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# The Goddess and the Islands: Mythopoetic Aura, Arts and Culture in the Balearics

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the treatment of the female trope as a precedent of creation during the 60s and 70s by foreign artists who made their journeys to the Balearics. Due to the social, political and economic movements that took place in the mid-twentieth century, the Balearic Islands became an artistic hotspot wherein these geniuses drew inspiration from. The Islands were reborn as a figurative Muse in a patriarchal social system whose artists tried to change by fusing the entitlement of Her with the Isles' connotations attributed to the Goddess. The aim of this paper is to explore the extent of which these blurred boundaries between literary and artistic blossoming, society and the Muse are intertwined in the Islands to substantiate how its representation resulted in a degeneration of the basic beliefs integrated with Her. Evidence has been gathered by dint of a review on some of the artists' output, collected mainly from books, songs, paintings and sculptures, setting out a departure point from Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. This research challenges the way in which the prototypical perception of the Muse has been characterized as it deviated from its initial set of values to a reduced image of sexual objectification since men deprived women of the agency they deserved.

Keywords: Muse, Balearic Islands, artists, psychedelia, feminism.

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## Introduction

The Mediterranean has become a blissful paradise; an endless source of inventiveness for alien off-the-beaten-track writers, painters and musicians in the 20th century. Many of these newcomers made for the Balearics with the aspiration of accomplishing their dreams with the premise that “artistic illumination could only be found by means of travelling to exotic places” (Waldren 2001, 222). They also intended to replace the physical and psychological injuries that resulted from the harsh outbounds of the First and Second World War. There, they pursued alternative ideologies based on equality, liberty and freedom that helped them to construct their identity and boost their creativity. The Islands, contrasted with the mythologic image of Robert Graves’s “White Goddess”, were understood to be an artistic commodity by craftsmen. They were presented in terms of typically women-associated stereotypes: passive, innocent and waiting to be explored. In fact, they emerged as a metaphorical Muse, an *Arcadia*<sup>1</sup> that served as a creative engine for those people who were seeking feminine nurturing energy arising either from the use of psychedelics or from empirical evidence. It was not until the first waves of feminist and hippie movements that promoted sexual liberation and rights’ equality appeared, that feminine motives were reconsidered in artistic fields from a completely different perspective. Consequently, the subject of the woman and the Balearic Islands as a personification of the Goddess-Muse rose as an eminent antecedent in the creation process for non-native iconoclast artists in literature, music and arts.

Several books such as *The Muse and the Sea* (2015) and *Robert Graves i el món clàssic* (2006) have come in handy to prove the correlation between the concept of the Muse, the island, and the manner in which its literary-artistic production shows a male-biased perspective. Some others like *Mallorquins, Estrangers i Forasters* (2001), for instance, have been useful to understand the dwellers’ ideology and lifestyle that led Graves to believe the Mediterranean was the most suitable spot to settle down, as he considered it was the only place where the perception of the myth was still pure: “5000 years ago the Goddess was a very potent figure in Hellenistic times in the Mediterranean” (Campbell 1988, 36:14). Nonetheless, most of these books have focused on the first half of the 20th century, so it remains unclear how this motif has been addressed to from 1960 onwards. Thus, this study has been conducted under the scope of an examination on these topics later on in order to

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<sup>1</sup> An image or idea of life in the countryside and harmony with nature that is believed to be perfect.

unveil their paramount artists and the impact both of the Islands as a woman and the woman as a Muse. This essay's main purpose is to expose the reconsideration of the woman as an idyllic emblem of artistic genesis by bohemian anglophone travellers through this article's exploration within literature, culture and arts in the Balearics framed in the context of the 60s and 70s. In order to delimit and connect the historical and sociocultural context, this work has been divided into two parts. The starting point is a literature review on Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948) that aims to introduce the notion of the Goddess. Then, the article moves from an inspection of Robert Graves's works to an interpretation of the song "Formentera Lady" (1971) by King Crimson, followed by an analysis on Kevin Ayers and Daavid Allen's musical formulation and finally a research into LP<sup>2</sup> covers by Mati Klarwein and Niki de Saint Phalle's crafts. All of them including a study on the origins and final products of literature, music and arts respectively in association with the Islands and the Muse.

### **Literature review**

Prior investigation has exhibited Robert Graves's portrayal of *The White Goddess* (1948) as a relevant point in the reassessment of the woman as a creative omen. The poet had become obsessed with the Goddess because She provided him with the instrument for poetic creation and expression. As William Graves reveals when referring to his father, "He became fascinated with the powerful figure of the goddess on mount Pelion and in the novel proposes the existence of a pre-classical matriarchal society. But he interrupted his work on *The Golden Fleece* to pursue further evidence of goddess worship in Western culture throughout the ages and its connection with the mysterious powers of poetic inspiration" (Graves 1995, 73). The works that focus on the Goddess usually incorporate a link between religion, the Goddess' mythological origins and Graves's poetic cosmos, considering issues of gender as well. The greatest part of the studies concentrate on the representation and the origins of the Goddess. In consequence, this review endeavors to corroborate the interaction between the Goddess, the Muse and the Islands. Nevertheless, the connection between these topics and other artistic fields and the effects of the manner in which women were portrayed during the 60s and 70s has not been scrutinized yet, so it will be further delved into in the rest of the essay. This

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<sup>2</sup> A long-playing record, a vinyl.

review has taken into account knowledgeable experts on the subject and has been broken down into two parts; the first one tackles feminism and the second one artistic enthusiasm.

Some scholars argue that *The White Goddess* defines the clash between patriarchal and matriarchal principles and conventions in mythology with the target of denouncing gender inequality. Graves proposes a different system where gender norms are not subverted but equated, so that men and women operate at the same level. As Campbell reports, “If the male is on top and the female is the subordinate all the way you have a totally different system from that when the two are facing each other” (Campbell 1988, 35:12). With this statement, he suggests that Graves’s central concern was to outline the Goddess as an enhancer of an alternative matriarchal social system in archaic times laying gender and myths’ parallelisms out.

The truth is that the rise of Zeus’s sovereignty in *The White Goddess* leads to the loss of female supremacy as the dreadful aftermath of masculine usurpation and domination. With this pretext, some authors emphasize Graves’s conviction that men are to blame for establishing a patriarchal totalitarian system and pushing women away from power:

Indeed, for Graves, the cult of the Virgin had descended uninterrupted from the matriarchal religions that had originated in the primordial worship of prehistoric European mother goddesses. There were no male gods; matrilineal clans grouped together in ruling tribes; and mother queens, claiming to be the descendants of the Moon Goddess, reigned. And it had been this way until the beginning of 2000 B.C., when hordes from the east conquered those matriarchal kingdoms, changing their socio-political and religious systems (Montaner 2015, 293)

On top of that, writers such as Llabrés<sup>3</sup> mention that “Per la seva visió idealitzada d’una edat d’or de la Deessa, tot reivindicant el seu retorn, que suposa un retorn a una vida més d’acord amb el món natural, s’anticiparà al seu propi temps. És un precursor dels nous corrents socials desenvolupats a partir dels anys 60” (Llabrés 2006, 143). It is under this basis that the Muse is displayed as a leitmotiv of feminist action epitomized by Graves, a pioneer in the contribution of a feminist eye on the approach of the Goddess-Muse.

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<sup>3</sup> Because of the inexistence of the English version of the book and the relevance of the author’s words, the direct quotes in Catalan have been extracted from the original edition.

Furthermore, Graves operated with the image of the Goddess and the island as a wellspring of creativity. As Sotelo states, “Women he met and lived with were the personification of his poetic Muse” (Sotelo 2002, 97), which is why he pairs this poetic trance with the adoration of this “sister of the mirage and echo” (Graves 1997, 8). Moreover, Fehlmann believes that it is possible to obtain the Goddess’ essence by visiting the places of her former worship as it remains stored there (Fehlmann 2017, 169). Graves thereupon took both the women in his life and the island of Mallorca as his Muses, which acted as a medium of poetic inspiration. As Llabrés points out, “L’autor basant-se en els testimonis arqueològics acceptats al seu temps, veu com a divinitat primitiva universal, almenys en la religió mediterrània, la figura femenina de la Gran Deessa o Deessa Mare” (Llabrés 2006, 223). For this reason, he might have found the poetic motivation he was looking for through the medium of religion and mythology as he compared the European and the Mediterranean traditions to see the remnants of Ancient cultures. He did so by considering women and one of his favourite settings ever, Mallorca, as the fountain of his poetic revelation. That is, reconsidering both as a metaphorical Muse.

All in all, the result of these two contrasts is the reinterpretation of the Muse as an incarnation of the Goddess, embodied either in the figure of a woman or under the shape of the island. Graves’s theory achieved success and he became a prolific writer known for his characterization of Mallorca as a paradisiac atmosphere with a special affinity for the Goddess. It is unknown how this subject-matter in the Balearics has been addressed to from the 1960s onwards, so this essay is going to prove the key role of women’s description in the interconnection between distinct fields of art, the islands and the Muse in Gravesian literature bearing in mind all the aforementioned writers’ meditations.

### **The Goddess as a Motif in the Arts**

The Civil Rights Movement and the antiwar protests that took place during the 60s shaped the world in terms of economy, politics and society. These changes sparked social movements that caused activists to engage in quarrels against gender and cultural inequalities, as the hippie or the second-wave feminist movements did. The Balearics, remote and isolated islands with crystal-clear waters, pristine landscapes and uncorrupted inhabitants, developed into a place of withdrawal for these dissidents. People with diverse backgrounds and ideologies moved to the islands to avoid their native countries’ disputes while chasing artistic instigation.



Mixing with the locals, they found there a reversion of roles and an exchange of abstractions bolstered by the cult of the Goddess. Therefore, the worship of this female deity related to the cult of matriarchy became a central motif that embodied a set of characteristics and qualities: “El paper de les dones en la colònia estrangera estava molt influït per les seves idees sobre les dones i el seu concepte de la Deessa Blanca, “més metàfora que mitologia”, que apareixia segons el moment com una mare nodridora, amant i seductora, i terrible deessa de la mort. Per a Graves, era el centre de la saviesa i inspiració poètica; només ella tenia els secrets de la vida, l’alegria i, finalment, la mort” (Waldren 2001, 274)<sup>4</sup>. Foreign male and female artists found in the model of the Goddess and the islands their allegorical Muse, a Divine Being who helped them to portray the notion of the islands as female and the female understood as the Muse. This principle put forward the encouragement and representation they needed, so it comes as no surprise that the Muse became a persistent theme in the Islands’s artistic hub.

Artists frequently coupled the use of psychedelics with this occurrence of the Goddess as a feminine nurturing energy that helped them in fostering new ideas. Due to the growth of the hippie subculture as a response against authoritarian regimes, psychedelics were spread all over the Mediterranean. Some of the aforementioned artists credited in the psychedelics’ potential as an enhancer of exploration in the realm of human subconsciousness. These authors maintained that artistic expression was usually beyond their control and psychedelics drew them near this aesthetic dimension. Graves, for instance, was heedful of the usage of hallucinogenic mushrooms in Greek religious practices (Graves 1995, 86). Others believed that, as Hewitt claims, “the symbolic feminine encompasses what has been excised as unnecessary, a threat, or excess: irrationality, the unconscious, emotion, imagination, play, mystery, and pleasure without purpose or closure” (Hewitt 2019, 8). Thus, they used psychedelics to approximate the emblem of the female figure as an antecedent in the making process of literature, arts and music in the Balearics. The idea of the Muse was overlooked in all senses; it became the product of a source of spiritual awakening and creative breakthrough but lacking agency by itself. Proof of this is the fact that most of the writers, musicians and artists that left their footprints in the islands were men.

Regarding literature that had a remarkable impact on the period between the 60s and 70s along with the figure of the Muse in the theory of poetic inspiration (Graves 1995, 85) its

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the unavailability of the English version of the book, entitled *Insiders and Outsiders: Paradise and Reality in Mallorca* (1996), the direct quotes have been excerpted from the Catalan edition translated by Ben Vickers.

major representative in the Mediterranean was Robert Graves. Since “islands became seedbeds of fertile imagination” (Lowenthal 2007, 203) some authors decided to migrate there in order to find some stimulation, which they obtained by escaping the turmoil of their original countries. The writer found in Mallorca “everything [he] wanted as a background to [his] work: sun, sea, mountains, no politics” (Graves 1995, 21). Graves’s interest in Greek mythology and in Deia’s origin led him to elaborate on the subject up to the point in which he came across a connection between Deia and an old temple devoted to the cult of the Moon Goddess. Besides, he asserted Rhea had conceived Mallorca from the bottom of the sea. In a pact with Zeus, the Goddess reserved Mallorca for herself, along with the Moon and Crete, forbidding Zeus to rule there (Montaner 2015, 297) and consequently legitimizing her power. Similarly to this theory of female authority vindication, Kayalçin suggests that “Life in ‘matriarchal’ times was superior in terms of quality of life and intellectual discourse” (Karayalçin 2006, 143). For this reason, Robert was intent on defending the relevance and the impact of women not only on history or religion but also on literature and art. He adopted this essence of the mighty Goddess and merged it with dichotomies like exotic and native, old and new and male and female throughout his narratives by using Mallorca’s past as a basis on which to recreate Greek myths. He added his personal tone by including the islands and ergo using it as a metaphorical Muse, which reconstituted at the same time the connotative ascendance of female authority in all artistic fields.

In truth, it was *The Golden Fleece* (1944) what stirred Graves’s interest in classical sources and his disclosure of the concept of the Goddess as the Muse. The novel commences with an invocation of Apollo and the Muses. The first paradigm of Graves’s personal input emanates in the tale: Greek mythical stories or settings and Deia are linked via an introduction of the Triple Goddess “adored under different scopes and names” (Sotelo 2002, 80) as might be the “Maid-Nymph-Mother/Crone represented by the new, full and waning moon” (Llabrés 2006, 95). *The Golden Fleece* echoes this displacement of the Goddess from “a Mediterranean matriarchy antecedent to Zeus’ patriarchal system” (Sotelo 2002, 80) despite of the fact that she was first enabled to govern and to exert her total power, leaving men sidelined through a rationalization of the myth. After this granted agency, Graves exposes the way in which “feminine divinities from the primitive matriarchy become subjected to the invaders’ masculine divinities, leaving them as daughters or brides” (98). The book also mentions Lemnos, an island inhabited only by women as a consequence of revenge towards men who

tried to rapt them and make them their wives. On account of the emphasis on this inversion of roles and the exposition of this male tyranny afterwards, Graves proves to be working on the nature of feminism by virtue of deploying the metamorphosis in Greek myth that set the current patriarchal system. Both the island and the woman converge so that the virtue of the Goddess as a literary creative token is shown in all her splendour.

Deià attracted bohemian travellers under its literary and artistic tradition additionally to its landscapes and the postulation of a “Promised Land” (Sabater 1986, 123). This use of the island as a Muse through a feminist premise that consisted on empowering women through Graves’s recreation of the Muse in *The White Goddess* (1948) is a clear example of literature challenging patriarchal limitations by deviating its attention on to an expression of numerous set of values through the Goddess embodiment, as demonstrated in *The Muse and the Sea*: “For Graves, a fundamental element in the history of the development of human thought was the start and later severing of primordial Mother Goddess worship as pertaining to the origin of: a) religion; b) poetry — a spiritual, creative activity of divine origin inspired by Her” (Montaner 2015, 296). Hence, this emblematic feminine mystical source, embodied in the island of Mallorca as well, furnished him with the insight he needed as a writer. Robert relied on the imaginative impulse bursting from the Muse and he understood it as an artistic expression which was beyond the artists’ control. The Goddess’ spiritual attributes (not so much the physical ones) merged with the ones of the islands, providing them with agency in the artistic production. Because of this, Graves’s influence on the expansion of the idea of the Muse extends beyond his publication of *The Golden Fleece* and *The White Goddess*. He had an influence on artists who were gathering around Deià allowing them to expand their horizons employing the Muse and the figurative meanings it carried. However, as Brearton affirms, female authority is usually framed within the male-authored text, so both authorship and authority of women are displaced under man’s command (Brearton 2008, 223), so this dominance of female authority was proved to be only present in the theoretical frame whereas the masculine contemplation took over in the practice.

With respect to music, King Crimson<sup>5</sup>’s “Lady Formentera” comes out as one of these evocative male-gazed stereotyped products of the Goddess-Muse. The song unites the model of the woman with the island and characterizes them as lacking of agency and of incapability to resist the male figure’s incursion, portraying the island as a metaphor of the woman’s body.

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<sup>5</sup> Progressive rock band from London (1968-present).

Eivissa and Formentera were the “Ítaca of love and peace” (Cerdà and Rodríguez 1999, 18), so they were eventually considered a sort of Eden for European and American hippies who were seeking alternative lives in the 60s. Spurred on by Formentera’s beauty, the song’s protagonist spotlights the Island’s features presuming that it is a paradise waiting to be exploited. His narrative reports these features as if he had been enchanted by these unspoiled bucolic landscapes of “white houses”, “pale-shored lines” and “stony roads” together with its typical flora and fauna of “cactus”, “pines”, “strange herbs”, and “Spanish lizards” (Crimson 1971). He is a traveller enraptured by the charm of the island, a heavenly setting which allows him to “shut out the oppressive present and escape the insistent drumbeat of modern progress” (Lowenthal 2007, 210). Yet, his physical description of the island culminates in him asking a lady he encounters to “dance for him” He had been entranced by the woman as well, behaving as if he were in command of the woman’s body and she had to be submissive to his will. This instance of female sexualization renders the image of the island contrasted with the woman, both described from a masculine viewpoint by physical terms as gadgets that must please him.

In addition, there is a male/female dichotomy that depicts Formentera and the lady as a passive but problematic Muse, being merely an onset of possible evil and always pictured from a male-biased point of view. King Crimson emulates Formentera and the woman’s hybridity in terms of sensuality and sexuality through a comparison between Odysseus and Circe’s mythological story and his own as a traveller, which reminds listeners of the past of the island and its first contact with the notion of the Muse. Circe, who was the daughter of Helios, seduced Odysseus and put him under a spell that made him and his men turn into pigs. What is more, the only clue of agency attributed to King Crimson’s Formentera lady turns out to be only metaphorical, as she is the Muse but she has not got any kind of voice, as opposed to Homer’s character: “Circe’s witchcraft also implies mastery of the natural properties of things, which gives her command of their perversion, too” (Warner 2007, 268). Another paradigm of this unfavorable significance regarding women are the words “spell” and “dark lover”, which establish a connection with black sorcery. Even if it is not clear whether the author is referring to the physical appearance of the girl or if he is implying an abstract condition, the word “dark” denotes negative connotations; a mysterious aspect, a sense of obscurity and ambiguity. The woman in the song is blamed since she is displayed as a sorcerer that had made him fall in love with her by using uncivilized methods like manipulation, enticement and seduction while the man is presented as her victim. All in all, the song is full

of detrimental clichés about women. These are expressed all throughout the song by means of stereotyped features and the recurrent image of the temptation of the island embodied by the female and therefore the latter as a hyper-sexualized Muse.

Other musicians such as Daevid Allen and Kevin Ayers found in the Mediterranean or rather in Deià their symbolic Muse. According to the documentary *Les Illes Escollides* (2008), these two representatives of the 1960s psychedelia who were inspired by *Beatnik*<sup>6</sup> authors like Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg, sought freedom through their creativity by combining art, nature and the usage of drugs. They arrived at the island of Mallorca pulled by the creative microcosm promoted by Robert Graves, as Allen claims: “Deià was a village for artists and, in fact, it was very rich in creative energy as well because before Christianity it was an old worship ground for the goddess Diana” (Turtós 2008, 26:30). Attracted not only by a mystic experience but also by Gravesian literature, they encountered gifted young people “painting, making music and doing naughty things at night” (Turtós 2008, 22:57), as Ayers stated in the interview. As a result of this first contact between paradise, an open minded-attitude towards its inhabitants’ culture and mystic revelations offered by the Goddess was the conception of Ayers’s eleventh studio album *Deià...Vu*, released in 1984. The album, which is fond of psychedelic aesthetics, was his particular way to pay homage to Mallorca, his personal Muse. Although the approach of the islands as a Muse might have been different for Crimson than for Allen and Ayers, the two cases show the persistence of the Goddess on the islands as a Muse and hence the significance of the female as an omen for musical composition.

In terms of art, Mati Klarwein prevails as one of the most idiosyncratic examples of artists who treated the allegorical interpretation of the island as a Muse and the Muse as a begetter of artistic illumination whilst pushing for women’s power to be made effective. Klarwein was a German artist who settled in the artistic colony of Deià during the 80s and became friends with Robert Graves. He attempted to harness a psychedelic visual revolution that was fueled by the intention of entrusting women, as journalist Young indicates in his magazine article: “In Klarwein's world, culture is a perpetual-motion machine where hierarchies are overturned and history collapses into itself, tunnels open up through the Earth allowing cultures, creeds and symbols to project themselves on each other’s irises, male and female” (Young 1998). Apart from subverting set-up sociopolitical systems, Klarwein traced his artistic inspiration

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<sup>6</sup> An American literary movement from the post-war period based on the rejection of standards in all senses; they are considered the predecessors of the hippie movement.

back to the Muse, trying to yield her with agency and visibility. He argued that his artistic germination did not come from within himself but from outside sources and he was just the funnel in charge of transmitting it through his artistic handicraft (Klarwein 2001, 0:08). These “outside sources” he mentions are an acknowledgement of the artistic power the Muse and Mallorca exerted over him. Altogether, he theoretically refuses to support stereotypes that sustain women’s inferiority through male and female cooperation, that is, he vindicated that the artist and the Muse should work hand in glove in a glorifying setting.

Furthermore, having lived in America and Europe, his works were motivated by his travels and female deities both of Western and non-Western religions, a matter which led him to represent and to discuss popular iconography. Accordingly, his cover art and paintings are keen on illustrating images of fertility and women, usually with a psychedelic consciousness touch, as of March 6, 2019, Klarwein’s interview in his webpage<sup>7</sup> proclaims: “In those days I had an obsessional passion for the female body that lasted deep into my thirties (...). Klarwein’s Muses were constantly depicted as Goddesses through his erotic and provocative paintings, a blend of striking collages of cultural and natural elements, usually associated with the feminine eminence. *Saint John*<sup>8</sup> (1962) discloses Western generalizations frequently identified with a blonde, blue-eyed, white, naked woman that resembles Graves’s White Goddess described in the poem: “Whose eyes were blue, with rowan-berry lips, / With hair curled honey-coloured to white hips” (Graves 1997, 8). On another note, *The Annunciation*<sup>9</sup> (1961), which later became Santana’s “Abraxas” cover, stands for the archangel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she was going to give birth to Jesus. The fact that Mary crops up as black and nude questions traditional iconography in addition to exploring the themes of motherhood and fertility, a recurrent topic in the majority of his cover arts. For all these reasons, Mati’s legacy symbolizes this parallelism between psychedelic music, art and the stimulus of an alluring place through the reproduction of plentiful feminine hallmarks as the origin of artistic generation. Nevertheless, in spite of the constructive ambition of depicting the woman as an incentive to artistic creation behind Mati’s paintings, they show an overly sexualized nature, violating Graves’s foremost principles about the Goddess.

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<sup>7</sup> “Mati Klarwein-An Interview”, on Mati Klarwein’s official website, accessed March 6, 2019, <http://www.matiklarweinart.com/mediapage.php?media=1>

<sup>8</sup> Klarwein, Mati. 1962. *Saint John*. Mische technique. 50 x 50 cm. <http://www.matiklarweinart.com/artworkgallery.php>

<sup>9</sup> Klarwein, Mati. 1961. *The Annunciation*. 88 x 128.5 cm. Mische technique. <http://www.matiklarweinart.com/artworkgallery.php?category=Selected%20Works>

Notwithstanding, women such as the French-American sculptor and painter Niki de Saint Phalle threatened patriarchal assumptions through this creative feminine force by questioning what were presumed to be the acceptable roles for women. In spite of male's attempts to entitle women through the medium of the Goddess as the Muse, it remained unknown how female artists in the islands interpreted and reproduced this same concept. According to Klein, "In the work of Goddess artists, nostalgia and primitivism are deployed strategically to challenge patriarchal limitations placed on women's bodies" (Klein 2009, 593). Be that as it may, although male artists had probably exceptional intentions, their products originated by their thesis on the Muse were usually linked with physical appearance and the beauty canon and thereupon highly sexualized. It is for this reason that Niki's artwork, which is clearly influenced by Deità and Graves's theory of a primitive Mediterranean matriarchal society (Boncompte 2015, 302), sheds light upon this pre-established idea of sexual objectification in art. Some instances of feminine empowerment by dint of non-sexualized female forms dominating the composition are found in *La Mariée*<sup>10</sup> (1963). The carved bride appears as a mournful, lifeless being whose soul has been taken away either by her husband or by the institution of marriage itself. The sculpture objects the imposition of marriage as a social norm as well as the expected social constructions imposed during the period. Niki managed to stand out against all odds as an epitome of feminism through her artistic expertise in a world impregnated by standardized masculine values.

In the same way, Niki used her art to adopt the issue of motherhood striving to criticize settled etiquettes and to trigger social changes. *White Goddess*<sup>11</sup> (1964) also embraces the perception of the female as a divine entity that typifies Graves's pure notion of the woman in the myth. Since it encompasses "generosity, abundance and fertility" (Boncompte 2015, 306), the Goddess is a Mother who gestates life in the womb and gives birth to it. The woman is given agency as she is granted the capacity to create life by her own. Likewise, Niki's sculpture of *Moonlady with Dragon* impersonates the Goddess and a direct attack on birth, fertility and creative artistry. Her guts are being gobbled by the dragon, an allegory of the male abuse of power. The sculpture puts across a combination of Gravesian mythology and the female form, constituting a parallelism that denounces the patriarchal system's

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<sup>10</sup> De Saint Phalle, Niki. 1963. *La Mariée*. Toasting, plaster, glued lace, various painted toys. Centre Pompidou, Paris. <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cdLAp8d/r7G7ypL>

<sup>11</sup> There is not any kind of information neither about the medium nor the location of *White Goddess* and *Moonlady With Dragon* in any webpage, so it has been taken out from *The Muse and the Sea* (2015).

aggressivity and atrocity (Boncompte 2015, 304). Having been raped by her own father, it stands to reason that her artistry was impelled by a sort of catharsis, a necessity of protesting and fighting against assumed female archetypes: “The spiritualized bodies that appeared in 1970s feminist art were bodies that invoked the Goddess in order to condemn the sexism and misogyny associated with female bodies in the present.” (Klein 2009, 594). Under this feminist basis, Niki managed to legitimize the figure of the Goddess, providing her with agency through her sculptural recreations, adding as well her personal feminine perspective on the subject.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, sociopolitical factors brought about a reinterpretation of the Mediterranean and the woman as catalysts in an artistic refuge where these international projections by different artists were determined to break with conventions. The creative impetus derived from the Muse, a divine being whose mystical ability has transcended time and has managed to keep stimulating current artists, stemmed from a refusal of fixed social norms besides a recognition of women’s potential. Under these circumstances, art was supposed to sabotage the binary opposition between men and women by means of deconstructing entrenched canons related to gender issues. As it has been demonstrated, this faculty of the Muse as a social marshal has been accredited by artists as unique to the feminine principle, exemplifying a theoretical ascendancy of female authority illustrated in Graves, Crimson, Ayers, Allen, Klarwein and Niki de Saint Phalle’s works.

Unfortunately, most of these eloquent examples are the offshoot of a misinterpretation of the initial Goddess-Muse proposed by Robert Graves. Even though these artists’ fine arts were consecrated throughout the years, not all of them reflected the Goddess’ earliest ideals. How those images of the woman embodying the islands, on the one hand, and the islands as a Muse, on the other hand, have been portrayed by the artists are nowhere near as faithful as Graves’s proposition. These products embraced Graves’s principles about the Muse but advocated feminine archetypes that mirrored its masculine counterpart, often without any kind of voice by themselves, excepting Niki’s art. Results were fruitful in the theory but in practice almost all of them reaffirmed masculine stereotypes instead, usually preventing women from obtaining an absolute agency. In consequence, the Goddess that inspired Graves to create and develop a feminist premise threatening to the pre-arranged patriarchal status metamorphosed



into a mere social product of hyper-sexualization for the rest of the masculine artists. It is proof of the persistent subordination of the female to the male, as women have usually been represented by their sexual attributes, so they were basically artistically serving men. How the notion of the Muse will be handled in the future remains still in the air, but evidence suggests that modern art and society might indeed not have changed that much. Perhaps in the future the theoretical postulation of the Muse and the Islands as an emblem of female empowerment will not be at odds with the artists' final outcome.

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