

GALERIE MITTERRAND

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE

NANAS 60s – 90s

23 OCT > 20 DEC 2014

The Galerie Mitterrand is pleased to announce a new exhibition of work by Niki de Saint Phalle this autumn. It coincides with the large retrospective devoted to the artist at the Grand Palais from 17 September 2014 to 2 February 2015.

Niki de Saint Phalle is a Franco-American artist who began her career as a painter in 1950. Her work quickly moved towards assemblages, reliefs and sculpture. In 1961, she became a member of the Nouveaux Réalistes [New Realists] group alongside other key figures or signatories such as Pierre Restany, Yves Klein, Arman, Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Mimmo Rotella, etc. The group advocated the direct appropriation of reality. Restany spoke of a 'poetic recycling of urban, industrial and advertising reality' (60/90. *Trente ans de Nouveau Réalisme*. La Différence, 1990, p. 76). Niki de Saint Phalle's work has evolved over the years and may now be divided into three distinct periods. *Tirs* [Shooting pictures] from the early 1960s consisted of performances during which the artist and spectators shot with a rifle at assemblages of found objects and paint-filled polythene bags covered in plaster. From 1965 onward, appeared the round, feminine and sexy sculptures the artist called *Nanas**. Then her art moved to exterior spaces with her large, bright and colourful sculptures. Some of these monumental pieces were created in collaboration with Jean Tinguely. Examples of the artist's exterior art include *Le Cyclop* [The Cyclops] in Milly-la-Forêt in 1969, *La Fontaine Stravinsky* [The Stravinsky Fountain] next to the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1983 and the masterpiece to which she devoted the last twenty years of her life: *Il Giardino dei Tarocchi* [The Tarot Garden] in southern Tuscany (Italy), inaugurated in 1998.

On the occasion of this exhibition, the Galerie Mitterrand will provide visitors with an insight into the evolution of the artist's famous *Nanas* from the 1960s through to the 1990s. Inspired by the rounded body shape of her then pregnant friend Clarice Rivers, Niki de Saint Phalle first began to make sculptures of voluptuously-shaped women in black, white and yellow from 1965 onward. These were adorned with very colourful decorative motifs (mainly flowers and hearts). Initially made of fabric and wire mounted onto metal skeletons or frames, the *Nanas* would eventually become more and more sophisticated. Their forms may be said to evoke Venus figurines from the Paleolithic period with their small faceless heads and impressively-proportioned bodies. Sometimes reduced to mere trunks as with *Nana boule (orange)* from 1966 to 1967, they gradually became more slender, with legs, thanks to the use of polyester resin which allowed for more creative possibilities. For example *Dawn*, produced in 1993, although a sculpture of a woman of generous proportions, depicts a body in motion, twirling on one foot and defying the laws of gravity. Niki de Saint Phalle's *Nanas*, whether monumental or miniature, rough or smooth, are now the artist's signature work, and are recognizable worldwide. They reflect the new vision of womanhood that appeared in the 1960s: strong images of femininity and of a triumphant maternity. In 1974, the *Nanas* became a feature of public space for the first time with the commissioning of three giant *Nanas* by the city of Hanover. Furthermore, *La Grande*

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tempérance and *L'Ange protecteur* [*Guardian Angel*] have been watching over the inhabitants of the city of Luxembourg and travellers at Zurich's main station respectively since the mid-90s.

Niki de Saint Phalle was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine (France) in 1930 and died in 2002 in San Diego, California. Raised in New York, where her family settled in the early 30s, she taught herself painting in the early 50s and returned to settle in Europe. Her first exhibition of paintings was held in St. Gallen (Switzerland) in 1956. From the 1960s onward, the artist embarked on a long and productive collaboration with sculptor Jean Tinguely, whom she would eventually marry. In 1965, her *Nanas* were exhibited in New York and Paris for the first time. A first retrospective was dedicated to Niki de Saint Phalle's work at the Centre Pompidou, Paris in 1980. This was followed by numerous exhibitions throughout the world: Bonn, Germany in 1992; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1993; the Mingei International Museum San Diego in 1998; at the MAMAC Nice in 2002; the Daimaru Museum Umeda, Japan in 2006, and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden in 2013, etc. Niki's works are included in some very prestigious museum collections: the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Tate Gallery London; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; National Museum of Art, Osaka; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, South Korea; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, etc. Between 2000 and 2002, the Sprengel Museum Hanover (Germany) and the MAMAC Nice (France) received significant donations from the artist. The greatest number of works by Niki de Saint Phalle can be found in these two institutions.

* 'Nana' in French is a colloquial word meaning 'girl' or 'woman'.

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