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PRESS RELEASE

Phillips To Offer Yayoi Kusama Soft-Sculptures From the Collection of Agnes and Frits Becht in the New York 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Among the Artist's Earliest Examples of the Medium to be Sold at Auction, After Remaining in the Same Collection for Nearly Six Decades



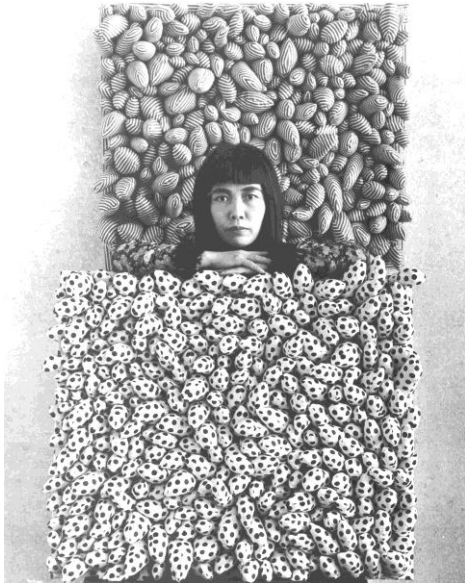
Yayoi Kusama
Blue Spots, 1965
Estimate: \$2,500,000 – 3,500,000



Yayoi Kusama
Red Stripes, 1965
Estimate: \$2,500,000 – 3,500,000

NEW YORK – 13 APRIL 2023 – Phillips is proud to announce two significant early works by Yayoi Kusama from the collection of Agnes and Frits Becht, which will be featured in the New York Evening Sale of 20th Century & Contemporary Art. To be offered for the first time at auction on 17 May, the internationally renowned pair of soft-sculpture works, *Blue Spots* and *Red Stripes*, are some of the earliest known examples of Kusama's famous tuberous forms, jutting from the frame, employing her iconic red and white color scheme alongside the polka dots that now define Kusama's career. The two works will be on view from 6-17 May at 432 Park Avenue.

Jean-Paul Engelen, President, Americas, and Worldwide Co-Head of 20th Century & Contemporary Art, said, "Agnes and Frits Becht are among the most influential European collectors of the twentieth century, having championed the emerging artists of the time, who would go on to become the most enduring artists in all of post-war and contemporary art. They held a particular affinity for the works of Yayoi Kusama, with these two artworks being among the six that the family purchased from the Internationale Galerij Orez in 1965. Since then, they have been exhibited extensively across the world – from Los Angeles to Berlin to Tokyo. Following the auction in May, they have been requested for the upcoming exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, opening this fall. As the record holders for a work by Kusama at auction, Phillips is proud to include these important works in our Evening Sale, as they are offered for the first time in nearly sixty years."



Yayoi Kusama with Red Stripes and Blue Spots, 1965; Credit Marianne Dommissie O-INSTITUTE, Artwork © YAYOI KUSAMA

Kusama moved to New York City in the late 1950s to establish herself as an international artist, but found greater success with European artists and audiences at first. From the mid-1960s until her return to Japan at the end of the decade, Kusama aimed to visit, create work, and exhibit with her European colleagues annually. Her aesthetics of repetition, accumulation, and obliteration aligned well with the European New Tendency, which included groups such as Zero in Germany, Nul in Amsterdam, and GRAV in Paris, among others.

While working in the Netherlands, Kusama created *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots* for the 1965 exhibition, *Facetten van de hedendaagse erotiek 1* (Facets of Contemporary Eroticism), with Internationale Galerij Orez, The Hague. When she arrived in The Hague, the gallery owners, Leo Verboon and Albert Vogel, supplied her with studio space and materials, including a sewing machine, and wooden boards like those that form the base of *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots*. The work Kusama created in this period filled the entire front room of the gallery; the exhibition is thus considered her first solo show in Europe. *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots* caught the eye of Agnes and Frits Becht, who purchased three of the artist's works from

the gallery that year, including *Chair*, 1965, which is now in the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Japan. A fourth accumulation work, gifted by the artist to the couple to express her gratitude for their patronage, and two collage works, purchased soon after, rounded out the Bechts' collection. In 1967, the Bechts bought an entire shipping container of Kusama's work, sight unseen, which was stuck in customs in the UK. Agnes remembers bringing the shipping container to the family home on a summer afternoon, and spreading all nearly forty works out on the grass in the back garden. It was an overwhelming, even transcendent experience. "It was so beautiful, I think I must have died from it," Agnes shared, recalling the moment. It was as if one of Kusama's infinity rooms landed in the Bechts' backyard; they were completely immersed in Kusama's world. Their support of Kusama was early and strong, and it had a great impact on the artist's ability to continue to exhibit work in Europe for the rest of the 1960s.

Red Stripes and *Blue Spots* have remained in the Bechts' family collection ever since 1965, an exceptional provenance for works by this artist. The works have always toured as a set, from their earliest exhibition in 1968, up to their most recent turn in a Yayoi Kusama retrospective in Berlin and Tel Aviv last year. The pair have been part of many major Kusama exhibitions, including the blockbuster retrospective tours, *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968*, 1998-1999, and *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, 2017-2019, which combined saw millions of visitors. Recognizable worldwide, *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots* are iconic early works by the international superstar. Kusama's presence in the art world continues to expand with the immersive, all-consuming, and infinite sensation of her works resonating with 21st century audiences.



Agnes and Frits Becht, 1960s

Kusama's signature soft-sculptural shape grew out of her development of the infinity net motif in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The undulation of the two-dimensional infinity nets expands into three dimensions in the tuberous shapes of *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots*, as the eye scans across the varying heights and widths of the forms. *Blue Spots* and *Red Stripes* are some of the earliest extant examples of the artist's soft-sculpture motif of tuberous forms that smother the surface. The works are concentrated onto squared boards hung on the wall like paintings while the soft, cloth-covered striped and spotted forms reach out towards the viewer. *Red Stripes* brings together perhaps her most iconic color combination of red and white, while *Blue Spots* provides an early example of the polka dots which would come to define Kusama's career. Although

made while she worked in Europe, there is a level of vulnerability in Kusama's work, as seen in *Red Stripes* and *Blue Spots*, that sets her apart from her European contemporaries. She has expressed repeatedly throughout her career that artmaking is a life-saving practice which allows her to process and express the trauma and mental illness she has experienced. The emotional vulnerability of this practice makes it all the more approachable, and relatable, even sixty years on.

Auction: 17 May 2023 5pm EDT

Auction viewing: 6 - 17 May

Location: 432 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022

Click here for more information: <https://www.phillips.com/auctions/auction/NY010323>

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