# Niki de Saint Phalle's vibrant Nanas and Jean Tinguely's kinetic art unite in Somerset exhibition



At Hauser & Wirth in Somerset, Niki de Saint Phalle's enchanting Nanas delight visitors, exuding joy and vibrancy on a sunlit lawn. These larger-than-life sculptures, a trio inspired by Botticelli’s three graces, consist of a striking palette—one silver, one black, and one white. Crafted from polyester, each Nana is adorned with colourful mosaics and glimmering mirrors, their exuberant poses capturing a sense of carefree celebration. The installation offers a tantalising glimpse into the whimsical yet profound world of Saint Phalle, a French-American artist whose works continue to resonate deeply with audiences today.

Saint Phalle embarked on her artistic journey in the mid-1960s, a pivotal moment in her evolving relationship with Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely, whom she met in Paris. They shared a complex partnership, one that interwove romance with artistic collaboration. Though both were married at the time of their initial meeting, their lives eventually became intertwined, culminating in their marriage in 1971. Their artistic synergy lasted until Tinguely’s passing in 1991, with Saint Phalle dedicating herself to preserving his artistic legacy until her own death in 2002. The current exhibition, marking the centenary of Tinguely's birth, celebrates their intertwined lives and legacies.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by Tinguely's kinetic sculptures, which serve as an emblematic representation of his unique artistic voice. The innovative works, composed of scrap metal and everyday materials, demonstrate a mechanical whimsy, featuring contraptions that clank and wheez as they come to life. These kinetic inventions, created between the 1950s and Tinguely's death, evoke questions about the relationship between humans and machines—an exploration of authenticity that feels acutely relevant in today’s technologically driven world.

In juxtaposition to Tinguely’s mechanical marvels, Saint Phalle's creations evoke a sensual exuberance. Their partnership began with a collaborative spirit, as she commissioned him to construct the iron frameworks for her early sculptures. Among their displays is a fascinating array of objects, including the whimsical gold furniture crafted for her film, *A Dream Longer Than the Night*, a work both ambitious and reflective of their intertwined artistic practices. The exhibition also highlights her striking series of shooting paintings, where Saint Phalle employed a rifle to punctuate canvases with explosive colours—artworks born from periods of emotional turmoil, capturing fierce defiance and social critique through visceral imagery.

The complexity of their connection is further explored through Tinguely's darker pieces, such as *The Infernal Circle of Death*. Here, the haunting imagery speaks to themes of mortality and existential reflection, hinting at the couple’s broader artistic narratives that often grappled with social and political issues. Their works offered an outlet for personal and collective trauma, serving as both a celebration of life and a meditation on its fragility.

In the final room of the exhibition, personal letters and sketches reveal the tender aspects of their bond, with intimate doodles and inked names echoing the affection they held for one another. One particular drawing features Tinguely’s name intertwined with whimsical illustrations, symbolising their creative and personal entwinement. Outside, the vibrant Nanas continue their playful dance under the sun, encapsulating both the joy and the complexity of Saint Phalle’s remarkable artistic journey.

Though the exhibition commemorates Tinguely, it is undoubtedly Saint Phalle who emerges as the central figure, her exuberance and brilliance illuminating the shared legacy they sculpted together. As an exploration of their artistic dialogues unfolds, it becomes evident that Saint Phalle’s presence is as monumental as the Nanas themselves, embodying resilience, creativity, and an enduring spirit of celebration.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Paragraph 2, 3, 4
3. Paragraph 2, 3, 4
4. Paragraph 2
5. Paragraph 4, 5
6. Paragraph 4, 5
7. Paragraph 3, 4, 5, 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/19/niki-de-saint-phalle-jean-tinguely-myths-machines-review-hauser-wirth-somerset> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/niki-de-saint-phalle-and-jean-tinguely-myths-and-machines/> - Hauser & Wirth Somerset presents 'Niki de Saint Phalle & Jean Tinguely: Myths & Machines,' a major exhibition running from May 17, 2025, to February 1, 2026. This UK-first exhibition showcases the visionary artistic output and enduring collaboration of Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely over three decades. The display includes unseen works on paper, art decor by Saint Phalle, shooting paintings, monumental open-air sculptures, and iconic kinetic machines by Tinguely from the 1950s to the final year of his life. The exhibition is part of Jean Tinguely’s centenary celebrations. ([hauserwirth.com](https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/niki-de-saint-phalle-and-jean-tinguely-myths-and-machines/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.hauserwirth.com/events/opening-celebrations-niki-de-saint-phalle-and-jean-tinguely-myths-and-machines/> - Hauser & Wirth Somerset hosted the opening celebrations for 'Niki de Saint Phalle & Jean Tinguely: Myths & Machines' on May 17, 2025. The event featured live music, complimentary drinks, and food from the farmyard. The exhibition, running until February 1, 2026, showcases the collaborative works of Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely, including unseen works on paper, art decor, shooting paintings, monumental open-air sculptures, and kinetic machines. The Education Lab, 'Our Imaginary World,' offers an interactive space for young people to explore their emotions and stories. ([hauserwirth.com](https://www.hauserwirth.com/events/opening-celebrations-niki-de-saint-phalle-and-jean-tinguely-myths-and-machines/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.newexhibitions.com/e/66380> - New Exhibitions lists 'Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely: MYTHS & MACHINES' at Hauser & Wirth Somerset from May 17, 2025, to February 1, 2026. The exhibition features unseen works on paper, art decor by Saint Phalle, shooting paintings, monumental open-air sculptures, and kinetic machines by Tinguely. The Education Lab, 'Our Imaginary World,' provides an interactive space for young people to explore their emotions and stories. The exhibition is part of Jean Tinguely’s centenary celebrations. ([newexhibitions.com](https://www.newexhibitions.com/e/66380?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://parisjetaime.com/eng/event/exhibition-niki-de-saint-phalle-jean-tinguely-pontus-hulten-grand-palais-e1213> - The Grand Palais in Paris is hosting an exhibition dedicated to Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Pontus Hultén from June 6, 2025, to January 4, 2026. The exhibition explores their visionary creations and influence on contemporary art through sculptures, archives, and installations. It celebrates the artistic friendship between these figures of New Realism in a magnificently restored setting. ([parisjetaime.com](https://parisjetaime.com/eng/event/exhibition-niki-de-saint-phalle-jean-tinguely-pontus-hulten-grand-palais-e1213?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.visitparisregion.com/en/niki-de-saint-phalle-jean-tinguely-pontus-hulten> - Visit Paris Region highlights the exhibition dedicated to Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Pontus Hultén at the Grand Palais from June 6, 2025, to January 4, 2026. The exhibition showcases their sculptures, archives, and installations, emphasizing their influence on contemporary art. It celebrates the artistic friendship between these figures of New Realism in a magnificently restored setting. ([visitparisregion.com](https://www.visitparisregion.com/en/niki-de-saint-phalle-jean-tinguely-pontus-hulten?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://nikidesaintphalle.org/niki-de-saint-phalle/exhibitions/> - The Niki Charitable Art Foundation lists upcoming exhibitions, including 'Niki de Saint Phalle & Jean Tinguely: Myths & Machines' at Hauser & Wirth Somerset from May 17, 2025, to February 1, 2026. The exhibition features unseen works on paper, art decor by Saint Phalle, shooting paintings, monumental open-air sculptures, and kinetic machines by Tinguely. The Education Lab, 'Our Imaginary World,' provides an interactive space for young people to explore their emotions and stories. The exhibition is part of Jean Tinguely’s centenary celebrations. ([nikidesaintphalle.org](https://nikidesaintphalle.org/niki-de-saint-phalle/exhibitions/?utm_source=openai))