

THE MAGIC OF THE FIRST BISCUITS IN VICTOR DE NALDA PORCELAIN

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On May 7, 1947, just two days after the appearance of the first figure produced by its artistic section, the first “biscuit” figure came out of the kilns of the company “V́ctor de Nalda Porcelain and Refractory Products Factory”.

That May day, in Alḿcera, a small town in the middle of the orchard, a few kilometers from the capital, Valencia, the magic of a sculptor, the science of a materials chemist, the trade of a assembler and the technology of a furnace engineer, allied, at last, to transform a piece of pure porcelain paste, only kaolin, quartz and feldspar, into a perfect work of art.

The completion of figures in biscuit, without enamels or varnishes, and usually with two firings, does not allow imperfections. It is the most demanding type of porcelain figures for the sculptor, for the figure assembler, who must ensure the correct gluing of the different parts and review all the joints, for the chemist who controls the composition of the porcelain paste and its homogeneity. and for the furnace technician who monitors the temperature and the inevitable contraction of the pieces, while protecting the figure from coloring due to combustion residues.

It is a technique that forces the sculptor to achieve all the expressiveness of the piece only with modeling. At the same time, the small deformations that the pieces can suffer in the kiln, and that can be hidden, in the successive firings, when applying the enamels that provide the color and expressiveness of faces, bodies and decoration, cannot be hidden in a biscuit .

We have located twelve biscuits in the first five years of Nalda's artistic section, from 1947 to 1951. A few more came later, but the Nalda sculptors and decorators, who at first used enamels like any other European factories, began directing their production towards the use of the characteristic Nalda slips that will largely define the aesthetics of the brand. Only some of those 12 biscuits went on the market, leaving others as "author proofs". It is a surprising and magical production of its first sculptors, which until now had been practically ignored by the History of Art, together with the somewhat better known production of decorated figures.

Nalda, a large industrial porcelain company dedicated to the production of dielectric material, began its artistic adventure at the request of Ernestina Pujol, wife of the owner, V́ctor de Nalda Fŕgols. It was not a business, nor did it need to be for the company that had almost monopolized the Spanish production of porcelain for an electrical industry in an accelerated process of development, after the "hunger years" between 1940 and 1945.

The company had started in 1913, when Bernardo de Nalda Pĺ, father of the former, bought a small industrial and domestic ceramics and porcelain factory, which Ram3n Canals had created and which was put up for auction that year for having entered bankruptcy proceedings. Bernardo de Nalda had resolutely oriented it towards industrial production, especially to respond to the needs of the growing Spanish electricity demand for insulators and other electrical control systems, which in the first years of the century were practically all imported from Germany and England.

The industrial Nalda that, after the civil war, resumed its activities under V́ctor de Nalda Frigols is practically unique in Spain in the production of large porcelain insulators, almost unique in insulators for electrical, telegraph and telephone lines, in which it competed with the glass and earthenware insulators, and participates in the market for small porcelain pieces that were required at that time by domestic and public facilities. It shares part of this last market with the company

"Sociedad Española Gardy", from Meliana, two kilometers north of Almacera, until 1923 "Gran Fabrica de Mosaico Nolla", and dedicated mainly to switches, fuses and circuit breakers, plugs, lamp holders and supports for electrical cables, necessary to use electricity in the domestic environment and industry in general, before the massive appearance of bakelite.

The company has a huge production for its time. We know the data from 1951: Nalda makes 54 "hornadas" in his kilns, with a total volume of occupation of 2,193 cubic meters of porcelain firing in total, and he has made 1,012 pieces of artistic porcelain.

With their new section, which followed in the footsteps of another company, Cerámicas Hispania, from Manises, west of Valencia, whose notable owner was the X Marqués de Mascarell de San Juan, Ricardo Trénor y Sentmenat, the Naldas aspired to be recognized by "high society" and Valencian culture, especially the one that emerged intact from the civil war. Ernestina, the soul of the new section, supported by her husband and the buoyant finances of the parent industry, sets out to find the means that would allow them to achieve the excellence that she desired for the artistic initiative.

The materials were sufficiently available. They had their own high quality clay and kaolin mines in Valencia, Cuenca, Guadalajara and Teruel. The kilns easily admitted the different firings of the new pieces. They had their own qualified technicians, under the orders of Bernardo de Nalda, Víctor's brother... and they had, after the war, the scientific and technical collaboration of the already famous ceramist Alfonso Blat Monzó, trained in the best European institutions, expert in chemistry and porcelain technology. They still lack the artists.

The sculptural aspect, the one that interests us the most here, is found by Víctor and Ernestina in 1946, in Vicente Beltrán Grimal and his artistic environment. Vicente Beltrán (1896-1963), born in Sueca, Valencia, studied at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts in Valencia. In 1922 he obtained a scholarship at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, from where he returned to Valencia in 1927. His sculptures for the facade and the glass room of the Valencia City Hall date from those years.

In 1931 he was already a professor at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts. In 1932 he created his famous Allegory of the Republic, a large wooden sculpture, which was installed in the plenary hall of the Valencia City Council. After the civil war broke out, Beltrán collaborated with the republican authorities and became responsible for the transport and conservation of the works of art from the Prado Museum in Madrid, taken to Valencia as an intermediate step towards Switzerland, in order to protect them from the disasters of the war

He is prosecuted in 1939 and sent to the Modelo Prison in Valencia. The conditions of his sentence are not too strict and in the prison a collective of artists is formed, tolerated by its guards, which includes, among many others, the sculptors Fulgencio García López and José Doménech, also graduates of the School of Fine Arts. In 1941 he is released.

In 1946 he was reinstated in his position as professor at the School of Fine Arts, of which he would become director. That same year there he came into contact with Víctor de Nalda Grifols, who offered him the position of director of the recently created artistic section of Nalda, his company. Beltrán, wanting to dedicate himself primarily to his teaching work at the School, rejects the offer, but agrees to be part of Nalda's initial staff of sculptors, and places himself in charge of recruiting confident artists from among his acquaintances and students in Fine Arts.

The first Nalda sculptors are precisely José Doménech, whom he proposes as director of the section, and Fulgencio García López. From Beltrán, Fulgencio García and Doménech, who were soon

joined, with sculptural works since 1951, by Amparo Montoro, Beltrán's favorite disciple. All these are the almost unique Nalda biscuits sculptors.

BELTRAN'S BISCUITS

The first figures to come out of the kilns are by Vicente Beltrán, the first on May 5, 1947, and from Beltrán too are the first biscuits produced by Nalda. Of May 7 is the "first kiln exit" of his sculpture entitled "Leda and the swan", measuring 275x140x95 mm. and it is followed by at least four others in the following years.

Beltrán is faithful to his art-deco style, very recognizable in the features of his sculpture, while endowing it with a gestural dynamism that he has already used in other of his sculptures made of marble and wood. The porcelain biscuit technique, which reached its splendor in the 19th century, was perfectly suited to his sculptural style.

"LEDA AND THE SWAN". 1st output from the kilns: 7 may, 1947. Dimensions (xyz):
275x140x95.





“OTTOMAN”. 1st output from the kilns: June 26, 1947. Dimensions: 270x97x90.



“CHILD OF THE SICKLE”. 1st output from the kilns: 10 june, 1947. Dimensions: 90x90x175.



“BUTTERFLY GIRL”. 1st output from the kilns: September 10, 1947. Dimensions: 90x90X105.
The biscuit figure does not have the butterfly, possibly because it was an author's proof. There are several decorated versions that do have it.



“THE BEAR AND THE ARBUTUS”. 1st output from the kilns: May 14, 1952.
Dimensions: 146x130X240.



FULGENCIO GARCÍA LÓPEZ, “GARCIETA”, AND HIS BISCUITS

Fulgencio García López (1915-1994) trained at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts and began practicing painting and sculpture, within a classicist style. In 1936, within the framework of a newly created Alliance of Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture, which, after the war broke out, lent its support to the republic, the young Garcieta began working with the master of the Fallas, Regino Mas.

In 1937 he collaborated with him in the realization of two of the four “Fallas antifascistas”, promoted by the Ministry of Public Instruction at the initiative of Josep Renau, with the slogans “El betlem d'enguany” and “La balança del món”, which They will not be burned for security reasons, being exhibited in La Lonja, and in other significant Renau signage and propaganda projects.

Sentenced after the civil war for these activities, he is confined in the Modelo Prison, in Valencia, together with Vicente Beltrán Grimal. Released after a few months, he approaches the workshop of Vicente Luna, a family friend, at the same time that he begins to work for free as a sculptor. A genius artist, in 1945, he obtained a prize at the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in Madrid.

In 1946, Vicente Beltrán called him to collaborate with Nalda, where he began to sculpt numerous figures from 1947. At the beginning of 1952 he left Nalda and had to produce for Cerámicas Hispania, until his arrival at Lladró. In 1954 we already know his figure of a humble bunny.

For the Lladró he began to regularly produce sculptures from 1956, although not exclusively, until his retirement. Between 1955 and 1959, for example, he collaborated with Regino Mas in the making of floats for various celebrations, on both sides of the Atlantic. except for a period, around 1964, when he set up, with a partner, Antonio Ruiz, and taking Adolfo Pucilowski, the Lladró chemist, with them, the T'ang porcelain factory, in Xirivella. The company failed in unequal competition with some angry Lladró brothers, and after trying a new business venture in Tangier, he returned to Lladró and remains its most prolific sculptor, both for the main brand and for the Nao brand, which the Lladró brothers created. to ruin T'ang.

At Lladró, after extensive work for the parent company and for its Nao brand, he retires. But still around 1983 he created, as an independent worker or "freelance", sculptures for other porcelain factories. His collaboration with the American company Franklin Porcelain, from Franklin, Pennsylvania, must be from this time. for which he designs a line of figures grouped thematically as “Girls of the flowers” of which we have so far identified three figures: “Patricia of the Primroses”, “Teresa the Tulip Maiden” and “Cecilia the Carnation Maiden”.

For Nalda we have located four biscuits by Fulgencio García and, above all, his famous Horses, created in 1949 and which were the main figure that Nalda presented, as a representative of Spanish porcelain, in a great European landmark, the exhibition "La ceramique espagnole du XIIIe siècle à nos jours", held from February 15 to April 22, 1957 at the Palais Miramar, in Cannes, which included Picasso and his “plats espagnols” as a prominent figure.

The Horses are a technical prodigy, as well as sculptural. Held on the fine front legs of one horse and the hind legs of another, they are a miracle in porcelain. If one takes into account that in its first firing, drying, the porcelain is reduced by approximately 5% and in the second, sintering, at more than 1300 degrees Celsius, close to another 15%, one can imagine the difficulty of sustaining the stable sculpture on those dwindling supports and close to the softening point of the material. After many tests, less than a dozen perfect pieces must have been produced, destroying all the rest, internal company sources stated.

HORSES. 1st output from the kilns: March 22, 1949. Dimensions: 240x120x275.





THE TREE GROUP. 1st output from the kilns: May 17, 1948. Dimensions: 240x190X275.



SHEPHERD BOY. 1st output from the kilns: March 9, 1951. Dimensions: 180x110x200.



SHEPHERD GIRL. 1st output from the kilns: April 30, 1951. Dimensions: 185x110x200.



There is a decorated version of the shepherds boy and girl:



JOSE DOMENECH

We still have little biographical data on José Doménech. He was a student at the Superior School of Fine Arts in Valencia, collaborated with the Alianza de Artistas para la Cultura and was imprisoned at the end of the war along with Vicente Beltrán and Fulgencio García.

He is Nalda's first artistic director, when Beltrán declined to accept that position in 1947, and he began collaborating with him in the making of his figures, until he began his own production, of great sensitivity, first copying models from German factories and then signing original parts. We do not know more significant dates in his life and we only have the testimony of some of his figures and the dates on which they were made. His technically complex Prancing Horse is a prodigy of dynamism, although it is doubtful that it went into serial production due to the large number of partial casts required.

RIDDING HORSE. 1st output from the kilns, November 4, 1950. Dimensions 205x95X225.





PIERROT. 1st output from the kilns: August 10, 1948. Dimensions: 110x110x200.
It is a copy of an original by Karl Ens, Wolkstedt, Germany.



Decorated version of Nalda's Pierrot. Below, figure of Karl Ens, Wolkstedt.



AMPARO MONTORO MARTÍN (Valencia, 1921-2011)

Amparo Montoro, the daughter of artisans, was the only woman in her class to study sculpture at the Superior School of Fine Arts in Valencia. When she finished her studies, Octavio Vicent called her as an assistant in making the heads of ninots for children's "fallas". Vicente Beltrán takes her to Nalda as a sculptor. Her first piece for Nalda dates from August 1951. In 1957, she married Juan Bautista Llorens Riera, a painter from Nalda since 1954. She abandoned sculpture in Nalda, but did some collaboration with Lladró, for which, according to Juan Lladró, "she made four or five figures.

THE ORCHESTRA GROUP. 1st output from the kilns: November 13, 1952.

Dimensions: 200x130X275.





There are individually decorated versions of some of the girls:



NALDA PAINTERS

Although this is not, here, our first object of study, and very little data on the Nalda painters are still known, it is worth noting some data that contextualize what has been said up to now about the biscuit figures that we have shown, and the decorated versions arrived to us.

The pictorial aspect, fundamental in artistic porcelain, is also found by Victor de Nalda Grífols and Ernestina Pujol, thanks to Vicente Beltrán, at the Superior School of Fine Arts, in Valencia. Unfortunately we have no record of almost any of these painters.

Juan Lladró Dolz claims his role as Nalda's painter and decorator between 1949 and 1953, together with his brother José. From that time, and surely as part of his artistic education at the School of Arts and Crafts in Valencia, which he attended for "seven or eight years, two hours at night", we still have several paintings on ceramics and porcelain, in plates and vases, which have been preserved in the Lladró Birthplace House-Museum, in Almácer.

His official work in Nalda, however, was as assemblers of figures, a delicate task that, in some pieces prior to 1949, present notable deficiencies. The assembly of the different pieces of a figure, which are made in separate molds, requires considerable skill in the use of porcelain slip, a semi-liquid paste with which the parts are glued. Once they are sufficiently dry, it is time to go over the joints with a spatula, so that the surface is homogenized and it is difficult for cracks to appear when the figure goes to the kiln for its drying firing, and then its second sintering firing or "recrystallization", at no less than 1300 degrees, which turns it into hard porcelain. Then, they are ready to receive a "decoration".

The concept of "decorator" is complex to define. For example, in Nalda they were looking for graduates of Fine Arts. In the Lladró company, the first painters and decorators were the Lladró brothers themselves. Later, the professionals who applied the slips, glazes and varnishes were specialized workers. The "eye painters" were the most valued specialists, due to the critical impact that this function represented on the final result of the decorated figure. In the successive Lladró training schools, they were a separate specialty from the rest.

In private conversations, Juan Lladró prided himself on being Nalda's best assembler and decorator and on having developed techniques that he would later use in his own company, as well as having "decorated" a large number of figures before and after their successive passages through the kilns. He even affirmed that, before his arrival, in 1947 and 1948, some pieces were sent to decorate in Madrid. From the rest of the Nalda painters, whom we know Beltrán brought from the Superior School of Fine Arts, in Valencia, and who constituted, like the sculptors, a group independent from the rest of the workers, we only know, for the moment, Juan Bautista Llorens Riera (1925-1986), who entered the School in 1949 and finished his studies with the Final Degree Award and the Bronze Victor Award from the Union of University Students, the SEU.

Llorens Riera is well known as a member of a pioneering and famous artistic group that emerged within the school, called "Els set". "Els set", active between 1948 (or 1949, depending on the sources) and 1954, was integrated, with successive exits and entrances, by Vicente Castellanos Giner, Juan Genovés Candel, Vicente Gómez García, Vicente Fillol Roig, Juan Bautista Llorens Riera, José Masiá Sellés and Ricardo Hueso de Brugada, founding members, and Ángeles Ballester Garcés, Joaquín Michavila Asensi and Eusebio Sempere Juan.

He enters Nalda, under the guidance of Vicente Beltrán, in 1954 and must remain there until the early 1960s, when he appears as a draftsman for the Valencia City Council. He also sets up the "Concordia 4" store, at that address in the Barrio del Carmen, in Valencia, specializing in materials

for the Fine Arts, in addition to developing great activity in the organization of exhibitions and cultural meetings. The rest of his career is already irrelevant to our object. Up to now, no other information has reached us from the Nalda painters. Only their works, fortunately preserved, give proof of the excellence that Beltrán knew how to print in the company's production and that would be preserved until the disappearance of the artistic section in 1971.

Biscuits after the ones we have presented here are very rare in Nalda. After the Beltrán period, who died in 1963, and even in his last years, the styles of Nalda Porcelain are characterized by the intense use of the slip technique, mixtures of naturally or artificially colored clays and porcelain slip, applied on damp or, as potters like to say, "leather textured". The Nalda slips are practically unique worldwide, from the 50s to the 70s, until their disappearance and are a distinctive sign that allows us to recognize, almost without possibility of error, the Nalda origin of the figures.

At the same time, Nalda sculptors and painters, in the period between the disappearance of Vicente Beltrán and the incorporation of the sculptor Ramón Inglés from 1966 to 1970, show in their works all the freedom that could be expected from young artists deprived in their work of stringent financial requirements. Nalda produced figures that are still surprising today, some for their strangeness and even ugliness, but always for their originality.



Couple on horseback. Nalda. Unidentified sculptor. Note the extensive use of slips, and their patinas, in the figure of the horse.

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