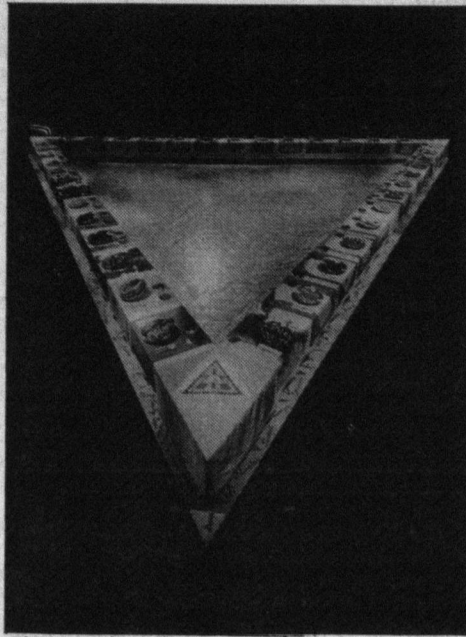


ARTS

Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* worth going to Calgary



The complete *Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, one of the most important art works of the last decade. It is showing at the Glenbow Museum.

by Dave Cox

I must admit I was rather skeptical about going down to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary to see Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. From what I had heard, feminists largely raved about the work and anti-feminists generally tore it to pieces.

I hate having predetermined responses, so I decided to approach it in a perfectly open-minded fashion and discard any preconceptions I had formed. My evaluation? Like any honest appraisal of a work of art existing outside Plato's world of ideal forms, my response was mixed.

I think this project will enter history as one of the most important artworks of the late Seventies, for more than just the controversy it has generated. To begin with, the conception is strikingly original

(although not complex as an idea).

The idea of a dinner party motif, with 39 plates, 13 on each side of a triangle each on an embroidered cloth, seems simple. What makes it more subtle, sophisticated and interesting is the way these settings are done, the intricate construction of each unique ceramic plate and the design of the runner beneath it; and the historical and symbolic significance attached to every setting.

Chicago chose the number 13 because there were thirteen holy men at the last supper, and there are thirteen unholy women in a coven. In effect it is a protest against the unfairly negative view of women in history, when they have been noticed at all. The lost contributions of women in history- they have been the makers of meals and setters of tables- are celebrated here.

The work is a massive effort in women's history- even those familiar with feminist history may not know some of the 999 names on the 2,300 tiles on the floor beneath the setting. These names are grouped in clusters around the 39 major settings, representing categories from female goddesses to modern feminists.

Eleven of the 999 women named on the tiles are still alive. Georgia O'Keefe (the last place-setting holder of the 39) is as well.

Natalie Veiner Freeman did a good article on Judy Chicago and *The Dinner Party* in *City Woman* magazine last year. I'm going to plagiarize the most interesting parts.

"Her father came from an unbroken line of twenty-three generations of rabbis. He was the first to break the tradition, becoming an atheist and moving radically to the left." Influential on Judy's views, he died when she was thirteen.

Her first husband, Jerry Gerowitz, died in a car accident. Her second, sculptor Lloyd Hamrol, was "lost...in the process of finishing *The Dinner Party*."

Her experiences in education were not entirely constructive. As Freeman puts it, "Art schools were places where women sat

in classes taught primarily by men, looked at slides of work done almost exclusively by males, and produced work that had to be exhibited in museums dominated almost always by male directors."

When the first showing of *The Dinner Party* took place in March 1979 in San Francisco, critics praised and damned it wildly. "Even *Ms.* magazine commented that it was "...one woman's conception, and therefore not typical of feminist collective projects."

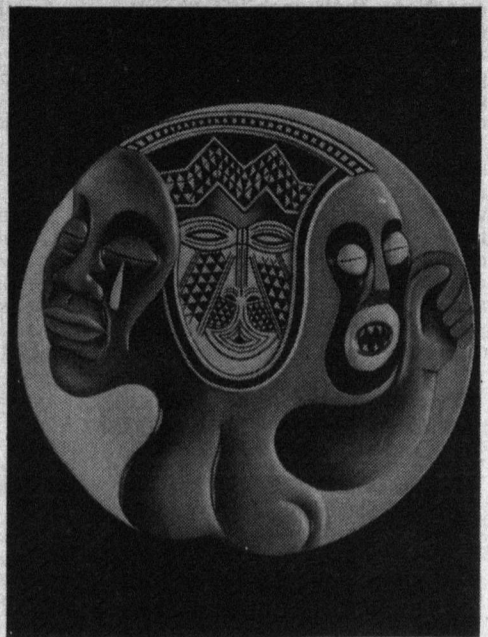
The project was highly collective, however, even if Chicago was the omnipresent guiding hand. It involved the efforts of over 400 people and took six years to make, and even its showing generally requires the collective efforts of committees in the prospective site.

It was interesting to see the detailing on the way in and out of the actual exhibit of the process by which it was made. The audience had a lot of time to look at this (also brief histories of the women named in the display itself) since it took three hours to get through the whole show the Saturday we went down.

But the needlework and ceramic techniques used are fantastic. The fascinating designs of the runners (each style from the period of the woman at the setting) and the intricacy and technical expertise of the plates would make the show worth weeing by themselves.

The ceramic fabrication of the plates was so tricky, and the multiple coats of china paint which required repeated firings were so involved that it took a year and a half before the first plate emerged unbroken. As Chicago recorded in her journal in March 1976, "I can imagine how Michelangelo must have felt- twelve years at that ceiling. Did he do anything else during that time?"

What is Chicago doing now? "She has just dreamed up another five-year megalomaniac idea, *The Birth Project* which is about to consume her again. 'There are no birth images in the history of art,' she says excitedly, 'If men gave birth



This ceramic dinner plate is that for Sojourner Truth, a black female abolitionist. It was one of the most interesting in *The Dinner Party*.

there would have been a thousand.' "

The imagery of *The Dinner Party* is one of its most intriguing aspects. Beginning with the triangular shape of the whole table (the triangle is an ancient symbol for woman) the symbolism carried through the plates is of vaginas, flowers, and butterflies. Some have called this overdone, but it seems quite appropriate both within the work's own context and as a reaction to centuries of phallic images in male-generated art.

I've heard rumors that the show may already be sold out to the end of its run (it closes the 27th) but by all means try to cajole yourself a ticket however you can and get down to Calgary to see this show. Who knows when it might ever come to our part of the world again.

Come back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean

by Gilbert Bouchard and Mervin J. Jungle

It was destined to be a hairy evening at the Cineplex 9 when Mervin J. Jungle and I saw *Come back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*.

One large Coke, medium Sprite, bucket of popcorn and one bag of twizzlers later Mervin expressed disappointment, and I overall satisfaction with the film.

A poignant little flick, typical of Robert Altman's tight, economical endeavors. Restricting itself to one set, a tiny clique of characters (one guy, six women), and the bare bones of a plot (little story, mucho character interaction) without producing a claustrophobic work.

A James Dean fan club reunites at their old haunt, a local five and dime owned by Juanita (Sudie Bond), on the 20th anniversary of Dean's death (September 30, 1975). The Club includes: Joanne (Karen Black), formerly called Joe, a transsexual who is smitten with Mona; Mona (Sandy Denis), who gave birth to Joe/Joanne's baby but thinks it's James Dean's; and Sissy (Cher), a slutty waitress with breast cancer. The acting was always smooth, flawless and engaging. Technically and artistically one can't criticize this film. A flick that works well while still being saleable and remains half intellectual; a nice mix and very rare in American film.

But Mervin and I did disagree on the interpretation of the film: the nitty-gritty of

what Altman is trying to get across. I'll let Mervin explain:

Mervin: Speaking from a woman's point of view, I'd say that this movie showed a typical group of women who didn't like each other 20 years back, using James Dean as a common bond then, returning to the old stomping ground in 1975 and realizing just how much they disliked each other without Dean as the bond.

Gil: In other words reunions suck.
Mervin: Yeah, it wasn't much fun back then, and the good old days weren't all that good after all.

Gil: Another thing is that of all the major characters, only Joanne really grew up, and to do that she had to get a sex change. I mean Mona was a total basket case, and the rest of the bunch were all time warped to some extent.

Mervin: Mona's vocabulary was almost educated.

Gil: Stilted....
Mervin: Yeah, not like a Texas girl would talk.

Gil: I guess her week in college (before dropping out to return to the five and dime) must have done her some good.

Mervin: Mona also saw herself as the mother of James Dean's son, Virgin Mona Magnallen, the woman who redeemed the world, pulled back Jimmy Dean from the grave.

Gil: The Christ parallel was a little

blatant and superevident (Mona's yearly pilgrimage to the set of *Giant*, "the Disciples of James Dean", the framed and illuminated portraits of Christ and Dean side by side).

Mervin: I won't touch that with a ten foot pole.

Gil: What's Altman trying to tell us? That Christ just can't fulfill modern Americans, we need modern movie martyrs.

Mervin: Hot spit!
Gil: Altman does seem to harp on death and death images, ghosts and dying people in a parched dried out town. I mean what kind of town has its lover's lane in the grave yard?

Mervin: Yeah, the only time the characters seemed to live was in the flashbacks, all seen in the store's mirrors, very original and well paced. But the movie was a downer!

Gil: Know what you mean, terminal small town blues.

Mervin: It was a bit predictable.

Gil: In what way?
Mervin: Well they did have you fooled, (in reference to Joanne's sudden gender shift) but not me, just call me Eagle Eyes.

Gil: You hinting I'm gullible?
Mervin: Nothing of the sort, just that some of us intellectuals like me aren't taken in by simple plot devices like that!

Gil: No kidding!
With that, our evening ended.

CABARETS

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ROUNDABOUT



Culture Club
Kissing to be Clever
Virgin VL2248

by Nate LaRoi

If you can get over the pretentiousness of the group name and the silliness of the album title, if you can tolerate the garish cover shot of Boy George (if you're wondering if it's a he or a she, check the name), if you can break any mental associations between disco and the dance music currently sweeping England, then this is one club you might want to get in on.

This is probably far too many if's for many, especially for those who don't happen to be followers of fashion or dance floor addicts. Nevertheless, the band's single, "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?", is unquestionably a mass appeal item. With Michael Craig's brooding bass

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