

Thames
&Hudson



Truth Bomb

Abigail Crompton

A dazzling object of art and ideas: where artists tell it how it is and what it takes to get there.

Illustrated in tritone throughout

27.8 x 22.8cm

208pp

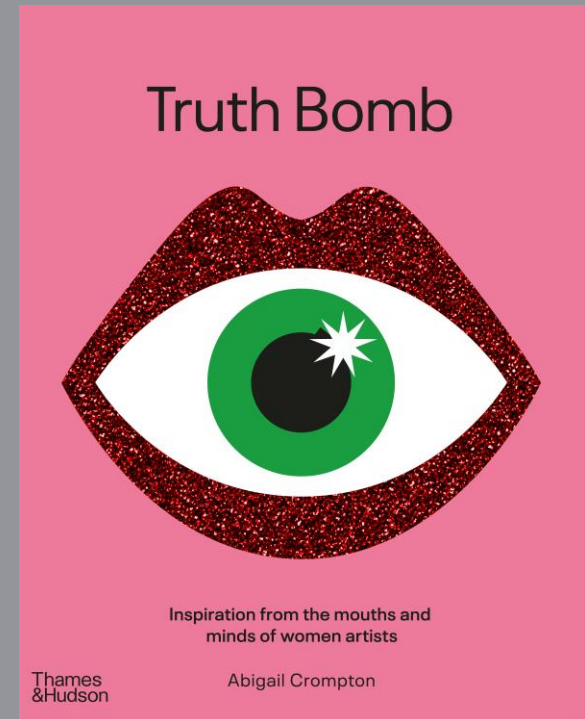
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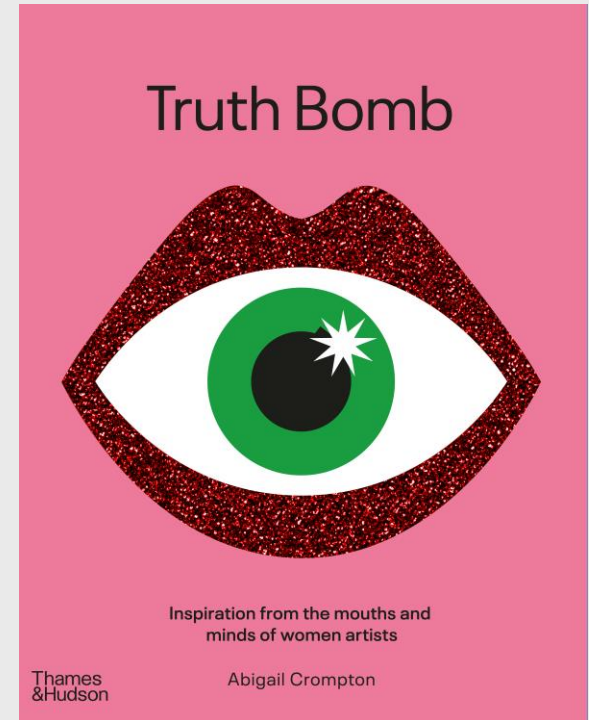


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Book

Key Sales Points

- A magical visual mash-up of images, memoirs, moments, interviews and inspirational beginnings as told by twenty-two leading women artists.
- Features such women as Yayoi Kusama, Miranda July, Kaylene Whiskey and Judy Chicago.
- Uncovers the power of taking a chance, pushing the envelope and not being shy when it comes to making a mark.



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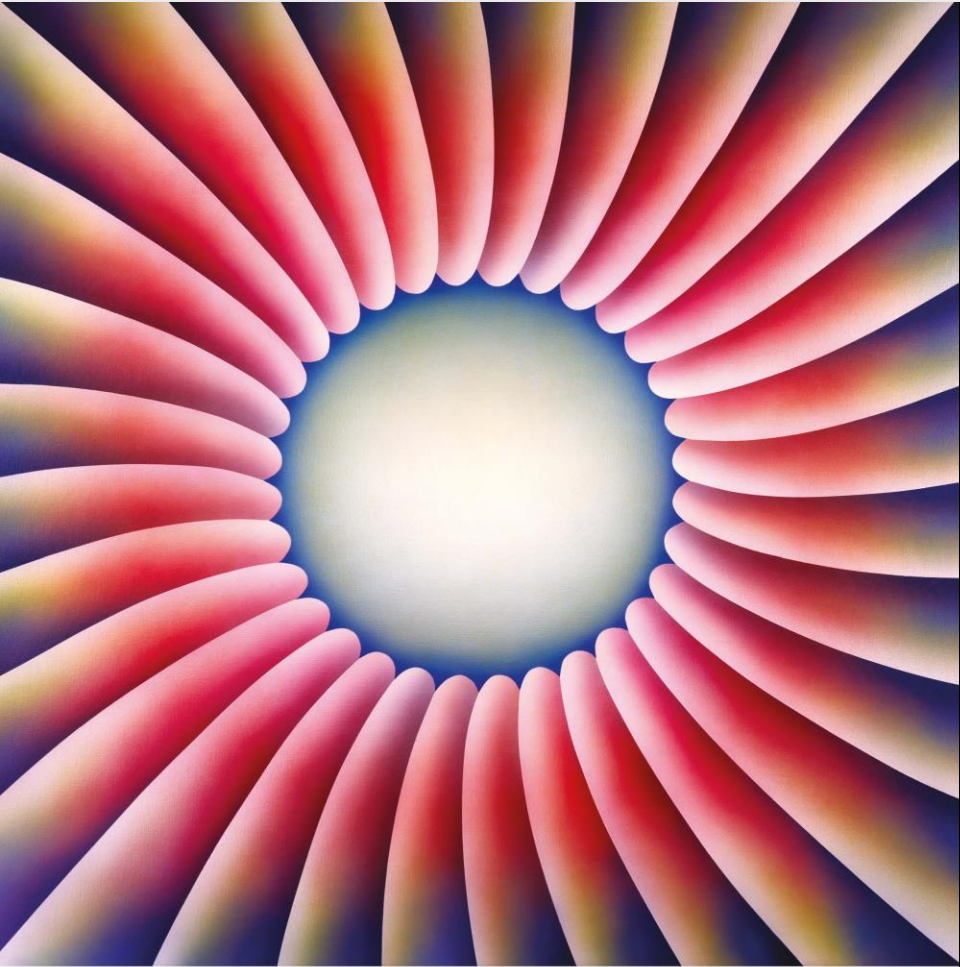
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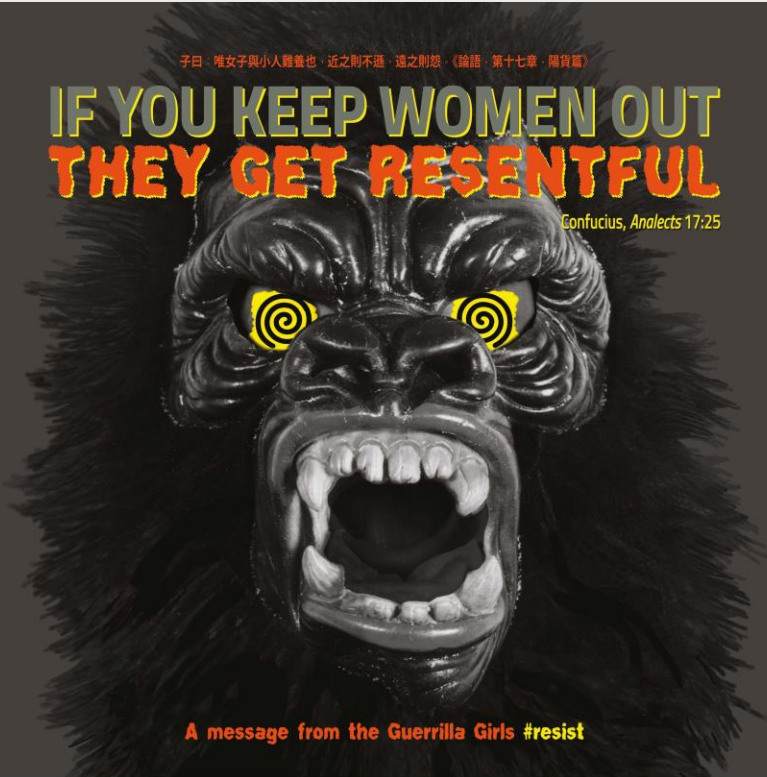


Judy Chicago — For most of my career, I was not focused on my career, the market, or money. I come from a generation before the international art market. We never thought we would make money from our work. What was important to me was making a contribution. I also believe, and have operated from the idea, that art is discovery. That is just how I operate – I educate myself, apprentice myself, study, and look, and then at a certain point I begin to formulate images based on what I have learned and what I have discovered. For me, that is just how I make art.

子曰：唯女子與小人難養也，近之則不遜，遠之則怨。（論語·第十七章·陽貨篇）

IF YOU KEEP WOMEN OUT THEY GET RESENTFUL

Confucius, *Analects* 17:25



A message from the Guerrilla Girls #resist

Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?

Less than **4%** of the **artists** in the Modern
Art sections are women, but **76%**
of the **nudes** are female.

Statistics from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 2011

GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
www.guerrillagirls.com

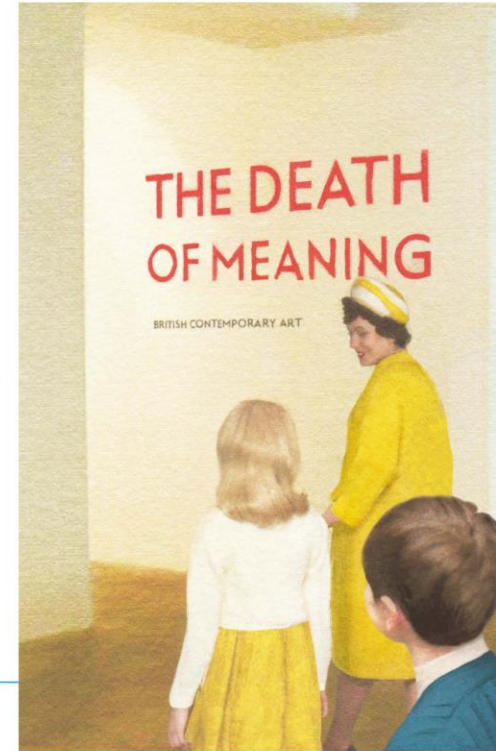
Miriam Elia — Everything I do is about a violent clash between two things that makes something funny. That clash is the backdrop of my life.

8

“Is the art pretty?” says Susan.

“No,” says Mummy,
“Pretty is not important.”

new words pretty not important



Misaki Kawai

Misaki Kawai's artwork never fails to tickle the inner child. The artist is a big fan of all things fluffy (in both theme and texture), and her work is humorous and strangely delightful.

Born to an architect father and a mother who made clothing and puppets, Misaki was perhaps destined to be creative. She often talks about her childhood in Osaka, known as the comedy centre of Japan, which may have been an early contributor to her quirky and absurdist humour.

Misaki's frequent travels with her photographer husband, Justin Waldron, and their daughter, Poko, inspire her to create paintings and sculptures as living memories – from a green-faced Mickey Mouse seen at China's 'fake Disneyland' to Mongolian camels in headdresses.

Misaki's art makes use of disparate materials and disciplines, from music to books, papier-mâché to painting. She has spoken about her 'bad technique, good sense', and her goal is often just to transmit a positive sense of the surrounding world. She imbues her work with a sense of comedy, so often undervalued in art.

Japan

A peek into Misaki's world:

Why did you become an artist?

'I can't stop creating. Making things is the same as eating and pooping, brushing my teeth.'

Which living person – not including family members – do you most admire?

'Jackie Chan is one of the goofiest artists.'

How do you get inspired?

'Inspiration is everywhere! Especially, I like handmade things and funny things I find when travelling: green-faced Mickey Mouse, blue-faced Hello Kitty, etc.'

When do you know a painting is finished?

'[I] follow my feeling.'

What question would you like to ask yourself?

'Did you brush your teeth well?'

If you were sent to prison, what would be your crime?

'I became friends with a panda and rode him to go get some groceries.'



How Yayoi Kusama Built a Massive Market for Her Work

Doug Woodham

When Yayoi Kusama moved to the United States in 1957, age 28, she was an ambitious young artist weary of the conservatism and discrimination she faced in her native Japan. She settled in New York, quickly becoming part of the avant-garde art scene, where she developed her several signature motifs. She loved brightly colored polka dots, sometimes covering an entire painting, wall, or room with them so that the polka dots obliterated the underlying support. She created mirrored rooms with suspended colored lights which made visitors feel they were part of an ethereal infinity. She also created large, monochromatic paintings called infinity net paintings filled from edge to edge with painted loops. The simple act of painting loop after loop created surprisingly complex paintings that seemed to have different points of tension as viewers scanned their surfaces.

These works, which she has consistently produced over more than five decades, were not always a commercial success. Today, she is one of the few women who consistently rank among the highest-selling living artists by sales volume and value. What accounts for her present popularity, and what does it tell us about the art market? Her partnership with consumerism is an important factor behind her career renaissance, but her work is also uniquely suited for our Instagram age. Her journey runs from downtown New York to Japanese mental hospital to the windows of Louis Vuitton boutiques and beyond.

The fame-hungry, anti-war New York workaholic

In 1959, Kusama showed five large infinity net paintings in her first New York exhibition. Each was composed of thousands of individual white loops painted on a black ground. Donald Judd, who at the time worked as an art critic for *ARTnews*, wrote in his review that 'Yayoi Kusama is an original painter. The five white, very large paintings in this show are strong, advanced in concept and realized.' He went on to say, 'The expression [in the paintings] transcends the question of whether it is Oriental or American. Although it is something of both, certainly of such Americans as [Mark] Rothko, [Cyfford] Still and [Barnett] Newman, it is not at all a synthesis and is thoroughly independent.' It was high

praise from a curmudgeon. (The two later lived in the same building and had a long, fruitful friendship.)

Kusama was a workaholic. Moreover, she was obsessed with being noticed and recognized; she hungered to be famous. She found her way to the center of the action, be it people, parties, or performances. Because she created provocative work for the time, it was easier for her to be noticed. She covered tables, chairs, and shoes with phallus objects she made of silver-painted stuffed canvas. She also organized naked anti-war happenings, including one on the Brooklyn Bridge, where participants stripped down and Kusama painted them with polka dots.

Surviving and working through mental illness in Japan

After fifteen years in the United States, Kusama moved back to Japan in 1973. She had a history of recurring psychiatric problems. When her issues became particularly acute in 1977, she elected to admit herself to the Seiva Hospital for the Mentally III in Tokyo. She continued as an active artist, going to a nearby studio to work and returning to the institution for meals and treatments. But the art world is a tough place: out of sight, out of mind. She fell off the radar, reduced to an interesting footnote in the history of the 1950s and 1960s New York art scene.

She gained notice again in the early 1990s, when she represented Japan at the 1993 Venice Biennale. Her work slowly appeared once more in gallery shows in New York, London, and Los Angeles. By the [mid-2000s], her career had accelerated, with important galleries in Europe and the United States representing her. Her rise coincided with a surge in Asian wealth and collectors there wanting to own her work. Important museum shows followed, including a major retrospective in 2011 and 2012 that traveled to the Whitney Museum in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid.

Personal narrative, high production, and something for everyone

Personal narratives are sometimes an important factor behind collectors buying an artist's work. This is especially true for Kusama. I remember one conversation with a young collector couple about the artist. I asked them, 'Why Kusama?'

Without hesitation, they said something along the lines of, 'She's badass. She does her own thing. She stayed true to herself and makes no apologies for it. She thumbed her nose at the world and waited for the world to come to her.' The visual and the emotional merged for this couple, who bought the highest-quality work they could afford at the time, a drawing from the early 1960s. Stories about Kusama's mental health issues and her fierce determination and longevity help some collectors understand her work and explain it to their friends. She still craves attention and dresses to remain unforgettable, wearing bright red wigs, outfits covered with polka dots, and goes about in a polka-dot encrusted wheelchair.

As her popularity increased, so did her production. She started using studio assistants and repeating older themes, especially infinity nets. She created work in different sizes, colors, and media, including new infinity rooms and large pumpkin sculptures. An infinity room at the Broad Museum in Los Angeles is now a major tourist attraction and a destination of choice for selfies. Her work is perfect for Facebook and Instagram.

While conceptual and highly emotional, her work is accessible through its graphic nature and exciting beauty. Collectors across the globe have been drawn to her aesthetic, from the broad appeal of her gallery and museum shows to her installation in a Ginza Tokyo department store [in 2017]. Her partnership with consumerism is an important factor behind her career renaissance. She embraced consumer culture to expand her market: her partnership with Louis Vuitton in 2012 dramatically increased awareness of her work and her personal narrative. But her availability penetrates deeper than the market for million-dollar paintings and multi-thousand-dollar handbags. Enthusiasts at a more modest price point can own their own piece of Kusama through licensed key chains, mouse pads, paperweights, and polka-dot pumpkin pillows.

The ready availability of her work at different price points helps stimulate demand – an odd case of higher supply generating higher demand. Buyers do not have to search high and low to find something to buy. If they're unable to get something from one of the galleries that represent her, they can buy something at auction, or at an upcoming art fair, or call around to the numerous galleries that offer her work on the secondary market. Familiarity has not bred contempt, but instead greater interest and demand for her work. Collectors are now willing to pay extraordinary sums for her important early paintings which laid the groundwork for her fully-realized vision today. In November 2014, a white infinity net painting from 1960 sold for a new world record of \$7.1 million [USD], ten years ago, it would have sold for a fraction of this amount. For most artists, scarcity rules. But for Kusama, like Andy Warhol, embracing consumerism helped propel awareness and sales of her work.

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