

RUTH NIVOLA:
Adornments

From June 3 through 26, 2006, The Drawing Room is pleased to present *Adornments* by long time East Hampton resident Ruth Nivola. This exotic body of work stands alone in the realm of contemporary jewelry. Delicately designed necklaces, Ruth Nivola's jewelry might be called "platonic;" their perfect form mirrors their perfect conception. In Jungian terms, Ruth Nivola's necklaces are archetypal female decorations. One imagines each necklace draped over the linen tunic of Cleopatra's friends, Empress Theodora at Ravenna, or a Sardinian princess.

To give form to her inspirations, Ruth Nivola reinvented the decorative arts and handicrafts she learned as a child in schools in Germany and Italy in the 1920's. Her accomplishments in crochet, embroidery, knotting, appliqué, braiding and sewing are transformed into modern, regal amulets in which she uses yarns, Indian silks, brocade, and Venetian beads. With gold and silver colored metallic yarns, she crochets the structure of each unique collar piece. Intriguing and unexpected compositions radiate from the crocheted collars like webs built by spiders. Thin yarns covered by sewn iridescent threads give way to tassels, and tiny bundles of tangerine, turquoise or fuchsia silk punctuate a strand with the pure color of gemstones to give focus and weight to her designs. Crocheted gold shell forms, pods of embroidered silk or bits of brocade dance and dangle from these marvelous feminine adornments.

In the invitation piece, *Festival of Queen Bees*, 1981, Ruth Nivola creates a bib of gold netting reminiscent of a honeycomb. Attached to each comb is her delightful version of queen bees: winged, gold sacks stuffed with brilliant embroidered silks and brocade. This magnificent ethereal necklace of spun treasures might have been the ultimate ceremonial adornment at Knossos or Pompeii.

The lyrical and fantastic shapes of Ruth Nivola's adornments are inspired by musical instruments, plant forms, insects and the embroidered costumes from her husband's place of origin, the island of Sardinia. At once contemporary and historical, her necklaces suggest in simple materials the filigree and gold techniques of Egyptian and Greek jewelry. Her ingenious braiding of metallic yarns reminds us of Ruth Nivola's appreciation for the Etruscan practice of twisting gold or silver threads into curls and spirals often welded at points of contact. Today, one imagines these original works of art would be hung on walls, talismans of the grace and dignity of women all over the world and throughout time.

Born in Munich in 1917, Ruth Nivola left Germany in 1933 for Italy where she attended the *Instituto D'Arte Contemporanea di Monza*, studying graphics, drawing and painting. There she met her husband, the Sardinian sculptor Costantino Nivola, with whom she fled from fascism in Italy to Paris. Ruth Nivola studied fashion in Paris, and the Nivolas moved to New York in 1939. Settling in New York and in East Hampton to raise their family in the late 1940's, the Nivolas welcomed artists from all over Europe who were immigrating to New York at the same time. Costantino, who died in 1988, left a prodigious body of work which Ruth Nivola has spent the last fifteen years organizing for the *Museo Nivola* in Sardinia, among other things. Ruth Nivola has shown her jewelry at the American Craft Museum, the Zabriskie Gallery, Longhouse Reserve, and in Italy.

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