

decorations⁷⁵³. They were very plentiful as grave goods; the characteristic ‘m’ shape [type III] decoration has largely been interpreted as a stylised bull’s head. Some researchers prefer to see this decoration as merely representations of standards or parts of scapulars. Others link the decoration to the double-horned Cretan altars. There are even some who see the Iberian symbol of the “divine eyes” in the circles. The discs’ chronology varies between the fourth and the third centuries BC.

PMA

Excursus II: (items 174-181)

174 Harry Mathews

The Conversions

New York: Random House, 1962

Montaner-Quiroga Collection (Palma)

Writer Harry Mathews (1930, New York) studied music at Princeton and Harvard Universities. In the 1950s, when he lived in Europe with his wife Niki de Saint Phalle, he prioritized his literary rather than his musical interests and he became a professional writer. Prior to his rupture with Niki in 1960, Harry had already finished his first novel: *The Conversions* (pub. 1962).

The Mathews lived in Deià between 1954 and 1956. There they struck up a close relationship with Robert and Beryl Graves, a friendship that was maintained after the Mathews left the island. *The White Goddess* (1948), Graves’s most famous book, left its mark on Niki’s artwork as well as on Harry’s writing (fig. 67). *The Conversions* can be situated within this sphere of influence. In this book, the subject matter revolves around the task of deciphering a code engraved in certain notches on a prehistoric axe. The incisions on the ritual hatchet and the religion to which it belongs are directly indebted to *The White Goddess*. In a photo of the Mathews in Deià, next to the dog Anubis (the name of the Egyptian god who accompanied the dead on their final voyage) and surrounded by esoteric symbols, the following text can be read: *The Mirage · Anubis · The Dog God · of Our World*, illustrative of the couple’s interests. (fig. 68)

Harry Mathews was the first American admitted into the French literary society Oulipo, whose objective was to experiment with new literary techniques; among them, writing with limits and algorithms. This was a research area in which Mathews was able to combine his musical training with literature. At present he lives in the United States.

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175 Lucia Pesapane

Le Petit Dictionnaire: Niki de Saint Phalle en 49 symboles

Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2014

Concepció Boncompte Collection (Els Llobards)

The relationship between artists and symbols is a diverse one; among those artists who favour their use, few are interested in revealing them. A symbol encompasses a scope that is poetical, lyrical and of infinite metaphor – describing it in prose impoverishes it. But nowadays many very visible symbols are unseen and undetected in a society that has already lost its references. In consequence, symbol dictionaries are necessary instruments for understanding works like those of Niki de Saint Phalle. The artist, with either pain or joy, expressed herself in a slightly naïf language, creating sculptures with an anodyne appearance that she used to submerge us in profound dialogues – if we are capable of understanding the symbols she uses.

Fortunately, Pesapane provides a dictionary with 49 entries that helps us to understand the elements and everyday objects that are repeated in Niki’s work. Some are the artist’s personal symbols but others are universal symbols whose more profound dimensions have been forgotten. This book makes it clear that a knowledge of symbols is as necessary for understanding the significance of water in a Botticelli as it is for comprehending a joyful child’s fountain by Niki, for example. Water is much more than just H₂O.

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⁷⁵³ Basically Enseñat, *Plaquetas, passim*. For a recent overview of the question vid. Balaguer, *Aproximación cronotipológica*, p. 235-245; Waldre/Grimalt, *A Case History, passim*.

176 Niki de Saint Phalle***Harry and Me: The Family Years, 1950-1960***

Zürich: NCAF & Bentley Publishers, 2006

Concepció Boncompte Collection (els Llombards)

Niki de Saint Phalle wrote and illustrated this book in her unmistakable style – simple, colourful and seemingly naïf – devoted to her years of marriage with writer Harry Mathews and the birth and childhood of their two children. The text is structured chronologically from 1950 to 1960: years during which the couple moulded their education between Cambridge (USA), Paris, Majorca, Italy, etc. Small details are transmitted with the same intensity as other events: the crisis that caused Niki to be hospitalised, the daily visits to the Louvre, the discovery of Gaudi's Parc Güell in Barcelona or the stimulating company of the intellectual circle that surrounded them.

The reader senses the love that the artist has placed in all the details: the illuminated capital letters, the drawings, the photos, the distribution of the text around the photos, etc. A very poetic and feminine way of doing things. Very "Niki". The book includes Harry Mathews point of view included as side comments. The chapter entitled "Renewal in Paradise" is devoted to the artist's Majorcan years (1954-1956). The paradise is Deià in the 1950s, where the Mathews lived with other artists in a community headed by Robert Graves. The close relationship with the Graves is seen in the influence that the author's book *The White Goddess* had on Niki's future work (her goddesses, her Nanas, etc.). It was not without reason that Niki always remembered how Robert Graves would greet her: "Are you the White Goddess?"

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177 Niki de Saint Phalle***Mon secret***

Paris: La Différence, 2014

Concepció Boncompte Collection (els Llombards)

Niki decided to write about (1992) and share (1994) the secret that had tortured her since age eleven: the rape she had suffered at the hands of her father. The artist explained this horror in a deliberate manner in a letter addressed to her daughter. It is an artist's book that retains Niki's childhood handwriting. Throughout the narrative, the painter's freedom creates surprises in the way she converts letters of the alphabet into amusing works of art.

The introduction situates the reader in the New England countryside, in the bosom of an aristocratic family during the 1942 summer vacations. The bucolic tone of the first paragraphs contrasts with the seriousness of the events subsequently explained. Rape, as Niki asserts, happens at all social levels; the hypothetical defence of the girl or boy by the law is impractical because at eleven years old children have many fears, among them, losing their family's love.

After the rape, Niki felt contemptible and developed different ways of rebelling. For 50 years, she felt her way around a target that she couldn't move closer to: telling the truth and directly confronting her father. In the series entitled *Les tirs* (1960s) Niki metaphorically shoots the father, and in the film *Daddy* (1972) she explores family horrors and kills the father. But it wasn't until the writing of *Mon secret* – half a century after the rape – that she was able to explain the truth and lighten the weight that would have converted her into a terrorist if she hadn't found a forum for dialogue in the fine arts and reinvented herself.

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178 Camille Morineau, dir.***Niki de Saint Phalle: 1930-2002***

Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2014

Concepció Boncompte Collection (els Llombards)

This catalogue, published as a result of the exhibition dedicated to Niki de Saint Phalle at the Grand Palais in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, is, for now, the most complete record of the French-American artist's work. In different articles it explores the complexity of this self-taught artist and the stages of her career. This study begins with her first paintings, some of them done in Deià (where they were linked to Robert Graves's circle), and arrives at her last piece, *Queen's Califa's Magical Circle* sculptural ensemble in Escondido (California).

The catalogue expands on Niki's different themes – the shootings, the births, the goddesses, the brides, the *Nanas*, devouring mothers, the horrifying father relationship, esotericism – and demonstrates the

unity between her life and work. An intense life dominated by her feminism and thoughts such as a return to a matriarchal society or the comparison between women in the world of men to that of black people in a white civilization.

Niki's great malleability is manifest in her capacity to adapt to different materials and techniques in function of her expressive needs (painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving, jewellery, etc.). The only woman in the French Nouveau Réalisme group, a feminine feminist, Niki fought to be recognized as a full-fledged artist in a world of men.

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179 Niki de Saint Phalle

Rêve, 1971

Lithograph, 65 x 50 cm

Niki Charitable Art Foundation (Santee, CA)

Among the multiple facets of her *Nanas* – symbols of woman and the feminine world – in *Nana Rêve* Niki highlights the capacity for dreaming. The *Nana* seems to float up with the dream emerging from her head, like diviners' rods, lifting her to another world. The dream world allows the *Nana* to fly.

With this subject matter, Niki exalts some of the feminine characteristics – intuition, dreaming – which she places in contrast to the masculine world dominated by reason, technology, science and the progress that is finishing off our planet. The *Nana*, drawn in sinuous black and blue lines, appears dwarfed in front of the dream's grandeur, the latter painted in all kinds of colours. On the woman's body, two images stand out on her breasts: a heart and a flower (love and Mother Nature?). The dream consists of bright flowers whose eye-shaped pistils (the female part of the flower) open new doors to other dimensions.

In 1969 Niki declared: "I used to think that to provoke, you had to attack religion or the generals. Now I have realized that there is nothing more shocking than joy." *Nana Rêve* also picks up on this idea of joy as a challenge.

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180 Niki de Saint Phalle

Nana pomme de terre, 1975

Lithograph, 51 x 67 cm

Niki Charitable Art Foundation (Santee, CA)

Ten years after her presentation at the Alexandre Iolas Gallery in Paris, the *Nanas* sculptures had acquired an extraordinary popularity and had also provoked controversy. As Niki had wanted, *Nana Power* had placed her symbol in multiple settings: *Nana Hon* (1966), the giant *Nana* whose interior was entered by the public via the vagina and which was temporarily exhibited at Stockholm's Moderna Museet; the Ball *Nanas* (1968) for children; the *Nana* Christmas card for the MoMA (1968); and the giant *Nanas* spread throughout the world's public parks, to cite a few examples.

At the source of these *Nanas* – a drawing of a pregnant Clarice Rivers (1964) – we find an essential feature: woman's fertility. Niki exaggerates this characteristic in *Nana pomme de terre*, emphasizing the hip, bosom and sex like the Palaeolithic steatopygian Venuses. Niki illuminates her goddess with a psychedelic joy and so gives *Nana pomme de terre* a parallel reading alongside the prehistoric fertility votive sculptures. But *Nana pomme de terre* is not an image used to attract fertility by sympathetic magic. She is individual woman, proud and happy with her fertility. Niki glorifies fertility as woman's own possession, to be used only by her and as she wishes.

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181 Niki de Saint Phalle

La Femme (Portrait of Mimi) or Clarissa, 1995

Lithograph, 65 x 50.5 cm

Niki Charitable Art Foundation (Santee, CA)

When Niki made this lithograph in 1995, 30 years had passed since she had launched her *Nanas* and, approximately, 5 years more since her series on white goddesses (related to Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*) and birth goddesses. With perspective, and having come to terms with the intrinsic characteristics of each of the creations that preceded *La Femme (Portrait of Mimi) or Clarissa*, Niki mixes the discoveries made in other periods and adds new values with complete freedom.

During the 1960s, the *Nana* sculptures received titles associated with Niki's friends because their generic decoration made them hard to identify. In contrast, in this portrait of Mimi, the artist tattoos her friend's body with images from her personal history: her monsters, her fruit, a caravan, a telephone number, a revolver, etc. Details that have shaped Mimi's soul and that define her more aptly than a physical portrait of the "real" model. In this picture, not only does the artist reinterpret herself; she also recycles what is useful to her from the work of painters from different eras. Arcimboldo (1527-1593) is the most important reference, for having been the first to use fruit and vegetables to shape figures. But in his case, it was for anonymous portraits or personifications of the seasons. Mimi's face is indebted to Picasso (1891-1973); her sex, to Neolithic spirals; the arm, to Alechinsky (1927)'s blue filigrees, etc. All this – and more – appears contained in a body based on a classic Venus, the prototype of woman and femininity.

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Excursus IV: (item 182)

182 Three antique Majorcan Jewels

Palma, 1700-1750

a: *Lion pendant*. Engraved gold with multicoloured enamel; coloured stone and pearls. 700 x 350 mm. Private collection: Joyería Forteza (Palma).

b: *Dolphin pendant*. Engraved gold with multicoloured enamel; coloured stone and pearls. 500 x 200 mm.

Private collection: Joyería Forteza (Palma).

c *Mermaid pendant*. Enamelled gold with multicolored porcelain; pearls. 730 x 320 mm.

Artgold S. L. Private Collection, Palma, inv. no. 0293

(Not exhibited)

In 1958, Robert Graves recounted that:

"Recently I bought from a Palma jeweler named Pomar [...] a small crowned lion in silver, hanging from a buckle set with a red stone. The lion had bells attached to its feet, and a fifth bell above its head. Señor Pomar had no idea what it represented, but guaranteed it to be ancient Majorcan work. I was antiquary enough to recognize the crowned lion as the Lion of Judah, and the red stone as the emblem of Judah; I guessed that the five bells represented the five Books of Moses. It proved, in fact, to be the ornament from an early 16th-century Torah."

Putting aside for a moment the Gravesian interpretation of the aforementioned object, it is interesting to note that this type of jewel is called a "pendant" (*pinjante*), a name which demonstrates its particular condition of hanging freely in the air. The name implies a jewel designed to hang; its suspension depends on the presence of two to four small gold chains with stabilize a central roundish figure, made of gold, and generally decorated with enamel and stones. These figures usually depict domestic animals (dogs, cats, lambs); exotics (giraffes, lions, parrots, camels); marine animals (dolphins); reptiles, etc.; and especially mythical creatures (mermaids, centaurs, dragons), which made the wearer feel protected by the symbolic force attributed to each animal.

In Spain, the majority of drawings used to create these jewels were collected in the *Passanties* books, i.e. collections of drawings submitted for the exam to become a member of the silver or goldsmith guilds in cities such as Barcelona and Valencia, from the Renaissance to the Baroque era. In the 1970s, specialists such as Yvonne Hackenbroch and Priscilla E. Muller began to study these jewels and their design, paving the way for contemporary Spanish historians who specialize in jewellery. With regards to Majorca, the crafting of this type of enameled jewels went beyond simple production adapted to the demands of a specific fashion or decorative design. The manufacture of these pendants and most notably their use continued on the island until the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, Majorca was a stronghold during almost two centuries for this exquisite type of jewel, also known as a "small jewel with chains" (*joyel con cadenas* or *brinco*).

EGG