

Brooklyn Museum

A YEAR OF YES

Press Release

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***Roots of "The Dinner Party": History in the Making* Is the First In-Depth Look at the Making of Judy Chicago's Iconic Work**

The exhibition concludes ***A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum***

October 20, 2017–March 4, 2018

Roots of "The Dinner Party": History in the Making is the first museum exhibition to examine the formal, material, and conceptual development of Judy Chicago's feminist artwork *The Dinner Party* (1974–79)—the artist's most influential work and a signature highlight of the Brooklyn Museum's permanent collection. From October 20, 2017, through March 4, 2018, the exhibition presents never-before-seen objects that illuminate the installation's development as a multilayered artwork, a triumph of collaborative art-making, and a testament to the power of revising Western history to include women. *Roots of "The Dinner Party"* is the final exhibition in *A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum*, the Museum-wide series of exhibitions that present voices from the history of feminism and feminist art in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

Presented in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, alongside *The Dinner Party*, the exhibition features more than 100 objects, including rarely seen test plates, research documents, ephemera, notebooks, and preparatory drawings from 1971 through 1979. The exhibition is presented chronologically, with sections introducing Chicago's vision for *The Dinner Party* and



Judy Chicago Designing the Entry Banners, 1978. Courtesy of Through the Flower Archive

her material study of China-painting, porcelain, and needlework—including focused case studies of the *Mary Wollstonecraft* and *Sojourner Truth* place settings. It continues with research documents and ephemera from Chicago's studio, highlighting the workshop and research project behind the artwork, and its eventual worldwide tour. *Roots of "The Dinner Party"* adds depth and context to the visitor's experience of *The Dinner Party*, revealing the thought process, creative evolution,



and history behind the work, while unpacking some of the misperceptions surrounding this controversial artwork and its critical reception.

Exhibition curator Carmen Hermo, Assistant Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, remarks: “*The Dinner Party* is a milestone in the art of the last century, and continues to inspire and inform those who come to see it at the Brooklyn Museum, read about it in art history books, or use it as a model for questioning history. This signature piece in our collection is a vital resource for sparking conversation about feminism, political art, and diverse representation.”

About *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago

The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago was created to rectify the absence of women from the dominant Western historical narrative, while also reestablishing the importance of materials and techniques like ceramics, China-painting, and textiles, traditionally considered the domain of women and domestic labor. Chicago involved nearly 400 women and men in a vast studio workshop to complete the installation. *The Dinner Party* comprises a massive ceremonial banquet, arranged on a triangular table with a total of thirty-nine place settings, each commemorating an important historical or mythical woman. The settings reflect the life of each honored woman, and consist of embroidered runners, gold chalices and utensils, and China-painted porcelain plates with motifs based on vulvar and butterfly forms. The names of another 999 women are inscribed in gold on the white tile floor below the triangular table, symbolizing the long history of achievement represented by each place setting.

After five years of work and preparation, *The Dinner Party* debuted at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, drawing in approximately one hundred thousand people during its three months on view. For many, the artwork’s alternative view of Western history and culture marked the first time they learned of the achievements and experiences of the 1,038 women named in the artwork. Despite its popular appeal, *The Dinner Party* was controversial, with some perceiving it to be pornographic and kitschy. Critics also argued that the work marginalizes women of color, reflecting the biases of the largely white and middle-class second-wave feminist movement.

After its debut in San Francisco, *The Dinner Party* went on a nine-year tour to fourteen international venues as a result of fundraising and planning by local communities. Each exhibition of the work attracted large crowds and continued the public conversation about feminism and history that Chicago sought to visualize through her artwork. Still, *The Dinner Party* struggled to find a permanent home, which was Chicago’s goal from the beginning. The work faced an ambiguous future until Elizabeth A. Sackler acquired the work in 2001 and gifted it to the Brooklyn Museum in 2002. The Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art opened in 2007 with *The Dinner Party* as its foundation.



About Judy Chicago

Judy Chicago is internationally known as one of the pioneers in promoting and articulating a feminist approach to art-making. She initiated feminist art and education in the early 1970s through unique programs for women artists at California State University-Fresno and, later (with Miriam Schapiro), at the California Institute of the Arts. Chicago is the recipient of innumerable grants, awards, and honorary degrees from prestigious colleges and universities, and her work is in the collections of numerous museums, including the Tate Modern; The British Museum; Brooklyn Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; National Museum of Women in the Arts; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, among others. Her career as an artist, author, and educator spans five decades.

Speaking about her mission to create *The Dinner Party* as a way to teach and honor women's history, Chicago states: "Because we are denied knowledge of our history, we are deprived of standing upon each other's shoulders and building upon each other's hard-earned accomplishments. Instead we are condemned to repeat what others have done before us, and thus we continually reinvent the wheel. The goal of *The Dinner Party* is to break this cycle."

About the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art

The Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is a nexus for feminist art, theory, and activism. It is the permanent home of *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, its Feminist Art and Herstory galleries display critically acclaimed exhibitions, and its Forum is a venue for lectures and a platform for advocacy for women's issues.

On Thursday, October 19, 2017, the Brooklyn Museum honors Judy Chicago at the inaugural **Yes! Gala** and will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art and the past, present, and future of feminist art. The benefit also honors this year's Sackler Center First Awardees—eleven women who have paved the way for future generations. For more information, please email press@brooklynmuseum.org and special.events@brooklynmuseum.org.

Roots of "The Dinner Party": History in the Making is organized by Carmen Hermo, Assistant Curator, with Catherine J. Morris, Sackler Family Senior Curator, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum.

Roots of "The Dinner Party": History in the Making is part of *A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum*, a yearlong series of exhibitions celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Leadership support is provided by Elizabeth A. Sackler, the Ford Foundation, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Anne Klein, the Calvin Klein Family Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Mary Jo and Ted Shen, and an anonymous donor. Generous support is also provided by Annette Blum, the Taylor Foundation, the Antonia and Vladimir Kulaev Cultural Heritage Fund, Beth Dozoretz, The Cowles Charitable Trust, and Almine Rech Gallery.