

THE DRAWING ROOM 66H Newtown Lane, East Hampton NY 11937 T 631 324.5016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COSTANTINO NIVOLA [1911-1988]

terracotta reliefs and figures

September 5 – October 13, 2014



C116, 1973, terracotta, 16 x 15 7/8 x 2 1/2 inches



C23, 1962, clay, 16 7/8 x 17 x 1 5/8 inches

On view September 5 through October 13, 2014, The Drawing Room is pleased to present a unique collection of terracotta reliefs and figurative sculptures by Costantino Nivola [1911-1988], the internationally recognized sculptor from Sardinia who settled in Springs, New York in the late 1940s. Within his oeuvre, the terracotta tableaus are the only works inspired by the local beaches and the sunbathers they attracted. Working into square, 15-inch slabs of wet clay in 2-inch thick relief, Nivola shaped this sensual medium with a masterful touch, bringing to life the reveries of the human figure at play and at rest.

Concurrent exhibitions featuring non-objective gouaches and monoprints by Rolph Scarlett [1889-1984] and paintings on canvas and paper by Jack Youngerman will also be on view.

Trained as a stonemason in Sardinia, Nivola later studied art and design in Milan and Paris. By the time he settled in New York City and in Springs, New York in 1948, his evolution had resulted in an ingenious, intuitive approach to the plastic arts. Renown for his collaborations with architects such as Le Corbusier and Eero Saarinen, from the 1950s to the 1970s Nivola's mural designs and large-scale reliefs enlivened modernist concrete architecture through public commissions in the U.S. and Europe. At the same time, he developed an important body of marble and travertine sculpture in the round, often working in the stone yards of Pietrasanta, Italy, where many exhibitions of his art took place. In Springs, where he lived with his wife Ruth, a jewelry designer, and their family, he treasured his studio time creating small scale sculpture in techniques such as wax and clay for bronze casting. Outside in his garden, he mixed sand with plaster or cement to achieve new textures for his ever-evolving exploration of three dimensions.

Nivola's works in clay are remarkable for the passionate translation that takes place in them from eye to hand. Imbued with fleshy corporeality, his figures possess the artist's soulful touch. He pushed and kneaded soft clay until it returned to the earthliness from which it originated. In the 1960s, when he first began his love affair with

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clay, Nivola was absorbed by the spontaneity and elasticity of the medium, creating bird's eye views of existential human dramas, both in the bed, on the beach and in swimming pools. Left unglazed, the dry terracotta invokes hot summer light. Manipulating the clay, he sculpted nude figures, sometimes erotic, sunbathing, swimming and cavorting in pools and on the shore.

Working with his fingers in wet clay and guiding a fine tool to articulate a belly button or the tiny profile of a bathing beauty, he built each figure from thin coils of clay. Forming arms, torso, hips and legs from a single coil, he then added two soft balls for the buttocks and breasts. A loop of a coil became a vulva; thinner coils were assembled for tresses of hair. Sometimes grouped enmass, the figure's lively gestures recall ancient Mediterranean figurines.

Louse Point, near the Nivola's home, is the site of the earliest relief, dating from 1962. With a seagull's view of the beach, the rhythm of the waves is gently modulated and the dunes on the far horizon reveal three tiny houses. There are no figures, only soft mounds of sand dissolving under the sharp rolling waves. Soon the nude sunbather appears in reliefs depicting Rubenesque nudes lying in the sand on their backs, their plump knees spread open to the sky. Overhead, an angel appears like a vision, with a beautiful face floating by on a cloud. Revisiting this composition nine years later, the fleshy limbs appear looser – almost abstract – with tired bodies that seem to disappear into the clay itself.

In several amusing reliefs, nude men and women are swimming in a pool with beach balls and floats. The lucky ones are enjoying orgies inside a walled garden. Much like a solarium, an ancient concrete structure open to the sky with a ladder for entry, the space echoes Nivola's own walled sunroom, which still stands on the family land. Lanky bodies lie on inner tubes on the water's calm surface or swim across it, all within a 2-inch deep theatrical tableau. As the human figure moves through the air, the water and the sand, one appreciates the challenge that excited Nivola as he refined his métier, articulating subtle variations of shadow and light in relief.

Costantino Nivola was a sculptor of monumental talents. His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art among many other institutions. The Nivola Museum, founded in 1995 in his hometown of Orani, Sardinia, houses the most comprehensive collection of his work in all scale and media. He is the subject of several monographs and an upcoming catalogue raisonné.

[www.drawingroom-gallery.com](http://www.drawingroom-gallery.com)

**Gallery hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10-5; Sunday 11-5**

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