

## ***Angel of Temperance*** **A monumental sculpture by Niki de Saint Phalle has arrived at the MNBAQ.**

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Québec City, Tuesday, April 22, 2025 ✕ Excitement has been palpable since this morning at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ). The Grand Hall of the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion is already shimmering with the vibrant colours of the forthcoming international exhibition, *Niki de Saint Phalle. The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed*, through the installation of the *Angel of Temperance*, a monumental work by the French-American artist.

Niki de Saint Phalle produced the sculpture in 1998. It echoes the *Tarot Garden*, a major work in a park in Italy comprising 22 giant sculptures representing the major arcana of the tarot card game whose interpretation serves as a tool for spiritual reflection.



## *A magnificent golden-winged Nana*

The giant 5-m work, which weighs 750 pounds, has arrived from the Mingei International Museum in California. It took the MNBAQ's experienced teams several days to install it. The spectacular effect of the work, visible from the Grande Allée, attests to the delicate operation's success.

The majestic golden-winged *Nana* affords a delightful foretaste of the exhibition, which opens on **June 12, 2025**, in all the temporary exhibition rooms in the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion. It will assemble over 150 works by Niki de Saint Phalle illustrating the last two decades of the fascinating career of an artist whose universe is varied, inventive, and committed. The strong, resilient artist opted for joy as a resistance strategy and sought to make the world a magical place again through art.

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.

## *Powerful women compel recognition in the public domain*

Niki de Saint Phalle brilliantly expressed her vision of art in the public domain and the intention underlying its creation: **"In my view, my sculptures represent womanhood amplified, women's delusions of grandeur, contemporary women, and women in power."**

Starting in the 1960s, the artist defied the conventions that usually reserved public commissions for male artists. She became a key figure in 20th-century monumental art and made way for new iconographies. She elaborated her projects according to their intended recipients, produced them in collaboration, and thus shattered the myth of the solitary, male genius.

Niki de Saint Phalle's monumental works for public spaces include the Golem monster slide (1972), designed for children in Jerusalem, and the Stravinsky Fountain (1983), designed with Jean Tinguely in Paris. The reinvented sculptures offered her the possibility of maintaining direct, joyful, inclusive human relationships.

## Niki de Saint Phalle, in a nutshell



A self-taught artist, Niki de Saint Phalle was born in 1930 in Neuilly-sur-Seine in a noble family. 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), with whom she had two children and from whom she separated after several years.

She first worked as a model and made her debut in the theatre. In 1953, she was hospitalized for a depression and began to paint and produce collages. She abandoned the theatre and chose art as a form of life and survival. In 1956, she settled in the Impasse Ronsin, the locale of artists' studios in Paris, where she met sculptor Jean Tinguely, who became her life partner in 1960. Starting in 1961, she was the only woman artist associated with the group of new realists and she developed her practice in opposition to convention. She produced shooting paintings. For two years, destruction sustained by rage and determination enabled her to reconstruct painting differently.

In 1966, the *Nanas* became the most celebrated portion of her work, including *Hon* ("she" in Swedish), a monumental *Nana*. This army of *Nanas* in numerous shapes and colours is an artistic and feminist assertion, assumed and reasserted, in which we can all recognize ourselves.

In 1967, Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely visited Montréal to present *Le Paradis fantastique* on the terrace of the French pavilion at Expo 67.

In 1978, she launched the construction of the *Tarot Garden* in Garavicchio (Capalbio, Italy), whose monumental sculptures are inspired by the major arcana of the tarot game. She worked for 20 years in this garden of wonders. The park opened in 1998.

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, marked by 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.

Niki de Saint Phalle died of respiratory failure at the San Diego Hospital on May 21, 2002.

*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** 

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***Niki de Saint Phalle – The 1980s and 1990s: Art Unleashed***  
**Pierre Lassonde Pavilion at the MNBAQ**  
**From June 12, 2025 to January 4, 2026**

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## CREDITS:

Pages 1 and 2 – Niki de Saint Phalle, *Angel of Temperance*, 1998. Painted polyester, gold leaf and electrical components, 579 X 335 X 182 cm. Mingei International Museum, donation of Barbara Joy Marriott-Wilcox. Photo: MNBAQ, David Cannon

Page 3 – French-American sculptor, painter and filmmaker Niki de Saint Phalle with one of her works, 1983. / Photo: © Norman Parkinson/Iconic Images