

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Judy Chicago Talks *The Dinner Party*, #MeToo, and Her New Tabletop Collaboration

By Hadley Keller

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In a collaboration with Prospect New York, the artist brings her groundbreaking installation to a dinner party near you



Judy Chicago in front of *The Dinner Party* at the Brooklyn Museum.

Photo: Donald Woodman

Jeff Koons has done it. Sol LeWitt has done it. Andy Warhol has certainly done it. All of these artist—and many more—have produced collaborations (either personally or posthumously through an estate) that see their work translated onto plates. But there's no one for whom such product launch would be a better fit than Judy Chicago. And, at long last, the pioneering feminist artist is translating her seminal work, *The Dinner Party*, part of the permanent collection at the Brooklyn Museum, to—well, the essentials for a dinner party. As part of a collaboration with Prospect New York, the year-old brand that produces homewares and accessories in partnership with artists (past launches have included Baron von Fancy and Nir Hod), Chicago has adapted four of the plates from her large-scale installation into two-dimensional versions that will be sold in editioned sets. Rounding out the collection are two pillows and a scarf pulled from the banners and table runners in *The Dinner Party* and a puzzle based on the installation's floor.

Working in tandem, Chicago and Prospect founder Laura Currie pored over images of the three-dimensional plates and richly-textured tapestries of *The Dinner Party*, each of which represents an iconic woman through history, to settle on ones they could reproduce in 2D. "We thought the four we picked—Sappho, Primordial Goddess, Elizabeth R, and Amazon—told a nice story of the range of women," says Currie. The two pillowcases bear the phrases "And Lo They Saw a Vision" and "And She Gathered All Before Her," the scarf is a riff on Margaret Sanger's runner, and the puzzle depicts Heritage Floor, which comprises bricks bearing the names of other pioneering women.

Jessica Silverman Gallery
488 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94102
415.255.9508 • jessicasilvermangallery.com



The Sappho plate by Judy Chicago for Prospect New York.
Photo: Courtesy of Prospect New York

Though it would be hard to capture the scale, scope, and atmosphere of The Dinner Party in a home—I gasped the first time I saw the installation in person after years of studying feminist art—Chicago hopes that making a piece of the work available more widely will make for some interesting dinner party conversation. AD PRO caught up with the artist to hear more about her foray into tabletop and her thoughts on the state of feminist art.

AD PRO: Why did you want to create reproductions of the plates? And now that they will be in people’s homes, what does it mean to have the work be more widely shared in this way?

Judy Chicago: Over the years, I have noticed that many artists have been commissioned to design and I’ve often wondered why no one has approached me with the idea of reproducing some of The Dinner Party images! So, I was thrilled when Prospect NY suggested this project. After all, my goal with The Dinner Party was to teach a broad and diverse audience about the richness of women’s heritage —what better way to achieve this than through easily accessible reproductions? Who knows what kinds of conversations these plates might spark around dinner tables at home?



The Elizabeth R dessert plate.
Photo: Courtesy of Prospect New York

AD PRO: I'd love to hear! Why did you select the motifs you did for reproduction?

JC: I worked closely with Laura to chose the motifs—it was important to both of us that they resonate across generations. We chose Primordial Goddess for the way that she embodies an ineffable cosmic force and creative energy—the ultimate artist. We chose Sappho for our faith in women’s wisdom and a commitment to supporting and educating each other. We chose Amazon for her representation of a communal society and female strength; and Elizabeth R for the possibility of women as rulers of the Western World. Collectively, these four figures embody the overarching concepts behind The Dinner Party.

AD PRO: A lot of your work has been about elevating so-called "feminine" arts that have been historically relegated to craft. How do you think the ceramics and textiles that you created for The Dinner Party challenged that assumption? How does reproducing them in this way today add a new layer or shine a new light?



The Primordial Goddess plate.
Photo: Courtesy of Prospect New York

JC: Since The Dinner Party, it has become quite common for artists to work in ceramics, needlework and fiber of all kinds. Also, with benefit of Gender Studies, we now understand that if men did it, it was considered "art" and if women did it, it was consigned to "craft." But techniques and artistic mediums have no gender. Simply insisting on this many years ago challenged the assumption.

AD PRO: You once said that you didn't want to be labeled as a "woman artist" because someday there would be no labels. What do you think of that statement today? How has feminism and feminist art changed throughout the course of your career?

JC: I am an artist. There was a time when it was important to fight hard against having the adjective "women" in front of a profession because it stood for something that was perceived as "lesser than." I

believe that we still need to fight for our proper nouns—an artist, a doctor, a teacher, a writer. And, at the same time, we can and should take great pride in the fact that we are part of a community of women. The two are not mutually exclusive.

AD PRO: There are many companies now that are bridging the worlds of art and design (like Prospect), but The Dinner Party essentially did that in its essence. What do you think of this phenomenon and how your work is a part of it?

JC: Lines between art and design—like many demarcations of difference—need to be questioned, prodded, and explored. If I helped in anyway to bridge a gap or blur the lines, I'm thrilled to have made a contribution! For this collaboration in particular, reviving The Dinner Party as a series of items for the home does give us the ability to make concepts that the project engaged with more accessible—simply put, we can reach more people and hopeful spark more conversations.



The Amazon dessert plate.

Photo: Courtesy of Prospect New York

AD PRO: If not a favorite, is there a plate from the new collection that you're especially proud of or connected to?

JC: My favorite plate of the new collection is the Amazon plate. With the multiple women's marches across the globe, the #MeToo movement, the movie Wonder Woman, and so much more, we're seeing a whole new generation of Amazons today.

Education about the influence women have had across time has always been at the foundation of The Dinner Party. So, it was important to me that each plate had information about the figure that inspired the design on the back as well as a small window into the design's symbolism. The Amazon societies existed in the third and second millennia B.C. They were communal, clan-based, egalitarian, democratic, generally peaceable, and they worshipped a mythical warrior—a woman of unbridled strength and courage. The plate design uses symbols and colors associated with the Amazons—the white egg, red crescent, and black stone, which join to form the body of this mythical warrior woman. These motifs are combined with metallic breastplates, thought to have been worn by women by amazons in battle. On either side of the center image is an upraised lustered double ax or labyris, an integral part of Amazon cultures, used to fell trees, clear land, and, of course, worship the goddess.

AD PRO: Do you think this collection will change people's perception of The Dinner Party or your work in general?

JC: The perception of The Dinner Party has already changed significantly over the past forty years—a lot has happened since then! My goal with the work was to expand and deepen the knowledge of the richness of women's heritage—this collection will hopefully help to do that even more by virtue of the fact that it is accessible and designed to live in people's homes.

AD PRO: Do you envision people eating off of the plates or hanging them on the wall for display?

JC: I envision both! In either case, I hope that people will read the information on the back of the plates about the women represented and share that with their guests so that they too might develop a greater appreciation for all that women have contributed.