

La Trobe's Art Therapy Masterclass

Date

Fri 2 – Sat 3 March

Location

National Gallery of Victoria

Register now:

latrobe.edu.au/art-therapy



YAYOI KUSAMA - La Trobe University Art Therapy Masterclass

This masterclass brings together experts from La Trobe University's Art Institute and Master of Art Therapy program to explore connections between Kusama's life and practice and the practice of art making more generally. From the perspective of the arts and health, participants will gain a deeper understanding of Kusama's work and the role of art in mental health, wellbeing and in therapy. Participants can attend individual lectures, or register for both days to attend workshops, exclusive exhibition access, lectures and an expert panel discussion.

For over sixty years, Yayoi Kusama has worked obsessively on her paintings, drawings, sculptures, fashion, experimental films, installations, writing and 'happenings'. Flower obsession 2016-17, is a new participatory artwork created by the eighty-eight year old artist especially for the NGV's Triennial this summer.

There is no doubt that Kusama holds a significant place in the history of Abstraction, with her work influencing several generations of contemporary artists. However, there is also a great deal of interest in the psychology and biography of the artist.

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Schedule

FRIDAY 2 March 2018

10am-11am

Location: Clemenger theatre (capacity 250)

Topic: The wellbeing effects of participating in art making –what the evidence tells us

Dr Patricia Fenner – art therapist, Course Coordinator, Master Art Therapy

In her 1975 biographical essay *Waga Tamashii no Henreki to Tatakai* (Odyssey of My Struggling Soul) Yayoi Kusama details the hallucinations, anxiety and depression that began in her childhood. For more than sixty years, Kusama has channelled her suffering into her practice, creating ‘...an obsessive-compulsive continuum of endlessly repeated shapes’¹. The artist considers her work as both a ‘symptom and a cure’ for her obsessions.

Early studies indicate there are wellbeing effects from engaging in making art, even for a short period. The evidence related to benefits from art making and art therapy for mental health recovery is also growing. In this lecture you will learn about benefits of art making and art therapy from the perspectives of researchers and art makers themselves.

11am-12.30pm

WORKSHOP: Education Room (limit 20)

Topic: Who is an artist? Looking at the social currency around the term and identity, challenging the norms

Dr Libby Byrne – art therapist, artist, lecturer and researcher Master Art Therapy

What are we really saying when we say, “I am an artist”? Despite her position as one of the most influential living artists in the world today, Yayoi Kusama has famously stated ‘... I don’t consider myself an artist; I am pursuing art in order to correct the disability which began in my childhood.’²

In this workshop we will explore questions of identity and meaning that arise in such a declaration. We will consider some of the philosophical and theoretical constructs that inform our understanding of what it means to be an artist and ask how it is that some people are able to claim this sense of identity whilst others do not. Is the artist’s identity determined by a particular social currency or is it something that emanates from a more implicit and primal need to explore the questions of human existence? Does the choice to identify and work as an artist in turn redefine the possibilities for how we can live, both individually and communally?

1pm-2pm

Location: Clemenger theatre

Topic: Children and youth - building supportive self-care strategies using art

Ms Vicky Nicholls – art therapist, psychotherapist, lecturer

In a fashion similar to her iconic Obliteration Rooms, Kusama invites children to alter a faux-domestic space by adhering stickers to the white walls and furniture in *Flower obsession* 2016-17. Flowers will eventually consume the entire space, effectively obliterating the room as its surfaces and edges are overtaken with colour.

Such art making provides an opportunity for play, aids problem solving, generates optimism, makes perseverance fun, supports development of a sense of mastery, and fosters empathy. It also contributes to a sense of belonging and can support community building. Qualities such as these support healthy human development and help protect against mental health issues such as depression and anxiety in our young population. Not all art making experiences are the same, this presentation will look at what can we do to facilitate activities that build and protect the mental health of our children and young people.

SATURDAY 3 March 2018

9am-10.15am

FLOORTALK: Exhibition Space

Topic: Yayoi Kusama: Aestheticizing Obsessions

Dr Karen Annett-Thomas – artist and Public Programs Coordinator, La Trobe Art Institute

Enjoy exclusive access to Flower Obsession 2016-17 and explore the immersive and expansive nature of Kusama's participatory installation. Renowned for her Obliteration rooms, Kusama seeks to explore the concept of infinite space and the consumption of the individual into the mass. Here, the gentle and beautiful form of the flower replaces the dot as material, but the desire to obliterate remains.

11am-12.30pm

Workshop: Education Room (Limit 20)

Topic: Working with what we have: Reconsidering the process and materials involved in art making

Dr Libby Byrne – art therapist, artist, lecturer and researcher Master Art Therapy

Working across a variety of media – Kusama has never confined herself to a single medium. She has however utilised the limited language of the dot to pursue her obsessive-compulsions – infinitely.

In his novel 'Theft', Peter Carey sheds light on the experience of art making saying, "As is true so often, it was the limitation of the materials that made the art". In this workshop we will consider our assumptions about the materials that are needed to make art and the possibilities for working with materials that are simply 'at hand'. Participants will explore the experience of making and re-making, erasing, working with and over an existing image in the material creation of a palimpsest.

1pm-2pm

Panel Conversation: Clemenger theatre

Topic: Art making and post traumatic recovery – the experience for individuals and communities

Dr Patricia Fenner, Dr Libby Byrne, Vicky Nicholls. Sally Goldstraw, Tanja Johnston

In her own words, Kusama experienced events in childhood which she described as "traumatic". Her subsequent experiences of a hallucinatory and profoundly disorienting kind can also constitute traumatic occurrences. Kusama has always drawn a link between her lived experience and her art practice.

The benefits of utilising art materials on the brain following traumatic events is a focus of international research. In 2008 Art Therapy was employed to address the traumatic effects experienced by thousands of teachers and school children following the devastating Sichuan earthquake. In 2017 the Victorian State Government funded a mobile art therapy program to address the needs of children from families experiencing violence in regional Victoria. This panel will discuss various local and international interventions where art has been employed to address diverse forms of trauma.

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