

Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party," from 1974-79, a monument of the American feminist art movement—and an example of the second wave's triumphs and blind spots—found a permanent home at the museum ten years ago. This show commemorates the acquisition with a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the project's genesis, and the community effort behind its realization. It took a small army of volunteers—accomplished craftspeople, self-styled scholars of suppressed herstory, and novice embroiderers among them—to create the thirty-nine place settings on the triangular table, representing a pantheon of female figures from "Primordial Goddess" to Georgia O'Keeffe. (An additional nine hundred and ninety-nine names of notable women are written in gold script on the glazed floor tiles.) In preparatory works—sketches, designs, and test plates—we see the artist refine her technique and develop the signature "central core" imagery of her semi-abstract ceramics—or, as she has jokingly referred to the plates, "vagina china." Indeed, Chicago deserves the last laugh. For years, "The Dinner Party" was an object of outrage and ridicule, perhaps even more than one of curiosity and reverence, but it endures as a stunningly ambitious experiment.