Judy Chicago

BIRTH PROJECT

FROM NEW MEXICO COLLECTIONS

GALLERY GUIDE

THE HARWOOD Museum of Art

Taos, New Mexico
Since its founding in 1923, the Harwood Museum of Art has presented countless exhibitions and amassed a collection of more than 6,500 art objects. Not surprisingly, the majority of these shows featured male artists, as is too often the case with museums throughout the world. The museum’s recent history shows how it has sought to address the social and institutional factors that determine what art is exhibited, recognized, and recorded in art museums. The establishment of the Agnes Martin Gallery, in 1993, and the 2018 Work by Women series of exhibitions are two noteworthy examples. In his essay “Art and Women in a Time of Truth” former Harwood Museum Director Richard Tobin notes that “All the women artists in the Harwood collections are essential to the living legacy of Taos arts. Their work is part of a complex narrative shaped over centuries by the confluence of Native American, Hispano, and Anglo cultures—all against the towering landscape of Taos and the Taos aesthetic—a mingling of sublime and humble, of high and low styles.”

This exhibition, Judy Chicago: The Birth Project from New Mexico Collections, is the next chapter in the museum’s history of exhibiting women artists. The 27 featured artworks are from the museum’s own collection, the University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque Museum, Through the Flower (Chicago’s nonprofit feminist art organization), the artist, and several private collections.

Prior to the Birth Project, few images of birth existed in Western art, a puzzling omission, as birth is a central focus of many women’s lives and a universal experience of all humanity. Chicago created images of birth, realized through needlework, a medium historically trivialized by the mainstream art community as well as by those women artists who sought its acceptance. Renowned art critic Lucy Lippard explained this in her 1973 essay “Household Images in Art.” Previously women artists had avoided “‘Female techniques’ like sewing, weaving, knitting, ceramics, even the use of pastel colors (pink!) and delicate lines—all natural elements of art making,” for fear of being labeled “feminine artists.” Beginning
in the 1970s, feminist artists, like Chicago, sought to elevate these traditional techniques to the level of “high art.” The completed Birth Project consists of more than 80 exhibition units — all designed by Judy Chicago and executed under her supervision by more than 150 skilled needleworkers in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. They are presented with documentation that contextualizes the art and describes needlework, birth, and the reality of women’s lives. The body of work initially toured for five years in over 100 exhibitions. Following that tour, most of the works were donated to a variety of institutions, from museums and universities to women’s clinics — including the institutions represented in this Harwood Museum exhibition — with the intention of providing them important artworks by and about women.

According to Chicago, “In the Birth Project, the content — birth, the essential female experience — [was] fused with needlework, a traditional form of women’s art. Working with the Birth Project stitchers was like being in touch with one aspect of the continuum of women’s history: the medieval workshops, where women stitched together for the glory of the church; the all-female Renaissance guilds, where women embellished royal robes; the nineteenth-century quilting bees, where women coded secrets into their quilts. But this time, we were using needlework to openly express and honor our own experience through this unique form, which has both contained and conveyed women’s deepest thoughts and feelings throughout the history of the human race.”

The Birth Project was informed as much by the community of needleworkers of its time as by its intention to create new networks and opportunities for the women who viewed them. It is not hard to imagine the Birth Project being conceived in our contemporary society, because it highlights the remarkable individual narratives and approaches of artists on their own terms. The work in tackling representation should not rest on Judy Chicago’s shoulders, nor, for that matter, on any individual effort or project. We must question the very structures and institutions that have created a narrative of art history that excludes as much as it includes. We must keep our eyes open, we must pay attention, so that these names do not become anonymous in the history books we write today.

Museum exhibitions are collaborative endeavors, and Judy Chicago: The Birth Project from New Mexico Collections is no exception. It has been my pleasure to be a part of the Harwood Museum’s curatorial team for this exhibition, which also includes Megan Schultz (studio manager for Judy Chicago), Matt Thomas (Harwood curator of exhibitions), Christopher Albert (registrar), and Janet Webb. Janet Webb deserves special recognition, as it was her dedication and drive to organize this exhibition. Her spirit of volunteerism and passion for the Harwood, Taos, and Judy Chicago is worthy of the highest praise.

The Harwood Museum would like to thank our friends and colleagues at the Albuquerque Museum — Andrew Connors (director) and Amy Baskette (registrar), as well as Stephen Lockwood (collections manager) at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, for coordinating the loans from their respective institutions.

Final and lasting thanks to Judy Chicago, whose artworks and career have inspired this exhibition.

Arif Khan
Director, University of New Mexico Art Museum
“The images in this piece represent five myths:
Life Uncoiling from Chaos; Hatching the Universal Egg;
the Sun Giving Birth to Twins; Climbing the Tree of Life;
the Goddess Breathing Life into the World While
Holding the Sun and the Moon.”

— JUDY CHICAGO
“Dolly spent four hours a day for over three years crocheting Birth on a table in her living room.”

— JUDY CHICAGO
"It is so important that the world understands that a woman with a needle can do more than darn socks."

— MERRILY RUSH WHITAKER, needleworker
A TIMELINE OF THE ARTIST’S JOURNEY

1939
Judith Sylvia Cohen is born on July 20, 1939, to May and Arthur Cohen in Chicago, Illinois, the first of two children. Judy's mother is a dancer and her father a political activist and labor organizer.

EARLY YEARS
From preschool through high school, Judy attends weekly art classes, mostly at the Chicago Art Institute.

1953
Judy’s father dies from complications during surgery, five days before her 14th birthday.

1957
Judy enrolls at UCLA, where she majors in art and minors in humanities. A professor states, “Women have made no contributions to history,” igniting the artist’s search to prove him wrong.

EARLY 1960s
Judy marries Jerry Gerowitz in 1961. She is widowed one month before turning 24, when Jerry dies in an automobile accident. She earns her master’s degree in painting and sculpture from UCLA and exhibits in the macho L.A. art scene. To learn how to spray-paint, Judy enrolls in an auto-body school, the only woman in a class of 250.

1965 – 1970
The artist explores minimalist themes. Her sculpture “Rainbow Pickett” is featured in Primary Structures, a show at New York’s Jewish Museum. She attends boat-building school in Long Beach, learning how to work in fiberglass. There, she creates her 10 Part Cylinder for the Sculpture of the Sixties exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

1970
Judy legally changes her name. She announces this in an Artforum magazine ad: “Judy Gerowitz hereby divests herself of all names imposed upon her through male social dominance and freely chooses her own name: Judy Chicago.”

1970 – 1975
This is Judy’s early feminist period. She develops her abstract vagina/core iconography in paintings including Through the Flower and The Great Ladies series. She begins studying china painting, finding a mentor in Rosemarie Radmaker, who teaches her to apply color to glazed porcelain surfaces. And, she stages her first outdoor performances using smoke and fireworks, an attempt to “feminize” the environment. She calls these works Atmospheres.

During this time, Chicago joins the faculty at Fresno State College to teach a women’s-only Feminist Art Program. Chicago moves the program to the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) and begins team teaching with Miriam Schapiro. The 21 women in the program renovate a dilapidated house to create Womanhouse, the first female-centered art installation in contemporary art. She collaborates with art historian Arlene Raven and designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville to open the Feminist Studio Workshop and Woman’s Building, a public center for women’s culture, in Los Angeles. (Forty-five years later, the Woman’s Building receives Historic Cultural Monument designation.)

1974 – 1979
The artist stops teaching to work on The Dinner Party. She conceives the work as a reinterpretation of The Last Supper from “the point of view of those who’ve done the cooking throughout history.” Hundreds of volunteers join the production crew — 400 men and women plus 20 researchers who help compile the 999 women’s names on The Dinner Party “Heritage Floor.”

Chicago establishes Through the Flower, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation with a mission to educate a broad public about the importance of art and its power in countering the erasure of women’s achievements.

1980 – 1985
Chicago focuses on the Birth Project, a series of painted and needleworked images celebrating creation mythology, the glory and pain of the birth experience, the joy and challenges of pregnancy, and the sense of entrapment that often accompanies childbirth. From a new studio in Benicia, California, MaryRoss Taylor coordinates the effort, which includes 150 needleworkers around the country and a graphics team located in Taos.

Simultaneously, the artist works on the series PowerPlay, an examination of the construct of masculinity in drawings, paintings, sculptures, weavings, cast paper and bronze.

1985
After a whirlwind romance, Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman marry.

1985 – 1993
Judy and Donald work on the Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light, which travels for 10 years to both Jewish and non-Jewish institutions.

Now headquartered in Belen, New Mexico, Through the Flower starts a series of programs and art workshops to educate the public about the importance of art and its power in countering the erasure of women’s achievements.

1994 – 2000
The artist focuses on the project Resolutions: A Stitch in Time. It is described by art critic Edward Lucie-Smith as a “post-modern project” in that it subverts the traditions of both needlework and proverbs. Resolutions premieres at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York and travels to eight venues.

Chicago’s archives are acquired by the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard. Chicago and Woodman move into the Belen Hotel...
in Belen, New Mexico, in 1996, after a three-year renovation/restoration by Woodman. The two begin team teaching feminist art programs to mixed-gender classes at institutions around the country.

**2000 – 2005**
Chicago undertakes a five-year study of the feline species. *Kitty City: A Feline Book of Hours*, a series of watercolors chronicling a day in the life of the Chicago/Woodman household, home to six cats; exhibitions and a publication result. All the while, Chicago works with animal rescue agencies around the country to promote cat adoptions.

The Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation acquires and gifts *The Dinner Party* to the Brooklyn Museum with the intention of permanently housing it in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the museum.

*WACK!* Art and the Feminist Revolution, curated by Connie Butler, opens at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. It is the first major survey of Feminist art.

**2005 – 2010**
Chicago concentrates on working in glass, sometimes with Jewish themes. An exhibition, *Judy Chicago/Jewish Identity*, opens at the Hebrew Union College Museum in New York, then travels to two other venues.

**2011**
Penn State University acquires Chicago's art education archive. The artist's work is included in multiple exhibitions as part of *Pacific Standard Time*, a Getty-funded initiative involving almost every institution from Santa Barbara to San Diego, documenting and celebrating Southern California art from 1945-1980.

The Museum of Art and Design in New York presents the first survey of Judy Chicago's work in tapestry, which dates back to the mid 1970s. This body of art — woven by Chicago's long time collaborator, Audrey Cowan — is gifted to the museum by Audrey and her husband, Bob.

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**2012 – 2015**
While the artist tries to focus on making art in the studio, working mostly with glass, her career is being recognized in major exhibitions around the world. Notable museum solo shows occur at Crocker Museum in Sacramento; the London Jewish Museum of Art; National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.; Palmer Museum of Art in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Brooklyn Museum; New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe; and Azkuna Zentroa in Bilbao, Spain. Numerous gallery exhibitions are also mounted in celebration of her 75th birthday.

**2016 – 2018**
Chicago reconstructs early minimalist work and in 2012 returns to fireworks and dry ice, picking up where she left off in 1974. She is included in many international art fairs and receives numerous awards and accolades. Particularly satisfying to an artist who was left on the sidelines of art history in the first decades of her career are being named in *Time Magazine*’s list of “100 Most Influential People in the World” and one of Artsy’s “Most Influential Artists of 2018.”

She has solo exhibitions at Salon 94 in New York City, Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco, and a major survey at ICA Miami, to name just a few.

**2019**
*Judy Chicago: Birth Project from New Mexico Collections* opens at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos in June and continues through November 10. A noteworthy exhibition of early work opens at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery in Los Angeles, and her latest body of work, *The End: A Meditation on Death and Extinction*, premieres at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) in Washington, D.C. The museum describes the exhibition as “nearly 40 works of painted porcelain and glass, as well as two large bronze sculptures … Through this series, the artist reflects on her own mortality and appeals for compassion and justice for all earthly creatures affected by human greed.”

These exhibitions coincide with the publication of a major monograph, *Judy Chicago: New Views*, published by NMWA and Scala.

For Judy’s 80th birthday, a big celebration, including a fireworks performance and the grand opening of a Through the Flower Art Space, is planned.

Judy Chicago’s work is represented by Salon 94 in New York and Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco.

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**BOOKS BY JUDY CHICAGO**

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<td><em>Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist</em></td>
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<td><em>The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage</em></td>
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<td><em>The Dinner Party: From Creation to Preservation</em></td>
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<td><em>Face to Face: Frida Kahlo</em></td>
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<td><em>Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education</em></td>
<td>2014</td>
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MANDELMAN-RIBAK GALLERY

Birth: Filet Crochet, 1984
Filet crochet
94 x 225 in.
Needlework: Dolly Kaminski
Collection: Albuquerque Museum, gift of Through the Flower

Birth Garment 4:
Great American Mother, 1984
Quilting
41.5 x 41 in.
Needlework: Linda Gaughenbaugh and Sally Babson
Collection: University of New Mexico Art Museum

Creation of the World:
Needlepoint 1, 1985
Painting and embroidery
on 18” mesh canvas
76.5 x 41.5 in.
Needlework: Lynda Healy, Helen Eisenberg, and Mickey Lorber, with Anne Dana, Roberta Daniel, Geraldine Eggers, Maggie Eoyang, Susan Jeager, and Sondra Kennedy
Collection: University of New Mexico Art Museum

Myth Quilt 2, 1984
Quilting and appliqué
81 x 103 in.
Needlework: Sally Babson
Collection: University of New Mexico Art Museum

Creation of the World:
Petit Point 2, 1984
Petit point over drawing on silk mesh
10.75 x 15 in.
Needlework: Jean Berens
Collection: Through the Flower

JUDY CHICAGO: BIRTH PROJECT

Birth Tear/Tear, 1982
Embroidery on silk
20.5 x 27.5 in.
Needlework: Jane Gaddie Thompson
Collection: Through the Flower

Birth Tear/Tear, 1985
Macrame over drawing on fabric
46 x 55.5 in.
Needlework: Pat Rudy-Baese
Collection: Through the Flower

Birth Power, 1984
Embroidery over drawing on silk
20.25 x 20.25 in.
Needlework: Sandie Abel
Collection: Through the Flower

Birth Power (study), 1984
Prismacolor on vellum
11 x 8 in.
Needlework: Pamela Nesbit
Collection: Judy Chicago

Caroline Lee & Robert Ellis Gallery

Childbirth in America:
Crowning Quilt 2/9, 1983
Quilting and embroidery over drawing and hand-painting on batik fabric
28 x 43.5 in.
Needlework: Hope Wingert
Collection: Albuquerque Museum, gift of Through the Flower

Childbirth in America:
Crowning Quilt 8/9, 1982
Quilting and embroidery over drawing and hand-painting on batik fabric
30 x 48.5 in.
Needlework: Rebecca Hanner
Collection: Through the Flower

CURATOR’S WALL

Mother India, 1985
Sprayed fabric paint, appliqué, and embroidery on fabric
127 x 96 in.
Needlework: Judith Meyers, Jacquelyn Moore Alexander, Judy Kendall, Norma Cordiner, Sharon Fuller, Susan Herold, Peggy Kennedy, Linda Lockyer, Lydia Ruyle, and Ruth Savig
Collection: Through the Flower

George E. Foster, Jr Gallery

Logo from the Birth Project, 1985
Embroidery
11 x 8 in.
Needlework: Pamela Nesbit
Collection: Judy Chicago

As the Sun Passed Over the Earth, a Drop of Blood from Her Fell to the Ground, 1981
Prismacolor on black Arches
11 x 15 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Trying in Vain to Protect Herself, 1981
Prismacolor on black Arches
15 x 11 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Guided by the Goddess, 1985
Serigraph on gray Rives BFK
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Mary Ross Taylor

GEORGE E. FOSTER, JR GALLERY

Guided by the Goddess, 1985
Serigraph on gray Rives BFK
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Mary Ross Taylor

Earth Birth, 1985
Serigraph on black Arches
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Harwood Museum, gift of Janet Webb

Birth Tear/Tear, 1985
Serigraph on Stonehenge Natural White
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Mary Ross Taylor

Birth Trinity, 1985
Serigraph on Stonehenge Natural White
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Mary Ross Taylor

The Creation, 1985
Serigraph on black Arches
30 x 40 in.
Collection: Mary Ross Taylor

The Crowning, 2009
Lithograph
24 x 24 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Study for Birth Garment, 1981
Prismacolor on black Arches
11 x 15 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Creation Scroll, Color Trial Proof – Section 1, 1981-1982
Lithography, gold leaf and Prismacolor on handmade paper
31.5 x 93.5 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Creation drawing – The Lord Shot His Net to Entangle Tiamat, 1980
Prismacolor on handmade paper
11 x 15 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

Study for the Creation – Arg-g-g-h, She Said, 1981
Prismacolor on black Arches
11 x 15 in.
Collection: Judy Chicago

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Jana Greiner.

JUNE 2 THROUGH
NOVEMBER 10
2019

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This exhibition is sponsored by
MaryRoss Taylor’s Pinchback Fund, Stephanie Bennett-Smith,
Greg Nelson, Private Label Select,
and those who wish to remain anonymous.

COLLECTIONS
This exhibition draws from the
Harwood Museum’s collection,
as well as from the University
of New Mexico Art Museum,
Albuquerque Museum, Through
the Flower, the artist, and other
private collections.

“I wanted to create figure/forms — the Birth Garments —
that speak of power and imprisonment simultaneously.”

— JUDY CHICAGO

On the cover: Birth Garment 4: Great American Mother, 1984 (see page 14)
Page 5: Photo © Donald Woodman, Artists Rights Society, New York
Page 11: Reviewing Birth in New York, 1984; photo by Michele Maier
Page 13: Chicago working with needleworkers, 1980-84; photo by Michele Maier
Page 14: Chicago with MaryRoss Taylor at Birth Project book signing, 1985; photo by Michele Maier

Design: FEEL Design Associates, Taos, New Mexico, © The Harwood Museum of Art / UNM 2019