

Niki de Saint Phalle – *Sun God*, 1983

Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002) is best known for her oversized figures that embrace contradictory qualities such as good and evil, modern and primitive, sacred and profane, play and terror. Her exaggerated "earth mother" sculptures, the *Nanas*, playfully explore the ancient of feminine deities while celebrating modern feminism's efforts to reconsider and revalue the woman's body. In recent years de Saint Phalle has made monsters and beasts into architectural forms for playgrounds and schools. These works demonstrate her deep interest in architects like Antoni Gaudi, who made organic fluid buildings incorporating wild fantasies and everyday objects. Her collaboration with the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely on a landmark fountain for the plaza of the Centre Pompidou in Paris is world-renowned. The marketing success of Niki de Saint Phalle perfume allowed the artist to fulfill a dream to create a park in northern Italy full of giant sculptures based on Tarot cards, many of can be entered and one of which is a functional residence.

De Saint Phalle's ***Sun God*** was the first work commissioned by the Stuart Collection and was her first outdoor commission in America. The exuberantly colored, fourteen-foot bird is placed atop a fifteen-foot concrete arch and sited on a grassy area between the Faculty Club and Mandeville Auditorium.

Although de Saint Phalle lived near Paris for more than twenty years, her artistic formation has been as much North American as European. She lived in New York from 1933 to 1951 and again in the 1960s when she was prominent in the development of "happenings" and other artistic efforts involving the integration of art and life. She lived and worked in La Jolla from 1992 until her death in 2002.

Folklore: ***Sun God*** has become a landmark on the UCSD campus. Students have at various times embellished the statue with giant sunglasses, a cap and gown, a UCSD ID card, and a nest of hay with eggs. ***Sun God*** has also been adorned with earphones and radio/tape player, turning the statue into a "Sony Walkbird," and has sported a machete and headband for its disguise as "Rambird." It appears on T-shirts and mugs. UCSD art students have made a shroud which covered the bird for the international "Day without Art," in memory of those who have died of AIDS. An annual springtime Sun God Festival has emerged as the largest event sponsored by the UCSD Associated Students. The grassy area beneath it is a popular site for rendezvous and celebrations. There have been countless spontaneous responses which embrace the ***Sun God*** as a campus character.