



The design of the island itself is a composite of pure, dry atmosphere, brilliant sky, and the sea that the sun bakes yellow by day, and light brown settlements marked by limestone masonry—the ancient (Greek) sometimes indistinguishable from the contemporary. (Gianni de Siga) The artist with his polychromed bas-reliefs.

## Sardinia

## and an artist

All ancient photographs by Constantino Nivola



## nivola traps an ancient vitality in hardened sand



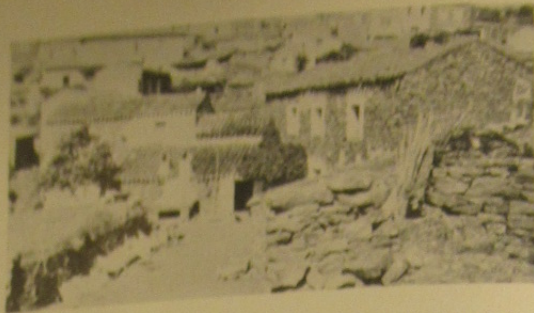
The recent opening of the spectacular Olivetti showroom on Fifth Avenue not only gave New Yorkers their first tangible contact with the much talked of Italian design movement, but also revealed in its full development one of the most interesting artistic talents that movement drew into its orbit. The 15' x 70' bas relief mural\* which is an integral element of the interior was designed and cast singlehandedly in sections, of plaster and sand, by Costantino Nivola. This does not

represent Nivola's first collaboration with the showroom's architects, Belgioioso, Peressutti, and Rogers, nor his first commission for the art-conscious Olivetti firm, Europe's leading maker of typewriters and calculators. Nivola served as an Olivetti art director shortly after his graduation from the Institut Supérieure d'Arte in Milan, where he studied painting, sculpture (with Marini), and graphic design (with Nizzoli and Persico). In New York since 1939, Nivola has been

known here mainly as a painter and graphic designer (for Bowoin Teller, the Spades agency, Fou, and Interiors, whose first art director he was). His sand sculptures, shown two years ago at the Tibor de Nagy gallery and last month at the Peridot, are a new invention, however, and a testimony to the freshness of his creative energies. He explains that they are the result of efforts to amuse his children on the beach near his home at Amagasset, Long Island. But of course



\*The mural will be illustrated in the August issue of our report on the Olivetti showrooms.



The design of the island itself is a composite of pure, dry atmosphere, brilliant sky, poor thin soil that the sun bakes yellow by May, and tight human settlements marked by impressive masonry—the ancient (below) sometimes indistinguishable from the contemporary. Opposite page: the artist with his polychromed bas-reliefs.

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all sardinian photographs by costantino nivola



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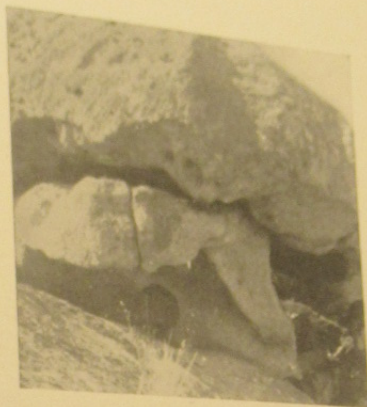
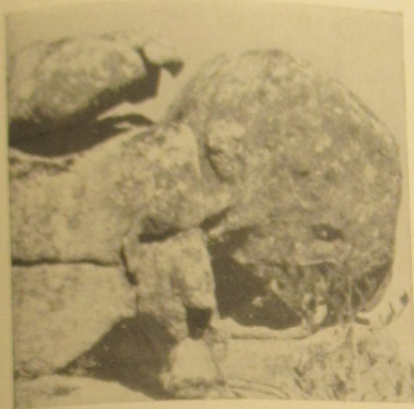


The sculpturesque rocks of Sardinia are placed, below, near sand sculptures outside Nivola's Long Island house. The man-made stone is as hard and durable as the granite, as animistic, but more benign. Variations in texture and surface interest—from geometric, prismatic architectural patterning to the porous powdering and wave-rills that the sea and marine creatures mark on the sand at the shore, are remarkably beautiful and sensuous. Sometimes the surface is left its natural sand tone; sometimes the artist applies color. The burnt land of the Sardinian landscape is marked with sparse patches of wild olive and oak, and the vermilion trunks of stripped cork trees. There are not too many of them; the invaded Sards carried out a scorched earth policy in defiance of Piedmontese landlords a century ago.

ben schultz



Enigmatic ancient structures, the round stone Nuraghi that dot Sardinia.



Nivola

There is more to them than that. Before a scholarship started him on the road to Milan, Paris, and New York, Nivola worked with stone and plaster at his father's trade as a mason in his native Sardinia. This origin is a fact he allows no one to forget for an instant, neither in his art nor in his very presence. Short and wiry, he dominates a room with the same defiant emphasis as that with which the Sardinians dominate the rugged landscape of their island, though in his case the means are not the geometric punctuation of the traditional costume, but an appearance equally incisive: jet black hair and black eyes flashing in a hand-sunburned face, a rich voice, an almost slightly sardonic humor.

Sardinia is hardly known even to Italians. In a March 1953 *Fortune* article illustrated

with Nivola watercolors reported the successful eradication of Sardinia's worst scourge, malaria, by a DDT campaign carried out with the help of the ECA and the Rockefeller Foundation. Before the ravages of the *anopheles labranchiae*, the Sards were invaded by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, Arabs, and the Piedmontese. Numerically overwhelmed, the Sardinians took to their forbidding inland hills and mountains. To this day the fisheries are carried on entirely by foreigners.

In the clear waters of the harbor at Cagliari can still be seen marble columns cut for a Roman temple and lost by a cap-sized barge. But the architectural remains of the island are quite un-Roman: half-sunken stone mounds with labyrinth passages—the *Nuraghi* fortresses of the

ancient Sards. Lively, almost impressionistic statuettes dating back 2,000 years B.C., recently unearthed prove a unique and independent artistic development without unlocking the secrets of the religion and the society they commemorate. During the visit he made for the *Fortune*-DDT report, Nivola took many photographs on the island. Reproduced with permission outside his Long Island home, they offer a few clues to an appealing art rooted in one of the most mysterious of Mediterranean civilizations. Incidentally, when pressed by critics and reporters Nivola describes his sculpture as "neo-plastic," but he is obviously not interested in categorizing verbiage. When the architects with whom he collaborated discuss his work, all they say is "Chè bello."—O.G.



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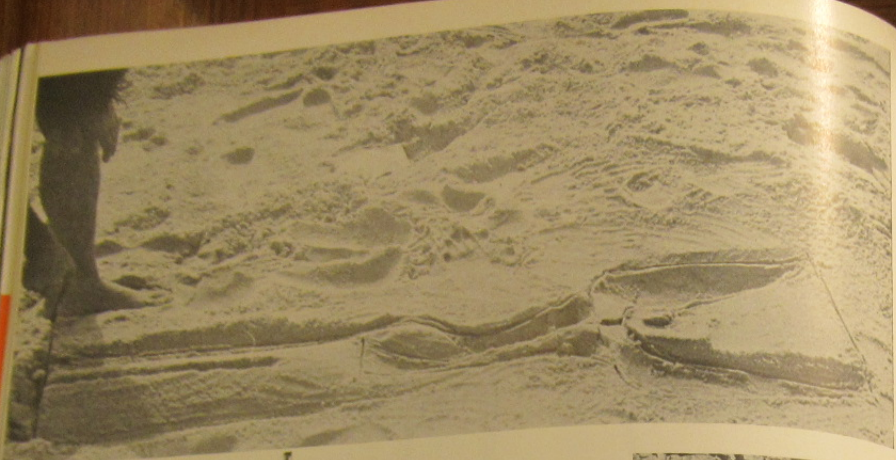
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ben schultz

"Child's play" on the beach, Nivola works quickly, pours a layer of plaster of Paris over the sand, which, when the plaster hardens, mixes with it and sticks to its surface. The plaster must be hard by the time the tide comes in, but Nivola, who has tremendous facility both as a potter and a sculptor, does not mind the threat to an occasional work, and enjoys the cheapness and abundance of the material he has discovered. At right, square loaves of bread from a Sardinian oven are being placed with the same precision in a lily-stem basket.



The Sardinian costume, in black and white or brilliant hues, is a precise geometric human statement in the jagged landscape. Those who forsake it for nondescript modern dress fade into the background. Nivola insists they change in spirit and forfeit their assertive individuality.



The costume is an heirloom and extremely valuable. Accordion-pleated skirts and very delicate lace are among the details.



ben schultz

Above: To work on the Olivetti mural, Nivola had trucks bring piles of sand and plaster to his yard, and after studying the design in models of various sizes, built the final mural in wooden frames. The process shows a superb mastery of large-scale design, as well as richness of texture. It also represents tremendous physical labor.

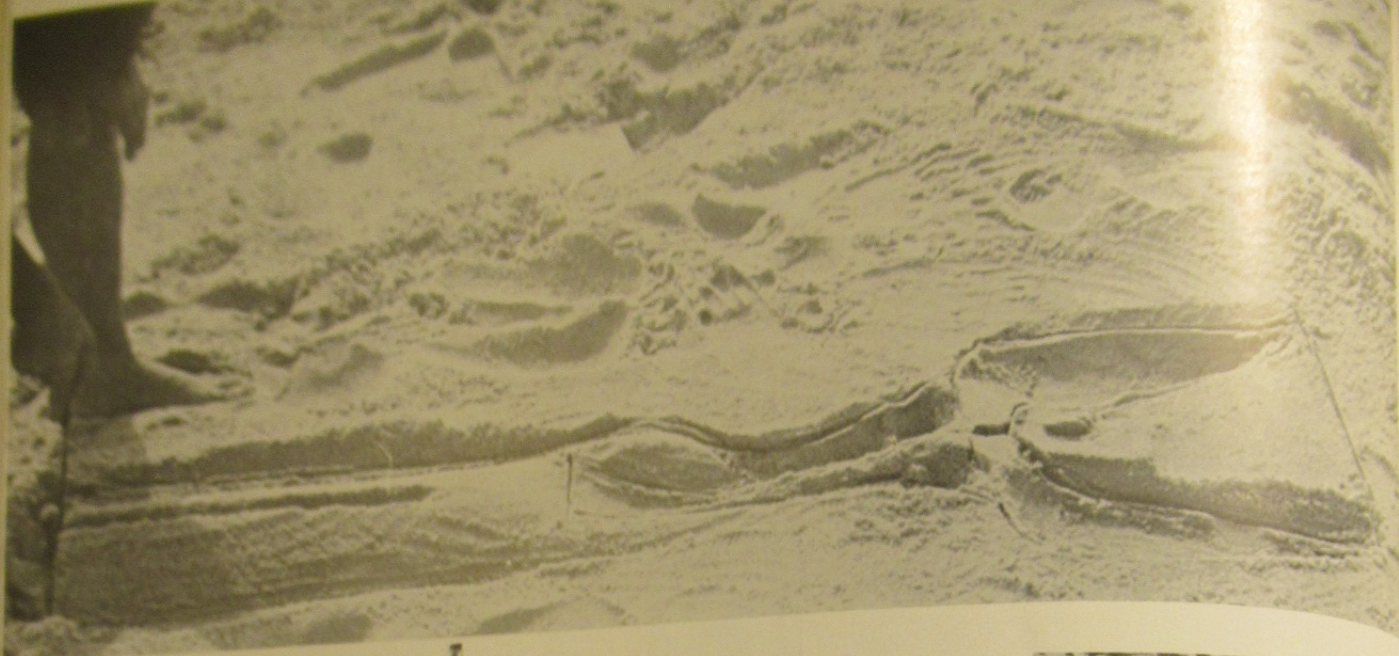
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hans namuth



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nivola

At left: Nivola has surrounded his Amagansett home with structures for outdoor living which he constantly changes: a solarium, a pergola, a stone oven. Stone and sheet metal sculptures stand among the lilacs; many walls are painted.

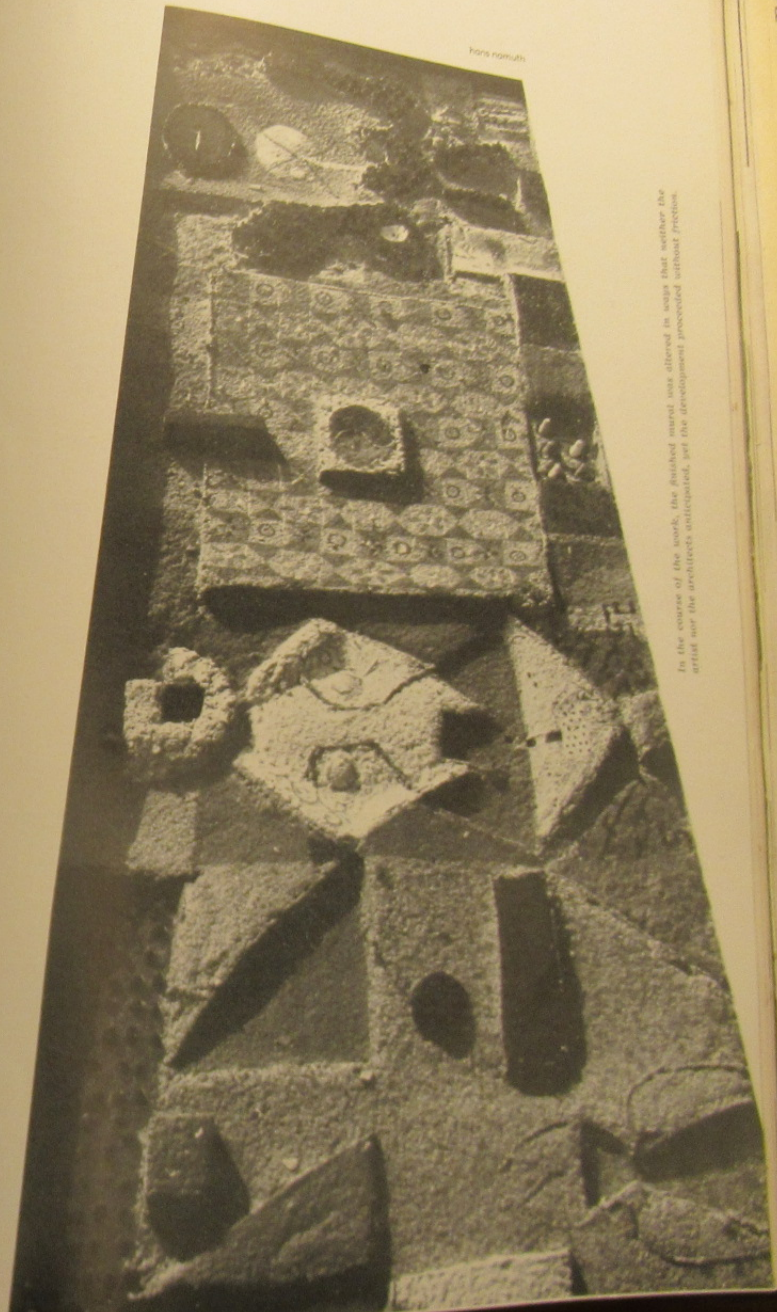


hana namuth



ben schultz

In contrast to the aerial sculptures of two years ago, Opposite page, which, some, however, free though, plaque-like flowers, the new bas-reliefs automatically suggest architecture, and show a return to his earlier practice of collaborating with architects. The brilliant work of the Olivetti mural proves this to be one of Nicola's most important capabilities, partly because of his own training in interior architecture, and perhaps also because of the sensitivity and facility of his artistic personality. The Olivetti mural was originally conceived as a polychrome. This is a large model.



home model

In the course of the work, the finished model was altered in ways that neither the artist nor the architect anticipated, yet the development proceeded without friction.

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At left: Nivola has surrounded his Amagansett home with structures for outdoor living which he constantly changes: a solarium, a pergola, a stone oven. Stone and sheet metal sculptures stand among the lilacs; many walls are painted.

In contrast to the sand sculptures of two years ago (opposite page) which were mainly free though plaque-like figures, the new bas-reliefs automatically suggest architectural applications and show a return to his earlier practice of collaborating with architects. The brilliant success of the Olivetti mural proves this to be one of Nivola's most important capabilities, partly because of his own training in interior architecture, and perhaps also because of the sensitivity and flexibility of his artistic perception.

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