

Writing In/Difference to the M/Other: Kusama Yayoi's Prose as Proto-Feminist Agency

Stefan Würrer

Abstract

This paper presents an attempt to critically investigate the literary work of Japanese artist Kusama Yayoi (b. 1929). It takes as its object two of Kusama's early prose texts and, by reading them through a feminist account of identity as fetishism, shows that the two novels presented in this paper—Kurisutofā danshō kutsu (1984) and Rijin katen no shūjin (1984)—can be understood as a critical engagement with a potentially non-normative feminine self and, in a broader sense, as a negotiation of the state of being a woman in a patriarchal/androcentric society. These features can be traced back to her 1960s sculptural work and her Infinity Net Paintings. By not only situating Kusama's literary work in a socio-historical context but also demonstrating that it constitutes an intertextual continuum with the rest of her artistic oeuvre, this paper offers an understanding of Kusama's work besides the dominant narrative of her mental illness and lays the ground for further investigations into her literary texts.

Keywords: Kusama Yayoi, contemporary art, contemporary literature, feminism, mental illness



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