

REGIONAL COSTUMES IN NALDA PORCELAIN

Antonio Ten Ros

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We have already devoted previous works ((Ten 2023 a), (Ten 2023 b), (Ten 2023 c)) to the origins of the artistic section of the “Victor de Nalda Porcelain and Refractory Factory” in Almácer (5 km. North of Valencia, Spain). Hereinafter “Nalda”. Nalda, an enormous factory, leader in Spain in production of porcelain electrical insulators, began producing porcelain figures in its industrial kilns in May, 1947.

Unfortunately, only one precious document, which includes the production of the section from 1947 to 1954, listing the number of pieces and name, the date of “first exit from the kiln”, sculptors and assistants, for each figure, has arrived to us. The document is preserved in the archives of the National Museum of Ceramics and Decorative Arts “González Martí”, from Valencia. Some documents on the life of the whole company, were published in official media, magazines, and collateral academic studies. Those are all the written information we have on Nalda. Its archives, if they are ever opened to scholarly research, will undoubtedly complete the panorama of the most elite brand of Spanish porcelain from after the civil war.

The rest of our knowledge about Nalda is provided by Oral History. Many of the protagonists and their immediate descendants are still alive and remember facts, details and the atmosphere of the factory. Oral History is here the most important source of information. The next are the collections, public and private, of Nalda objects. The González Martí Museum preserves an important collection of Nalda figures. Some private collectors have rich collections too, which in several cases have the added value of the memory of the origin and history of its objects. Together, all this information allows us to see and understand the artistic reality of this very fleeting brand of Valencian porcelain.

Through this oral tradition we know the name and times of those responsible for this brand. We owe the emergence of Nalda as an artistic porcelain adventure to Ernestina Pujol, wife of Victor de Nalda Frígols, son of the founder of the parent company, Bernardo de Nalda Plá, who in 1913 bought a small company, the Ramón Canals factory, already specialized in technical porcelain. Ernestina Pujol is too the mother of the next owner of the Company, Victor de Nalda Pujol. Fina Inglés, sister of the last sculptor from Nalda, Ramón Inglés Capella, affirms of Ernestina Pujol that she took up the artistic section as “her hobby” and that it was she, with her husband, who sought out all the best in technicians, materials and artists for her adventure.

Oral History also allows us to divide the short history of Nalda’s production of figures and decorative objects into three periods: from 1947 to the end of the 50s, from 1960 to 1965 and from 1966 to 1971.

The first period, from which documentary information has come to us to a large extent, is marked by the powerful figures of Vicente Beltrán Grimal and Fulgencio García López. The data that we know about them is already collected in the cited works. They were accompanied in the early years by the sculptors José Doménech, formally the artistic director of Nalda since 1947, Amparo Montoro, Amparo Hueso and Francisco Catalá, all of them trained at the Superior School of Fine Arts in Valencia and for whom we have less biographical data.

The link between these sculptors, and also the painters, with the School is a distinctive feature of the Nalda brand. Victor de Nalda and Ernestina, owners of a successful industrial company, with no need for profitability, with the best industrial facilities, technicians and kilns and with their own

kaolin and clay mines, tried to find the best sculptors and painters that could be found in Valencia in 1947. They found them through the already famous Vicente Beltrán, professor and later director of the School of Fine Arts, who channeled the best of its graduates to Nalda.

In this, in addition to the lack of concern for immediate financial returns, Nalda was also unique. Nalda's contemporary brands, Cerámicas Hispania and Lladró, were not as rigid in their elitism. Juan Lladró's phrase "We did what was most salable", without concessions to artistic minorities, sums up this philosophy well. Cerámicas Hispania drew on the excellence of the manual workers of the Manises ceramic industry and its figures constantly imitate or copy the aesthetics of the great German brands of the early 20th century. Until the 1980s, Lladró depended exclusively on the artistic taste of its founders, the three brothers Juan, José and Vicente Lladró Dolz. The Lladró family, Nalda's workers until 1953, initially relied on local sculptors and, from 1956, on the figure of Fulgencio García López, who had left Nalda in 1952 and, already in 1954, did some works for Lladró. Fulgencio García, a prolific and brilliant academic sculptor, marked from his departure de Nalda and according to the brothers, the successive aesthetic lines of Lladró until the 80s.

The period from around 1958 to 1966 is still the least known of Nalda, in terms of sculptors and painters. We have their works but not their names. We are certain of its origin in the School of Fine Arts, but both the later famous of its graduates and the most anonymous others have not identified themselves as sculptors and painters for Nalda. Only the name of Juan Bautista Llorens Riera has come down to us. Llorens Riera started to work in Nalda in 1954 and left the company around 1960.

Finally, the last period, until the disappearance of the brand in 1971, is monopolized almost exclusively by the very unique and powerful figure of the sculptor Ramón Inglés Capella. Was Ramón Inglés who decided, together with Ernesto de Nalda, brother of Víctor de Nalda Pujol and in charge of the artistic section in this last period, all the main lines of the Nalda aesthetics until his departure from the company to found his own brand, Porcelanas Inglés, in 1970

The study of the different versions of figures that have come down to us reveals the great stylistic freedom that painters and decorators had when designing their final appearance. From his contemplation it is easy to verify that Nalda almost never exactly repeated the decoration of his figures. The short number of copies of most of them, made in successive editions, and their equally low sales, which limited mass production, allowed for the introduction of important variations between the figures of one edition and between successive editions of the same figure.

In these variations one can recognize very different styles that attest to very different sensibilities. In the first period, the one with the greatest influence on Vicente Beltrán, the painting and decoration are clearly inspired by the finishes of the most consolidated Central European porcelain, especially German, with its decoration based on high and low temperature enamels, but with their own sculptural styles. From the end of the 50s and the beginning of the 60s we already find an almost exclusive use of the most important of Nalda's characteristic innovations: sculpture with marked impressionist features and, above all, an intensive use of a decoration based on "Engobes", slips, mixtures of the same paste of porcelain than the figures, with colored clays in brown, black and dark red will constitute the distinctive sign of Nalda porcelain. In the period of Ramón Inglés, since 1966, we find both techniques, still with preference for slips over enamels, and the sculptor's own characteristic style.

The slip technique does not prioritize classicist realism. Often realistic parts, such as the faces and eyes of the figures, are combined with looser strokes, even flirting, for a short period, around 1958, with Picassian influences due to the contacts of Victor de Nalda with Picasso. The clothing and decoration magnify the aesthetic impression of color over and over again, close to the sculptural

impressionism that the painters and sculptors of the period between Beltrán and Inglés also make abundant use of.



Figure 1. Water carrier woman. Nalda. Sculptor Fulgencio García. Left: figure from July 1951, with enamels and realistic decoration. Right: figure from a later edition, with slip applications on clothing and objects.



Figures 2 and 3. Shepherds. Nalda. The first are by the sculptor Fulgencio García, from March 1951. The second are by an still anonymous author, from the 1960s. Note the coincidence of themes and accessory objects and the radical confrontation of sculptural styles, from classical realism to the most daring impressionism in the treatment of shapes and volumes. The contrast in pictorial details and decorations is also notable, from the enamel techniques to the large strokes in strongly colored slips, typical of Nalda.

The Nalda sculptors often let their inspiration flow, throughout the life of the company, towards more or less long thematic series. We have already devoted a work to a short series of representations of the Holy Family (Ten Ros, 2003 c). Other thematic series, such as the one with figures of popular characters and trades, the one with surprising figurines dressed in Mexican folkloric costumes, or the bookends, with powerful sculptural images of monks, scribes, thinkers, Mexicans or Egyptian vases, are among the most widespread of the brand and they still frequently appear in the artistic markets, ignorant of such thematic affiliations.

Among these thematic series, and extending throughout the life of the brand, there is a more numerous one but much less well-known due to the complexity of some of the figures, their expensive decoration or their elitist and small market: that of the figures in regional costume.

So far we have located eleven figures or groups of figures that can be grouped into this thematic series, which extends from the early days of Beltrán to the last of Inglés. We have documentary evidence of some more, which has not come down to us. Thus, in the documents some “Charros from Salamanca” appear, by Francisco Catalá as sculptor, dated 1952, and some “Aragonese, also by the same sculptor, from 1953.

Those that we have been able to document graphically are the following:

Drum boy in Valencian regional costume.

Valencian “Clavariesa” in procession dress.

Woman in gala dress of the Valencian countryside.

Valencian children dancing traditional dances.

Galician woman, or perhaps Asturian, due to the similarity of costumes.

Group of Lagarteranas. From Lagartera, a small town in Toledo.

Young Lagarterana girl making bobbins.

Andalusian women dancing, in various decorations.

Andalusian children dancing.

Majorcan girl, Balearic Islands woman.

“Extremeña”, Extremadura woman.

In some cases, such as the Valencian countryside women, we have documented figures by different sculptors and of different sizes. All of them retain an identical sculptural structure, although with different ornamentation, for example in the use by Beltrán of porcelain lace trims. Most of them seems author's proofs, unrepeatably and, surely, in very short series.

Let's see the figures, as they have arrived to us, not always in perfect condition:

Drum boy in Valencian regional costume (East of Spain)

Separate piece of a "Festa Major" figure of large dimensions, also by the same sculptor, which we have not located. Sculptor Fulgencio Garcia. October 1948. Dimensions (x,y,z): (135x110x230mm)



Figures 4,5,6,7

Valencian “Clavariesa” in procession dress.

Gala dress for processions and liturgical acts, of Valencian tradition in its jewelry and accessories, which extends throughout the Spanish Levant. Two versions, bigger and smaller from 1948 and 1951. Sculptor Fulgencio García. October 1948. Ours: (150x150x285 mm)



Figures 8,9,10,11

Woman in gala dress of the Valencian countryside.

Vicente Beltrán (april, 1949, with porcelain lace trims) and José Doménech (1953, the one here presented, 135x130x240 mm) signed editions of the same, in different sizes and decoration.



Figuras 12,13,14,15

Valencian children dancing traditional dances

Date after 1954. Unidentified sculptor. Girl (45x51x108mm); child (45x42x98mm).



Figures 16,17,18,19

Goup of "Lagarteranas"

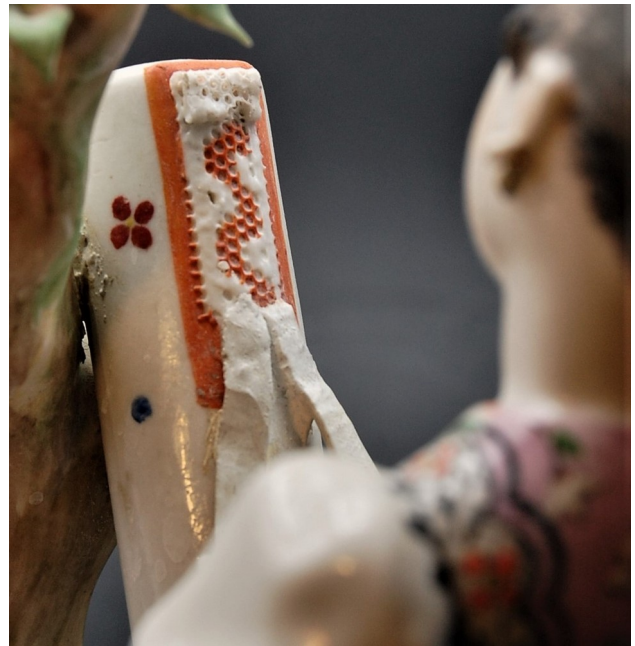
Typical costumes of the town of Lagartera, in Toledo (Center of Spain). Sculptor Amparo Montoro. April 1953. (242x230x225 mm)



Figures, 20,21,22,23

Lagarterana girl making bobbins

Separate piece of the "Group of Lagarteranas". Sculptor Amparo Montoro. After 1954.
(250x210x250 mm)



Figures 24,25,26,27

Galician or Asturian (North of Spain) woman

Sculptor Amparo Montoro. January 1954. (110x150x240mm). Suit similar to that of Asturias.



Figures 32,33,34

Majorcan (Balearic Islands) woman
Sculptor not identified. Without date. (90x90x190 mm)



Figures 32,33,34,35.

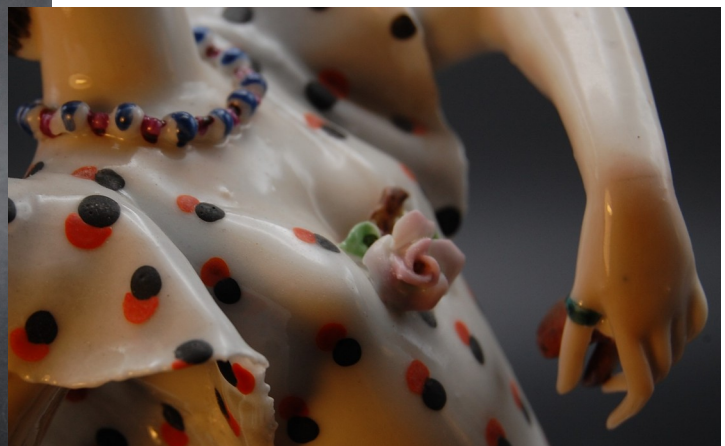
Andalusian (South of Spain) dancing woman, in green

Unidentified sculptor. No date known,
(110x150x240mm)



Figures 36,37,38,39

Andalusian (South of Spain) dancing woman, in red
Unidentified sculptor. No date known. (100x140x220mm)



Figures 40,41,42,43

Andalusian (South of Spain) children dancing
Unidentified sculptor. No date known. Girl (58x65x97). Child (52x35x108).



Figures 44,45,46

“Extremeña”. Extremadura (West of Spain) woman

Unidentified sculptor. No date known. (145x165x300). There is a larger version, in biscuit.



Figures 47,48,49

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