

Yayoi Kusama's T-shirt between Work of Art and Object Design: An Illusionist Transversality

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Opinion

Today, the boundaries between the different artistic disciplines seem to be closing. Contemporary art allows any kind of confusion and transversality between specialties. In other words, the painter can become a photographer, graphic designer, sculptor, performer, videographer. New art forms such as installations, happenings, light projections, web art, offers the artist the freedom to cross the classical classification that separates him in a particular specialty. Being multidisciplinary is, in a way, a search for a complete artist. The artist who concretizes to the letter what we have just explained seems to be the one who upset the very concept of American art of the sixties: Yayoi Kusama, who does not obey any rules of classification and who tries to touch the maximum artistic movements, forms, techniques, mediums, media, communication tools... even creating its own means of expression such as its nudity festivals or «Body festival» mixing happening, installation, dance, scenography, painting and cinematography. At the time, she directed film shorts or clips that she called «self obliteration film». And it was exclusive and without references. Her creative madness has guided her to touch everything to make the world she dreams of a reality and to externalize her hallucinations of a multi-sport universe. This strange philosophy has led him from the avant-garde to exploit common products as components of his installations making shoes, chairs, lilies and t-shirts fixed elements in his works. These design products certainly undergo transformations on his part but without losing their identity. These objects reinterpreted by the artist still deprive themselves of their utilitarian function and become decorative objects.

However, they regain this functionality when it dedicates exclusively to them a shop specialized especially in fashion products created by itself. Here we think that Kusama presents the best example of artists who make this t-shirt oscillate between these two worlds: that of art and design by sometimes considering it one of the components of the work and sometimes a work properly so called but which does not give up its functional status to specific use, that of covering the human body.

Nowadays, his signature of peas dyes any kind of product indicating once again on the reality of his art of universal order that «does not belittle himself to the futility of the aura of art» to the detriment of the realization of his greatest dreams, that of occupying this globe with his peas to erase and mark it at once. The point for her is a sign absence and presence at the same time... Beyond this metaphasic question that forms, among other things, the foundation of his art, nothing seems to interest him: whether it is considering this type of creation work or object design it seems to be the last of his concerns.

It is an analytical study of different t-shirts created by the artist and considered as works of art while using several mechanical and industrial techniques ensured by the use of computer tools. Thus, we focus on the transition from the artisanal to the industrial in

her art by evoking the influence of her interdisciplinarity on this artistic t-shirt (fruit of the crossing of her artistic genres) of which she seems specialized.

Yayoi Kusama's T-shirt: A Sign of Belonging to his Universe

Yayoi Kusama: A creative madness

Nowadays, Kusama is known as a national treasure in its country of origin: Japan. Our contemporary artist still alive has had an exceptional career in the world of art. Marked by a difficult childhood according to her biographies, she turned to painting, from a young age, to escape her frustrating reality of a daughter born of an adulterous father and a traditional and strict mother. Indeed, she suffered from hallucinations that were concretized in her works: In the middle of a family as toxic as this one, the only thing I lived for was my art. And as I lacked common sense in my relationship with people and society, the conflicts with those around me worsened even more. The mental pressure and my natural anxiety became more and more present as the criticism was directed at me, and the future began to seem dark and repugnant to me." At the beginning of his career as an artist in Japan, Kusama leaned towards water colours largely influenced by overalism. But it was by leaving her native country that she knew the glory of the artists of the fore.

She knew her mouth in the late seventies. But after a disappointment, she returned to Japan to live in the psychiatric hospital in Tokyo, to treat her psychological disorders. Back in Japan, she revisited her pop painting and her naive drawings but this time, much richer in colors and more contrasts. In recent years, his name still rings in the media and his works have been widely publicized thanks to his exhibitions around the world, notably the one in 2001, at the Japanese house in France, which has made his name shine to the French public. An audience who discovered her more thanks to her retrospective at the Pompidou Centre and her collaboration later with the famous Louis Vuitton fashion brand. This is how she found the fashion world after forty years.

Indeed, influenced by the Peace and Love movement of sixties, she launched a hippie clothing line at the time and she opened a shop specialized in unpublished clothes sewn by herself since still as a child, She helped make parachutes during the Hiroshima War. Without forgetting that she opened another shop or store in the manner of wharol where she sold her derivatives and notably, her t-shirts that will make the matter of our analysis in the following, trying to group them according to major concepts that marked her art.

This T-shirt is red printed with pink polka dots of different sizes at the top of the chest. The famous English expression «Love Forever» occupies the center of the composition of peas in black capital letters written in a certain standard character. The ends of the letters are retouched by finishing with black polka dots. Everything is signed on behalf of the artist just at the bottom of the text, on the left. «Yayoi Kusama» is written, this time, in the same color and with the same standard character of the text but not

retouched and with a less imposing format (much smaller than the artist's expression) but rather readable (Figure 1&2).



Figure 1: A collection of kusama products. Ayala Museum organizes the exhibition "J'aime Kusama" from July 16 to September 16, 2013 in the Philippines.



Figure 2: Des t-shirts exposés dans une Kusama Store à Tokyo, 2014.

This t-shirt tattooed with this emblematic message of the Peace and Love movement, which the artist attended at the time, is a kind of proof that testifies to a transitory period in life, as well as in the art of the latter. It is therefore a garment witness to a stage where she was part of the revolting American society going to the streets, denouncing the hardly and militant to spread messages of love and peace. Translated into French, the text means «love forever» or «to infinity», a sure value that the art of Kusama claims to defend, facing the war that negatively marked his childhood. And if she chose one day to memorize forever her major concept of «dot obsession» by means of our first t-shirt, she only wants to insist on the ends of this first one through this second T-shirt «Love Forever». As if these two garments complement each other: the first presents the driving idea of his art and the second shows its purpose. This reading will find reference in these words of the artist: I had in me the desire to measure prophetically the infinity of the immeasurable universe from my position, showing the accumulation of particles in the

mesh of a net where peas would be treated as negatives. It is by anticipating this that I can become what my life is, which is a pea. My life is a dot in the middle of the millions of particles that are peas.”

Moreover, we can only dwell on the word «infinite». Indeed, infinite is a key adjective of Kusama’s work. In fact, there are few works where the artist proposes a center, a significant element or a beginning and an end to his compositions. His works are open, unlimited and unforgiving, a kind of accumulation of points or phallic forms in a repetitive way creating, thus, a certain rhythm and a certain rather monotonous musicality. The infinite aspect is further developed by the use of mirrors in several of her installations, where she projects this rhythmic composition out of the space reserved for the installation and extends it to infinity. What concerns her, apparently, is to open up, project and expand her art into a world that is larger, larger and more global than ours. It does not believe in limited spaces and does not consider itself an inhabitant of the earth but it wants to be an entity of this cosmos or a particle of this universe. She dreams of a world where Man detaches himself from his ego and melts into space: According to her, man must dissociate himself from his ego and let himself be carried away into infinity to finally become one with the cosmos. For the artist whose pacifist consciousness is very sharpened by the experience of Hiroshima and the Vietnam War, “auto-obliteration” is therefore the only way to guarantee peace».

Wearing this T-shirt, she invites the public to offer her body as a mobile support for this value that her art defends, of course, but

the meaning conveyed seems much deeper and more personal to her. A kind of codified message, since the dimension of «infinity» for the artist is beyond the meaning close to the consumer’s mind. It is no longer a simple slogan of Peace and Love that we know, but it is intended to convey visions of the artist to the letter. Love certainly, but not as usual, it asks us to go beyond the known limits of love and not necessarily a love that relates to our spouse but a love of everything, without borders or obstacles, an extended and free love that encompasses every particle of our unlimited ultra-planetary universe.

In reality, this Love forever t-shirt belongs to an unlimited series of products by the artist. A recent collection dedicated especially to the public admiring her art and generally exhibited in the shops of art museums where she displays her works. A sort of souvenir object memorizing this series of artist’s works bearing the same name but belonging to another era, that of the sixties. With this kind of products: a coffee cup, a whiskey glass, a clip or a t-shirt the artist seeks to anchor his art and his name in the memory of the spectator. Like a historian, she wants to memorize this series by immortalizing it forever with these products for daily use. A way to revisit his art, update it, reinvent it or even update it, especially with young people who do not know enough about its beginnings and history. In this way it guarantees its art to persist to infinity and its values conveyed to be broadcast in another epoch with other people and in other settings forever concretizing this infinite dimension of this universal world to which it belongs.