

Judy Chicago's movable feast

By Scarlet Cheng

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IN 1974, artist Judy Chicago launched a work in Los Angeles to redress ignorance of women's history. "The Dinner Party," an installation in the form of a banquet table commemorating important women, became an icon of the era. Now the work has a permanent home at the Brooklyn Museum, where it went on view this weekend at the new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Here on the West Coast, other works by Chicago are part of "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA. Chicago, 67, who now lives outside Albuquerque, was in town recently for the MOCA opening and took time to address issues of bicoastal concern.

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How do you feel about the reception you've gotten? Los Angeles is in some ways your artistic hometown.

The strange thing is that after years of hostility from New York, New York has become very receptive to me and my work. Whereas L.A., which had been my home base, where I had incredible support, is not quite like it was. It's like the coasts have reversed. I mean obviously the audiences at the Skirball and the MOCA events were exceedingly positive

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What is your definition of feminist art?

In the '70s I saw feminist art as gender-based, centered in female experience and representing that. I also felt that it needed to be accessible to a broad audience and be aimed at social transformation. I have a very expanded definition now. First of all, feminist art has expanded as it's been mediated by culture, geography, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation. Also, I think we made a mistake then to base the argument in terms of gender, thereby alienating many men who could have been our friends, rather than in terms of value. Because art history is written backward, it may be a long time before feminist art completes its definition.

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What do you think of contemporary art?

I find a lot of contemporary art puerile

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In looking back to the '70s a lot of the art forms that you and your collaborators were working with at the time were considered new, daring, far-out. Now installation art, performance art and Conceptual art are integral to the language of contemporary art.

Yes, a whole lot of things came from it. New forms as you've mentioned – also video, duration performances. These are things that have not yet been addressed as art historically. Also challenging the hierarchy between art and craft that I went up against in "The Dinner Party." Plus new content – menstruation, birth, sexual abuse, there were very few images of these things before.

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There is an ongoing debate over politics versus quality – there's the thought that when you overemphasize content you may deemphasize quality.

Quality is relative. One of the things that's been used against women and people of color is that their work is lacking in quality. No. 1, who decides? Look, we're all educated to look through a male prism. We all have to reeducate ourselves. I reeducated myself to see through my own eyes.

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Is feminist art being made today? If so, who are some of the artists making it?

You'll see from the "Global Feminisms" show at the Brooklyn Museum that feminist art has spread around the world and influenced generations of artists – both male and female. In the most recent version of Janson's "A Basic History of Western Art," "The Dinner Party" is cited as having announced the art of the 1980s, an art that still prevails today and has come to be called Post-Modernism.

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Is feminist art still necessary?

The question is, "Is feminism still necessary?" We will not live in a post-feminist world until we live in a post-sexist world, and we're not there yet. As long as we do not live in a post-

feminist world, feminist art is necessary because its goal is to contribute to building a world of justice and equity for everyone.