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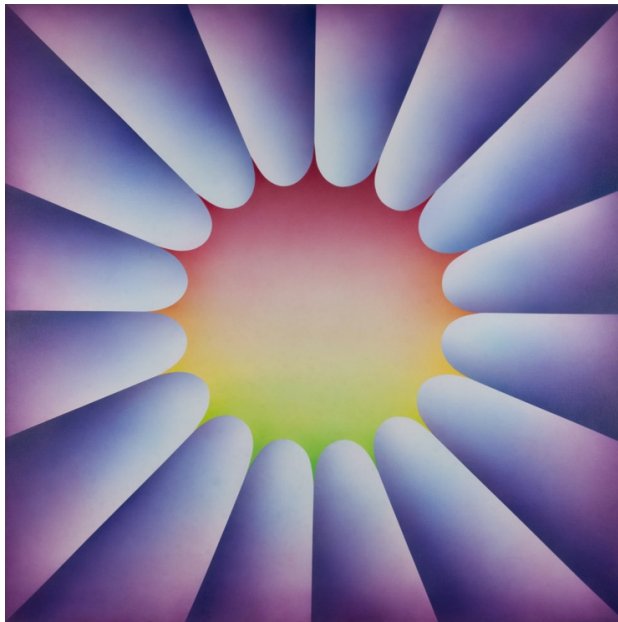
"Judy Chicago in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist"

In Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist
November, 2023

Across six decades, artist, activist, curator and feminist icon Judy Chicago has been crafting an audacious and uncompromising body of work underpinned by the question: 'What if women ruled the world?' Fuelled by a desire to end the erasure of female artists, Chicago has dismantled and redefined the canon for herself and her contemporaries whilst paving the way for a future generation of changemakers.

Chicago is best known for defining pieces such as *Womanhouse* which transformed a dilapidated LA home into an experimental art space for women, *Menstruatio Bathroom*, a lavatory laden with bloody sanitary products attempting to destigmatise the conversation around periods, and *The Dinner Party*, a conceptual triangular banquet table set with individual places for overlooked historical female figures.

Now, a career-spanning retrospective titled *Herstory* has arrived at the New Museum collating and celebrating Chicago's oeuvre across all four floors of the New York City gallery. Alongside her work, the section *City of Ladies* places Chicago's pieces in dialogue with women across centuries, from Frida Kahlo to Hilma af Klint. Next is a show at London's Serpentine Galleries, coinciding with the publication of *Revelations*, a book uniting unseen archival pieces alongside newly created artworks featuring contributions by Hans Ulrich Obrist.



Through the Flower, 1973.

All artworks copyright the artist. *Through the Flower* courtesy Elizabeth A. Sackler, photo by Donald Woodman.

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HANS ULRICH OBRIST It might be interesting to begin with some general questions. You were born Judy Cohen in Chicago in 1939, your father was a postal worker and also a Labour organiser, so he was an activist...

JUDY CHICAGO And a Marxist.

HANS From a very early age your father instilled in you this sense of social justice, whilst your mother – May Cohen – was a medical secretary and also a dancer. So, art and activism were in your childhood. When was the first time you felt this awareness that you were an artist?

JUDY I started drawing before I started talking, and from a very early age all I ever wanted to do was be an artist, and become part of art history. I started going to The Art Institute of Chicago for art classes when I was five – my family background is very important in terms of understanding me and my career because, for a woman of my generation, having a father like I had was very unusual. Fathers weren't involved in their children's lives and my father was very involved in mine from when I was very little because he worked nights, so when I woke up from my afternoon nap he was there. We played games that he made up to teach me values and logic, and in his political organising he had meetings in our house where everybody would participate – men, women, people of colour. He also taught me that the goal of life was to make a contribution. The most important thing, though, is a story about my mother and father fighting about money, which they did a lot when I was young because they didn't have very much. My father said to my mother, "Look around, look at this art, look at these books, listen to this music, that is wealth!" And I believed him! [laughs]

HANS The New Museum exhibition will be about the future being invented with fragments of the past. The installation on the fourth floor will present your works alongside archival materials from more than 80 women artists and cultural figures. In those early days when you were starting to make art as a child, who were the artists you were drawn to?

JUDY After my art classes I would wander around the galleries of the Art Institute which had an incredibly stellar Impressionist collection. Probably the first works of art I ever saw were reproductions in my parents' house of two Diego Rivera's and then at the Art Institute, I can vividly remember looking at, and studying, the Impressionists. I was fascinated by [Georges] Seurat's grandeur and his use of colour, nobody has ever connected his use of colour opposites and my use of colour opposites, and his use of the spectrum to create form with different colour dots. I, of course, looked at Monet's Haystacks in the changing light and again, light figures very prominently in my work although differently – my work has an inner light which I've worked very hard on. [Henri de] Toulouse-Lautrec and his use of reds too. I was too young to realise that there was maybe only the work of Mary Cassatt in the museum, I didn't really realise that there was such an absence of women. Those were probably my earliest influences.

HANS The show at the New Museum is a retrospective, and the show at the Serpentine is a very different kind of retrospective. At this moment in time, there are surveys on more than 70 years' worth of your art-making practice. It's interesting to think about number one in your catalogue raisonné – what is the first artwork you felt was no longer student work?

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JUDY Actually, it would be 80 years because if you start at the first work in my catalogue raisonné, it would have to be the finger painting I did when I was four years old, which my mother kept and is now in a private collection.

HANS It's fascinating that two different shows are happening in the same year, it's very complimentary.

JUDY Yes, actually this is how I've been describing it. The New Museum show is going to hopefully establish the historical context out of which my work grows – it's still an unknown context, which is an alternate cultural paradigm of women dating back to Christine de Pizan. I was asked yesterday in an interview about which wave of feminism I relate to, the second wave or the third wave. I burst out laughing and I said, "Young people know so little about their history!" Feminism really started in the 15th Century with Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, hence the title of Massimiliano Gioni's [Artistic Director of the New Museum] show within the show: *The City of Ladies*. Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* in response to the misogynist literature of the Renaissance, specifically *Le Roman de la Rose* [by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun] was very popular. She created 500 biographies of women, many of whom we had to re-research for *The Dinner Party* because of the erasure of women's history, and her book set off something called *Querelle des Femmes* – The Discussion of Women – which raged all over Europe; it was probably the first discussion about the rights and roles of women. When my first retrospective opened in 2021 at the de Young [in San Francisco], the museum director Tom Campbell talked about my long marginalisation in the art world. I realised when the New Museum show was being conceived that one of the reasons for that was the historical context out of which I've worked for the last 50 or 60 years is the cultural production of women, which is still unknown. So, Massimiliano's show will hopefully establish the historical context in which my work should be understood. The show [at Serpentine] is very different because of your decision to publish *Revelations* [an upcoming book by Judy set to release in 2024] which I wrote in the 1970s and which I never expected to be published in my lifetime. *Revelations*, as you have pointed out, is foundational in terms of the underlying vision of my work. So, if you think of these two shows together, one provides historical context and the other will provide the underlying vision that has guided my work and my goals. In that way, they are totally complimentary, and the two catalogues will make clear who I am and have been as an artist.



Birth Trinity: Needlepoint 1, from the Birth Project, 1983.

Birth Trinity: Needlepoint 1 courtesy The Gusford Collection, photo by Donald Woodman.

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HANS These shows are two different methodologies but your main epiphanies will be visible in both: experiments with minimalism in the 60s, your revolutionary feminist practice in the 70s, then the extremely holistic practices from the 80s and 90s like PowerPlay, Holocaust Project and A Stitch in Time. Then, of course, your more recent series. What is really important is that both exhibitions will show these epiphanies.

JUDY They both address erasure and my determination to overcome the erasure of not only women artists, but of women's contributions and women's cultural production. Yes, there has been more acknowledgement of women's contributions and of women artists since I did *The Dinner Party*, but the problem is that the mainstream art world is still attempting – on an institutional level, specifically, The Museum of Modern Art, or what I call 'The Museum of Men's Art' – to maintain the patriarchal paradigm that has been confused with universal art history. The issue is, and I hope the show within a show at the New Museum will make clear, that there is an alternative cultural paradigm that is female-centred, that is as important as the patriarchal paradigm and should be seen side by side, not fit in around the edges. Then viewers can make up their own minds. Hilma af Klint is a very good example, they discover Hilma af Klint then first of all there is this, "Oh my god, these women in Sweden are all into spirituality, isn't that quaint?" I'm like, "What the fuck do you mean?" Women and spirituality date back to Hildegard von Bingen, there is an entire tradition of women who have been interested in, and worked out of, the spiritual world. If the alternative paradigm was understood and accepted, Hilma af Klint would have been seen in it, and her work then would have illuminated the entire history of women artists and spirituality. We're nowhere near there and that is, as far as I'm concerned, the job of younger curators and institutions. That's why I'm so thrilled about these tandem shows at the New Museum and the Serpentine because they present the possibility for a discussion about the existence of alternative cultural paradigms.

HANS There are so many aspects to your practice – you're an artist, activist, a cultural historian and you're also a curator. That fourth floor also has a curatorial dimension that all goes back to *The Dinner Party* which is both a seminal artwork and a work of cultural history. Can you tell me about what prompted you, in 1974, to do *The Dinner Party*? I'm always interested in this idea of epiphany, do you remember the day when you had the idea?

JUDY Well, it wasn't a day... In 1968, I was struggling in the LA art scene – I was the only woman taken seriously by the entire male-centred art world. I started wondering if there had been any other women before me who had encountered similar obstacles. It wasn't just women artists, it was women in general and how they had overcome that. I started a self-guided study tour that went on for years, and the more I studied, the madder I got because what I discovered is, contrary to what I had been taught in college by a very respected historian – that basically women had made no contribution to European intellectual history – women had made enormous contributions which

had been erased, and that made me *really* mad. Now, rage can eat you alive or rage can fuel creativity and, in my case, that's what it did. I decided with the hubris of youth that me and my paintbrush would overcome this erasure I had discovered – that was the beginning of *The Dinner Party*. How was I going to do it? I was going to tell the story of all these women who had been erased. Donald [Woodman, Chicago's husband] jokes about the New Museum show and *The Dinner Party*, he says "Actually, you're having a subway retrospective." [laughs]

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HANS That's true, people can take the subway to go and see *The Dinner Party* at the Brooklyn Museum. I think, for more and more artists, there is an interest right now in having long-duration pieces which don't move; we can go and visit them, they're always there. *The Dinner Party* has been in Brooklyn for a long time, it's something which is still quite unusual, but we need more of it. Not only the idea that something doesn't move and we can always visit it, but it's about something always being exhibited. Very often artists have work in a museum, then it's not being shown, but *The Dinner Party* is always there. We can visit it every day of the year and every day of your exhibition, so we can say the exhibition happens both at the Brooklyn Museum and the New Museum in that sense.

JUDY Well, of course, most of those permanent installations are not by women. I can't actually think of any other than Niki de Saint Phalle's Tarot Garden installation in Tuscany. There is Barbara Hepworth's house and studio now, Virginia Woolf and Nina Simone, but those are all of recent origin. I made pilgrimages to see a lot of art in Europe, like Jan van Eyck's altarpiece in Ghent, and at that time there were very few places where you could see a work by women. So, one of my goals was permanent housing for *The Dinner Party*. One of the things that the Brooklyn Museum is doing that's interesting is an audio project asking people to ruminate on the relevance of *The Dinner Party* now. I really like that idea a lot and I'm interested to see what people say, because that is one of the things that comes into play in terms of a work that is permanently housed: will it continue to have relevance, or will it become dated? I set my sights on making art that was not tied to a particular period so it could exist and be relevant for a long time. Did I ever imagine I would live to see the erasure of so many of the gains that took place in the 1970s in America? No! *The Dinner Party* tells of the erasure, not only of women's contributions, but women's gains, this is not the first time in history that women artists have become prominent. In the 18th Century in the court of Mary Antoinette, women artists were so famous and so successful that little girls wanted to grow up to be artists and studied at the studios of women like [Élisabeth Louise] Vigée Le Brun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. The French Revolution ended that, I'm not saying the French Revolution wasn't a good thing, but it was not a good thing for women artists. Actually, it wasn't that great for women either.

HANS It's interesting also that *City of Ladies* history leads with an illuminated manuscript by Hildegard von Bingen. Hildegard is important in many ways because it shows there was a pioneering, world-changing artist, composer and healer in the 12th Century. But it's also relevant because of the aspect of healing, which I think a lot of younger artists now are interested in. At this moment of the climate emergency, the idea of healing – not only the human species but healing the planet, plants, and trees – a lot of these women artists have that healing dimension in their work. Emma Kunz was a great composer, a great public figure and also a healer, there was an amazing book I read of hers about healing through plants. I grew up in Switzerland and I was often sick as a child, so my mother would buy this powder in a pharmacy by Emma Kunz – it was basically a powder from this healing stone she had discovered. Kunz made these amazing geometric drawings with a pendulum with which she wanted to heal the world – she once made a drawing and hoped she would draw so intensely that Hitler would die. [Judy laughs] The aim of that drawing was to kill Hitler, which is amazing. She wanted to heal the planet and she's actually an artist who has her own chapel in a way – the Emma Kunz Centre is outside Zurich. Her drawings are in a house but there is also a quarry where the healing stone is, so people can actually experience the healing qualities. From the very beginning of your *Extinction* series, that aspect of healing is important in the work. I wanted to ask you about that because I think it's relevant for the 21st Century for so many young artists.

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The Dinner Party, 1974-79.

Installation view Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art Brooklyn Museum courtesy Through the Flower Archives and Penn State University Archives, photo by Donald Woodman.

JUDY Historically, women were the traditional healers, and all through the Middle Ages women were healers and midwives. One of the things that is not really discussed is that one of the major targets of the Inquisition was female healers, and the destruction of female healing gave rise to the male-dominated medical profession. Of course, even though there have been incredible advances in medicine, the approach of male medicine is quite different from traditional healing practices - even indigenous cultures who used herbs also used spiritual practices which have been exiled from what is known in America as 'managed care', where medicine has come down to statistics and computers. You don't even see your doctor half of the time, you communicate via systems. That's a very good metaphor for the dehumanisation of our planet and reconnecting to the human impulse on all levels, including the artistic impulse, which is an impulse of generosity and an impulse of healing. But the one thing that stands in the way is the art market. The art market stands between, and distorts, art in the same way the modern medical system stands in the way and prevents *real* healing. That's all a function of capitalism. One of the reasons Nadya [Tolokonnikova] from Pussy Riot and I connected so much is that when I read *Read and Riot* and I read her statement, "We don't want to live in a world where everything is about money and nothing is about the public good"... I could have said that.

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HANS I also wanted to ask you about the rooms in the exhibition [at the New Museum]. The fourth-floor gallery we were describing is a total installation, featuring a Dior carpet that you designed along with your work, works by 80 women dating back to the 12th century along with archival materials. In Jeffrey Deitch's exhibition [in 2019], you played on wallpaper, here you play on the carpet. At the Serpentine we have an even more immersive room – the *Feather Room* – where visitors are going to be fully immersed. I think that's another aspect of your practice which isn't known enough. Particularly in the case of the *Feather Room*, it's very participatory because you can immerse, play, disappear, and reappear.



Feather Room, ca. 1965.
Installation view Rolf Nelson Gallery Los Angeles.

JUDY So much of my practice is becoming visible now, for a long time most of this was invisible. But if you think about my collaborations, participation and installations they go back to the 60s, the *Dry Ice* pieces were collaborative in terms of making them, they were participatory in terms of people being able to walk around and the smoke from the dry ice was an immersive environment. My atmospheres were participatory, I had a group of people who would go with me to do them, and we would all be in the smoke and it's the same thing as being in a feminised, softened, humane, beautiful, empowering environment which, instead of making you feel small, makes you feel free. That was the same impulse with the *Feather Room* and one of the things I've been disappointed about in terms of my more recent smoke sculptures is that some people found being in the smoke frightening, while other people loved it. I remember when Jeffrey Deitch came to Belen to see one of my smoke sculptures, he just loved being in the colour. There were people who would go to the door of the *Feather Room* at Villa Arson [in Nice, France] and they wouldn't even go in, they were frightened.

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HANS I was so excited. When we were together in the *Feather Room*, that's the moment we decided to do a show in London.

JUDY I know! You had the opposite experience. It's so interesting, the *Feather Room* is going to be seen a lot in Europe this year because the Haus der Kunst show is going to travel and it's opening in Switzerland at the end of October. Then it'll be at the Serpentine, so I'm just thrilled that the *Feather Room* has a new life. I'm *thrilled* with what's happening, not because of me, but because people will have the opportunity to actually see my work instead of reading about it.



Menstruation Bathroom, 1972.

Installation view *Womanhouse* Los Angeles courtesy Through the Flower Archives and Penn State University Archives, photo by Donald Woodman.

HANS Absolutely. There is also *Womanhouse*, the 1972 installation in a Hollywood Mansion which you, Miriam Schapiro and the Feminist Art Program created. It was part of a really important early feminist art exhibition because you worked with students and local artists to develop this through a series of room-filling, immersive installations.

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JUDY The whole story of *Womanhouse* encapsulates so many of the different things we're talking about. There is a show that opened in LA this year at REDCAT that's about the Feminist Art Program [founded by Chicago at Fresno State College], which had a huge impact. *Womanhouse* grew out of the Feminist Art Program when I was invited to bring my Fresno program to CalArts and team-taught for a short while with Miriam Schapiro. Despite its impact, CalArts basically erased the history of the Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse*. It was all rediscovered by young women artists at CalArts in the 90s. So, everything we've been talking about in terms of erasure is encapsulated in the story of the Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse*. It wasn't my epiphany in terms of the idea for *Womanhouse*, but when I brought my Fresno program to CalArts, the new building was not finished, and CalArts was meeting at a convent in Burbank. So our first classes were held in living rooms, Miriam Schapiro's living room, and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's living room. CalArts had brought in a young historian named Paula Harper – the first formal feminist art historian – who had come out of Linda Nochlin's seminar, and she had the idea that since we had no space of our own, we do a house together, which was a great idea. In the month *Womanhouse* opened it had 10,000 visitors which, in 1972, was a huge audience when visitors to a gallery show might normally number 100 or 200 in a month. Since that time, there have been *Womanhouse* projects all over the world done by all different types of people which I celebrate. CalArts was basically forced into recognising the fact that it has sponsored what turned out to be an incredibly revolutionary project, Andre Perchuk, who is the Deputy Director of the Getty Research Institute, refers to *Womanhouse* as one of the most important installations of the 20th Century.

HANS He's absolutely right.

JUDY I hadn't planned to make art in *Womanhouse* because I was facilitating the project, but at a certain point when I was walking around the house I had already done Red Flag, the first image of menstruation in Western art. There were all these women working, and the one thing they all do is menstruate, but there was no reference to it in the house. So I decided to do the *Menstruation Bathroom*.

HANS Can you describe that?

JUDY There was the original, and the reinstallation in 2022. We did a 50-year celebration of *Womanhouse* by recreating a house, but with artists across the gender spectrum, which was really interesting. Probably one of the most interesting recent works was done by a young trans artist who did a trans bathroom. The *Menstruation Bathroom* is a clean white space with a shelf on which there were originally a limited number of menstrual products that were available in the 70s, and then a white garbage can overflowing with bloody used menstrual products. In 1972 when I was painting the tampons, all the participants gathered around to advise me on the colour of the blood. [laughs] They were saying, "That's too purple, that's not brown enough!" Then when I reinstalled it in 2022, my female staff did the same thing. We all had a painting party where they advised me on the colour because now they're young and I'm old way beyond menstruation. It's been an interesting journey around the *Menstruation Bathroom*.

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Cover of *Womanhouse* catalogue, 1972.
Courtesy Through the Flower Archives.

HANS A lot of these rooms also have a lot to do with rituals. Byung-Chul Han, the philosopher, says that we live in a world with a lot of communication but we lack rituals, and it's correct. We need to reintroduce new rituals into the 21st Century. The early fireworks, the smoke pieces, *Women and Smoke* from 1971 and also the installations you've just described suggest rituals. You said that there is a connection to the early stages of women-centred activities such as the kindling of fire, and the worshipping of divine goddesses.

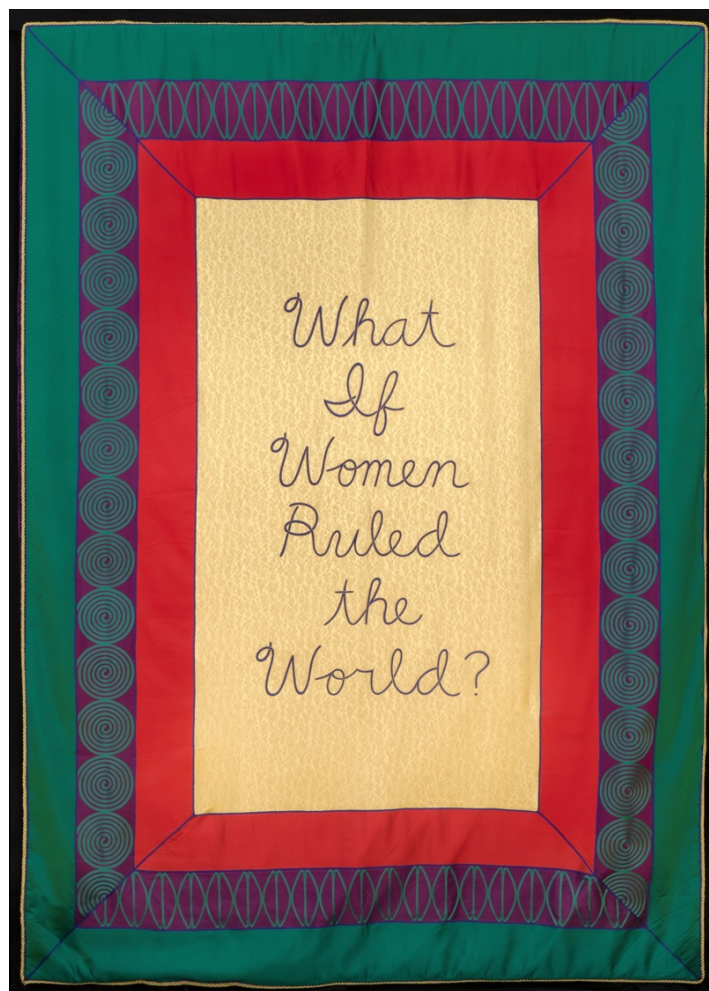
JUDY I discovered all that in my research, particularly in the *Women and Smoke* images. I was definitely interested in suggesting that it was women who invented fire. There is one image where there are road flares, a naked woman on the ground is igniting them one at a time as a ritual incarnation of a woman making fire. I discovered that all early societies worshipped goddesses, so some of the images of those painted figures were meant to invoke a goddess. One through line from *Women and Smoke* to the fourth-floor installation to *The Female Divine* project I did with Dior embodies my efforts, over the decades, to sacralise the female experience; to suggest divinity. I believe that if there is a god it's definitely not a white guy, if there is a god it represents all of life, and as long as women are not considered divine as well as men, women will always be second-class citizens.

HANS I also wanted to discuss your newer installations. This is an interview about London and New York because we go back and forth between the Serpentine and the New Museum, and also to the Brooklyn Museum, then to make it more complex we go to Munich and Lausanne with the *Feather Room*. It just shows what an extraordinary year it is for you. And in this extraordinary year, there are new installations, and you have experimented with wallpaper in the Jeffrey Deitch exhibition and in the New Museum you're going to experiment with a carpet.

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JUDY Well, the carpet was originally designed for *The Female Divine* project I did with Dior in relation to Maria Grazia Chiuri's 2020 couture show, which was held inside the body of a goddess figure I originally designed in the 70s but had never realised. My idea for the carpet was that it would be the catwalk for the models, and it is based on my drawing for the runner top for Eleanor of Aquitaine [one of the place settings in *The Dinner Party*] which is based on the Courts of Love. Women used to hang sheets adorned with flowers, and there were specific flowers associated with the Courts of Love which I incorporated into the runner design, which then got translated into the carpet design. Because Dior is sponsoring the New Museum show, they offered to re-weave the carpet for the top floor, the banners from *The Female Divine* are going to be on the fourth floor too. The monumental *In The Beginning* drawing is are going to be up there too and a very little-known work of mine called *Did You Know Your Mother Had A Sacred Heart?* which is china paint on porcelain in a triptych, based on Virgin Mary triptychs of the 13th Century which I did in the 1970s, and was definitely an early effort. I did it while I was working on *The Dinner Party* and it was very much part of my effort to render images of the female as divine.



What if Women Ruled the World? from *The Female Divine*, 2020.
Courtesy Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation.

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HANS You mention collaboration and I'm very fascinated by your ongoing collaboration with Dior. We live in a time where more and more artists are working with brands, sometimes artists are designing a fashion show and sometimes artists are doing a campaign, but it's very rare there is such an in-depth collaboration over many years. You did a gigantic installation with banners and it produced a really important work of yours with slogans for the fashion show initially, and since then the dialogue has not ended.

JUDY When Dior first approached me out of the blue, which is the story of my career, I had a typical feminist view of fashion – that fashion is oppressive to women. When Maria Grazia brought us to Paris to discuss collaborating, by then I had done some research about her and the history of Dior. I discovered she had been working with female photographers and feminist artists and that she had been trying to use fashion as a vehicle of empowerment for women. That really interested me, but when we went to Paris in July of 2019 for our first and only couture show I was completely overwhelmed by the sound, the music, the people, the paparazzi – the whole thing! Even though there was an installation by a feminist artist, it was kind of in the background and I can remember sitting there thinking, "Is it possible for art to have a real place in this world?" One of the things that has been so exciting about working with Dior is that I was focused on trying to make something really meaningful. The project that I started there – *What If Women Ruled the World?* – has gone on to have a whole life of its own. One of the ways I think you distinguish art from decoration is that art lives on beyond its original context. So, not only have the banners been shown several times, but they have morphed into a global participatory project called *What If Women Ruled the World? Digital Quilt*. It has to do with an organisation called DMINTI that works in Web3 and has been trying to do projects with artists that have a cultural impact. Nadya [Tolokonnikova] and I launched it in December 2022 at Miami Basel. Nadya's partner set up video booths and people got to answer the eleven questions posed on the banners. Since that time, this has spread to eight countries that have participated in answering these questions and now DMINTI is getting requests from high schools in New York where the kids want to answer them. It seems like the questions posed in the banners are questions people are really thinking about, like "If women ruled the world would there be equal parenting? If women ruled the world would the planet be protected? If women ruled the world would there be violence?" DMINTI is in the process of creating a big digital quilt that has all the answers from people around the world and in the centre will be videos so you can hear people speaking about it. Dior sponsored the event at ICA Miami that kicked this off. The Dior project not only brought my work to a global audience but continues to have a life of its own. As I say about a lot of my projects, I end up going "Wait for me!" They take on a life of their own. [laughs]

HANS It connects to what we talked about earlier – it's not about [single] events it's about long duration, and here we have a brand who understands that they get to go on a long-duration journey with you. So many of your projects have long- duration collaborations and collectivity. With *Resolutions: A Stitch in Time*, there is this incredible reciprocal exchange between you and needlework over close collaboration. I read that many of the needleworkers speak about the opportunity you gave them to develop their skills, but also to trust their gut. You also produced this amazing newsletter through this project which is very much a testimony of this collective legacy.

JUDY When *The Dinner Party* premiered at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, everybody who worked on it had just emerged from five years of being in an environment in which people felt empowered. For me, power is not about power over others, power is

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empowerment and empowering the people with whom you work. I'll give you an example of contrast, when I lectured in New Zealand I was talking about *The Birth Project* and I mentioned by name the needleworkers if I showed one of the pieces they worked on, for example, "Earth Birth" it was executed by Jacqueline Moore Alexander; *Birth Tear/Tear* it was executed by Jane Ganey Thompson. "Afterwards, in the question and answer period, one of the people in the audience stood up and said, "Last week we had a lecture by a male artist who talked about how he couldn't have done his work without his two assistants, both female, and when somebody in the audience asked him their names he said he couldn't remember." When *The Dinner Party* opened in San Francisco, I got accused by Griselda Pollock in the art press of exploiting the people who worked with me. Nothing could have been further from the truth, and some of the people from *The Dinner Party* tried to address it. After Amelia Jones, the art historian from LA who did *Sexual Politics* at the Armand Hammer Museum in LA, heard this unfair accusation, she was on stage with Griselda Pollock and Amelia said, "Griselda, I interviewed 30 of the primary people in *The Dinner Party* studio and not one of them felt that way. What is your source for this accusation?" Well, of course, the source is in the way in which patriarchy enacts and defines power, which is power over others. People apparently cannot imagine a different way of enacting power and that is what I have tried to do. Like everything else, I have tried to present, embody and express a different view of power: the power that is used to empower others rather than "power over" that is used to diminish others and that is the reason people have wanted to work with me and have continued to work with me. In fact, some of the *Birth Project* people who then worked on *Resolutions* with me were all arguing with me in one of our first meetings and I'm like, "What's this?!" And they said, "Judy you empowered us, now we're empowered." [laughs] I thought that was great and actually, that's why they did the newsletter. I wasn't included in the newsletter, they wanted their own way of being able to express themselves without any fear. I would go, "What the fuck are you saying or doing? Including things that are critical of me..." I thought it was absolutely great.



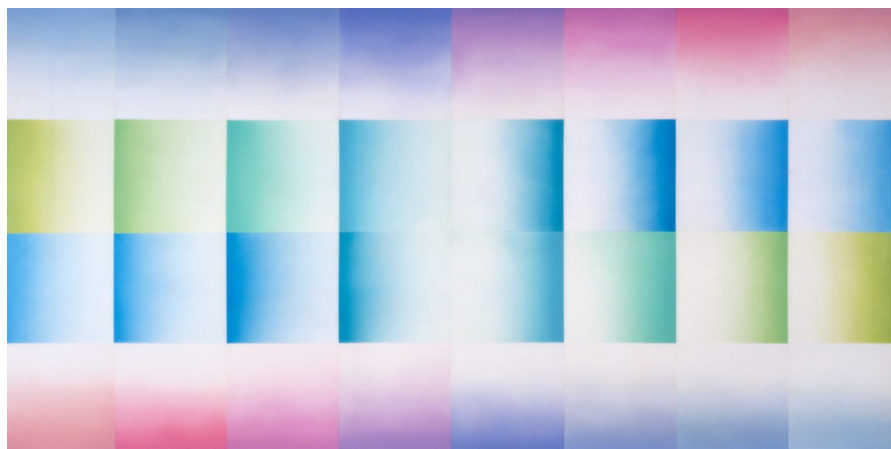
Did You Know Your Mother Had A Sacred Heart?, 1976.
Courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mary Ross Taylor.

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HANS I have a very last question which is this: in order to change the world, not only have you done so many projects, but you also started a non-profit organisation. At the moment a lot of artists have started their own non-profits and they can learn from your great example, Through The Flower which was founded in 1977. We've never spoken about that in our interviews. What prompted you to start it, and where does it stand now?

JUDY I wish I could take credit for being visionary in that. Through The Flower started because Henry Hopkins - who was the director of The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art - had promised to premiere *The Dinner Party* if I ever finished it. [both laugh] Apparently, it was a false offer because he didn't believe I ever would! But anyway, he set up a project account for people to give donations because, particularly in the last couple of years, we were burning through money. We were raising money every way we could, I would sit on the stage after lectures and sign posters. His controller at the museum came to him and said, "Listen we're not getting \$100,000 or \$50,000 we're getting tonnes of small donations \$5, \$10, \$15. It's costing more money to process these than it is to benefit the project." *The Dinner Party* was really fuelled by grassroots donations, so Henry came to the studio in Santa Monica and explained this to us. He said, "You have to do something about it Judy," I was like, "What am I supposed to do about it?" He said, "You have to start your own non-profit," so five of us in the studio started Through The Flower and we didn't have a clue. It's not a foundation, it's a non-profit organisation, but it's a good thing we did because when the museum tour broke down in the face of vile reviews by the major New York critics and *The Dinner Party* became the piece everybody wanted to see and nobody would show, all these grassroots organisations sprang up and Through The Flower became the tour organiser. I lost everything after *The Dinner Party* - my staff, my studio, my marriage and I was in debt (such was the power of those guys) - and I had to start all over again, all I had was my burning desire to make art and all these hundreds of letters from needleworkers. Through The Flower became the sponsoring organisation and then it toured *The Birth Project*. Over the years, Through the Flower has done a lot of educational programming which we're still doing, and it has been community-based. When Donald and I moved to this small town south of Albuquerque in New Mexico we tried to bring programming to the town and around New Mexico. Through The Flower has had its own life all these decades.



Evening Fan, 1971.

Evening Fan courtesy Jay Franke and David Herro.

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