



Niki de Saint Phalle Chronology (1930-2002)

1930

Born Catherine Marie-Agnès de Saint Phalle on October 29 at Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, the second of five children of Jeanne Jacqueline née Harper and André Marie-Fal de Saint Phalle. Her father is one of seven brothers sharing ownership in the family's banking house and directs New York operations. When the stock market collapses, he loses both his share of the business and his entire fortune. Sent to live with paternal grandparents in Nievre, France, where she spends the next three years.

1933

Returns to parents' home, now in Greenwich, Connecticut. Spends summer holidays in France with maternal grandfather, a prominent American lawyer in Paris, at his Château de Filerval (with formal gardens designed by Le Nôtre).

1937–47

Family moves back to New York City. Marie-Agnes, now known as Niki, attends the Convent School of the Sacred Heart. Upon expulsion, sent to Princeton, New Jersey to live with maternal grandparents who left France shortly before World War II. Returns to New York City and attends Brearley School in New York City where she befriends Jackie Matisse, daughter of prominent gallerist Pierre Matisse. Matisse will later create glass containers for sacred waters at Niki's *Tarot Garden*. Reads Edgar Allan Poe, Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, takes part in school performances and writes first poems and plays. In 1944, leaves Brearley after applying red paint over the fig leaves placed on the Greek sculptures adorning the grounds. Attends another convent school in Suffren, New York and eventually graduates in 1947 from Oldfields School in Maryland.

1948–51

Starts a career as a fashion model. Photographs appear in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, *Life* and other French and American magazines. At 18, elopes with Harry Mathews whom she has known since early adolescence. Moves to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1950. Produces her first oils and gouaches while husband studies music at Harvard University. First child Laura is born in Boston in 1951.

1952–53

Moves to Paris and studies theater and acting while husband takes music classes at L'Ecole Normal de Musique. Spends summer months in the South of France, Spain and Italy visiting museums and cathedrals. Hospitalized in Nice with a nervous breakdown and finding that

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painting helps her to overcome this crisis in her life, decides to give up acting and become an artist. Around the same time, husband abandons his music studies and begins his first novel (later he will found the literary magazine *Locus Solus*).

1954–55

Couple returns to Paris where they share a house with Anthony Bonner, an American jazz musician and composer. Introduced to American painter, Hugh Weiss, who becomes a mentor and encourages her to continue painting in her self-taught style. Moves to Deyá on the island of Mallorca where son Philip born in 1955. Visits Madrid and Barcelona, where she discovers the work of Gaudí and is deeply affected by the experience, opening her to the many possibilities for using diverse materials and found objects as structural elements in sculpture and architecture. Returns to Paris and meets Jean Tinguely and his wife, Eva Aeppli. Asks Tinguely to weld armature for her first sculpture. Visits Louvre and discovers the work of Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Henri Rousseau. Inspired by the postman Joseph Ferdinand Cheval's fantastic castle *Le Palais Idéal* in Hauterives, France.

1956–58

Lives in Lans-en-Vercors in the French Alps with family. First solo exhibition of paintings in St. Gallen, Switzerland in 1956. Paints and explores various collage elements. Meets many contemporary writers and poets including John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch through Harry Mathews.

1959–60

Visits the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and is introduced to works by the American artists Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg. Separates from husband; he moves to new apartment with children. Sets up studio and continues her artistic experiments, producing assemblages in plaster and the “target” paintings. Included in group exhibition *Comparison: Peinture-Sculpture* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Moves with Jean Tinguely into the Impasse Ronsin where they share the same studio and live surrounded by other artists, such as Brancusi. Through Tinguely, meets Pontus Hulten, then director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. He includes her in several important exhibitions at the time and acquires work for the museum's collection.

1961

Expands on the “target” paintings with a series of “shooting” paintings or *tirs*—assemblages of disparate objects held together with nails and chicken wire on boards covered with plaster that conceals containers of paint. When hit by a bullet from a pistol, rifle or cannon fired by the artist or others, they produce spontaneous effects and the dispersion of colors. As they evolve, the *tirs* become larger, more elaborate in concept and include elements of spectacle and performance.

Pierre Restany, founder of the *Nouveau Réalisme*, attends first public *tir*, and invites her to become a member. Becomes involved in the ideas, festivals and activities of this group whose members include Arman, César, Christo, Gérard Deschamps, François Dufrene, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Mimmo Rotella, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely and Jacques de la Villeglé.

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First solo exhibition in Paris at Galerie J with assemblages, *tirs* and a public shooting area. Exhibits in group shows in Europe and the United States. Becomes friends with American artists staying in Paris including Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Larry Rivers and his wife Clarice, and will participate in various projects with them over the years.

With Tinguely, introduced to Salvador Dali by Marcel Duchamp. Travels to Spain with him for celebration honoring Dali, and they make a life-size exploding bull with plaster, paper and fireworks for the arena at Figueras. Included in *The Art of Assemblage* curated by William Seitz at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

1962–64

In February 1962, travels with Tinguely to California and visits Simon Rodia's Watts Tower in south Los Angeles. In March, Tinguely exhibits at the Everett Ellin Gallery in Los Angeles. With Niki's help, organizes a "happening" (*Study for an End of the World, Number 2*) in the desert near Las Vegas. Stages her first two "shootings" in the United States: the first held at gallerist Virginia Dwan's beach house at Malibu; the other in the Malibu Hills assisted by Ed Kienholz. In May, travels to Mexico with Tinguely. Major "shooting" painting *King Kong* created in LA and sponsored by Dawn Gallery; later acquired by Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

With Tinguely, finds an old country inn outside of Paris in Soisy sur Ecole to live and work. Begins creating figurative reliefs—confrontational depictions of women, some giving birth or vivisectioned. Works on other figurative assemblages including freestanding dragons, monsters and brides presented in first solo show at Hanover Gallery, London.

Travels to New York with Jean Tinguely and stays at the Chelsea Hotel, taking part in New York art activities. Niki, Tinguely and several other artists including Frank Stella and Robert Rauschenberg take part in New York premiere of Kenneth Koch's play, *The Construction of Boston* directed by Merce Cunningham. The play features a "shooting" of Niki's sculpture *Venus de Milo* by the artist herself.

Exhibits ten "shooting" paintings and altars at Galerie Rive Droite, Paris. Among the visitors is Alexander Iolas who invites her to exhibit at his New York gallery in October. This first one-woman show in New York marks the beginning of a long friendship with gallerist who provides her with financial support and introduces her to Surrealists such as Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, Matta and René Magritte.

1965–66

Inspired by the pregnancy of Larry Rivers' wife Clarice, she begins considering archetypal female figures in relation to the position of women in society. Her updated versions of "everywoman" are named *Nanas* (French for "dame"). The first of these freely posed forms, made of papier-mâché, yarn and cloth are exhibited at the Alexander Iolas Gallery, Paris, in September 1965. For this show, Iolas publishes her first artist book that includes handwritten words in combination with drawings of *Nanas*. Encouraged by Iolas, she starts a highly productive output of graphic work that accompanies her exhibitions in the form of invitations, posters, books and other writings.

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In 1966, collaborates with Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt on a large-scale sculptural installation, *Hon* (Swedish for “she”) for the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. The outer form of *Hon* is a giant, reclining Nana whose internal environment is entered from between her legs. The immense public reaction to the work is written about in magazines and newspapers throughout the world. The interactive quality of the sculpture, combined with a continued fascination with fantastic types of architecture, intensifies her resolve to see her own architectural ambitions realized. Meets Swiss artist Rico Weber during construction. Over the next ten years, he will be an important assistant/collaborator for both she and Tinguely.

Designs decor and costumes for two theatrical productions—a ballet by Roland Petit at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris and an adaptation of Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* at the Staatstheater in Kassel, Germany.

1967–68

Works with Tinguely on *Le Paradis Fantastique*, a commission from the French government for the French Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. Through the efforts of Pontus Hulten, the piece is saved from destruction and acquired by the Moderna Museet where it is installed. Working on *Paradis Fantastique*, she is exposed to toxic fumes produced by polyester. This and other materials used in her work cause severe damage to her lungs resulting in recurrent health problems.

First retrospective *Les Nanas au Pouvoir (Nana Power)* is held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Creates a number of new pieces for the show that emphasize a direction toward architectural and functional design (*Nana Dream House* and *Nana Fountain*) and the placement of elements to form a sculptural tableau (*The Bride's Dream*).

Writes story that she adapts with Rainer Von Diez into a play, *ICH (All About Me)*. Designs sets and costumes for performance at the Staatstheater in Kassel.

In October, exhibits her eighteen-part wall relief, *Last Night I Had a Dream*, at the Galerie Alexandre Iolas, Paris. Designs Nana inflatables, a multiple in plastic that are produced and distributed in the United States. Publishes series of semi-autobiographical serigraphs that are executed in a pictographic style combining images, letters and writing into a complete narrative. Exhibits extensively in the United States.

1969–70

First permanent architectural project is private commission for Rainer Von Dietz's summer residence in the South of France. The project consists of three buildings, each uniquely shaped, detailed and painted, completed in 1971. Continues involvement in “fantastic” architectural projects requiring her total commitment in all stages of planning and execution.

Sculpture *Black Venus* acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and exhibited in museum's show, *Contemporary American Sculpture, Selection II*, April 1969. Travels to India and Egypt—these cultural experiences broaden the context of visual associations used in her work.

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Tinguely begins work on his monumental construction, *La Tête or Le Cyclop* at Milly-la Forêt, France. Declared a monument of France, this work in progress for over twenty years is a collaboration of many artists including Niki, Daniel Spoerri, Arman, César, Rico Weber, and Larry Rivers. Participates in the festival held in Milan to mark the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Nouveaux Réalistes.

1971–73

Marries Jean Tinguely on July 13, 1971. They travel together to Morocco. Granddaughter Bloum born to Laura and Laurent Condominas in 1971. Receives a public commission to create *Golem*, an architectural project for children in Jerusalem's Rabinovitch Park, which is completed the following year.

In 1972, in the Belgian town of Knokke-le-Zoute, builds *Le Dragon*, a playhouse for the children of Fabienne and Roger Nellens. Begins productive association with art fabricator, Haligon for her large-scale sculptures and work in editions. Makes first jewelry design for GEM Montebello Laboratory, Milan. Exhibits new sculptural tableaux *Devouring Mothers* and the following year *Les Funerailles du Pere*. These works are based on ideas of a child's perspective of estrangement from the world of adults.

Acts in film *Daddy* that she wrote, produced and directed with Peter Whitehead. The film is a surreal, psychological exploration of a relationship between a father and a tri-part character of the daughter as child, adolescent and adult. Official premiere in September 1973 as part of the Film Society of Lincoln Center's 11th New York Film Festival. Designs the festival's program cover with reference to three noted women directors.

1974

Builds three large-scale *Nanas* for permanent site near town hall in Hannover, Germany. The city names them Sophie, Charlotte and Caroline in honor of three historically distinguished women from Hannover. Exhibits maquettes of realized and unrealized architectural projects, creates artist book and invitation to accompany the show.

Hospitalized with a serious lung ailment. Lives in the Swiss mountains to regain her health. There she meets a friend she had known in New York in the 1950s, Marella Caracciolo Agnelli, to whom she confides her dream to build a sculpture garden based on interpretations of symbols from the Tarot. Her friend's brothers, Carlo and Nicola Caracciolo, offer a parcel of their land in Garavicchio in Tuscany, Italy, as a site. The massive undertaking of the garden will consume her thoughts and energies for nearly twenty-four years.

1975–76

Writes, directs, produces and acts in the film *Un rêve plus long que la nuit*. The production includes the talents and participation of her daughter Laura Condominas, Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Eva Aeppli, Marina Karella and others. In 1975, her sculptural tableau *Last Night I Had a Dream* is installed on the exterior of the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, for an arts festival.

Returns to Switzerland for a period of time. Develops ideas for the imagery that will carry the special mystic meanings, energies and associations of the Tarot to the site of her planned

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sculpture garden. Beginning of a close and long friendship with assistant/collaborator Ricardo Menon, who will be with her for many years.

1978–79

Land is cleared and foundations dug at site in Tuscany. Makes first models related to the Tarot figures that will be represented in the Garden. Becomes interested in the idea of linear sculpture-drawings in space and makes the *Skinmys*. This series of totem-like pieces often have colored lights and elements suspended by string. Begins to design furniture and other functional objects with serpents and figurative forms.

Lives for a while in Malibu, California and conceives of a series of maquettes based on new ideas for architectural fantasies. These works are first exhibited at Gimpel & Weitzenhoffer, New York. Has first solo show in Japan at Gallery Watari, Tokyo for her architectural projects. The exhibition *Monumental Projects* tours the United States.

1980

Construction begins on the *Tarot Garden*'s first architectural sculpture, *The High Priestess*, representing female creativity and strength. Spends the major part of the next ten years on-site receiving assistance from many friends and supporters.

Moves into *The Empress*, a building designed in the shape of a sphinx that serves as her studio and home. Jean Tinguely, together with Rico Weber and Seppi Imhof, begin welding the iron understructures for the first group of enlarged tarot figures; this work involves special engineering skills for each piece and is taken over and completed by Dutch artist Doc Wilsen. Local residents are hired, whose efforts over the years will be important to the project's success. Meets Venera Finocchiaro, a ceramics teacher from Rome who oversees ceramic mosaics for the Garden.

The Ulm Museum organizes the first retrospective devoted to her graphic work. Permanently installs the sculpture *The Poet and her Muse* at University of Ulm. Honored with a major retrospective at Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. It then travels to Austria, Germany and Sweden. First show is organized at experimental space, SPACE NIKI in Tokyo established by Yoko Masuda.

1982–83

Creates fragrance that bears her name for the Jacqueline Cochran Company, New York. Designs distinctive blue and gold bottles and packaging with logo of entwined serpents. Makes a promotional tour across the United States for the perfume. The money from the perfume goes to finance the Garden.

Collaborates with Tinguely on commission to create a fountain for the City of Paris on a site beside the Centre Georges Pompidou. They combine their fifteen sculptural elements in a fluid, moving setting—an apt homage to Igor Stravinsky for whom the fountain is named. Assisted by Pierre Marie Lejeune who will also design seating at the *Tarot Garden* and *Queen Califia's Magical Circle* in Escondido, California (2003), as well as oversee installation of Hannover's *The Grotto* (2003). Creates permanent sculpture *Sun God* for the University of California at San Diego as part of the Stuart Collection.

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Designs print for a project to support the Temporary Contemporary, Los Angeles. The work, in the form of a pictographic letter, expresses her early awareness and concern for those afflicted by AIDS. Continues to be involved in efforts to reverse the effects of ignorance and bias, which allow this fatal virus to spread. Suffers first of recurring, debilitating attacks of rheumatoid arthritis.

1984–87

During these years, spends most of her time on site of the *Tarot Garden*, where many of the major works are nearing completion. Works based on Tarot figures, accompanied by an artist book, are exhibited at Gimpel Fils, London and at Gimpel & Weitzenhoffer, New York. The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, acquires one of her perfume bottles capped with entwined serpents. Produces a series of flower vases in the shape of various animals. Meets Marcelo Ziteli who becomes an important assistant/collaborator.

In collaboration with Dr. Silvio Barandun, writes and illustrates the book *AIDS: You Can't Catch It Holding Hands*. This informative text, presented in a positive and compassionate format, is published in seven languages. Receives commission from to create a fountain, *Snake Tree*, for the Schneider Children's Hospital, Long Island, New York. Has major retrospectives at the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich, and Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts in Roslyn, Long Island.

1989–90

With Tinguely, creates *Fountain Château Chinon* commissioned by French President Mitterand. Alexandre Iolas, her longtime friend, dies. Begins to be represented in Paris by JGM Gallery and Gallery de France. These galleries organize a number of exhibits that focus on different periods in her career.

Begins use of bronze in new series of sculpture derived from ancient Egyptian deities. Continues to develop images that have long interested and impressed her, including Nana fountains, Tarot figures, phallic-like obelisks, skulls, *Skinny* lamps and a series of pictorial reliefs made in response to the killing of endangered species. The experience of the *Tarot Garden* carries over in her use of materials, particularly brilliantly colored or mirrored mosaics. The Palais Bénédicte in Fécamp, France, presents an exhibition dedicated to the *Tarot Garden*. Publishes a catalogue with texts by Pontus Hulten, Pierre Restany and Jean Tinguely.

Ricardo Menon her assistant/collaborator with whom she shared a unique rapport, dies. Collaborates with son Philip Mathews on an animated film based on her AIDS book. This film, drawings for the film, and a revised edition of the AIDS book, are published by the French agency in the Fight Against AIDS and exhibited at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, opening on international AIDS Awareness Day in November 1991. Designs a giant kite, *Bird Lovers*, for a worldwide exhibition of artists' kites organized by Goethe Institute, Japan.

1991

Makes maquette for *Le Temple Idéal*, a place for worship for all religions. This architecture was originally conceived in the early 1970s as a hopeful alternative to the religious intolerance she observed while working in Jerusalem. Receives commission from the city of Nimes, France to build this architectural sculpture. Because of politics, project is never realized.

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Jean Tinguely dies in Bern, Switzerland in August 1991. In his honor, she makes her first kinetic sculptures, the *Meta-Tinguelys*.

1992–93

The Kunst und Ausstellungshalle, Bonn, organizes large retrospective. Exhibits in McLellan Galleries in Glasgow, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Fribourg. Installs fountain *The Rescuer (Lebensretter)* in Duisburg, Germany and creates *The Soccer Players (Les Footballeurs)* for the Musée Olympique in Lausanne, Switzerland

1994-96

Moves to La Jolla, California where she lives for next eight years. Contracts with Lech Juretko to organize a studio for the cutting of mirrors, glass and stones, which she is increasingly using in her sculptures instead of paint. Creates a series of silkscreens, *California Diary*, published by Ebi Kornfeld, as well as 26 lithographs created with two former collaborators of Sam Francis—George Page and Samuel Jacob. In October, the Niki Museum opens in Nasu, Japan directed by collector Yoko Masuda.

Peter Schamoni completes a documentary film about Niki, *Who is the Monster? You or Me?* The French cultural organization AFAA organizes traveling exhibition to museums in Central and South America. Embarks on collaboration with Swiss architect Mario Botta for a major sculpture/architecture project, *Noah's Ark*, commissioned by the Jerusalem Foundation for The Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem, Israel. Awarded the Prix Caran d'Ache.

Begins construction of *Gila*, a children's playhouse in the form of a large dragon covered with mosaics, ceramics and glass, at a private residence in San Diego. The Jean Tinguely Museum designed by Mario Botta opens in Basel and includes a major donation by his widow.

1997–98

Works on first volume of her autobiography *Traces*. Architect Mario Botta builds a gateway and adjacent wall for the *Tarot Garden*, which officially opens to the public on May 15, 1998. The Swiss Railways (CFF) commissions a monumental sculpture, *Protective Angel*, for the main station in Zurich. Finishes the last of twenty-two animal sculptures for *Noah's Ark* as well as the *Black Heroes* series, an homage to prominent African-Americans including Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong and Josephine Baker. Largest American retrospective to date curated by close friend Martha Longenecker, director of The Mingei International Museum in San Diego.

1999–2001

Begins search for land on which to build a sculpture garden in San Diego County. In October 2000, the City of Escondido accepts offer to create a garden in the Sankey Arboretum in Kit Carson Park. Starts design work and plans for *Queen Calafia's Magical Circle*. She draws much of its imagery from her interpretations of early California history, myth, legend, Native American and Meso-American culture and the study of indigenous plant and wildlife.

Awarded the 12th Praemium Imperiale Prize (Sculpture Category) sponsored by the Japan Art Association and considered to be the equivalent to the Nobel Prize in the art world. Among the

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other prize winners in 2000 are American composer Stephen Sondheim, painter Ellsworth Kelly, the German composer Hans Werner Henze and the British architect Richard Rogers.

In November 2000, the Sprengel Museum in Hannover unveils a portion of the more than 300 works donated by the artist and publishes a major catalogue about the gift.

2001

Accepts commission to redesign and ornament three rooms in the historic 17th century *Grotto* built in Hannover's Royal Herrenhausen Garden. Originally decorated with shells, crystals and minerals removed in the 18th century, the building was used as a store for many years. Donates major gifts of work to the City of Nice for its Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain and to the Musée d'Art Décoratifs in Paris

2002

Niki de Saint Phalle dies on May 21 at the age of 71 in La Jolla, California.

Granddaughter Bloum Cardenas, assistant/collaborator Marcello Zitelli, technical advisor Lech Juretko as well as other members of her international staff oversee final work on Escondido and Hannover projects to ensure they meet her specifications.

The exhibition, *From Niki Matthews to Niki De Saint Phalle*, opens at The Sprengel Museum.

2003

The Grotto opens in March with mosaic decorations of glass, mirrors and pebbles as well as a host of painted and sculpted figures.

Summer exhibition of monumental sculptures in Palais-Royal Gardens in Paris as well as shows in Hungary, Denmark, Poland and Germany.

The Niki Charitable Art Foundation, a non-profit organization, is established.

Queen Califia's Magical Circle is dedicated and opens to the public in October. This is her first American garden and the last major project realized by the artist.

This chronology is largely drawn from three sources: Pontus Hulten, *Niki de Saint Phalle: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1992); *Niki de Saint Phalle: Catalogue Raisonné 1949-2000: Peintures, Tirs, Assemblages, Reliefs, 1949-2000*. (Lausanne: Acatos, 2001); and the chronology on the artist's website www.nikidesaintphalle.com. Additional information obtained from the artist's archives and staff.