



Niki de Saint Phalle's International Workshop

Like the great cathedrals of Europe that inspired her work, Niki de Saint Phalle's own monumental projects are the creation of both a singular vision and a collective ideal. Since the 1970s, she has collaborated with a team of artists, artisans, and other specialists whose own unique talents and fierce dedication were critical to the realization of many of her large-scale environmental gardens, parks, and public art projects. The building of *Queen Califia's Magical Circle* is no exception and for the four individuals whose stories are highlighted below, the opportunity to work with Saint Phalle over the years has been deeply affecting on both a personal and professional level. "I have been very fortunate in my life to work with many leading artists like Richard Serra and Jasper Johns and I think that Niki has been one of my major influences," said Ron McPherson, whose company La Paloma has fabricated many of the artist's large sculptures since 1994. "It is just incredible to see a person that can live in so many different worlds at one time—a mature woman, a child, a mystic, and a realist."

Marcelo Zitelli, La Jolla, California

Argentinean-born Marcelo Zitelli first met Saint Phalle in 1987 in Paris where he had come to work in the theater. For the first five years, he lived in the artist's home, assisting her in the making of small maquettes from original drawings, and working with her and Jean Tinguely on the fountain at Château Chinon for French President Mitterand, and at the *Tarot Garden* in southern Tuscany. He was Niki's assistant and collaborator for fifteen years until her death in 2002 and remains the curator and a trustee of the Niki Charitable Art Foundation. "With Niki, it was always a collaboration. She knew how to discover the ability of other people, right down to the last person on a project," remarked Zitelli.

Lech Juretko, El Cajon, California

A native of Szczecin, Poland, Juretko lived for five years in Hamburg, Germany, before immigrating to San Diego in 1986. A contractor by trade with no prior experience in art, Saint Phalle immediately recognized

Lech Juretko, El Cajon, California (cont'd)

Juretko's skilled eye and superior craftsmanship and offered him the opportunity to work on the mosaics for *Gila* (1994), a private commission in San Diego. Juretko now heads Art Mosaic Inc., which has overseen the selection, design, hand cutting, and application of mosaics for all of Saint Phalle's later projects including *Queen Califia's Magical Circle*.

Pierre Marie LeJeune, Les Andelys, France

A well-known French sculptor and designer, LeJeune met Saint Phalle in 1978 and worked with her on painting her sculptures for the *Stravinsky Fountain* in Paris (completed in 1983). Later, he was involved in decorative and design work for the *Tarot Garden*, the *Grotto* in Hannover's Royal Herrenhausen Garden (2003) as well as other collaborative projects, including mobiles, lamps, tables, chairs and fountains. He also created the integrated bench seating in the Escondido garden. LeJeune's work has been exhibited throughout Europe, most recently at the Arsenal Ney in Metz, France. He is the subject of a new book *iloveart3* (Au Meme Titre Editions, Paris) with text by Dr. Ulrich Krempel, Director, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany.

Ron McPherson, Sun Valley, California

Ron McPherson's company, La Paloma, fabricated the snake and maze walls and the Queen Califia sculpture for the Escondido garden. He previously worked with the artist on the structural engineering and fabrication of *Gila* and *Coming Together*, a 2002 commission for the Port of San Diego. McPherson studied engineering and printmaking before going to work with Kenneth Tyler at Gemini GEL, where he eventually ran the print shop. La Paloma started in 1974 and the company has worked with many important artists such as Jasper Johns, Jonathan Borofsky, Ellsworth Kelly, Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg, Paul McCarthy, Tim Hawkinson, and Ed Ruscha.

Media Contact:

**Ellen Fleurov — (760) 745-9396 or press@queencalifia.org
c/o City of Escondido, Public Art Commission, 201 N. Broadway, Escondido, CA 92025
www.queencalifia.org**