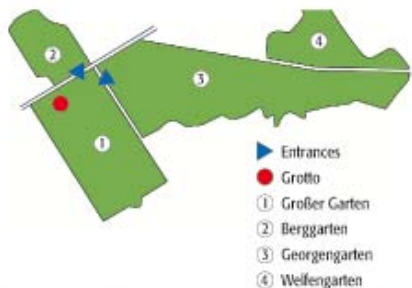




The Location Plan.



The Realisation.

To create a permanent base for the decorations, the Grotto walls and ceilings were first sprayed with glass fibre. This was cut away in manageable sections and taken to France, where the artist's assistants covered them with mosaics of mirrors and glass. Finished sections were brought back to Hannover, bolted in place, and the fibreglass figures mounted on the new surface.

This painstaking and complicated process meant that work on the Grotto interior took from the spring of 2001 till spring of 2003.

The Grotto may be visited throughout the summer season, from April till early October, whenever the garden is open.

Project commissioned by:
 Hannover City Council, Directorate of Environment and Urban Greenspace, in association with the Directorate of Construction



A project by the Landeshauptstadt Hannover
 and the Allianz Umweltstiftung, Munich

together with:



Sigrüd von Berlepsch

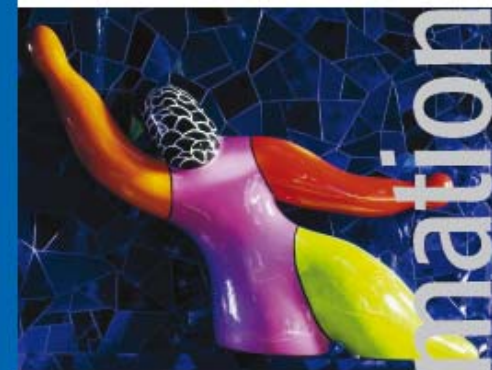
Grotto photographs by Fria Hagen, garden photographs by R. Kunert. All photographs of the Grotto © Niki de Saint Phalle 2002

The Allianz Environment Foundation.

Since its establishment in 1990 the Allianz Environment Foundation has supported projects all over Germany wherever humankind and the environment meet - from renaturalisation of watercourses through retention of precious cultural landscapes and reshaping of and new designs for urban open space through to establishment of environmental information centres. One of the foundation's special funding areas is devoted to the rehabilitation and reinstatement of historic gardens, squares and parks.

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GardenArt

The Historic Grotto in Herrenhausen Gardens with new decorations by Niki de Saint Phalle

Information



The Gardens.

The Herrenhausen Gardens, comprising Georgengarten, Welfengarten, Berggarten and the Grosser Garten, are some of the most beautiful parks in Germany. The Baroque Grosser Garten was begun in 1666 and laid out in its present form between 1696 and 1714 by the Electress Sophie. It is one of the few European Baroque gardens to have retained its characteristic structures in their original form.



The Grotto.

The Grotto was built in the northwest corner of the Grosser Garten in 1676. Its three rooms were originally ornamented with shells, crystals and minerals to create a place of enchantment and refuge from the heat of the day, but this intention was soon abandoned, the decorations were removed in the 18th century, and for many years the building was used as a store. After structural restoration for the 2000 World Exposition, between 2001 and 2003 the Grotto was given a new interior according to plans by Niki de Saint Phalle. The project was made possible by generous support from the Allianz insurance company's environment foundation and other sponsors.

The Work of Art.

The octagonal middle room and the two adjoining rooms to the right and left are completely covered with mosaics of coloured glass and mirrors, pebbles and many painted figures on the theme of 'The Life of Man and Woman'.

The spiral ornamentation around the pillar and walls of the entrance room symbolises 'Spirituality'. The Mirror Room, on the theme of 'Day and Life', contains over 40 relief figures, examples from almost all of Niki de Saint Phalle's stylistic periods. The Blue Room is devoted to 'Night and the Cosmos'; brightly-coloured female figures dance in the intense blue of the night sky and reach for the stars. Windows and doors of the Grotto are ornamented with grills, specially designed by the artist, also inlaid with glass and mirrors.

The Artist.

Niki de Saint Phalle has been a well-known personality in Hannover since her 'Nanas' appeared on the bank of the River Leine in the city centre in 1974. At first execrated as an artistic scandal, within a few years these three exuberantly buxom ladies had become a famous city landmark. In the autumn of 2000 Niki de Saint Phalle gave almost 400 of her works to Hannover's Sprengel Museum.

The famous artist and honorary citizen of the City of Hannover died in May 2002, one year before her work in the Grosser Garten was completed. She had, however, discussed all the artistic details with her assistants, making it possible for them to complete the Grotto as her last work of art.

