

## **Yayoi Kusama: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture**

Elias Fine Art

120 Braintree Street, Rear

Allston

October 25 to December 22

Review by Michael Cochran

The Yayoi Kusama show at Elias Fine Art is important for artists, collectors, teachers, students and historians to see. Very few artists publicly proclaim that making their art is their therapy and has actually aided them in overcoming emotional illness. Kusama's work since her childhood has been about her "obsessional neurosis" as she describes it and that focus has created a bounty of sculpture, painting and drawings. As a young artist in the late 1950's and 60's in New York City, she was known for her involvement in happenings and environmental sculpture utilizing materials that broke with formalist tradition, i.e., stuffed fabric, macaroni or glass. Always at the core of her work have been the elements of repetition of form and the perseveration of process.

In the current exhibition, successfully curated by Joseph Carroll, we see a small but informative sampling of her oeuvre. Accompanied by examples of her published writings, the gallery has focused primarily on her two-dimensional work. Hung in a well-balanced salon style are three groupings of her two-color acrylic "net" paintings. At first glance they appear to be dots on a colored field but upon closer examination the opposite is found to be true. The dots are actually a monochrome ground upon which are placed numerous small connected clock-wise brush strokes of contrasting color that create a net-like effect on the surface. They have been painted repeatedly, area by area and when viewed from a distance, the "net" appears to be wrinkled and almost kinetic. In "Nets 13," the ground is green and the lines of the net are painted in complementary red creating a pulsating rhythm between foreground and background, line and form. A group of three "Infinity Nets" on the gallery entry wall is painted in a more controlled manner. Measuring 21" X 18," one painting from 1993 has carefully placed straight white lines that reveal a bright red background. These "Infinity Nets" appear to be more like random grids and feel more cerebral and less emotional than Kusama's other paintings.

On adjacent walls are several of her mixed media "boxes," two of which contain her signature stuffed fabric phallic forms. In "Nest (ABC)," the white-on-white forms are contained/protected behind a chicken-wire netting within the confines of the box. Also in the show are six small drawings on illustration board that were completed in 1978, just after she committed herself to a mental hospital in Japan. These are beautifully spray painted through a net template with droplets of diluted red or black pigment passionately stained into the surface. Each illustration board is edged lightly in gold which adds to their delicacy and poignancy.

At age seventy-two, Kusama now lives outside but near the institution in Japan and is experiencing a strong resurgence in the visibility of her work with major retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1998. She has not shown in Boston since 1958 and Daniel Elias should be applauded for bringing her presence back to New England.