

## ART AS A DESTINY

Pierre Restany, New York, 23 December 1990

Nicola is a kind of special blend between freedom of mind and action, fantasy and practical realism. Her life has a very strong existential reason, but at the same time she is a builder. She wants to realize things. In 30 years of activities she has accomplished an impressive number of works related to many different art forms.

She was educated in Paris as a painter at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and she started painting very early in her life, at the end of the fifties, she was an abstract painter in the sense that one could have been in The Paris school of this period. But at the same time she has a strong impulse to her life and to all its manifestations.

To tell the story of Nicola would take a long time; writing novels, books or making a film. She has travelled extensively and she is a good traveler, but what she has kept within her is this phenomenal urge for self-expression. Just like if she had a desire for establishing a balance between the vital impulses and this idea that life is also a construction—life must be a space of production and a space of creativity.

She lived very intensely the Paris art and cultural scene of the end of the fifties and throughout the sixties, a big mixture of different people. Paris cosmopolitanism. The Parisian frenzied kind of reason where everybody was mixing with each other and where the crucial and creative life was not fragmented into different chapels or different mafia-like groups. This has surely impressed her in a definitive way. She understood totally that life being absolutely polyvalent and rich in different possibilities, her art and self-expression should follow this kind of diversity. That is the reason why she started her collage period very early in 1962, when she quoted painting with words, in a very romantic way, this kind of abstract Tachiste painting that she did at that time. The collage served for her, like for many people belonging to this traditional modernist art form, a way of integrating directly into the same kind of space and time of her work a lot of references to everyday life: e.g. tickets [parking tickets]. This was very significant of this sociological move, if I may say. Together with the collages Nicola has been tempted by, what we could call today, a multi-form expression. I mean a free design. She was very soon into the experimental field of existential design. She thought to realize objects which could give a better quality to the domestic life of her potential buyers.

Nicola started with “The Red Foot” in 1968, which was a soft sofa in the shape of a giant human foot. She used a lot of the anatomical parts of the body at that time to realize different pieces of furniture: lamps, tables, chairs, etc. In that sense she can be a little linked to Pop design as it was conceived at that time, in England much more than here in America. But she was not especially a Pop artist. She had a sense of adventure, a sense of freedom. She wanted to create, to have the best

taste of life that she could. She has been very much affected by the May 1968, let us say, student protests. She was maybe one of the rare protagonists who felt with very intuitive feelings that behind the May 1968 unrest there was something more than the revolt of youth against its own culture. That there was already something changing more deeply, affecting both, the economic structure and the production systems. Of course, these ideas were only intuitive. And she had intuitive feelings of those signals of a new history and a new society, but she could not formulate them clearly.

So she decided to go to Ibiza, where she used to spend time in the early sixties. The period of Ibiza after 1968 was very important. She could, in Ibiza, take the necessary distance from events and the American experience. [She lived in New York from 1966-1968 where she met Abbie Hoffman and many of the protest leaders in America.]

In a way this first-hand experience and the collages of Ibiza take today a big meaning because they are quite rare. Before going to Ibiza, she decided to destroy a lot of her previous productions— and what remained was sold several years later in an auction in Paris. Therefore the Ibiza collages are in a way the survivors of a very intense and creative period.

They also have another meaning, they illustrate the impact and influence of her '68 vision of the world and self-expression—her experience with those collages became language.

And as one can see that information, the sense of the words, are not simple lettering or a kind of aesthetic, but they are the meaning of an active philosophy. It is very interesting to look at these pieces today in 1991, 25 years later, to look at this period of very strong literacy, almost philosophical and semantic presence.

Certainly, the collages shown at the Rempire Gallery are an archive of Nicola's creative thinking. To a certain extent this form of collagist line could be considered as the spinal bone of her work. It is, in a way, a respiratory line—and as such the memory of a "person-computer". Together with this documentary archive of her mind, Nicola shows at the Rempire Gallery a series of recent paintings. She quit painting in 1962 after the death of Alberto Greco, an Italian-Argentine painter, who had an exemplary life and acted, for Nicola and many of her friends, as an existential and artistic guru.

So she decided to paint again, which was her immediate means of expression. In 1986, after a retrospective show of her design period at the Alan Moss Gallery, she gave the impression to the public, at least a part of them, that she had disappeared for a long time and that it was a reappearance [she made films from 1975 to 1985]. In fact, somebody in the audience on the day of the opening asked if she was actually still alive.

This sense of time, a brutal reappearance in her mind gave her the impulse to go on painting again after so many years.

# ALISON JACQUES

These recent paintings show in many ways the continuity of her broad vision of existential and creative thinking and feeling. The first paintings of the new period are very close to the continuity of the first collage—and the presence of the words - and - lettering effect in a smooth expressionistic background is quite significant of this period. The most important thing, also, is that the continuity of this vision is located in the brain, in the head of the artist—and this is the reason why these paintings are in the form of a head. A head which is very precisely shaped and in another way is totally integrated in an effusionistic, if I may say, cosmic form of space.

The space of thinking has no limit. Nicola assumes this challenge of infinity: infinity of dreams, infinity of vision, infinity of action as a real factual fate of destiny. If there is an artist who shows in a most evident, way that the creative dimension of being lies in his possibility of fashioning and shaping his own destiny then I believe that we have the most emblematic, symbolic and exemplary case in Nicola's work. Her life and work are absolutely indisassociated. And she lives her art as her own destiny.

Nicola has lived and worked in New York since 1979.

Transcribed by Brian Coleman from a tape made by Pierre Restany on December 23, 1990. New York City.