

Nicola L.
I Am The Last Woman Object
4 October/29 December

Nicola L., *We Want to Breathe*, 1975. Ink, cotton, wood.
© Nicola L. Collection and Archive. Courtesy The Collection of
Donald Porteous, acquired from Alison Jacques, London.



Camden Art Centre is proud to present the first major institutional solo exhibition in Europe of the work of celebrated French artist Nicola L. (1932-2018). Encompassing sculpture, performance, painting, collage and film—all of which carry an air of wit, playfulness, and radical subversion—the exhibition is an unprecedented opportunity to experience the full breadth of her multidisciplinary practice.

Often celebrated in the context of Pop Art, Nouveau Realism, Feminism and design, Nicola L.'s expansive practice ranged into cosmology, environmental concerns, spirituality, sexuality, soft sculpture, activism and political resistance. A group of the artist's extraordinary *Pénétrables* will be shown alongside archival performance documentation. These life-size textile sculptures were originally intended as participatory works with apertures that people could insert limbs or heads into, in some cases with other performers to create a single organism. This was a political gesture—all people united in one skin, regardless of ethnicity or gender. Video documentation of *The Blue Cape*, performed in Cuba, China and at the Venice Biennale, will be shown along with documentation of *The Red Coat*, performed most recently London on the occasion of the work's display at Tate Modern in 2015.

In a large-scale installation made in 1969 and titled *Chambre en Fourrure*, or *Fur Room*, Nicola combined purple faux fur, zippers and a metal armature to create a freestanding room which invites the audience to become performers. This fur environment was shown in Camden Art Centre's galleries in 1974 in a group show titled *Soft Art*. The original *Fur Room* no longer exists but a reconstruction, overseen by the artist's estate in 2020 for an exhibition at the LA Hammer Museum, will be re-presented at Camden some 50 years later, with visitors again invited to interact and participate in the piece.

Many of the artist's large-scale functional objects will also appear throughout the show, including sofas and commodes: lacquered wooded cabinets produced with the silhouette of a stereotypical female torso. Taking furniture as their basis, the sculptures are endowed with an anthropomorphic quality—lamps take the shape of an eye, a coffee table has the outline of a woman's body, and a sofa reads as a head seen in profile. Other 'loungers' are made from various soft, pliable forms, including feet and other fragments of dismembered bodies. The exaggerated, oversized and caricatured shapes are imbued with a political commentary on equality, collectivity and the place of women in particular, within the home and society.

Nicola's concern with feminist politics continues in another major series included in the exhibition: *Femme Fatale* (1995) – a group of paintings and collages made on bed sheets, memorialising women whose lives ended in tragedy or violence, among them Eva Hesse, Marilyn Monroe, Billie Holiday and Ulrike Meinhof.

The exhibition also features the artist's work in moving image, which became a focus for her from 1977 onwards. It includes a feature film shot in Ibiza, *Les Têtes sont Encore Dans L'île* [The Heads are Still in the Island] with Terry Thomas and Pierral; as well as documentaries touching on subjects as diverse as the punk-rock band Bad Brains, the activist Abbie Hoffman, and the Chelsea Hotel.

In the work of Nicola L. the boundaries between body, space, functionality and art blur and converge. Across her decades-long visual practice she demonstrated a singular energy, characterised by a whimsical, confrontational yet deeply personal vision.

The exhibition is accompanied by the launch of a new monograph on Nicola L. published by Camden Art Centre. The publication includes new texts by Martin Clark, Géraldine Gourbe and Leonie Radine, with full-colour illustrations of works in the exhibition and a timeline of the artist's life and work.

A new essay by Fanny Singer is published in the latest edition of Camden Art Centre's long-running File Note series: produced for every exhibition, it represents an important strand of the organisation's programme, enabling the commission of a new piece of long-form writing accompanied by a reading/listening/watching list compiled by the artist. File Notes are an accessible resource, available in the galleries for a small charge and online for free.

Camden Art Centre has invited a selection of artists to produce editions responding to the work of Nicola L., which will be released for sale upon the exhibition opening. In addition, a range of exclusive merchandise is being produced taking inspiration from the works featured in the exhibition. All proceeds help to sustain and support the work of Camden Art Centre.

I Am The Last Woman Object at Camden Art Centre is a collaboration with Frac Bretagne, Rennes; Kunsthalle Wien; and Museion—Museum of modern and contemporary art, Bolzano/Bozen.

Notes to Editors

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Camden Art Centre

Since 1965 Camden Art Centre has been a place for art and the people that make it. Rooted in our local community and internationally acclaimed, we foster a sense of belonging and a deeper relationship to art. We aim to push boundaries and connect people to their own creativity through our exhibitions, residencies, events and learning programmes. Originally built as a public library, the building now combines historic architecture with open, modern spaces and a secluded garden with free entry for all. Camden Art Centre has always led the way supporting artists and audiences to create and engage with the most vital and inspiring contemporary art and culture today.

Nicola L.

Born in El Jadida, Morocco to French parents, Nicola L. (1932-2018) studied abstract painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and spent her formative artistic years in Paris, before moving to New York later in life. Following significant international exposure, including a major solo show at the SculptureCenter, New York (2017) and inclusion in a number of important group exhibitions, from *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London (2015) to *Future Bodies From Recent to Past – Sculpture, Technology, and the Body since the 1950s*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2022), *Our Silver City, 2094*, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2021), *Elles*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009); *She-Bam Pow Pop Wizz! The Amazons of Pop*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Nice (2021).