



**For Immediate Release
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**Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* Takes Center Stage in Nation's
First Museum Center Devoted to Feminist Art**

Brooklyn, NY — Imagine the most powerful and provocative women who have ever lived. Then imagine them sitting down together to share a meal. In that startling, impossible, but extraordinary idea lies the seed of one of the most famous works in the history of American art, Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Now, with the Grand Opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum on March 23, 2007, *The Dinner Party* will be restored to public view on a permanent basis.

Widely regarded as the first epic feminist artwork, the monumental installation functions as a symbolic history of women in Western civilization. Upon entering the installation, a viewer sees 39 elaborate place settings carefully arranged along a massive triangular table. Virginia Woolf, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Theodora of Byzantium are among the guests, as is Hatshepsut, the first female Pharaoh, who is also the focus of a companion exhibition at the new Center. *Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses*, the adjacent presentation, draws objects relating to Hatshepsut and several other of *The Dinner Party*'s guests from the Museum's renowned Egyptian collections in order to explore changing interpretations of Egyptian art and life (also opening March 23).

The Dinner Party honors the achievement of women over the millennia in craft forms associated with the domestic, or feminine, realm. Each table setting, unique to the woman whose life it honors, includes a hand-painted china plate, ceramic flatware and chalice, and a napkin with an embroidered gold edge. The settings rest upon elaborately embroidered runners, executed in a variety of needlework styles and techniques taken from the periods in which these women lived.

With Chicago wielding the brush, the decorous art of china painting metamorphosed in *The Dinner Party* into a vehicle for the creation of bold, sensual imagery suggestive of flowers, female genitalia, and butterflies,

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about which the artist once explained, “My images are about struggling out of containment, reaching out and opening up as opposed to masking or veiling.”

Chicago's triangular table is configured so that one wing represents women from prehistory through classical Rome, beginning with Primordial Goddess and ending with Hypatia, symbolic of the decline of the classical world. Another wing begins with Marcella, denoting the rise of Christianity, and concludes with the 17th-century Anna van Schurman. The final side begins with Ann Hutchinson, symbolizing the beginning of the American Revolution and modern civilization, and ends with the place settings offering tribute to Virginia Woolf and Georgia O'Keeffe, who represent for the artist that historical moment when women began to find and create a uniquely female voice in literature and in art.

The set dinner table stands on *The Heritage Floor*, made up of more than 2,000 white luster-glazed triangular-shaped tiles, each inscribed in gold script with the name of one of the 999 women who have made a mark on history. In the installation at the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center, the Entrance Banners, Heritage Panels, and an extensive online database dedicated to this iconic work, will help illustrate the contributions of these women and credit the many participants who made possible the realization of *The Dinner Party* in the 70s, and today.

Since it was first presented at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, *The Dinner Party* has been seen by more than one million people on three continents. The Brooklyn Museum first displayed the installation in October 1980, the fourth venue in a national tour. Kay Larson, writing for the *Village Voice*, called it, “The first epic feminist artwork.” Meg Cox in the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, “Ms. Chicago's purpose...was to simultaneously represent women's accomplishments and their struggles. She wanted the women to be honored guests, but she also wanted to portray them as trapped on the plates, 'eaten alive,' since so many of their works and even their names have been erased from history.”

For the first two years of the project (which eventually took more than five years to complete), Judy Chicago worked alone in her Santa Monica workshop conceiving and executing her extraordinary vision. However, the undertaking proved so ambitious that eventually 400 women and men from all over the country became involved, volunteering their time, from a month to several years, to work on this installation. One of Chicago's aims was to end the on-going cycle of omission in which women's achievements are repeatedly written out of the historic record, a cycle of repetition that results in generation after generation of women struggling for insights and freedoms that are too often quickly forgotten or erased again.

Says the artist: “Elizabeth Sackler's act of generosity and vision demonstrates that one individual can still make a difference, in this case, interceding in history to help ensure an ineradicable place for women.”

The Artist

Judy Chicago, whose name has become synonymous with feminist art, grew up in Chicago and later took the name of her hometown as her surname. Educated in California, Chicago's early work spanned several styles, including minimalism, abstraction and finally the evolution of a feminist art practice. In 1970 she pioneered

the first Feminist Art program at California State University, Fresno. Prior to creating *The Dinner Party* Chicago had been showing for over a decade and struggling to create a feminist art practice. *The Dinner Party*, at once representative as well as conceptual art, utilizes a wide range of crafts generally regarded as women's work. "Tell women's history through woman's crafts," Chicago has said.

The Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation purchased *The Dinner Party* from the Judy Chicago Charitable Trust whose future mission, upon the death of the artist, will be to support artists, writers, and scholars whose works expand the vision embodied in *The Dinner Party*.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$8; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$4. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. Bus: B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.