

OPERA GALLERY



Niki de Saint Phalle, *Last Night I Had a Dream*, 1968, painted polyester, variable dimensions.
© Niki de Saint Phalle Charitable Art Foundation / ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2025

LONDON

Niki de Saint Phalle & Yayoi Kusama *Inner Child*

3 APRIL - 5 MAY, 2025

LONDON, January, 2025—Opera Gallery is pleased to present 'Inner Child,' a two-artist exhibition with paintings and sculptures by Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002) and Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929). Featuring 41 artworks comprised of 7 paintings and 34 sculptures, the exhibition's eclectic grouping of subject matter ranges from Saint Phalle's playful, yet often subversive, depictions of animals and the female form, to Kusama's recurring engagement with the dot motif in both abstract and figurative works. On the surface, both Kusama and Saint Phalle's work is often typified by vibrant colours and imaginative figures that tend to strike a playful and jubilant tone.

Kusama and Saint Phalle's candid reflections on the lasting impact of their challenging childhoods suggest that engaging with their archetypal inner child through their art has provided a transformative path toward emotional healing and resolution.

Central to the exhibition is Niki de Saint Phalle's *Last Night I Had a Dream*, a monumental 1968 wall installation collectively made up of 18 sculptures that evoke childlike imagination and surreal elements of subconscious exploration. Concurrently, several paintings from Yayoi Kusama's long-running *Infinity Nets* series, inspired in part by hallucinatory visions she experienced as a child, highlight the artists' shared exploration of how childhood experiences have shaped their significant aesthetic developments.

Born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan, Kusama has frequently spoken about her complex relationship with her mother growing up in a strict household. "From the time I was a child, I wanted to run away from my mother," Kusama remarked, adding "I ran into my art." As a child, Kusama experienced hallucinations of dots and flowers crowding her vision, which laid the groundwork for her ongoing use of the dot motif in her work. "I began painting polka dots and nets as a child and they continue to inspire me. The *Infinity Nets* represent my own obsessive-compulsive neurosis and my fear of hallucinations," said Kusama, speaking to the transformative role that art played in channeling childhood memories and experiences into resonant artworks.

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Yayoi Kusama, *Summer and Butterfly*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 38 x 45.5 cm | 15 x 17.9 in

Born in 1930 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, Saint Phalle also frequently referenced in her oeuvre her difficult childhood marked by trauma and abuse. From her iconic *Nana* sculptures to the monumental Tarot Garden sculpture park in Pescia Fiorentina, Italy, Saint Phalle's oeuvre radiates a free-spirited sense of vitality and playfulness, running counter to her own experiences in childhood. "I transformed my childhood pain into something magical. My monsters became my friends, my fears became my work", she

noted. By creating works that celebrate innocence and embrace the imaginary, she invites others to find solace and strength in their inner child.

For both artists, engagement with the proverbial inner child can be interpreted as an act of liberation, reclamation and healing. Underpinning the sense of play and wonder seen in this diverse presentation of works is an understanding of childhood as a core tenet of both artist's ongoing interrogations into self actualisation.

The title of the exhibition honours Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist Carl Jung, who introduced the 'child archetype' and celebrates his 150th anniversary this year. For Jung, the child archetype symbolises renewal and potential. He believed that adults could revisit this aspect of themselves to reconnect with forgotten parts of their identity—an idea that both Kusama and Saint Phalle explored in their work.



Niki de Saint Phalle at the Stedelijk Museum, 1967
© Jac. de Nijs / Nationaal Archief, CCO / Anefo

About Niki de Saint Phalle

Born Catherine Marie-Agnès de Saint Phalle in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France in 1930, Niki de Saint Phalle was a French-American artist who took an avant-garde approach painting, sculpture, assemblage, and several other mediums to create a body of work that explored themes of femininity, oppression, joy and injustice. Today, Saint Phalle is celebrated as a pioneer in feminist art and a central figure in 20th century art.

Growing up primarily in New York City, De Saint Phalle developed her self-taught approach to painting and sculpture through both experimentation and as a means for personal exploration and emotional catharsis. She gained recognition in the 1960s as part of the Nouveau Réalisme movement with her provocative *Tirs* or *Shooting Paintings*. Later, she became known for her *Nanas*—monumental sculptures characterised by colourful, curvaceous female figures in joyful poses representing a celebration of femininity and empowerment. The *Tarot Garden* in Italy, her last and most ambitious project, features a fantastical world of mosaic-covered sculptures. She died in 2002 in La Jolla, California.

Her sculptures have been displayed in numerous public locations including Fukuoka City in Japan, University of California in San Diego and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, among others. Her work is held in public collections worldwide including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Tate in London, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, among others.

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Portrait of Yayoi Kusama in 2015. © Yayoi Kusama

About Yayoi Kusama

Born in Matsumoto Japan in 1929, Painter, writer, sculptor, performer and installation artist Yayoi Kusama is recognised as one of the most influential living artists today, and is known for her conceptual works that incorporate autobiographical and political references into a singular artistic world replete with polka dots, pumpkins and other bulbous forms.

Kusama began painting as a young girl, against the will of her mother, who often confiscated her materials. She studied nihonga, a traditional Japanese painting style, at the Kyoto City University of Arts. She moved to New York City in 1957 to begin pursuing her art career, where her early minimalist work began to develop into a blend of Pop Art and performance, with a visible influence from the late 20th century Abstract Expressionists that surrounded her. In 1974, she returned to Japan, and in 1977, voluntarily admitted herself into a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo, where she continues to live today. After a period of relative obscurity, Kusama achieved international recognition in 1993 when she represented Japan at the 45th Venice Biennale. Her work has steadily gained popularity since, and she continues to examine and reproduce the set of motifs that she has become known for globally.

Kusama has been the subject of numerous institutional solo exhibitions throughout her career and was awarded the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale prize for painting in 2006. In 2017, the Yayoi Kusama Museum opened in Tokyo. Her work is held in public collections worldwide including the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Tate in London and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, among others.

About Opera Gallery

Founded in Singapore in 1994, Opera Gallery has forged, over its 30 years, a network of galleries worldwide including London, Paris, Madrid, Geneva, New York, and Miami, establishing itself as one of the leading global players within the international art market.

Headed by Gilles Dyan, Chairman and Founder, and Isabelle de La Bruyère, CEO, Opera Gallery specialises in Post-War, Modern and Contemporary Art. In addition, the gallery represents contemporary artists such as Andy Denzler, Pieter Obels and Gustavo Nazareno, alongside internationally recognized names such as Ron Arad, Manolo Valdés, Anthony James and Anselm Reyle.

In 2024, Opera Gallery celebrated its 30th anniversary, and its mission remains focused on showcasing the dynamic, innovative, and diverse expressions of modern and contemporary art. Through its ambitious annual exhibitions, the gallery continues to unite institutions that shape the cultural landscape, while also supporting private collections and collaborating with leading public institutions.

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Monday-Saturday: 10 am - 6:30 pm

Sunday: 12pm - 5pm

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