

Documentary film on life and work of international artist Niki De Saint Phalle to be presented at UCSD

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Media Contact: Mary Beebe, The Stuart Collection, 534-2117, or Jan Jennings, 534-8687

DOCUMENTARY FILM ON LIFE AND WORK OF INTERNATIONAL ARTIST NIKLDESANT PHALLE TO BE PRESENTED FEB. 16 AT UCSD

With rifles and handguns, artist Niki de Saint Phalle literally shot at balloons on her assemblages and watched as the paint-filled spheres exploded over the works -- called "shooting paintings." On the other hand, she created giant Nana figures, gentle, generously proportioned Earth Mothers, decorated with child-like designs and colors.

"Who is the Monster -- You or Me?", a documentary film about the life and work of Niki de Saint Phalle, an internationally acclaimed artist whose colorful and imaginative creations are exhibited throughout Europe, will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 16 in the Price Center Theatre, University of California, San Diego. General admission is \$6.

A special reception for the artist and film producer David Hess will follow in Gallery B. The film and reception are \$50 per person. Proceeds will go toward funding a video documentary of the university's Stuart Collection -- for which de Saint Phalle's Sun God was the first work commissioned.

A paragon of paradox, the French/American artist was the lone, female member in the decidedly male-dominated Nouveaux Realistes of the late 1950s and early 1960s -- and also a lady who endorsed her own signature perfume created for Jacqueline Cochran cosmetics.

The 100-minute de Saint Phalle documentary looks at both the personal and professional life of the 65-year-old artist and great grandmother. It took German film maker Peter Schamoni three years to research, film, and assemble it. Pivotal to that process was the input of de Saint Phalle: "I insisted on being really present in the film, not a 'star.' I wanted to bring to it the experiences, contradictions, rage, joy, humor, and paradoxes that I express in my work."

Among highlights of the presentation is her professional -- and personal -- relationship with Swiss-born creator of "machines that did nothing" Jean Tinguely, inspiration for the film's title. "The film is such a love story," says Schamoni, who was intent on including this portion of the artist's life. "My main interest is to show the cooperation between her and Tinguely I think in the history of art in our century, this collaboration is unique...This is moving. This is emotional. And in her writing, I found this sentence: 'Dear Jean: Who is the monster -- you or me?'"

Though de Saint Phalle initially balked at such emphasis on the de Saint Phalle/Tinguely liaison, she and Schamoni eventually compromised.

Born Marie Agnes de Saint Phalle in Neuilly-sur-Seine, de Saint Phalle was raised in New York by her half-French, half-Southern belle mother and her French banker father. At 19 she eloped with Harry Matthews, the scion of a comfortable Eastern family, and the two became "hippies before there were hippies," bumming around

Europe, soaking in the arts. After 10 years and two children, de Saint Phalle restlessly left her family, driven to make her mark in art.

In addition to the artist's "shooting paintings" and Nana figures, the documentary covers her collaborations with Tinguely; the monumental, sensuous, recumbent figure, "Hon," habitat for a coffee bar and small cinema for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm; the mammoth monster Golem, part of a children's playground in Jerusalem; a monster-dragon playhouse in Belgium, and her most ambitious project, which she continues to work on, the fantasy Tarot Garden in Tuscany, filled with giant sculptures based on Tarot cards. It also touches on her current project, a Noah's Ark for Jerusalem, in collaboration with Mario Botta, Swiss-born Italian architect of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Suffering from emphysema, de Saint Phalle has found refuge in the climate of San Diego, where she lives during the winter months, while spending the balance of the year in her home outside of Paris. About her illness, de Saint Phalle wrote: "San Diego was my last card. If this did not work, I would join the Hemlock Society."

De Saint Phalle's Sun God in UCSD's Stuart Collection is a brightly colored, 14-foot bird placed atop a 15-foot concrete arch, located on a grassy area on the UCSD campus between the Faculty Club and the Mandeville Auditorium. Completed in 1983, it is the first of 12 -- soon to be 13 -- outdoor sculptures which make up the Stuart Collection, a unique selection of site-specific works by leading artists of our time. Mary Beebe is director of the Stuart Collection.

For further information on the Feb. 16 Niki de Saint Phalle film showing, the benefit reception, or the Stuart Collection, call 534-2117.

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