

PENTA

"Worldwise: Artist Judy Chicago's Favorite Things"

By Michael Kaminer

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Donald Woodman

Judy Chicago's art is going up in smoke—which is exactly how she wants it.

The feminist-art pioneer will present one of her mesmerizing "smoke sculptures" in June as part of the Toronto Biennial of Art. A carefully choreographed "performance" of vibrantly colored vapors, the event—dubbed *A Tribute to Toronto*—will become Chicago's first smoke sculpture created on a floating barge.

Long before she created *The Dinner Party*, a seminal 1970s work now installed at the Brooklyn Museum, Chicago experimented with colored smokes, fireworks and dry ice in southern California—her response to the "macho" Land Art movement of the time.

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"I've been doing smoke sculptures since the late '60s, and they've been multiple things," Chicago, 82, tells *Penta* from the 7,000-square-foot New Mexico home and studio she shares with photographer Donald Woodman, her husband and frequent collaborator. "They've covered World War III, nuclear apocalypse, and climate collapse. They've celebrated women and goddesses within. They've softened the landscape and feminized the manmade environment. I did one in the middle of the Vietnam War, which made people think about that."

This has turned out a banner year for Chicago, including a career retrospective at San Francisco's de Young Museum—the first in her six-decade career. The exhibition inspired another smoke-sculpture event, *Forever de Young*, in Golden Gate Park. "It was joyous. There was pure color in the air. It was a beautiful aesthetic experience."

For her Toronto piece, Chicago hopes that as viewers "stand there for 15 minutes looking at the water, with all the other emotions they experience, they'll end up with a sense of awe at the beauty of the landscape and our planet, and a commitment to make sure it's not destroyed."

Chicago recently shared some of her favorite things with *Penta*.

My favorite place to create art is... my studio. It's where I've spent most of my life. If you're going to spend a lot of time somewhere like that, you have to make sure you like it. It's a big space, white, with music, and my cat, Tuxedo. Now if you asked about the most incredible place where I ever created art, that would be the Dior project in Paris [working with Dior's creative team, Chicago last year created a bag inspired by her 1973 work *Let It All Hang Out*].

On my studio playlist, you'll hear... Leonard Cohen. In 1982, when *The Dinner Party* was in Montreal, I met a woman who was his cousin. She promised to introduce us at the opening. I got sick. I didn't care about missing the opening. I cared about not meeting him.

When he died, I did a series of 12 porcelains called *Cohanim* for the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. I used phrases from different songs.

My favorite Leonard Cohen song is... [1988's] *Everybody Knows*. During my Holocaust project, I played it endlessly. I can hear a Leonard Cohen song and remember exactly where I was. With [1969's] *Bird on a Wire*, I was in my Pasadena studio in the '60s. With *Everybody Knows*, it was my Santa Fe studio in the '80s.

Right now, the books I'm reading include... I'm reading about (World War II-era) comfort women. The information has only recently begun to be available. It was hard to get in English. Otherwise, I read *The New York Times* in the morning to see what's happening with the war.

The artists I admire are... the artists of the past that I modeled my whole career on. I grew up looking at the impressionist paintings in the Art Institute of Chicago. I wanted to become part of the art history represented there.

I don't like a lot of contemporary art, but there are some artists I do like. Andrea Bowers just had an opening at Jessica Silverman, the same San Francisco gallery where I show. I sent her flowers. I admire Sue Coe and her courageous images about what we're doing to other creatures. I appreciate Nick Cave and Kathe Kollwitz. They're all artists who have something to say that's meaningful.

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My favorite museum is... well, there are a lot I don't like. They're too big and overwhelming. I like small and quirky. I love the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe. I love the Brooklyn Museum, because The Dinner Party's there. I love the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#) in Toronto because I'm doing a talk there in June. And I love the Musee d'Orsay in Paris.

My hidden talent is... I don't have that many, unlike my husband, who has a gazillion. I can paint, write, and speak publicly, and I adore my cats. I make images of my cats. We have a whole memorial to our cats. They're paintings on porcelain and ceramics. All the cats will all be together after we die because they're going to a museum.

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