



## ★ **Kusama: A Graphic Biography**

**Elisa Macellari**

**Edward Fortes, Translator**

Laurence King (Oct 20, 2020)

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Elisa Macellari's graphic biography *Kusama* concentrates on the life and work of artist Yayoi Kusama.

The book follows a natural arc, moving from Kusama's childhood in Japan, and her first interest in art, to her years of growing fame in America. It also covers her later resurgence after facing mental illness and suicide attempts. Kusama is fascinating: an underdog who seeks solace in creativity and becomes a major figure in the art world, despite her health troubles and disapproving parents. Her relationships with other famous artists, including Andy Warhol, Salvador Dalí, and Georgia O'Keeffe, provide context for her own achievements, as well as a glimpse into the personality of the woman behind the art.

The distillation of Kusama's long, full, and atypical life to a trim, fast-flowing graphic novel is admirable. The text draws from multiple sources, listed at the book's end; chief among them is Kusama's autobiography.

The book features an appealing, focused palette, heavy on red and teal. The interior art captures the essence of Kusama's work, in panels showcasing paintings on museum and gallery walls, and by using patterns and backgrounds central to Kusama's style, including her extensive use of polka dots and circles. This marriage of text and visuals is magical. Kusama hallucinated a talking field of flowers as a young girl; no text or graphic alone could convey the experience, but here, valuable understanding is imparted of not just her artistic mind, but also her budding psychological problems.

*Kusama: A Graphic Biography* is a wonderful introduction to a gifted artist. Even those familiar with her work will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the troubled imagination from which it spawned.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2020)

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