornell, and shortly thereafter of her own father, Kusama's health (psychic but also physical), started to deteriorate. She created new collages ("Message of Death from Hades") which were exhibited in Tokyo's Nishimura Gallery. This eccentric exhibition, so emotionally striking, grabbed the attention of art critic Akira Tatehata, who would play an important role in Kusama's future.

After a few short stays in Tokyo, and, more importantly, after a suicide attempt, exhausted, Kusama decided to return to Japan for good. As of 1977, she became a permanent resident of a psychiatric clinic in Tokyo. Under such depressing conditions, she edited poems and an art album ("7"). As of this sadly remarkable year, her artistic creativity declined and she remained in the shadows until 1981.

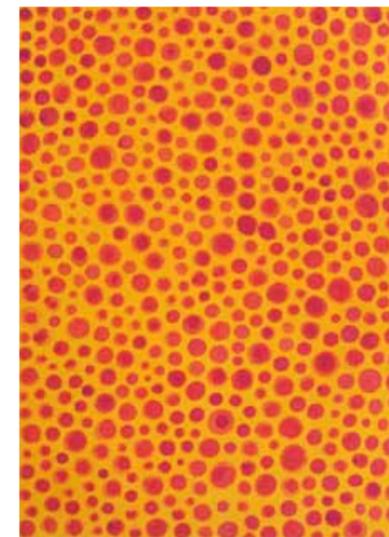


In that same year, both the Tokyo and Kyoto Modern Art Museums included Kusama in a list of the most important painters of the 1960s, with her works highlighted in an exhibition called The 1960s: A Decade of Change in Contemporary Japanese Art. It was, in fact, this total reappraisal of Kusama as an artist, by her own country and by the international art world, that gave a new impulse to her creativity.

From 1981, numerous and remarkable retrospectives would contribute to her international reputation, culminating with the famous solo exhibition Kusamatrix, organized by the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo in 2004. The exhibit attracted more than half a million visitors.

In 1993, Kusama was selected to represent Japan at the Venice Biennial. She chose one of her main subjects, pumpkins, to create the installation "Mirror Room - Pumpkins". This magnificent and unforgettable work again depicted the red line of her plastic creation, a concept comprised of accumulation, repetition and infinity.

It is precisely this rebirth period, from 1981 to the present, which is highlighted in the exhibition organized by Opera Gallery, Hong Kong.



**Dots 1999**, acrylic on canvas, 33,3 x 24,2 cm

The show combines a variety of works from Kusama's eclectic and rich pallet, including the famous pumpkins, infinity nets and dots paintings.

Kusama's obsession with dots from such a young age is probably related to the hallucinations she suffered as a child. These famous dots of various forms, shapes and colours would become her trademark; for the first time in 1965, she proposed polka dots combined with mirrors (Phalli's Field). Dots became an integral part of her "happenings" or experimental movies, as an expression of her opposition to the Vietnam War. She used the visual capacity of the dots to "break" an object by destroying the details of shape or silhouette.

With respect to dots, Kusama declared on numerous occasions:

***"My life is a Dot lost among thousands of other dots."***

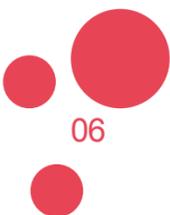
Kusama Yayoi is definitely one of the world's most distinctive and influential multidisciplinary conceptual artists. After 70 years of active practice, her works continue to amaze us, with such an incredible feeling of creative power radiating from her works.

Started in 2011, and scheduled to continue throughout 2012, Yayoi Kusama's solo exhibition has been hosted by the most preeminent contemporary art museums worldwide - in Madrid, Paris, London and New York.

In response to Frances Morris, the curator of Tate Modern show in London, Kusama said:

***"I have a flood of ideas in my mind... I just follow my vision".***

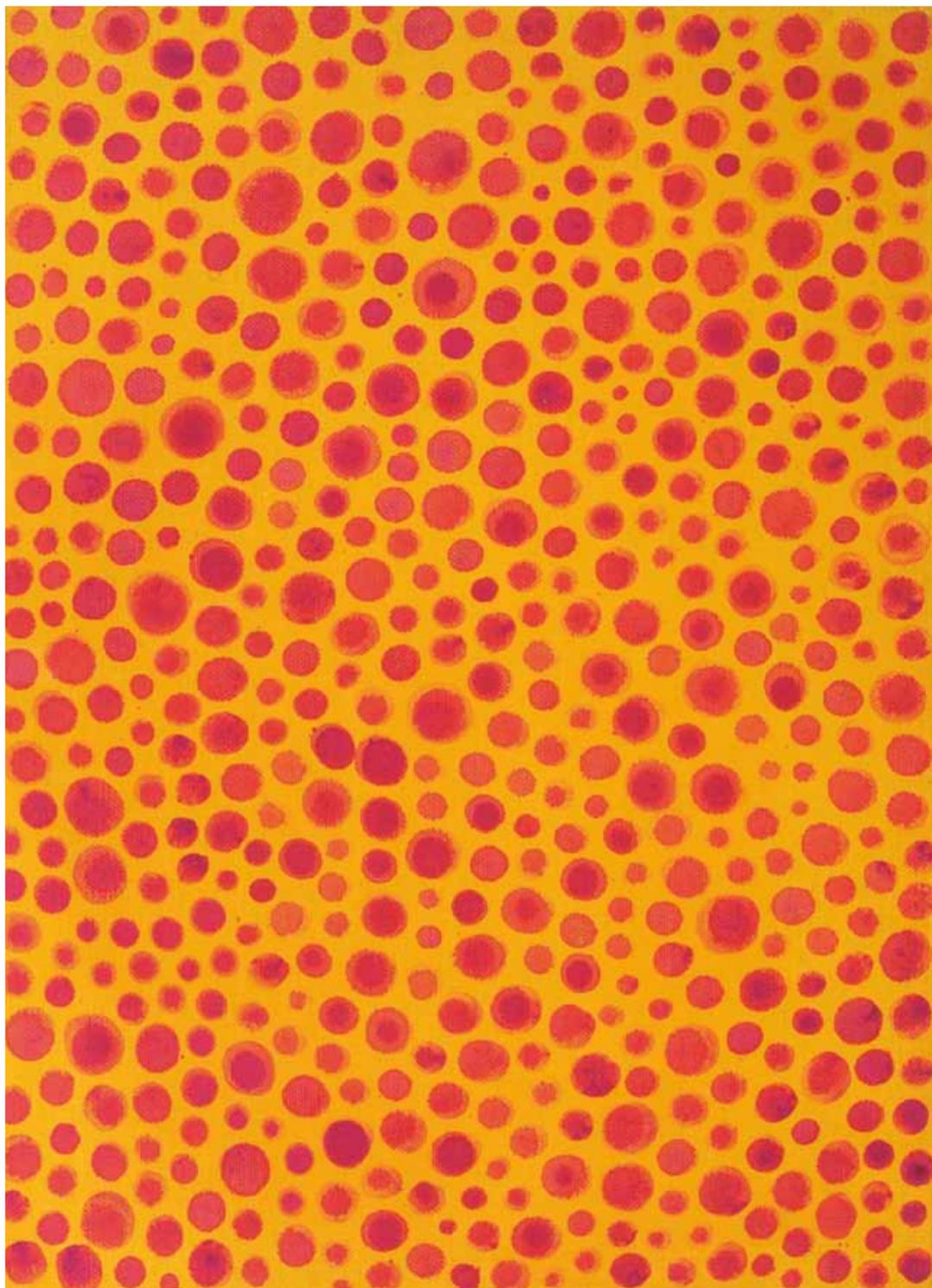
**Galina COULOT**  
**Art Historian critic**





**Kei-Chan**  
2011

Fiberglass reinforced plastic, metal, urethane paint, unique piece, 260 x 135 x 100 cm

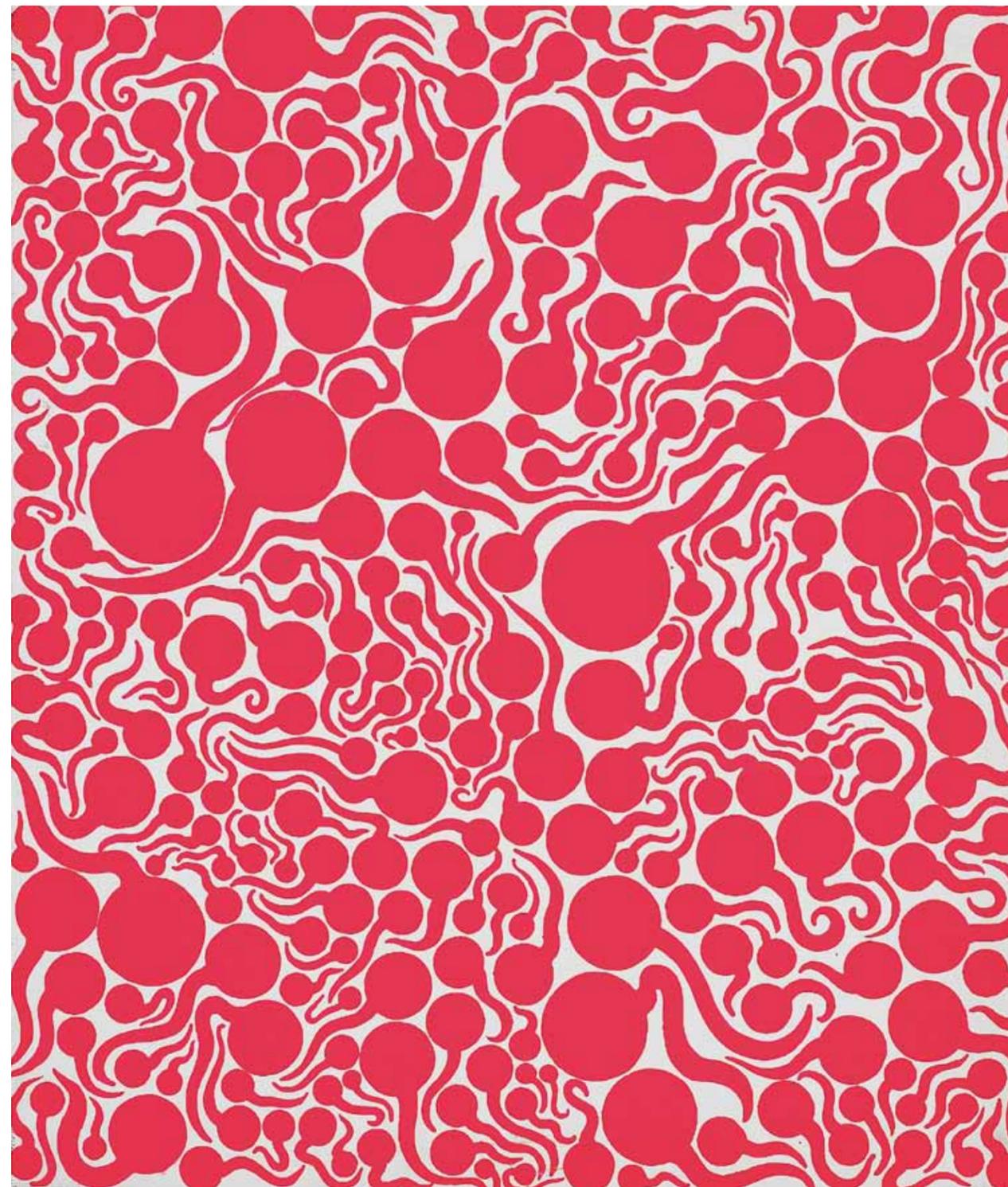


10

**Dots**

1999

Acrylic on canvas, 33,3 x 24,2 cm



11

**Flames**

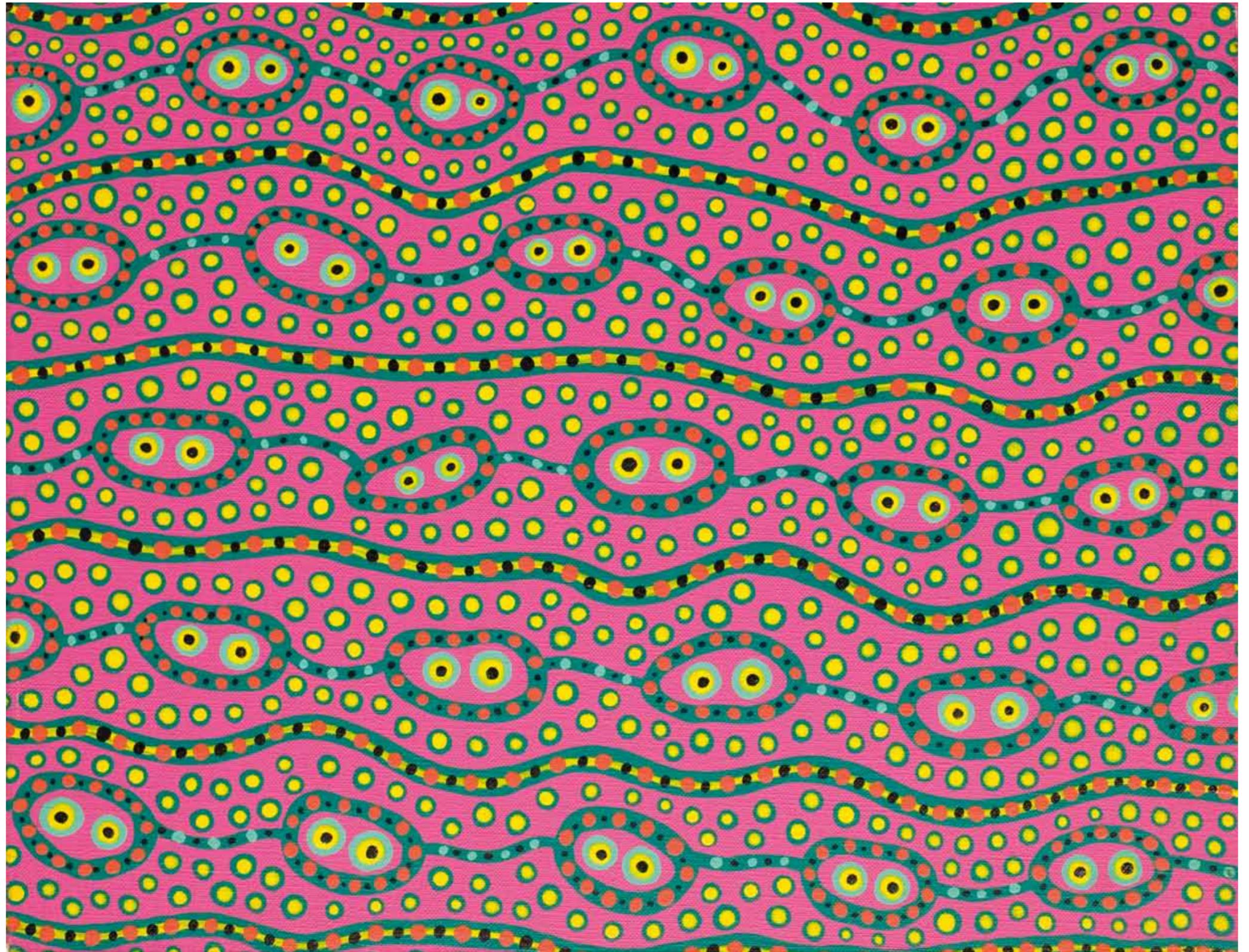
1990

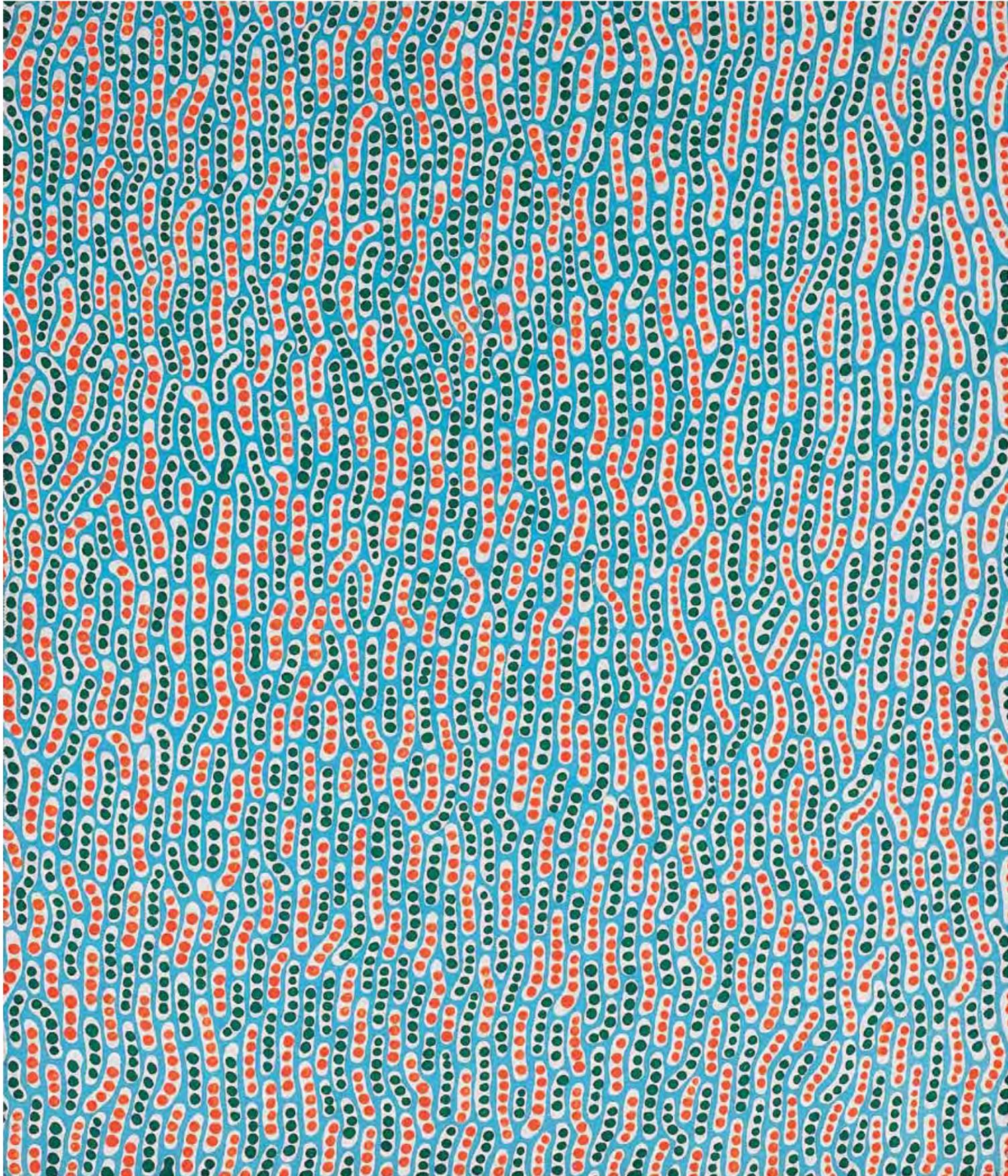
Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45,5 cm

**Necklace's tears**

1988

Acrylic on canvas, 31,8 x 41 cm





**Waves on the lake**

1988

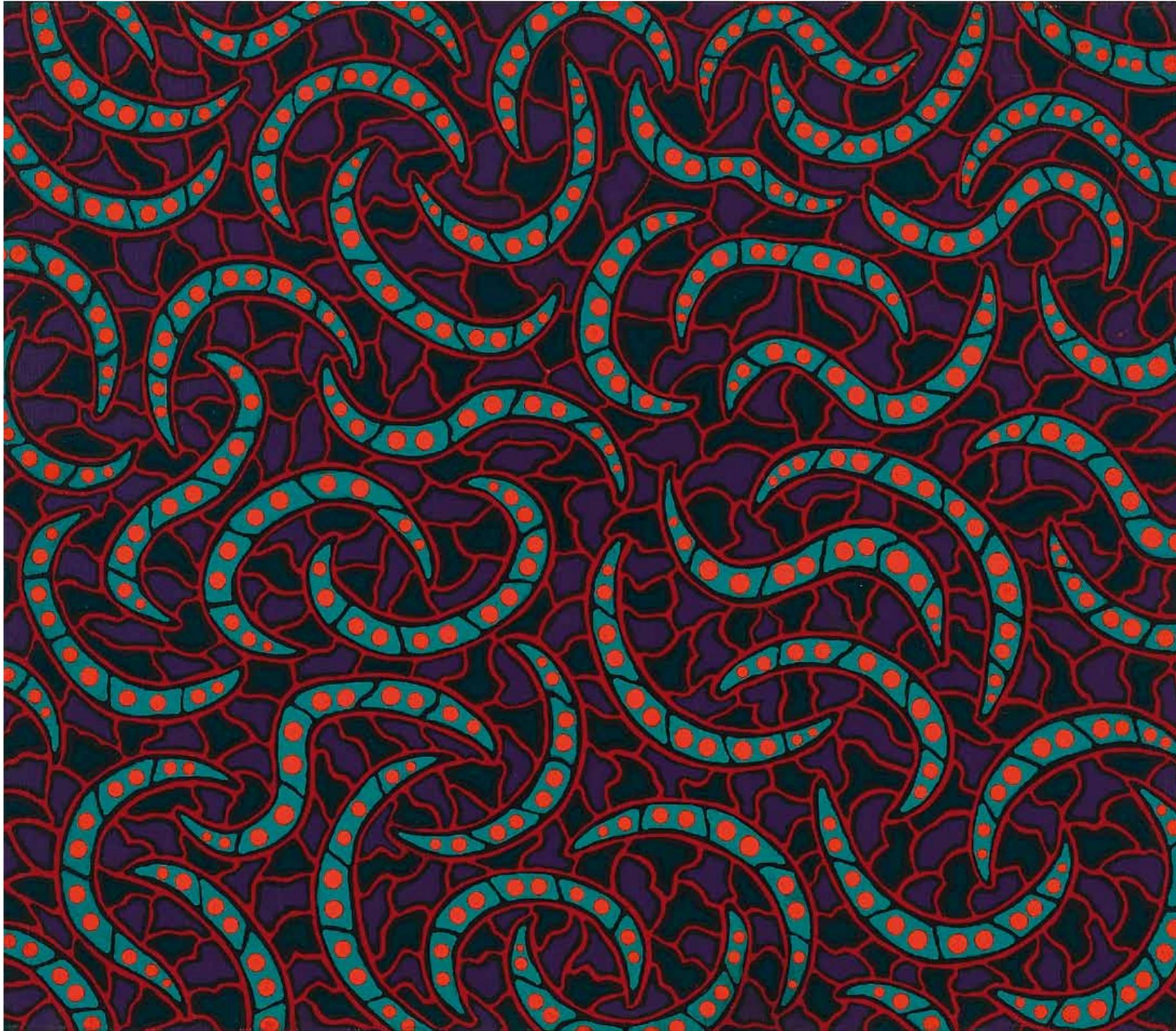
Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45,5 cm

**Season of cannas**

1988

Acrylic on canvas, 38 x 45,5 cm



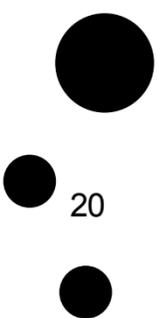


**Waves in the evening glow**

1988

Acrylic on canvas, 45.5 x 53 cm





**Infinity nets**

1993

Acrylic on canvas, 91 x 61 cm

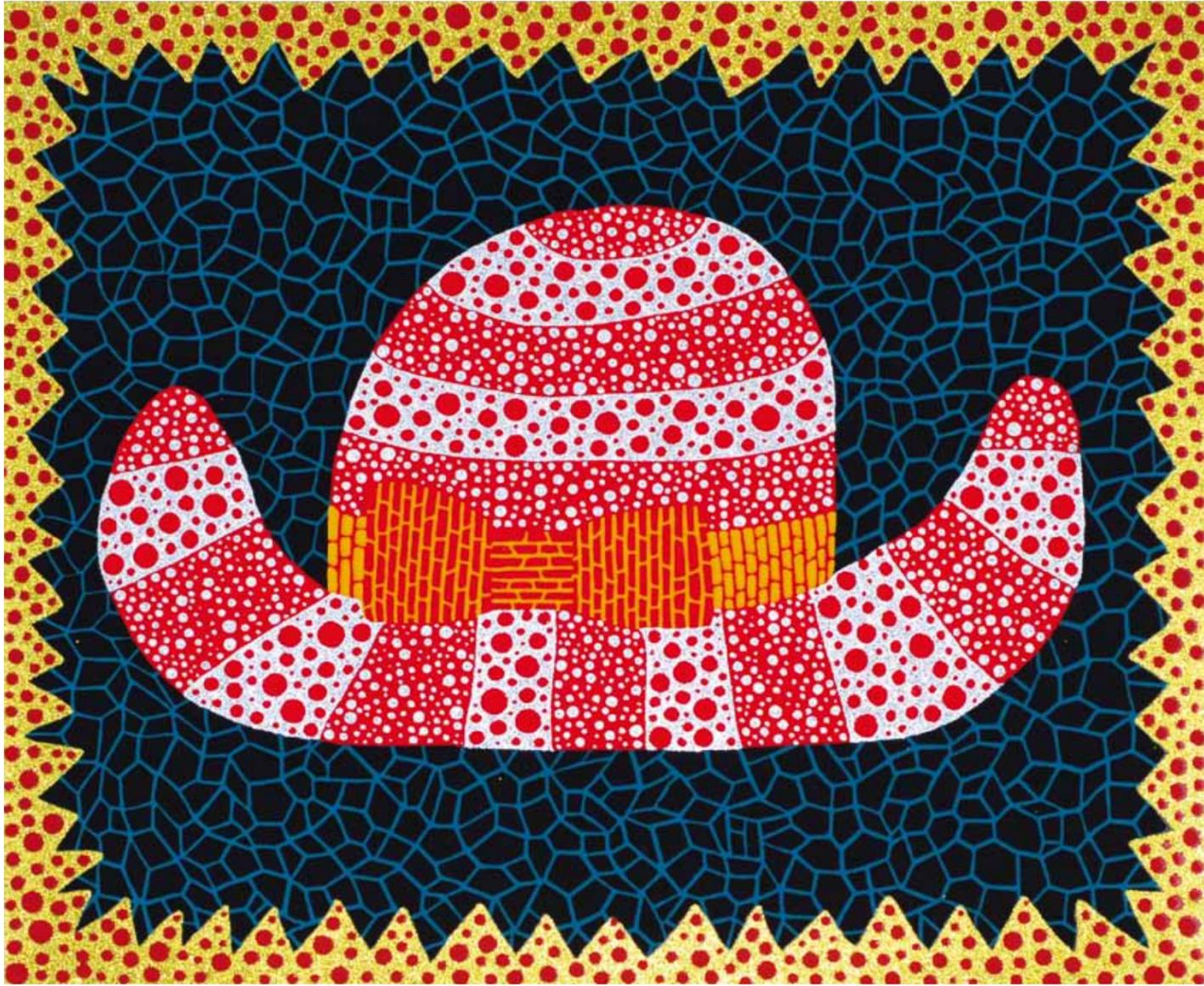




**Hat (ate)**

2001

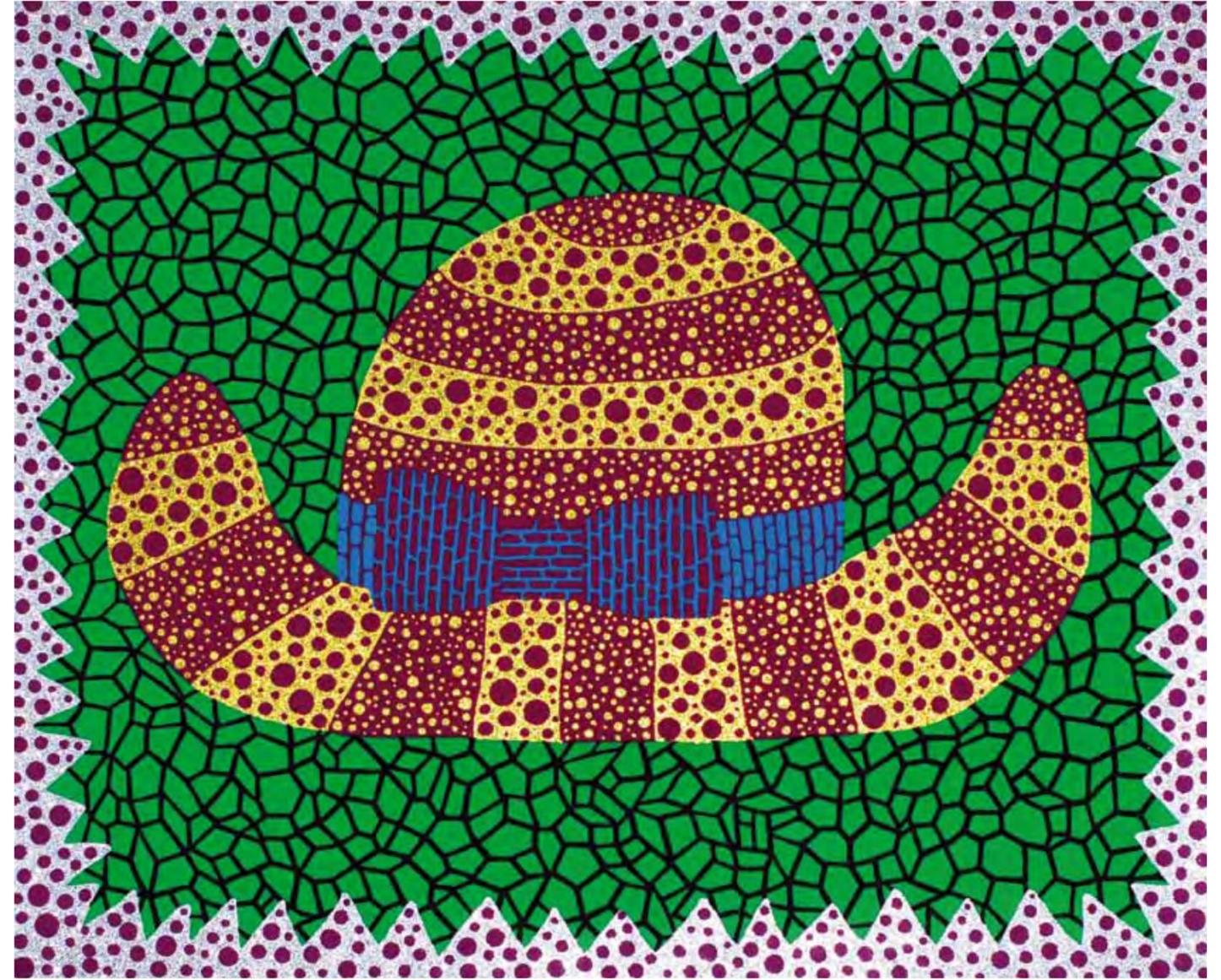
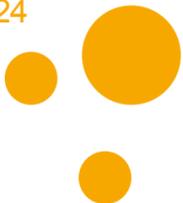
Acrylic on canvas, 22 x 27,3 cm



**Hat I**

2000

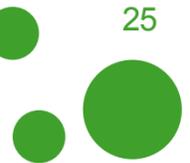
Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm



**Hat II**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm

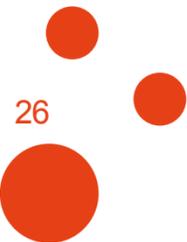




**Pumpkins**

2002

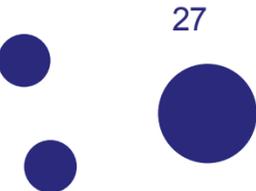
Limoges porcelaine, edition of 130 + 10 HC, 8,5 x 7,3 x 7,5 cm each



**Pumpkin**

1992

Acrylic on canvas, 15,8 x 22,7 cm



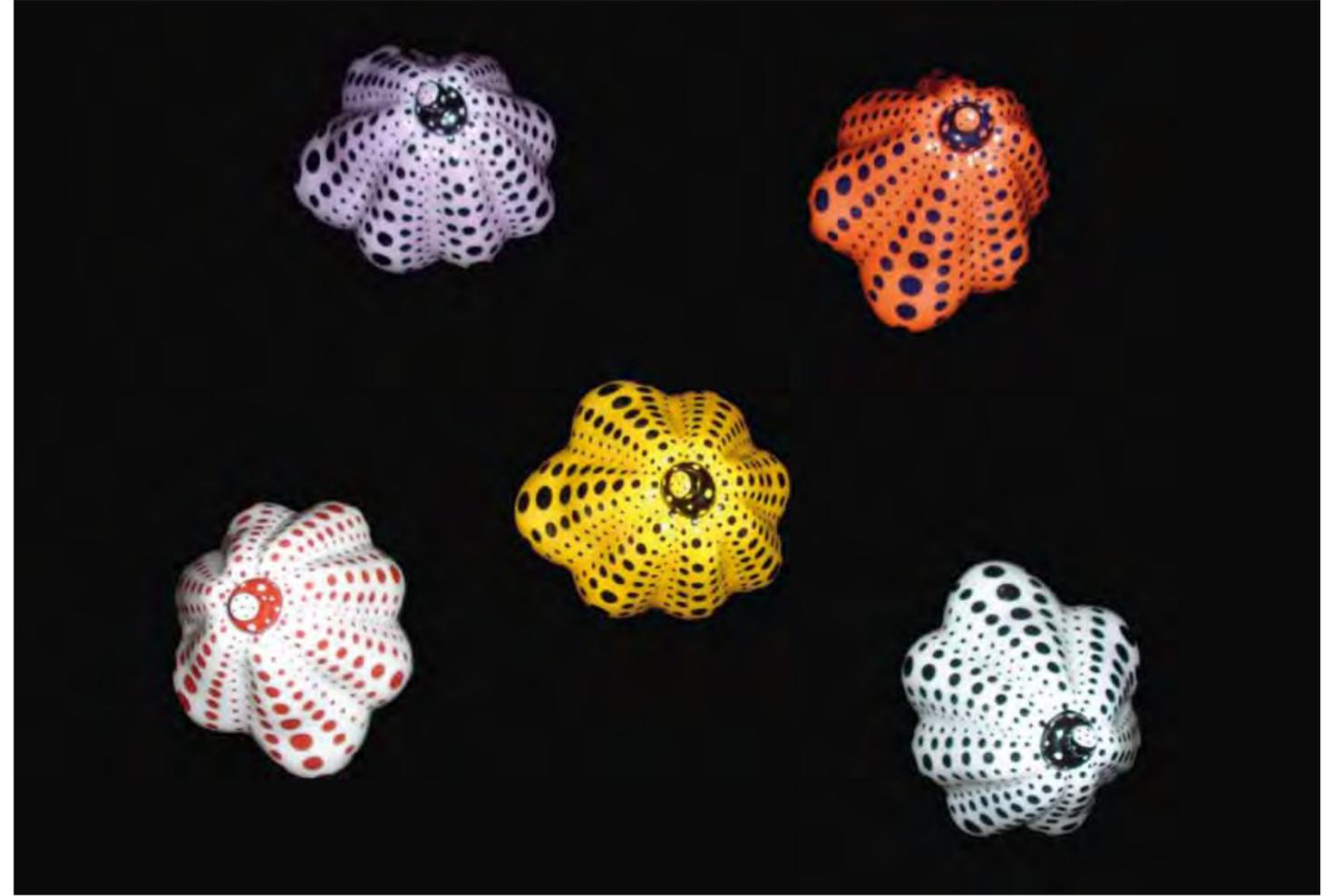


**Pumpkin**

1990

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 23 cm

28



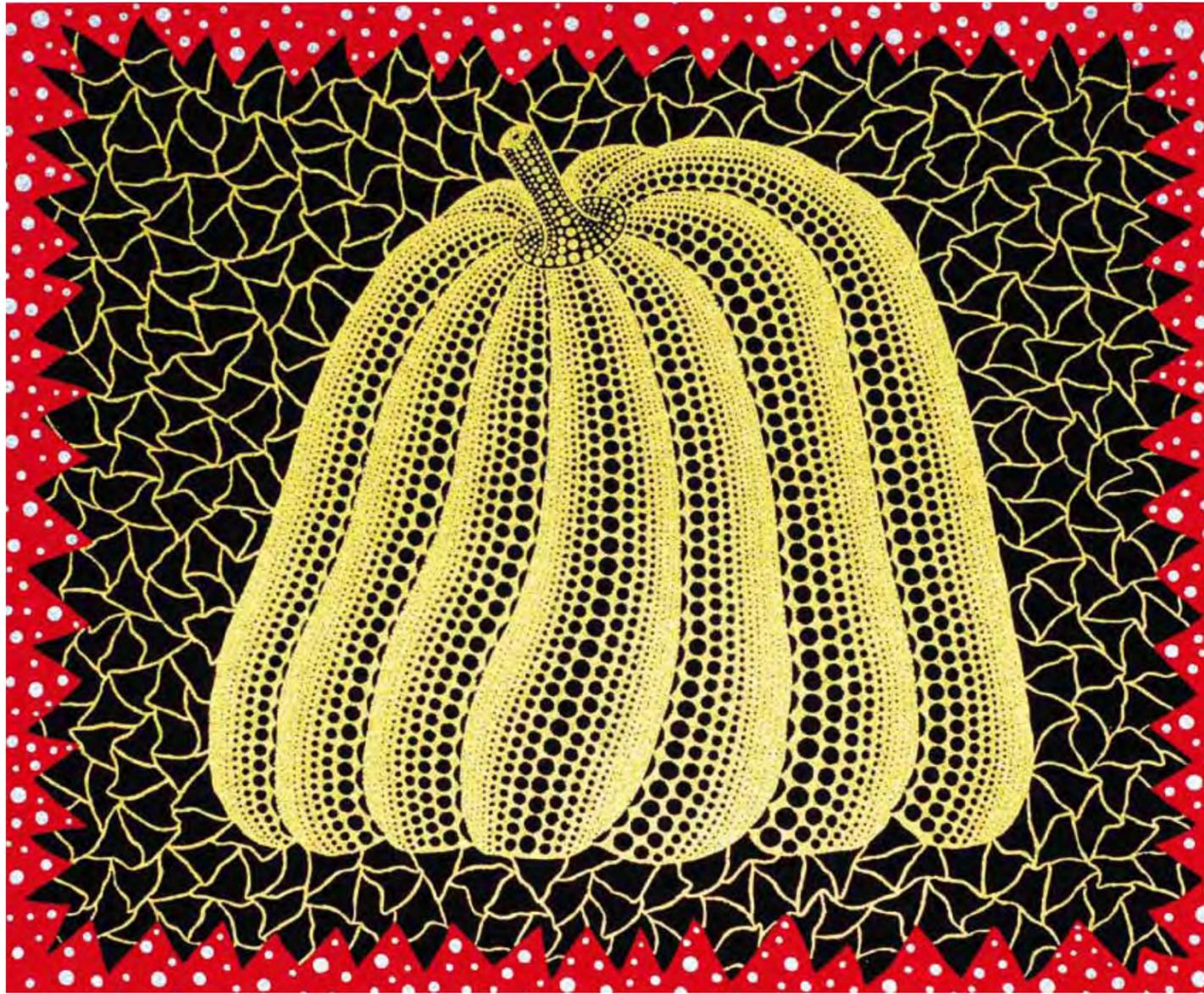
**Pumpkins**

2002

Limoges porcelaine, edition of 130 + 10 HC, 9 x 10 x 8 cm each

29

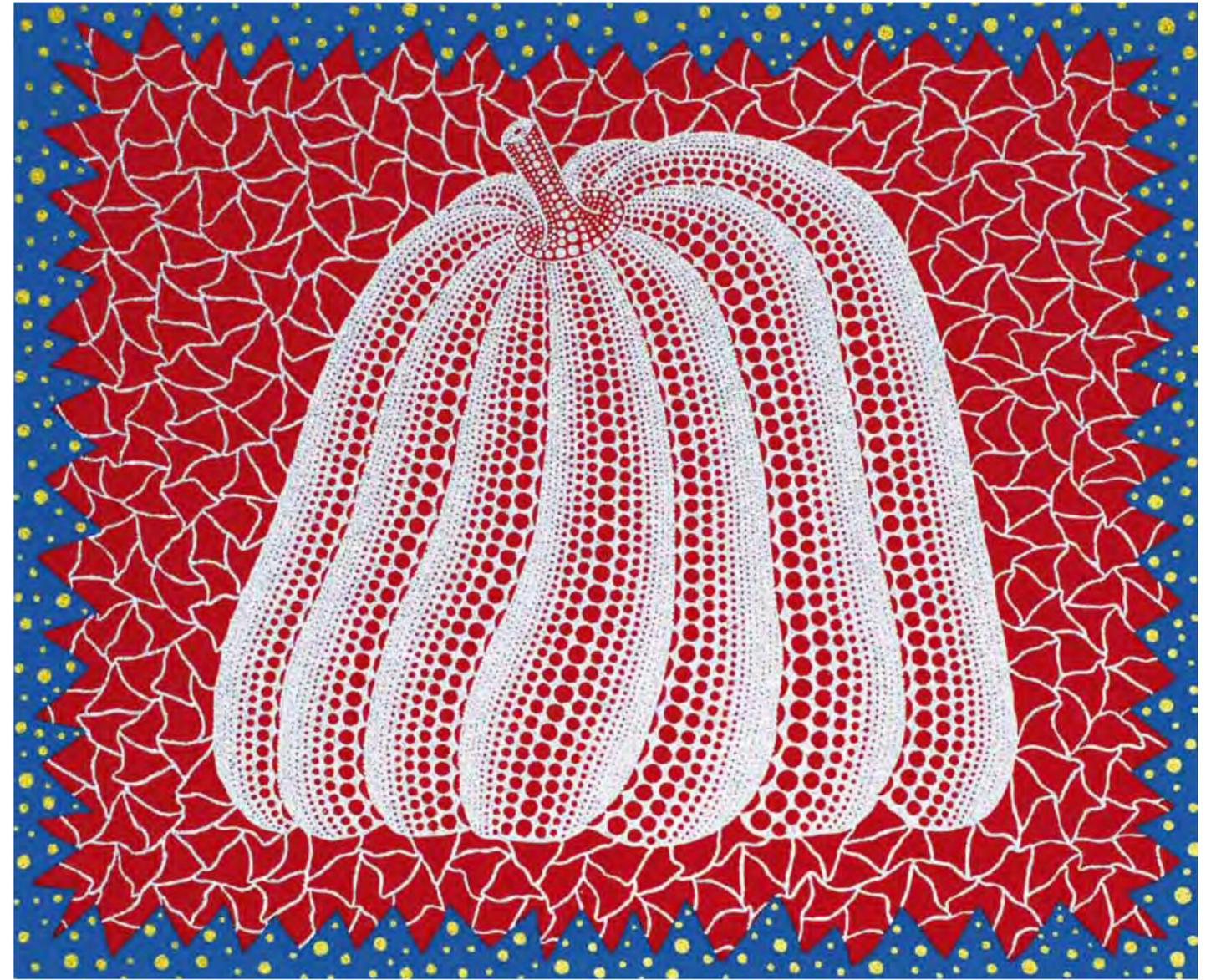
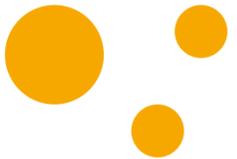




**Pumpkin I**

2000

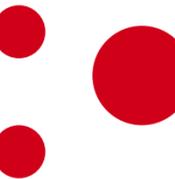
Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm



**Pumpkin II**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm

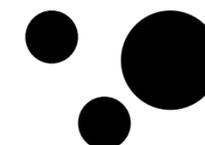




**Watermelon**

1983

Acrylic on canvas, 38 x 45,5 cm

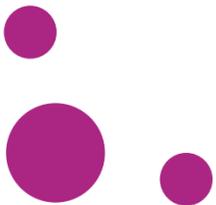




**Tulipe I**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 65 x 50 cm



**Tulipe II**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 65 x 50 cm



**Fruits Epsob**  
2011

Acrylic on canvas, 112 x 145,5 cm

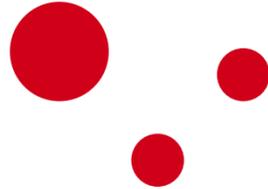




**Panier de Fruits I**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm



**Panier de Fruits II**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm



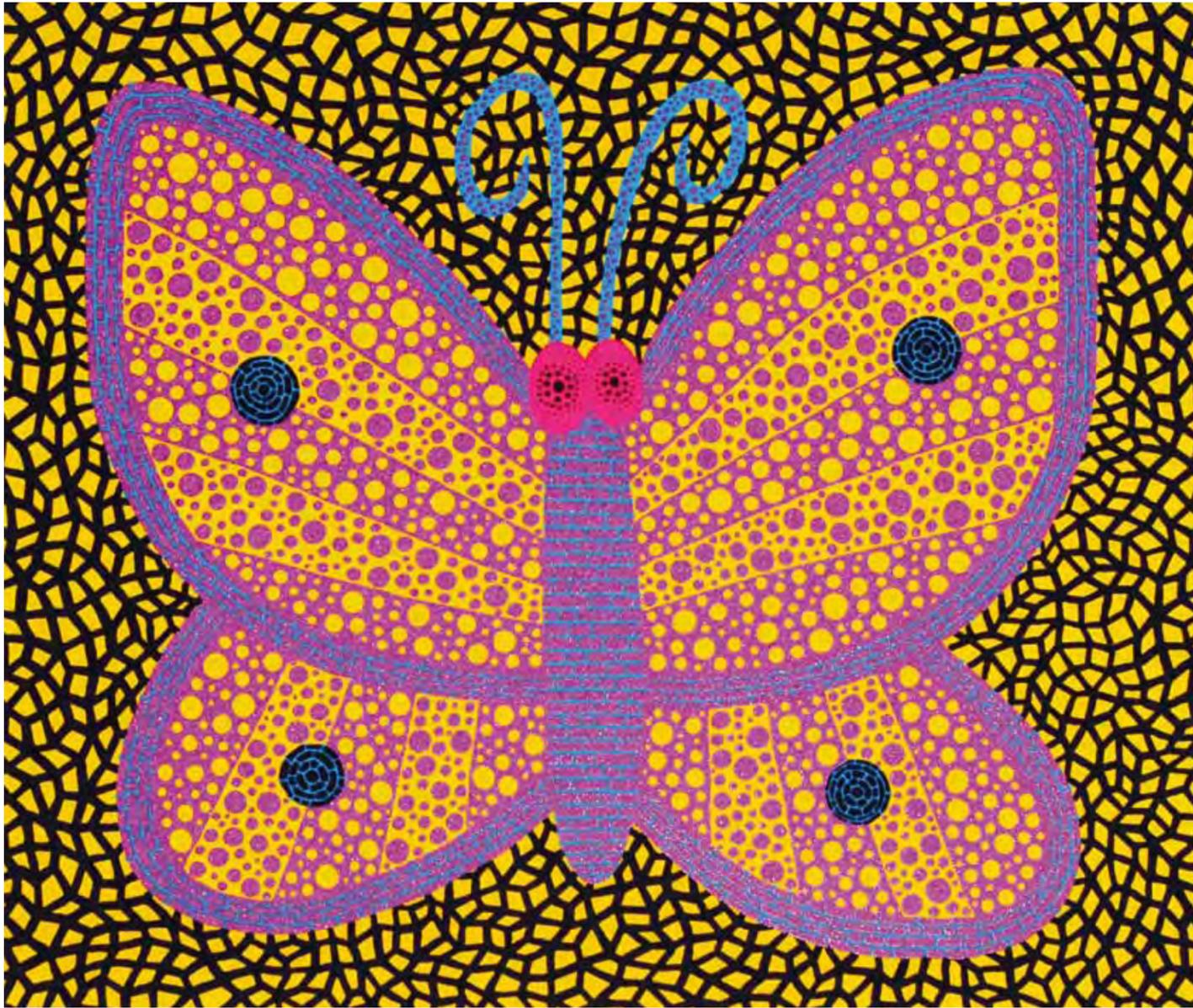


**The imminent death**

1989

Acrylic on canvas, 38 x 45,5 cm

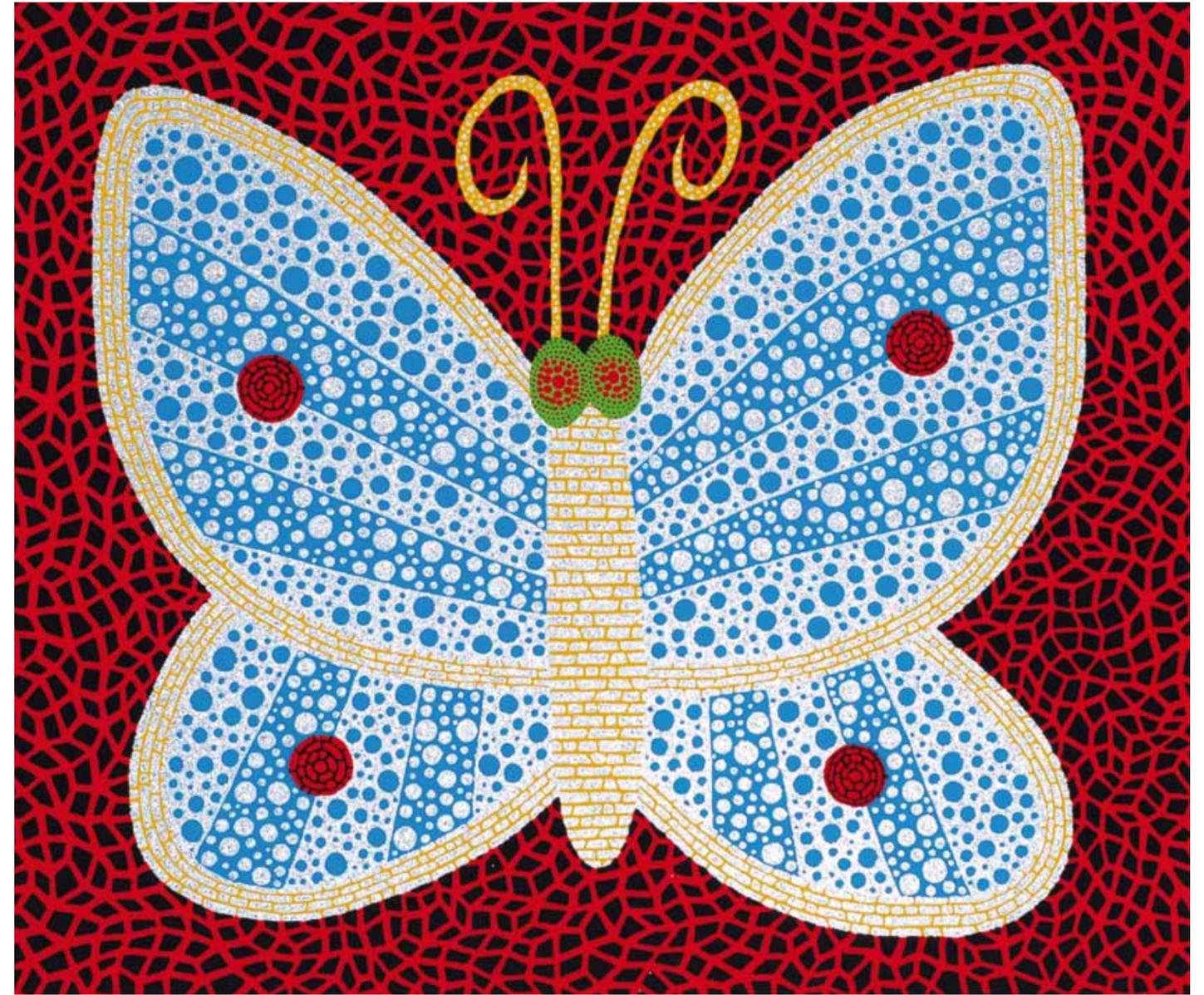




**Papillon I**

2000

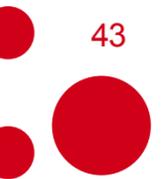
Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm



**Papillon II**

2000

Silkscreen, edition of 60 + 12 HC + 15 AP, 50 x 65 cm

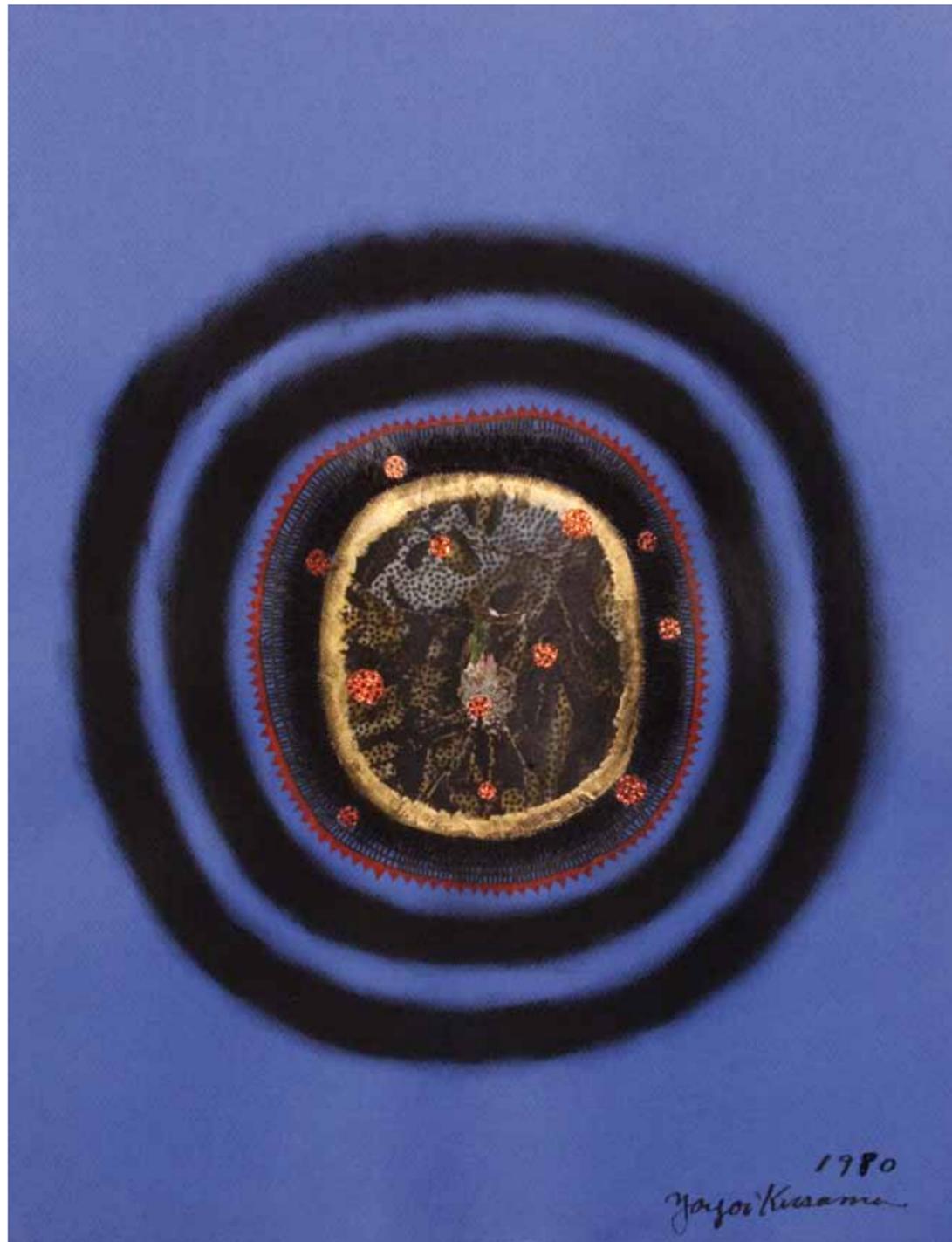


**Bird**  
1981

Gouache, pastel, ink, paper collage and fabric collage on paper, 66 x 51,4 cm



1981  
Yayoi Kusama



**Nest**

1980

Pastel, felt pen and collage on paper, 65,7 x 51 cm



**Vase**

1994

Pastel, felt pen and collage on paper, 51,2 x 36,6 cm

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