

Nicola L.



When the Earth Turned the Other Way
Quand la Terre tournait dans l'autre sens

M HKA

EN

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WHEN THE EARTH TURNED THE OTHER WAY

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‘Skin is an obsession for me. The different skins, the sensations, the skin of things. Everything has a skin, it’s life.’ This statement by Nicola L., written while developing the participatory installation *La Chambre en Fourrure* (1970), captures the underlying logic of her artistic practice. For Nicola L., skin was a space of encounter — something shared, inhabited, penetrated, and transformed. Her understanding of skin extends beyond the human body toward architecture, objects, environments, and social relations themselves. Throughout her work, bodies recline, merge, disappear into collective structures, or inhabit sculptural forms together. Rejecting monumentality, verticality, and rigid individuality, Nicola L. instead proposes softness, horizontality, and participation as alternative ways of imagining both art and communal life.

The exhibition *When the Earth Turned the Other Way* brings together works by an artist who consistently challenged the boundaries between sculpture, performance, design, film, and lived experience. Working from the 1960s onward between Paris, Brussels, Ibiza, and later New York, Nicola L. developed a singular visual language rooted in collectivity, sensuality, and transformation. Her practice evolved in dialogue with the political and cultural shifts of the period: feminism, antiwar movements, experimental theatre, Conceptual Art, and new forms of communal living.

The exhibition focuses particularly on Nicola L.’s formative years in Belgium and France during the late 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by intense experimentation and close collaborations with artists, writers, musicians, and critics across Europe. Belgium occupies a special place within this trajectory. It was in Brussels and Antwerp

that many of her iconic works were first exhibited and produced, often with the support of local artists and craftspeople. Her friendship with Marcel Broodthaers proved especially significant, shaping a shared interest in surrealism, poetic displacement, and the transformation of ordinary objects into carriers of unexpected meaning.

Nicola L.'s work consistently resists fixed categories. Her famous *Pénétrables* invited visitors to enter sculptures as though stepping into another skin, collapsing the distinction between artwork and participant. Functional sculptures transformed domestic furniture into anthropomorphic presences: feet became sofas, eyes became lamps, bodies became cabinets and communal spaces. These works destabilise conventional hierarchies between art and design, object and subject, utility and imagination. They also propose an alternative understanding of collectivity—one based on proximity, vulnerability, and shared experience.

A central focus of the exhibition is the performative exploration of the body. Her artworks often operate in the space between the public and the domestic, individual and collective—questioning how bodies inhabit social structures. Particular emphasis is placed on her engagement with the female body, approached not as a fixed identity but as a site of transformation, and political agency.

The exhibition title originates from a graphic novel Nicola L. began while imprisoned in Beirut in 1969. During this period of isolation and uncertainty, she started drawing a speculative story populated by wandering hands, feet, and fragmented bodies moving through desolate landscapes. The phrase *When the Earth Turned the Other*

Way evokes a world that has lost its sense of direction—politically, emotionally, and physically. It suggests both rupture and possibility: a moment when dominant systems lose stability and other forms of relation begin to emerge.

At the centre of the exhibition stands *Red Coat* (1970), a communal garment created for eleven participants. The coat was sewn, “baptised” in the sea of Ibiza, and activated during performances across Europe and the United States. The work embodies Nicola L.'s vision of art as a shared experience. Describing the project, she wrote: “The Coat would be made out of plastic and would fit like a skin: ‘Same Skin For Everybody.’” The phrase captures the utopian impulse running throughout her oeuvre—a desire to imagine forms of togetherness that exceed social divisions while preserving individuality within the collective body.

When the Earth Turned the Other Way is more than a retrospective. The exhibition proposes Nicola L.'s work as a living proposition for the present: at once playful and radical, intimate and political, grounded in the belief that even the smallest gestures can transform the way we inhabit the world together.

In the visitors' guide, audiences find a series of narrative captions based on memoirs written during the last decade of the artist's life. In this way, the exhibition gives voice to Nicola L. herself, allowing her to explain the context behind the creation of selected artworks presented in the exhibition. A specially designed website presents archival materials, films, and essays reinterpreting key themes within Nicola L.'s artistic practice.

Nicola L. (1932–2018) was a French artist whose practice rigorously questioned the boundaries between art, objecthood, and social relations. Born in Morocco and later active in Paris, Brussels, New York, and Ibiza, her nomadic life informed a transnational and communal approach to artmaking. From the late 1960s onward, she developed a distinctive body of work encompassing functional sculptures, environments, and participatory performances that foregrounded use, touch, and collective experience. While her work intersected with Nouveau Réalisme, it resisted categorisation, articulating instead a feminist politics rooted in the activation of the body.

Fragmentation, scale, and chromatic intensity recur as strategies through which bodies are multiplied, shared, or temporarily unified. Nicola L.'s work consistently proposed art as a lived, social process rather than a static object, anticipating later discourses around participation, relationality, and embodied spectatorship.

¹ The Chronology of Work is based on the unpublished memoir titled *DIVE*, translated from its original French. The English translation was created for *Nicola L.: Life and Art* (Apartamento, 2023). It preserves the artist's formatting and style, unless noted by square brackets.

In 1950, Nicola L.² moved to Paris to study at the Académie Julien and subsequently at the École des Beaux-Arts. It was there that she met Fred Lanzenberg, a meeting that would profoundly shape both her personal life and her artistic journey. In the mid-1950s, Nicola and Fred married and settled in a former studio once used for decorative elements. The generous space allowed Nicola to fully explore her creative vision.

We live in the workshop. I paint large abstract canvases. F.³ works in the decoration house of his uncle H.,⁴ it does not go well at all. He is often depressed and runs up against the despotism of the great decorator (moreover always charming with me socially) and F. builds, paints and

organizes the workshop himself with talent and the little money we have. The gigantic size of the workshop allows me to work on large formats, sorts of abstract landscapes which I imagine are part of the space of the universe. After the very figurative teaching of Souverbie, I need to leave the human body and drown in space, the abstract. There is great loneliness in painting and that corresponds to my feeling of the moment ... I sometimes feel trapped in a life of a couple to which I may not have been destined.

- 2 **Nicole Jeannine Suzanne Leuthe**, later known as Nicola L., was born in El Jadida, Morocco in 1932.
- 3 **Fred Lanzenberg** (F.) was Nicola L.'s husband. He was a gallerist active in Brussels, where he founded Galerie Fred Lanzenberg in 1971. The gallery initially engaged with Pop Art—before aligning with currents such as Nouveau Réalisme and Narrative Figuration, in dialogue with critics including Pierre Restany and Alain Jouffroy. The gallery also supported key figures such as Marcel Broodthaers through editions and exhibitions. Remaining active until 2019, it constituted a significant platform for postwar and contemporary practices in Brussels.
- 4 **Henri Samuel**, Fred Lanzenberg's uncle who owned a decorative arts workshop in Paris.

Nicola at the École des Beaux-Arts, 1950s.
Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and
Alison Jacques





Black Head Pénétrable, 1964. Vinyl, 38.1 x 47 cm.
Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and
Alison Jacques

In the summer of 1964, Nicola L. found herself in Ibiza, a place that shaped her practice and connected her to a community of international artists. Together with Fred Lanzenberg, she bought a house on the island that became her second studio. There she met Alberto Greco⁵, the Argentinian conceptual artist whose radical ideas challenged everything about art. Their conversations left a deep impression on her. In 1965, tragedy struck: Alberto Greco died. This event had a strong personal and professional impact on Nicola. According to her memoirs, she could still hear his doubting voice asking, “How can we paint in the 60s?” Driven by both grief and inspiration, she destroyed her abstract paintings, letting go of the work that no longer spoke to the urgency.

I find a large blank canvas, I pierce it with 5 holes for the head, arms, legs and penetration as I thought I could do with doors ... and I sew [something like] sleeves which become an empty skin to penetrate, the “Penetrable” as Restany will call it in his essay A LONG JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE NIGHT in 1968 ...

Back in Ibiza I continue this work of Penetrable where the spectator can enter, where I can also enter and become the sky, the sea, the sun, the air etc ... these are my new landscapes ... it pays off to imagine being a part of the sun, the ocean, the Earth ... this work brings me the peace that I needed after the shock of Greco ...

I have a vague memory of 1965 of my first exhibition at Boulakia where I mix the first Penetrable and some paintings escaped destruction after the death of Greco.

⁵ **Alberto Greco** (born in 1931 in Buenos Aires, died in 1969 in Barcelona) was an Argentine conceptual artist associated with Nouveau Réalisme, known for his radical *Vivo-Dito* actions that declared everyday life as art, challenging institutions.

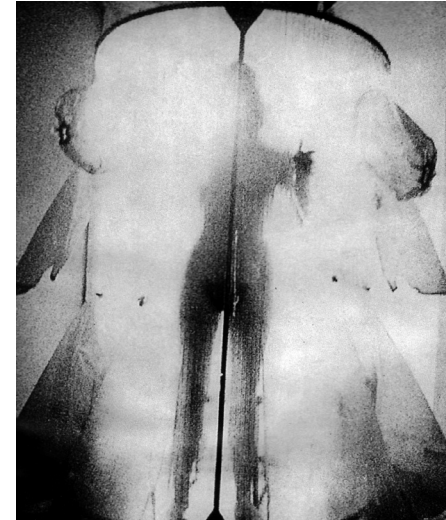
The *Pink Cylinder* (1967) appears to be the first object activated as a performance. Nicola L. used objects as extensions of the body, transforming them into performative tools. In *The Pink Cylinder*, the object becomes activated through participation, blurring boundaries between sculpture, costume, and human body, emphasising embodiment, interaction, and the merging of individuals into a shared, living artwork. The work was unveiled at the Fifth Biennale de Paris in 1967. The *Pink Cylinder* performance was later restaged at La MaMa in New York in 1968, in collaboration with writer Copi.⁶

At the Paris Biennale ..., I was part of the Graziella Martinez show, and produced a red vinyl cylinder in which the English group Soft Machine made a performance. Copi comes, with Victor Garcia and Elaine Stewart, the director of the La MaMa theater in New York, who invites me

to come and do a performance with the cylinder in her New York theater in the coming months. Copi will write a text for the event ... joy ...

I do my performance at La MaMa Theater. Copi wrote me a text on childbirth which turns into a performance against the war in Vietnam, where my burnt dolls come out of the pink cylinder ...

This period of 1966/68 passes very quickly ... I am lucky to be in New York at the right time and age ... (at the right time and at the right age) I try to absorb everything, to see, to hear, a theme that I will take up in collages on my return SEE, HEAR, SCREAM, LAUGHTER, LOVE, SILENCE and DIE ... I arrived at the time of the declaration of the Black Panthers by Stokely Carmichael, huge demonstrations against the war, Hippie movement, Feminism movement, incredible sexual liberation in such a Puritan country, and we feel like the end of the sixties



with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 68.

I have to go back to France at the beginning of May 1968, partly to decide if F. and I continue, I organize a farewell picnic for friends in a place I like in Central Park.

The weather is nice, we are happy, sitting in the grass around a tablecloth with things to drink and eat, there are musicians playing near us ... and suddenly a long parade of silent Black [people] crossing the park ... they walk to protest against the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. by a hired killer, the musicians stop playing, we remain frozen, sad, the party is over, yes, the sixties are over.

⁶ Copi was an Argentine French playwright, novelist, and cartoonist (1939–1987), known for his avant-garde, politically charged works that blended surrealism, humor, and social critique.

In 1968, Nicola L. worked in Ibiza, preparing her *Hand* and *Feet* sculptures for her first solo exhibition at Galerie Veranneman in Brussels. The following year, in 1969, solo exhibitions were planned at Galerie Templon in Paris and Galerie Kontakt in Antwerp, which showed *Nicola: Sculptures Vinyl*. Nicola developed the idea of “functional sculpture” (Functional Art) by merging art, design, and the human body into objects meant to be used rather than simply observed. She created works that operate as furniture—chairs, lamps, or cabinets—while retaining a sculptural presence. These pieces challenge traditional distinctions between art and utility, inviting physical interaction and turning everyday use into a performative, bodily experience.

I prepare during the summer an exhibition that I will have in October in the large Galerie Veranneman in Brussels ... I do not yet know that I have just made my first functional sculpture ... and that the 1/50 edition sofa feet [work] will be shown at

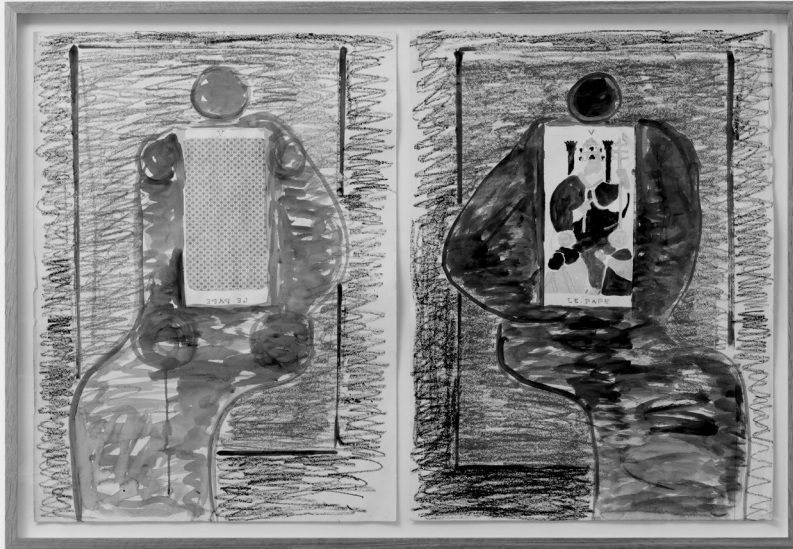
Galerie Veranneman in Brussels in 1968 and Daniel Templon in 1969 ...

The exhibition in October 1968 at Veranneman in Brussels went well, and was a success. There are feet and hands of all colors, the pink cylinder, the penetrable, everything is about the broken body, inspired by my stay in New York ... In Brussels, there are still good craftsmen with whom I can work and it is a positive period for me. In addition I found the complicity of working with F. with whom I can study certain projects ... When I see on my resume that the exhibition after Brussels in October 1968 is Daniel Templon in 1969, I realize that my Lebanese misadventure is just after, Brussels, January 1969.



Exhibition at Galerie Veranneman, Brussels, 1968. Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques

Fortune, Tarot, and the Other Way Around



Serie Tarot—Le Pape, 1988. Watercolour and pencil on paper, 76.2 × 114.3 cm.
Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive
and Alison Jacques

In 1969, Nicola had a run-in with the authorities during her trip to Lebanon together with her American friends, who imprisoned her in Beirut for a couple of months. She started to sketch her graphic novels during her months in prison in 1969.

I can not tell everything because it could hurt some people including F. who was involved ... We arrive at the women's prison where I will share the cell with two very young women, a Swedish and a Danish [woman] ... They tell me about the prison ... most women are killers, and almost all of them have killed their husbands... divorce does not seem possible for this class of society, even if they are mistreated, abused to the highest degree, they Receive 5 years in prison if the crime is not premeditated and double if it is. That is to say that the revolver or the knife as a murder weapon is cheaper to pay [for] than the poison ...

The next morning when I look with the other women — through the gate hole — the visitors arriving in

the prison yard, I see F. walking with piles of books in his arms. I understand then that I will not leave any time soon ... From the books he brought me, two very important ones to support this prison, a book on yoga that I will practice every day and another on tarot. I was already drawing the cards (I had learned the rudiments with this cook / cardreader from my parents when I was 15 years old). The tarot is a revelation for me, which will keep me very busy during these long idle days ... I also begin to draw and write on a sketchbook HISTORY OF WOMEN'S HANDS AND MEN'S FEET WHEN THE EARTH TURNED THE OTHER WAY ... it keeps me pretty high ...

In 1970, at the Isle of Wight Festival, Nicola L. conceived *Same Skin for Everybody*, featuring the *Red Coat* as a communal garment, for a performance with Brazilian musicians. Prior to the festival, she ceremoniously “baptised” the

coat at Playa de las Salinas in Ibiza. Between 1970–76, the performance with *Red Coat* took place in multiple cities including Brussels, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, Flaine, New York and Antwerp.



Red Coat performance in Antwerp, 1976.
M HKA. Archive of ICC (International Cultural Centre)

We are now in 1970, the only images / sound / memory are around the Red Coat, The Red Coat which will change my art and my life ... In the summer of 1970, I met two young Brazilians in Ibiza. They had brought with them several cassettes of very good Brazilian music, much of which was by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, whom I did not yet know of. They told me about a music festival that was going to take place on the Isle of Wight at the end of that summer and were planning to go there with Caetano and Gilberto ... “Why don’t you come with us? Find an idea for a performance, we will be a group there, at least nine or ten ...” Before they left, I suggested the idea of a communal coat. This coat would be worn by eleven people — myself included. That way we would be protected from the cold, the rain, and also from getting lost ... The coat would be made out of plastic and would fit like a skin: “Same Skin For Everybody.” My two friends applauded the project with great enthusiasm and left the island shortly thereafter.

When I realized that this project would not be just a dream, I began to design the coat ... A rectangle measuring five by three meters with eleven slits to fit eleven hooded jackets. The part reserved for the legs would be communal, like an enormous skirt, allowing for free movement. Only the faces would be visible ... I found a very shiny red vinyl fabric. I created the pattern, and together with my assistant we completed the giant coat.

Before leaving, I tried out the Coat (which would become the first of what I would later call The Coats of Transformation) in the Mediterranean on one of Ibiza’s beaches in Las Salinas, photographed by my friend the Brazilian photographer Carlos Rodriguez, then I left with him for Barcelona, from whence I would board the plane to England.

Between 1969 and 1970, Nicola L. developed *La Chambre en Fourrure*, a new form of wearable soft sculpture that functioned as both installation and participatory environment, presented in various venues across Europe, including Nicola's solo show at ICC (International Cultural Centre) in Antwerp in 1976.

I design and make La Chambre en Fourrure for the Galerie Appolinaire in Milan in June 1970 on the theme of a community skin [called] "Same Skin for Everybody." I create it for 15 people and whose walls are made of body envelopes — empty humans in acrylic fur ... The house is made up of empty figures that you can enter, envelopes of empty human bodies that you can penetrate. The ceiling is the only part that is not penetrable. It is the mirror, the dream ... When a person enters a room, their gestural behavior is quite different from what it would be if he entered a wall. Everything changes completely: the movements of the arms, legs, head ... a kind of release, improvisation. I am very surprised sometimes to discover

afterwards the identity of the people who have inhabited the wall or the floor ... Skin is an obsession for me. The different skins, the sensations, the skin of things. Everything has a skin, it's life

Nicola L. inside *La Chambre en Fourrure* at Galerie Alexandra Monett, Brussels, 1975.
Archive of ICC (International Cultural Centre)



Pénétrables

A Wearable Sculpture

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In 1975, during the solo exhibition *Pénétrables, Bois & Soft* at Alexandra Monett in Brussels, Nicola L. invited visitors into a world of playful interaction. At its center was *La Chambre en Fourrure*, alongside individual *Pénétrables* that could be taken off the walls and worn, thereby blurring the boundary between artwork and participants. The *Bois et Soft* series – wooden branches partially draped in fabric – evoked fragmented human forms, while works such as the *Hand Sofa* and *Eye Lamp* further transformed the gallery into an immersive environment where sculpture, design, and performance converged. This exploration of participatory and embodied experience continued in 1976 with Nicola L.'s first solo exhibition in Antwerp, *Pénétrables*, at the ICC.

In 1976 I continue in Ibiza my PÉNÉTRABLES which become banners of protest, whose requests are BREATHING, LOVING, LAUGHING, DYING, CRYING, SILENCE etc. taken up in a series of collages which resemble bandages ...

revealing my state of thought – a kind of suffocation and wound. I then have two major exhibitions in Belgium, a retrospective at the ICC in Antwerp directed by the formidable Flor Bex, and an exhibition of 60 international [artists] at the Museum of Ixelles, Je / Nous, organized with the collaboration of Harald Szeemann in favor of the Belgian newspaper Pour in 1975, which will be my last important exhibition in Europe. I am 40 years old.

Terre, 1974–1978. Ink on cotton, wood.
Collection M HKA / Collection Flemish Community



In 1975, *Je/Nous* brought together a remarkable group of international artists at the Musée d'Ixelles in Brussels, exploring relationships between the individual ("Je") and the collective ("Nous"). The exhibition featured works by figures such as Daniel Buren, On Kawara, Yoko Ono, and Panamarenko, alongside Belgian and international contemporaries.

Running concurrently was the *Salto Arte* project, a collaborative effort organised with Harald Szeemann⁷ and the magazine *Pour*, involving artists who contributed performances, prints, and editions to support the publication and the circus-like program. The event highlighted creative exchange, collective action, and experimental practices within the 1970s art scene. Both the exhibition and the event were intended to save the left-wing magazine *Pour* from bankruptcy.

Harald Szeemann ... decided that the time had come to organize a great event for contemporary art. The exhibition is called Je / Nous; it takes place in spring 1975 at the museum of Ixelles in Brussels. You could say that this exhibition is a great collection of the most stimulating creators of the decade: the list includes Carl Andre and Artschwager, Ben, Beuys, Boltansky, Buren, Byars ... Christo, de Maria, Filliou, Haacke, Immendorf, On Kawara ... Le Gac and Lewitt ... Panamarenko, Pen and Polke, Arnulf Rainer Tinguely, Tuttle and Toroni ... Among them Nicola, who takes part the next night in the hilarious evening under a circus tent erected in Brussels — event organized by several of the participating artists, evoking the Comte d'Orgel's Ball, a avant-garde cult circus of the 1920s, which [was] in real time, like an arena of provocation, that artists of the 1970s did everything to go and see when they could ...⁸



The only existing photo of Nicola L.'s performance during Salto Arte program. Exhibition *Je/Nous*, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, 1975. Catalogue for *Je/Nous*, M HKA Archive

⁷ **Harald Szeemann** (1933–2005) was a pioneering Swiss curator who redefined exhibition-making, notably with *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), championing Conceptual Art and establishing the independent curator as a creative author.

⁸ Here in her memoirs, Nicola quotes a text by art critic Alan Jones.



Nicola behind a giant *Foot* for the invitation for her exhibition at Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, 1969. Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques

Nicola L.'s vinyl sculptures, developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, transformed everyday materials into immersive, participatory artworks. Individual vinyl forms allow interaction, emphasising the body as a shared and domestic space. With their tactile surfaces and pliable shapes, the vinyl sculptures reflect Nicola's interest in the human body, collectivity, and the integration of art into everyday life, challenging conventional distinctions between sculpture, performance, and design. She found in New York a fertile experimental environment that embraced interdisciplinary practices, allowing her to expand beyond the European avant-garde context. Living in the Chelsea Hotel,⁹ she connected with an international artistic community that supported the evolution of her practice toward film and more socially engaged work.

During her time in New York, she integrated her functional sculptures into her living environment, treating domestic space as an extension of her artistic practice. At the same time, she began to shift her focus toward filmmaking. Her sculptural works, meanwhile, increasingly assumed the status of commodity.

We arrive in New York in November 1979 again at the Chelsea Hotel communicated. I decided to stop all production of my sculpture objects, also called Functional Art, whose first piece was THE FOOT made in New York and after Brussels in 1967, followed by many pieces including THE EYE, THE LIPS, LA FEMME COMMUNE etc., and the last two in 2009 THE ANGEL and THE WARRIOR lamps. The production of these pieces is obviously linked to relationships of money and trust with the galleries that represent me and I could not or didn't know how to find the support I needed for this in my experiences over the past few years. I therefore stop all my projects in progress, especially the editions for which I had not signed a contract

and which I consider canceled. I will therefore limit myself to my work of installations, film and writing, and performances which brings me much more joy and creativity.

... I find a loft of 3000 sf on Broadway and 3rd street, completely empty, just the walls... We build very quickly three bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom ... everything is built so quickly here ... The loft will be furnished with the functional sculptures exhibited at Waddel in 1973 and which were in a furniture repository, SOFA GIANT CORPS DE FEMME, BLACK BARTENDER, FOOT SOFA, PREVIOUS TELEVISION WOMAN, EYES AND LAMP MOUTHS etc ... objects all made in the 60s and early 70s, which give a strange note to the loft of the 80s.

⁹ The **Chelsea Hotel** was a legendary New York residence where artists, writers, and musicians lived, collaborated, and created, fostering experimentation, exchange, and a vibrant countercultural community throughout the twentieth century.

The 2008 edition of *Egg Round Table* reflects Nicola L.'s friendship with Marcel Broodthaers and her admiration for other Belgian masters, including surrealist paintings of Magritte. The work carries a characteristic poetic and surreal spirit.

I saw Marcel Broodthaers again in the sixties between Paris and Brussels. He had a hard time surviving as Belgian collectors buy American Pop but don't watch his work. Restany, to whom I ask for support so that he exhibits in Milan at Lenocci at the Apollinaire gallery, deaf, finds the work too intellectual. I'm trying to organize a dinner with a big collector who I forgot the name [of] in Brussels, but it doesn't work.

F. who has successfully opened his avenue Louise gallery produces an edition of Marcel's CECI N'EST PAS UNE PIPE which I think is a success. It is thanks to Marcel that I create the eyes and the mouth lamps. When I show him the drawings of the objects in search of a factory to make them, he takes me to his plastic factory in Antwerp. These 2 objects, in different



editions, have helped me to survive since my arrival in New York in 1979 ... thank you Marcel ...

That's when I designed and had THE BAR TENDER big black man bar made, inspired by a very beautiful Brazilian Ricky.

Egg Round Table, 2008. Wood, eggshells, plexiglass, steel, 76 × 102 × 100.5 cm. Courtesy Galila's collection, Belgium

Red Lip Lamp, 1969. Plexiglass, steel, 129.5 × 71.1 × 6.7 cm. Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques



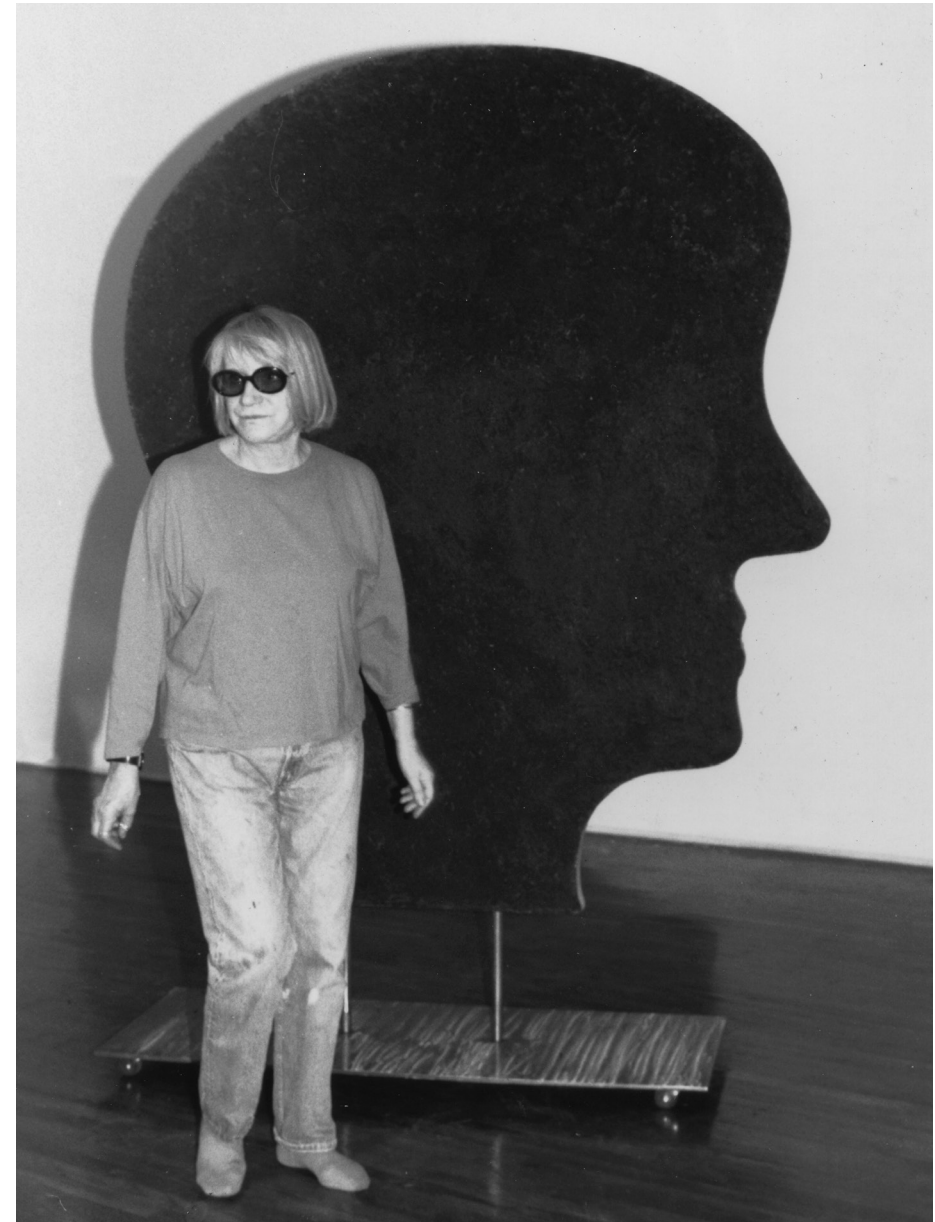
Nicola L.'s work is structured around a series of recurring thematic motifs. It develops a highly specific visual language in which body parts and dismembered forms occupy a central position. The motif of the head in particular recurs across a wide range of works — including drawings, films, and sculptures. This interest is notably reflected in her Super 8 film on *Les Têtes d'Ibiza* (*The Heads of Ibiza*) from 1977, conceived as a speculative and narrative inquiry into the island's layered histories. The recurring head motif present in the artist's oeuvre is an existential response to personal crisis, transforming fragmentation, loss, and displacement into a unifying visual form that contains both body and landscape. The head becomes a psychic territory — at once wounded and generative — through which she reclaims identity and reimagines the self as an expansive, inhabited world.

The contour-profile — always the same — of a giant head started being my obsession in 1986. It came after a

drama in my life (probably the only positive thing about crises is that they make you come out of yourself). So, in a "desperate state of mind," I started designing, with a piece of charcoal, a big profile of a head on a large piece of plain paper hanging on a wall.

The Head became so huge that the paper was not large enough, and I added a vertical strip of paper alongside it, on the right side of the profile, the slit between the two sheets looked like a wound. And when I applied a piece of tape to it, it then looked like a scar. But also, the important part of the profile — always the right side — the Forehead — Nose — Lips — Chin — Neck — became the coastline of the map of an imaginary country. Heads country.

And the design of this Head came naturally, without hesitation, as if I had done it 100 times before. I thought that this charcoal head was going to be unique, but just after, I started a series of 6 oil paintings on paper, same size, same profile, with lettering inside:



Air — Ocean — Sun — Wind — Night — etc. and progressively I couldn't see or create anything that was not inside the contour or in the shape of this head's profile.

Portrait of Nicola L., circa 1992. Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques

Her return to painting led to the development of the series *Femmes Fatales* (1995), composed of painted bed sheets incorporating photographic images and text. The works focus on women who met tragic or violent deaths, each figure evoked through a combination of

visual and textual elements that frame their lives and destinies.

When I started the first series of “femmes fatales” it rapidly became an obsession. I couldn’t read anything except about those women, who were Cleopatra, Billie Holiday,



Femmes Fatales: Frida Kahlo, 1995. Oil, paper and ink on cotton on painted wood, 193 × 193 cm. Courtesy Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques

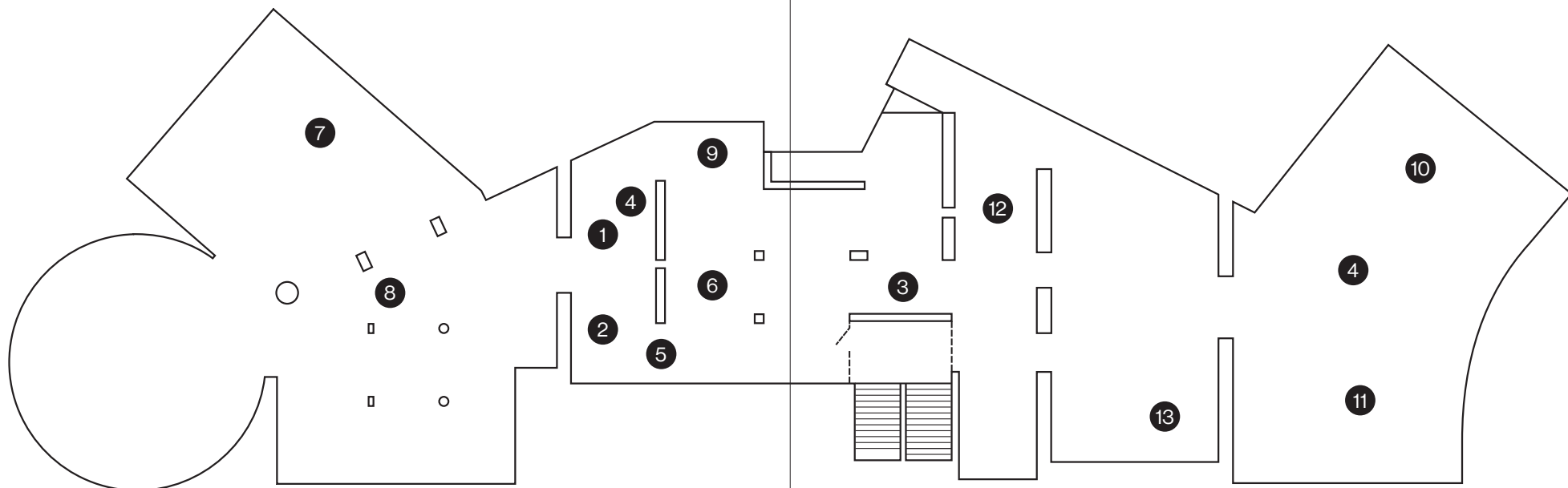
Joanne d’Arc, Marilyn Monroe, Frida Kahlo and Madame Bovary. They were a group, a clan. I could see them everywhere, especially in the Headlines of the newspapers: “Lady with an attitude – witch. Bitch. Victim. Child. Murdered. Hooker. Beauty. Clever. Attractive. Trouble. Intelligent and Provocative – Love. solitude. Rebellion. Rage. Politics. Magic. Search of Ecstasy. Cries and whispers behind a wall of silence. Stories. Dreams and Distortions – Fight. Death. Still alive. Femme fatale.” I was cutting all these words in the newspaper, putting them together, they become sort of poems. Each femme fatale could be represented by the same words arranged differently. There were now six paintings, collages, hung in my studio in a certain order that could not be changed. Each woman has her own color. It seems to me that they were talking to each other. Didn’t they have the same language I mean were they not made of the same words? Bitch, witch, victim,

child, Eve? Then, this year I added three Femmes Fatales to the group. Eva Hesse, Ulrike Meinhof and Mona Lisa. I made a new series putting all mine together. The drawer. “La femme commode” at the end of the sixties I made the drawer woman. Then a piece of furniture-sculpture. A chest of drawers in the shape of a woman body – was a protest against the woman object.

*All parts of the body being used as drawers
The eyes
The nose
The mouth
The breasts
The stomach
The womb
The genitals*

Twenty-five years later, I have made a multiple in six different colors. I feel them because they represent exactly what the femme fatales did not want to be.¹⁰

¹⁰ This quote is not part of Nicola L’s unpublished memoir *DIVE* but from her personal notebook about the *Femme Fatales* series.



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EXPERT TOURS

Guided tour by Christophe Lanzenberg & Joanna Zielińska*Saturday 27 June, 11:00–12:30*

Christophe Lanzenberg, Nicola L.'s elder son, followed his mother from Ibiza to New York and shot several of her films. Along with curator Joanna Zielińska, he will talk about Nicola's rich oeuvre and incredible personality.

Guided tour by Géraldine Gourbe*Thursday 24 September, 19:00–20:30*

Curator and philosopher Géraldine Gourbe takes you into the lively network of artists with whom Nicola surrounded herself, from ORLAN to Grace Jones. She also explains how these connections helped to shape Nicola's practice.

Guided tour by Annosh Urbanke*Saturday 10 October, 11:00–12:30*

Nicola L. had strong links with Belgium. M HKA researcher Annosh Urbanke delved into the archives to retrieve a treasure trove of stories and anecdotes.

CONVERSATION

Philosophical Café*Sunday 18 October, 14:00–15:30*

How can we 'slip into a shared skin' and form one body together? And what does that mean to each of us? Nicola L. inspires us to think about how we can be free, equal and collective. We discuss this together with a drink. Philosopher and theatre maker Gideon Hakker will moderate this conversation.

KIDS & FAMILY

Family guided tour, 6+*Every Sunday in July and August, 11:15–12:15*

Travel through the life and work of Nicola L. Explore her ideas about equality and freedom with a guide and discover her humour and playfulness. Step inside one of her works and move as one body with a genuinely 'shared skin'!

Family Day*Sunday 12 July, 11:00–17:00*

Take a toddlers' tour or a family guided tour, or join a movement workshop. You can also help sew a big, collective quilt on the theme of 'weeds'. End the day with waffles in the M HKAFE.

Salon*Ongoing during opening hours*

Move together in a raincoat for four people, make a collage or draw inspiration from philosophical questions. In the Salon, you can feel free to investigate, feel and imagine.

FILM SCREENINGS

Ibiza Bodies: Summer films of Nicola L.*Saturday 27 June, 17:00, De Cinema*

Watch three short films that Nicola L. made during her stay in Ibiza in the 60s and 70s, a period characterised by experimentation, artistic exchange and communal living.

Doors Ajar at the Chelsea Hotel*Saturday 10 October, 17:00, De Cinema*

This film captures the atmosphere and energy of the Chelsea Hotel, an iconic sanctuary for artists and free spirits. Nicola herself lived there for the last thirty years of her life.



Oliver and *pénétrable*. Courtesy Nicola L.
Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques

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This exhibition features archival material from M HKA's archives and Nicola L. Collection & Archive and Alison Jacques. The museum has made every effort to correctly identify and credit all creators, photographers, and rights holders. If you notice any errors or omissions, please let us know via bart.cornel@muhka.be.

A digital platform featuring archival material, films, and texts was developed specifically for this exhibition. Read the essay by M HKA researcher Annosh Urbanke, titled *Entering the Skin: The Embodied Practice of Nicola L. in Belgium (1960s–1970s)*.



Cover images: based on original photographs of the *Red Coat* performance in Antwerp, 1976. Archive of the ICC.



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