

Judy Chicago: "Welcome to Wo/Manhouse"

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Main image: 'Judy Chicago & Leda Catunda', exhibition view, Galpão Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo, 2022. Courtesy: the artists and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; photograph: Eduardo Ortega

Judy Chicago Once Again Opens Doors

From the looks of 107 Becker Street in Belen, one would think a tidy family resides there. Open the front door and it is clear that, like most households, it is much more complicated than that.

Want to Come Inside?

On June 18, several hundred viewers not only opened the door, they entered *Wo/Manhouse 2022* to experience two exhibitions: a reinstatement of Judy Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* and *Wo/Manhouse 2022*.

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Both *Womanhouse* and *Menstruation Bathroom* were the first groundbreaking feminist art installations at California State University in the early 1970s. *Menstruation Bathroom* is pretty much what it sounds like — a stark white bathroom with bloody tampons, blood stains on the floor, a trash can with menstruation pads and other “taboo” items that were hidden once puberty and Aunt Flo struck young women.

The first *Womanhouse* showed, room by room, women’s conventional roles exaggerated, magnified and often subverted such as the *Eggs to Breasts* room that showed eggs turning into sagging breasts as the pattern moved from the ceiling to the floor.

The 2022 *Wo/Manhouse* showcases 19 artists that transformed the household rooms in 107 Becker Street into works of powerful art probing the changing concepts of life at home. The themes are not always easy, but homes are where all the feels come together. There are rooms of abuse, love, changing gender roles, racism, good and bad parenting and the daily grinds that happen behind closed doors that bind us together as humans.

Chicago has said that the addition of male artists resulted in some interesting work, because after all men live in homes as well. A subsequent *Womanhouse* exhibition in the early 2000s in Kentucky added men to the artist list.

She explains this inclusion best: “You might ask, what are the differences between the original *Womanhouse* and *Wo/Manhouse 2022*? The 1970s project included only white women. Secondly, with the inclusion of men, trans and non-binary people dramatically expanded the subject matter of home. Third, the participants were far more diverse, both in terms of race, age, sexual orientation and experience. Most importantly, both projects attest to the importance of meaningful art that is accessible to a broad audience at a time when art has succumbed to the allure of the market, with no benefit to most of the art that is being produced.”

Judy Who? Belen Why?

Judy Chicago is an international icon of feminist art. In 1979, she created *The Dinner Party*, a triangle table with intriguing place settings honoring important women in history. She and her husband Donald Woodman moved to Belen in the early 1990s. They bought the old, red brick Belen Hotel, renovated it and made it their home, a place where they could be away from the big cities and have the space to focus on their respective work.

But it has not always been easy for an internationally known feminist artist to live in a relatively conservative town named after Bethlehem when you do art depicting menstruation. In 2018, some in the little town of Belen came a bit unglued when a Judy Chicago museum was suggested. Visions of bleeding vaginas no doubt spun in their heads. After much squawking, the museum was a no go. What did come about was a place called **Through the Flower Art Space**. And that is where these historic installations are taking place through October 9.

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Chicago said in an email that the opening weekend was an enormous success with viewers taking in the art show and the evening performances "where participants were given standing ovations both nights."

We asked her how living in this small New Mexico town had influenced her reinterpretation of this anniversary exhibition. "The original 'Womanhouse' was very unique in that it opened up new subject matter and new techniques, it seemed important to celebrate it by doing the same thing in a contemporary context, also to demonstrate that one doesn't have to be in major cities in order to see meaningful art," Chicago said.

Who's Home?

The nineteen artists were chosen from more than 90 submissions. Some of the artists and the rooms they transformed include Helen Atkins and her *Divinity Bathroom* located in the blue bathroom; Apolo Gomez doing the *Pleasure Closet* in the master bedroom along with Kara Sachs who joined him with her *Life as a Bed* work; Ana June, Graysen Riedel and Chris Riedel with their *Arsenic Hour* in the formal living room; down the hallway is Sallie Scheufler's *Encouraging Banners for Orgasm*; Price Vincent Valentine did *Disappointing Birthday Party* in the small dining room; and Gabriel Partido in the second bedroom with *Ay Mijo*; among other intriguing, thought-provoking art installations.

Come Inside and Play

This is not just a one-time, walk-through art experience. There will be numerous live performances, lectures and educational program opportunities throughout the five month duration. Every Saturday there will be historic and contemporary performances that will include a special reenactment of *Leah's Room* from the 1972 *Womanhouse* by the original creators Nancy Youdelman and artist Karen Le Cocq.

Make it a day trip. Chicago said that during the opening weekend most people stayed an average of one and half to two hours. "Some came back the next day, saying that they hadn't had time to see all the installations, describing them as very moving," she said.

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