

GALERIE MITTERRAND

DEBORAH ROBERTS & NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES

26 MAY > 22 JUL 2023

PRESS RELEASE

Galerie Mitterrand is pleased to present *Deborah Roberts and Niki de Saint Phalle: The Conversation Continues*, from May 26 to July 22, 2023. The exhibition will be the first in France for American artist Deborah Roberts, whose latest series of painting-collages entitled *Période Nègre: The Conversation Continues* has been placed in a dialogue with sculptures and works on paper by Niki de Saint Phalle. The exhibition is organized in collaboration with Gardy Saint-Fleur.

Born in 1962 in the United States (Austin, Texas), Deborah Roberts is an African American artist who places racial identity and inequality at the heart of her work. In her collages, brimming with symbols and double meanings, the artist questions the lack of representation of Black people in art history. Roberts' politically engaged practice also enables her to deconstruct the codes of beauty and finally include Black women, who have long been excluded. She is also directly involved in current socio-political movements such as Black Lives Matter.

French-born Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002), is best known for her sculptures of imposing, corpulent female figures that she warmly referred to as *Nanas* (chicks). While her work is often said to have a childish aesthetic, it is not devoid of socio-political activism. The matriarch of 'high heels and lipstick-wearing feminism' through her work, Niki de Saint Phalle denounced gender-based society and the omnipresence of the patriarchy. The artist is thus associated with the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s, the echo of which still rings clear through society today.

At first glance, we see Deborah Roberts and Niki de Saint Phalle taking similar innocent approaches to subjects of the greatest sensitivity. In their respective works, the viewer is drawn in by a naïve pop aesthetic that dissimulates a criticism with regard to representation. In this way, Galerie Mitterrand offers a unique dialogue between these two women artists, political activists, and charismatic figures who have fought to bring social and political justice to the most important causes of the past fifty years.

Deborah Roberts' latest series, *Période Nègre: The Conversation Continues*, is a reference to Picasso's African Period during which, inspired by African art, the artist revolutionized his way of painting, thus inventing cubism. As explained by Roberts, the aim of this exhibition is to "continue this conversation fifty years after his death by exploring the patterns, textures and history of the African people who inspired Picasso."

Increasing the breadth of this conversation, the works of Niki de Saint Phalle – notably her famous 'Nanas' including *La Patineuse* (1967), *Nana fontaine type* (1967), and her silkscreen print *Black is Different* (1994) – bear witness to the artist's unwavering desire to create inclusive works that raise questions concerning the representation of identity throughout art history.