

Press Release

NICOLA L.

13 May – 23 July 2022

Preview: Thursday 12 May, 6–8 pm



Nicola L., *We Want to Breathe*, 1975 © Nicola L. Collection and Archive

Alison Jacques announces an exhibition spanning 50 years of work by Nicola L. (b. 1932, Morocco; d. 2018, US). This exhibition, presented in partnership with the Nicola L. Collection and Archive, Los Angeles, is the artist's first UK exhibition, and anticipates a forthcoming monograph, published by Apartamento in Autumn 2022, and a major survey at Camden Art Centre, London, in 2024.

Nicola L. spent her childhood between North Africa and France. In 1950, when she was nearly eighteen, she left her family home in the Ardennes city of Sedan and decamped to Paris, which, in addition to New York and Ibiza, would prove vital to the development of her practice. Nicola L. found Paris in the midst of cultural upheaval. Abstraction succumbed to figuration; Pop Art took hold, along with its European counterpart, *Nouveau Réalisme*; art felt collaborative.

It was during this period that Nicola L. first incorporated the body into her work. It was not until 1964, however, that the full potential of this metaphor made itself apparent. Following a meeting with her mentor, the Argentinian artist Alberto Greco, in Ibiza, Nicola L. lay on a beach and dreamt of a single unifying skin: a literal and metaphorical site within which the individual could become the collective. Greco took his life the following year. Nicola 'burned all of my abstract paintings' and produced the first in her series of *Pénétrables*: wearable fabrics that connected those within, transforming a group of individuals into a singular, functioning organism.

The *Pénétrables* and the political banners that followed (*Same Skin For Everybody*, 1975; *We Want to Breathe*, 1975) encouraged bodies to gather and co-

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exist; the 'functional objects', however, deconstructed them completely. Assuming various forms – *La Femme Coffee Table* (1969/2015); *Red Lip Lamp* (1969); *White Foot Sofa* (1968) – this anthropomorphic furniture took the objectification of women's bodies to a comedic conclusion, while accentuating Nicola L.'s belief that art should serve a function. 'I refused to create sculptures that were not going to be used for something', she once said.

This philosophy was most visibly implemented in 1989, when Nicola L. took up permanent residence in the Chelsea Hotel in New York, her home until 2017. Collaborating with interior designer Fred Flores, Nicola L. transformed one of the hotel's apartments into *The Snail Suite*: an immersive space in which rugs, headboards and tables took the shape of a snail shell. Represented at Alison Jacques through a trio of Plexiglass lamps – *Snail (yellow)*, *Snail (green)* and *Snail (blue)* (all 1995) – this spiral form spoke to the infinite cycles of life, while also extending the logic of the *Pénétrables*. As curator Ruba Katrib notes: 'the shell can be understood as both architecture and skin'.

Politics and collective action were central to Nicola L.'s practice, whether experimenting with performance, sculpture or film, her focus in the 1980s. Fundamentally, however, hers was a humanist project, something typified by the form of the head that characterised much of her work in the 1990s. During this period, Nicola L. recommitted to painting, a medium that had proven vital throughout her life, and incorporated heads into such works as *Meditation* (1991) and the 'Planet Heads' series (1990) of oil and newspaper collages. A fitting late chapter in Nicola L.'s storied career, these paintings upheld human consciousness as the sole creative force in the universe, one that invites hope, remembrance or even revolution.

Nicola L. had museum solo exhibitions at SculptureCenter, New York, curated by Ruba Katrib (2017), and Brooklyn Art Museum, New York (2005) and was included in ground-breaking institutional exhibitions such as 'Elles', Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009), and 'The World Goes Pop', Tate Modern, London (2015). Recently, her work was included in 'Our Silver City, 2094', Nottingham Contemporary (2021-22); 'Domestic Drama', Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz (2021-22); 'She-Bam Pow POP Wizz!', MAMAC, Nice (2021); 'Made in L.A. 2020: a version', Hammer Museum and The Huntington, LA (2021); and 'Amazons of Pop!', Kunsthalle zu Kiel (2021), which is on view at Kunsthaus Graz until August 2022.

A panel discussion on the work of Nicola L. will be available to view from 1 June on the gallery website (alisonjacques.com). The talk features Nicola L.'s son Christophe Lanzenberg; Flavia Frigeri, Curator, National Portrait Gallery, London; and Ruba Katrib, Curator, MoMA PS1, New York.

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The opening coincides with London Gallery Weekend, during which the gallery will operate extended opening hours: Friday 13 May: 10am-8pm; Saturday 14 May: 11am-6pm; Sunday 15 May: 11am-5pm.