

Forbes

Judy Chicago Still Making Waves And Making Art As She Approaches 80

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Judy Chicago, *Earth Birth*, 1983. Sprayed Versatex and DMC floss on fabric. Collection of Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn and Nicolas Rohatyn. © JUDY CHICAGO/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK PHOTO © DONALD WOODMAN/ARS, NEW YORK

Judy Chicago still has it.

The feminist painter found inclusion among *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2018.

Six months shy of her 80th birthday she's still rattling conservative sensibilities.

A proposal in late 2018 to open a museum in Belen, New Mexico honoring her work drew sharp opposition from members of the local community, population 7,098. Belen has been comfortable calling Chicago a resident for over 25 years. What everyone there is not entirely comfortable with is housing her sexually charged, convention-challenging body of work in perpetuity.

Chicago withdrew her offer to work with the municipal government on the museum following the backlash.

And she can still headline important contemporary art exhibits, creating fresh work, as is the case with *Judy Chicago: A Reckoning*, on display through April 21 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami.



Installation view: "Judy Chicago: A Reckoning" at Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. Dec 4, 2018 – Apr 21, 2019.
PHOTO: FREDRIK NILSEN STUDIO

"Judy Chicago has offered the world a unique, beautiful and profound visual language through which to interpret the world," ICA Miami's Artistic Director Alex Gartenfeld said. "This exhibition endeavors to demonstrate her provocative approach to line, color, form and craft.

"Judy's life and long career are testament to her perseverance—reflecting the strength of female practitioners to overcome structural biases; her success in the present moment reminds us how far we've come—and how much further we have to go."

Chicago and her work have been controversial since her rise to prominence in the 1970s. Her most famous piece, *The Dinner Party*, completed in 1979 and showcasing "unrepentant vaginal iconography," only found two U.S. museums willing to exhibit the mixed media installation on its initial tour. Eventually, more than a million people would see it in 16 different exhibits spanning six countries over the next 10-plus years.

Despite that, Chicago's plans to have the work permanently displayed at the University of the District of Columbia were derailed following the application

of political heat related to the work's subject matter. After spending years during the late 1990s in storage, it finally found a home at the Brooklyn Museum in 2002 where it resides to this day. ICA Miami Senior Curator, Global Art, Stephanie Seidel says Chicago's impact extends well beyond that one signature work.

"Judy Chicago is most often associated with her iconic installation *The Dinner Party* and while this is an important work, Chicago has created hundreds of works that are integral to the canon of feminist art. (*Judy Chicago: A Reckoning* spans four decades, featuring rarely seen, rarely studied works. *Sunset Squares* (1965/2018), for instance, one of Chicago's early minimal works, has been re-fabricated for the exhibition after it had not been on view since the early 1980s. Departing from these early minimal works, we're connecting several distinct series—including the *Birth Project*, *PowerPlay*, *Autobiography of a Year*—for the first time in a museum exhibition."

The *Birth Project* celebrates birth-giving and the creative capacities of women; *PowerPlay* critiques the negative effects of men exerting power and the consequences for the world. The exhibition concludes with *Autobiography of a Year* (1993-94), a major body of work featuring 140 drawings that explores Chicago's relationship to failure and identity, offering a personal look into her drawing practice and artistic process.



Judy Chicago, *Birth Tear/Tear*, 1984. Macrame over drawing on fabric. Courtesy the artist © JUDY CHICAGO/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK PHOTO © DONALD WOODMAN/ARS, NEW YORK COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; SALON 94, NEW YORK; AND JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

Seidel says both Chicago's subjects and mediums have been groundbreaking.

“Throughout her career Judy Chicago has sought to create images that reflect women’s experiences, the *Birth Project* is especially pioneering here, creating images of women giving birth that had been largely absent from a Western art-historical canon. Through her approach, she has been challenging centuries of the patriarchal stronghold on visual art and its history, disrupting a long tradition of a male-centric narrative and practice. Through her choice of media and techniques that have often not been associated with contemporary art production previously—auto-body painting, china-painting, pyrotechnics, needlework—Chicago continues to challenge the prevailing status quo.”

Chicago continues producing new art and will do so for this exhibit, debuting a site-specific smoke piece, *A Purple Poem for Miami*, in ICA Miami’s sculpture garden on February 23. The work revisits and extends her iconic performance works from the 1960s. Chicago uses her smoke pieces to alter, emphasize, and feminize natural landscapes.

“Having worked on the exhibition for more than two years, the breadth and depth of Judy Chicago’s work is still captivating,” Seidel said. “Developed over four decades, the seven bodies of work shown in the exhibition find so many

different ways questioning established narratives of modernism, minimalism and more broadly male-centric narratives in art history and beyond.”