

Press release
New exhibition
From June 12 to October 13, 2025

Niki de Saint Phalle – The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed at the MNBAQ in 2025

A tremendous body of work focused on nature, humanity, and joy

Parc des Champs-de-Bataille
Québec (Québec) G1R 5H3

418 643-2150
1 866 220-2150

mnbaq.org

Press Contact

Linda Tremblay
Media Relations Officer

418 644-6460, ext. 5532
linda.tremblay@mnbaq.org



Québec City, Tuesday, October 24, 2024 ✕ The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) is proud to announce that *Niki de Saint Phalle – The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed* will be one of its major international exhibitions in 2025. The flagship exhibition will run from **June 12 to October 13, 2025**, and assemble more than 150 works that afford visitors an opportunity to engage in the fascinating discovery of the varied, inventive, committed universe of this French-American artist who enjoyed an exciting career path. This indispensable exhibition is sure to delight visitors from all backgrounds.

A free artist in search of the absolute

“I decided early on to become a hero. Who will I be? George Sand? Joan of Arc? Napoleon in a skirt? Whatever the future held in store, I wanted it to be difficult, exciting, and grandiose.”

— Niki de Saint Phalle, 1999

Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002) achieved recognition in the 1960s and 1970s for *Shots*, paintings produced by shooting at the canvases with a rifle, for her participation in the new realism movement, and her emblematic *Nanas*. The time has come to examine her late work.

Through collaboration with Les Abattoirs, Musée - Frac Occitanie Toulouse and the generous participation of the Niki Charitable Art Foundation, this first monographic exhibition of the artist presented in a Canadian museum will be devoted to the works from the last two decades of the artist's life starting from 1978, when she launched the monumental *Tarot Garden* in Italy, which became at one and the same time an art space and a living space that opened to the public in 1998.



Art history often overshadows the final decades of artists' creation, especially among women artists. However, Niki de Saint Phalle enjoyed considerable freedom during these years. In addition to unquestionable artistic freedom, she enjoyed freedom of speech, which accompanies the extensive writing that she produced with her singular calligraphy, but also financial freedom stemming from an innovative, exemplary entrepreneurship model.

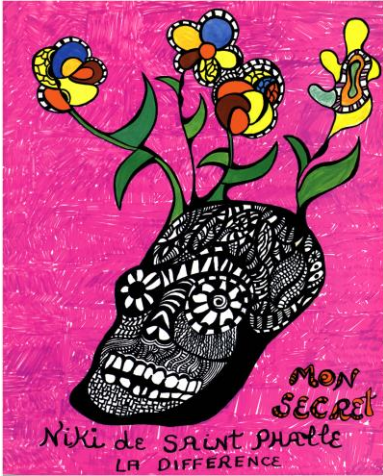


Art at the heart of human life

At the same time, Niki de Saint Phalle developed a new chapter in her work with the creation of a perfume, which enabled her to sponsor her projects. If independence is the hallmark of this period, the years also witnessed a renewed commitment: what interests the artist is the direct encounter between art and individuals. Moreover, she continued to create works for public spaces, from the Stravinsky fountain with Jean Tinguely, opposite the Centre Georges-Pompidou in Paris, to *Queen Califa's Magical Circle* in Escondido, California. Through the production of artist's furnishings, accessible works in several formats, books, and perfumes, she hoped bring art to individuals and make everyday life outstanding.

Joy, an unsuspected strength

The artist used joy as a resistance strategy against violence and injustice, which rebounds in the motifs that appear during the two decades: coloured monsters, sculptures made of mosaics and mirrors, animals, and *Nanas*, and hearts and skulls. Through her commitments, the artist contributed to social justice, e.g., the fight for women’s rights and against racism, early support for AIDS sufferers, or the protection of animals and the environment. Niki de Saint Phalle’s art embraces all human beings, nature, and the life cycle. It is indeed a privilege to welcome her works to Québec City.



A major \$500 000 contribution

The presentation of the exhibition, which will put the MNBAQ in the spotlight in the summer of 2025, is being made possible through a cultural development agreement between the Québec government and Québec City. The \$500 000 contribution comes from the Mesure d’aide financière à l’intention des musées d’État pour des expositions internationales majeures.

“The MNBAQ has, for several decades, been a seminal site for high-calibre exhibitions. We are proud to pursue our collaboration with prestigious organizations, thereby bolstering our presence on the international scene. With the *Niki de Saint Phalle - The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed* exhibition, we are indeed privileged to present in Québec City the work of an emblematic artist. Through her social and political commitments, Niki de Saint Phalle has shaped art history in France and the United States by opening new paths for women’s artistic freedom. I am convinced that the strength, vitality, and humanity of her works will captivate the public,” noted enthusiastically Anik Dorion-Coupal, Director of Exhibitions and International Partnerships at the MNBAQ. “I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Québec City and the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications for their essential support over the years to produce international exhibitions at the MNBAQ. Many Quebecers will be able to discover this outstanding artist in the Capitale-Nationale through the cultural development agreement,” Ms. Dorion-Coupal concluded.



Niki de Saint Phalle, in a nutshell

Catherine Marie-Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle, known as Niki de Saint Phalle, was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine on October 29, 1930, and died in 2002 in the United States. Born to a big Franco-American aristocratic family, she spent her early years in French family castles, surrounded by paintings that glorified the often military exploits of the men of her lineage. She rejected stereotypes and gender-related constraints from an early age. She made this rejection a combat and a strength throughout her life and career, first with *Shots*, then with *La Mariée*, and reached an apotheosis with *Nanas*, and more specifically *Hon*, a monumental sculpture, starting in the second half of the 1960s. She questioned women's place in society and called into question the patriarchy, which she criticized as much she criticized communism and capitalism.

Although she was born in France, she spent her youth in New York before returning to Europe in 1952 with her first husband, Harry Mathews (1930-2017) and their first child, Laura, born in 1951. She started to paint the following year while confined to a psychiatric hospital as a result of a depression. She passionately threw herself into art to overcome the wounds of her childhood.

While her output in the 1960s and 1970s and the couple that she formed with Jean Tinguely, nicknamed the Bonnie and Clyde of art, are well known, it is also important to point out other facets of her work and life, especially her works from the period 1980 to 1990, her social and political commitments, and her tremendous contribution to the artistic freedom of women. In 1980, the Centre Georges-Pompidou devoted a retrospective spanning 30 years of her career, which took stock from another angle of the work of Niki de Saint Phalle and included her on the list of great French women artists.

Her works are presented in the foremost museum collections: the Centre Pompidou (Paris); the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (Paris); the Moderna Museet (Stockholm); Tate Modern (London); the Sprengel Museum Hannover (Hanover); the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, DC); The Museum of Modern Art (New York); the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (Nice); the Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris); and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), among others.

The Niki de Saint Phalle – The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed exhibition is presented by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in collaboration with Les Abattoirs Musée – Frac Occitanie Toulouse and the participation of the Niki Charitable Art Foundation. It has been made possible through a cultural development agreement between the Québec government and Québec City. The contribution comes from the Mesure d'aide financière à l'intention des musées d'État pour des expositions internationales majeures. The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is a state corporation funded by the Gouvernement du Québec.

Québec 

Niki de Saint Phalle – The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed
Pierre Lassonde Pavilion at the MNBAQ
From June 12 to October 13, 2025

PRESS CONTACTS:

Linda Tremblay

Media Relations Officer, MNBAQ

418 262-4681

linda.tremblay@mnbaq.org

Montréal

Rosemonde Gingras

Rosemonde Communications

514 458-8355

rosemonde@rosemondecommunications.com

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Page 2 – From top to the bottom: Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Tarot Garden*, 1991 © Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved / Photo: Ed Kessler // Niki de Saint Phalle, *Flowers vase*, 2000-2001. Painted polyester, Mingei International Museum, gift of the artist

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