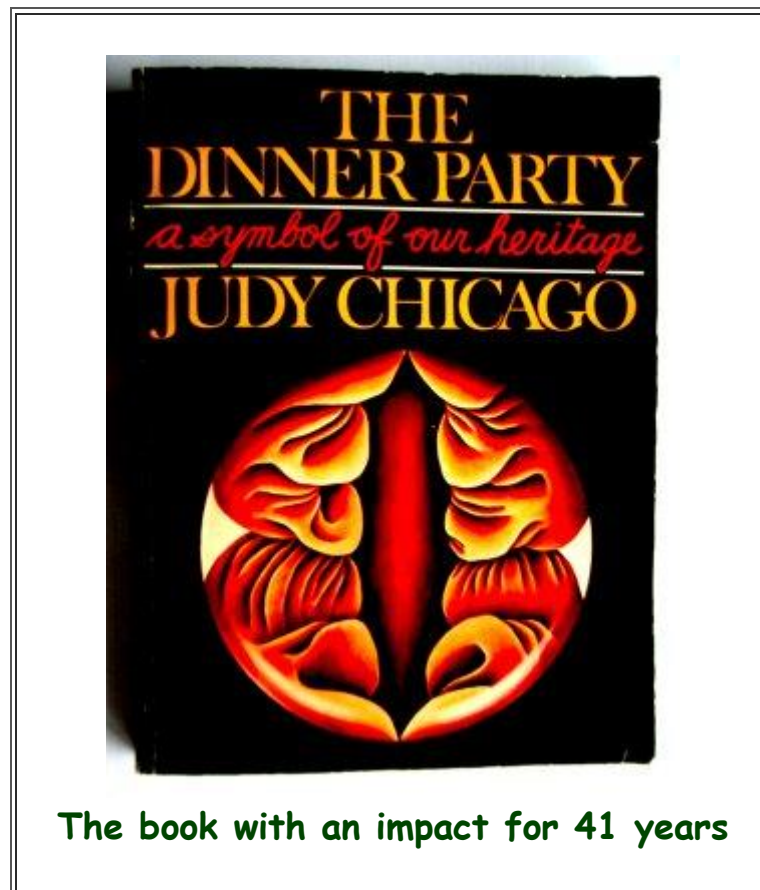


Symbol of Our Heritage

- presented by [Rolf A. F. Witzsche](#)

The Dinner Party Project of Judy Chicago a Symbol of Our Heritage in review



The book, *The Dinner Party - a symbol of our heritage*, by Judy Chicago (ISBN 0-385-14567-5) was laid before the world in 1979, together with the exhibition of her gigantic art installation, *The Dinner Party*. The art installation comprises a triangular space surrounded by three joined tables, forming a triangle. On each of the three tables 13 place settings are laid out for a dinner party hosting 39 women of achievement from the three main periods in the history of civilization: the primordial age; the dark age; and the modern revolutionary age. The central space is composed of more than 2300 triangular ceramic tiles that have the names of 999 women of significant achievements painted on them, which the 39, named in addition, represent at the tables surrounding these names. The 39 place setting feature each an embroidered runner according to nature of the individual woman's achievement. For each place setting Judy Chicago designed a dinner place, a large plate, 14 inches in diameter, which she intricately painted with a motive that symbolizes the butterfly, which has four wings, and with its central core representing the vaginal core. The designs are all individual and symbolic for each of the women, or groups they represent.

[The Dinner Party Curriculum Project](#)

The above cover image of the historic book on the art project features the image that represents the primordial goddess, "the feminine principle" as it was seen "as the fundamental cosmic force. The female creative energy is embodied in the first plate on the table..." wrote Judy Chicago in the above book describing the story behind each plate. The 39 stories are essential for one to know, for the proper appreciation of the symbolic art that is presented. The book, thereby becomes more than just a tag-along item, but a core element of the art itself. After the 39 stories, the book also lists the names and the stories of the 999 woman that are represented by the 39, individually grouped with the symbol for each of the 39, with another cover-story added for each group.

The 39 names and their grouping is listed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dinner_Party

By listing these names with their story attached, the book that presents them gives the art installation a depth that few art installations achieve. With symbols on the plates, representing both the four wings of the butterfly and the vaginal core, the resulting metaphor represents the spiritual process of the individual woman, embracing the vaginal core and lifting it off the plate, off the ground as it were, to a higher spiritual platform, above the

prevailing background of the time.

The art installation roused many critics into strong denunciation, mostly because Judy Chicago has but the 'vaginal core' on display that anatomically identifies a woman as a woman and not as a man, which became the core of three thousand years of subjugation, persecution, and even genocide of women on a massive scale. Some critics cry: "A woman is not a vulva." But this precisely the issue at the center of this art, which is indeed pornography without the butterfly that lifts the vulva off the plate to higher levels of significance. And this is precisely the factor that the shallow critics tend to ignore. If the vaginal core is the only image the beholder sees, than the resulting perception is mythological and is far from representing the truth. Modern society likes to ignore the fact that mankind is made up of men and women and reduced the whole of mankind to the homogenous soup of being just persons, by which a lot of rich aspects of our humanity fall by the wayside, including the critical factors that inspire the development of intimacy in society, socially, economically, culturally, and as a nation. Intimacy is a spiritual factor that civilization depends on. When this factor is blocked, which sexual intimacy develops, then a lot of higher principles become blocked with it, such as the Principle of the General Welfare. For centuries some cultures went far out of their way to surgically block the sexual factor with the imposition of the male circumcision and female infibulation, with the result that the self-victimized cultures became problematic to themselves and others and became persecuted for it throughout history. Something vital becomes missing in civilization when the sexual factor is trashed.

For example, the entire field of classical music, with a few rare exceptions, is dominated by men. By excluding half of mankind from this form of expression, society deprived itself of a form of cultural wealth that would have included colors in composition that thereby never became heard. We simply don't know what we have lost on this basis, that might have been, but never came to be. By diminishing the sexual factor, society created its own dark ages that to some degree still continue, and with consequences that have not yet been overcome.

In the struggles of women that Judy Chicago describes, the focus was on achieving women's equal rights and opportunities, and equality with men in value expressed in female qualities and characteristics. The critics who would have loved to see the vaginal core not included in the art installation would have been hailed in Mao Zedong's universe where the entire nation was reduced to a single face, a single uniform dress, and a single thought - Mao's thought. In the dark ages women did not just seek equality. They fought for the right to be women with equality acknowledged. The sexual division and discrimination in modern society is not healed by reducing the factor sex to zero, but by building onto it a world of value in individuality, without which the world would be a dreary place. When this is accomplished the world of value expands so richly that the vaginal core becomes a vanishing point in comparison as its essence becomes reflected in higher forms, as if seen from a great height.

Today's age is far from that, but is trending in this direction, even while the lower-level trend of seeking equality in isolation still continues. I would like to suggest that Judy Chicago had an effect in raising the platform of women to significant heights.

Judy Chicago invited society for dinner as it were, hosted by these women of achievement, to both 'listen' to their stories and thereby to 'eat' of their plate, to be 'nourished' by the achievement of the butterfly in their nature and its uplifting impetus, and not to ignore what it uplifts. Thereby society is honored as these women bring their substance to it for the greater honor of all mankind.

The subjugation of women that was a built-in feature of the dark age in civilization, also created a dark age for man, so that the still ongoing revitalization of the scene with evermore cultural achievements by women, becomes an enriching process for the entire world. The book therefore - with its many stories of women raising themselves above the background of their time, often starting their own revolution in the process - is more than just a book that keeps the historic cultural achievements by women in the foreground, so that they won't be lost, but is thereby a book that is designed "to help build an environment where woman as well as men can be free," as Judy Chicago has put it, on the last page of the book, and has put her name to it.

The book also has a banner story threaded across the tops of the pages from the first page to the last. Let me present the beginning and the ending:

"In the beginning, the feminine principle was seen as the fundamental cosmic force. All ancient peoples believed that world was created by a female Deity. This Goddess was conceived as brining the universe into being either

alone or in conjunction with a male consort, usually Her own son, whom the Goddess created parthenogenetically. Creation was not understood to be connected with coitus, and it was thought the Woman - like the Goddess - brought forth life alone and unaided. Awe of the universe was transformed into reverence for Woman Herself, Whose body became the symbol of birth and rebirth...

"The women represented are either historical or mythological figures; I have brought them together - invited them to dinner, so to speak - that we might hear what they have to say and see the range and beauty of a heritage we have not yet had an opportunity to know. Sadly, most of the 1038 women included in *The Dinner Party* are unfamiliar, their lives and achievements unknown to most of us. To make people feel worthless, society robs them of their pride; this happened to women. All the institutions of our culture tells us - through words, deeds, and even worse, silence - that we are insignificant. But our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing the other women have been strong. To reclaim our past and to insist that it become a part of human history is the task that lies before us, for the future requires that women, as well as men, shape the world's destiny."

The art project, *The Dinner Party*, was created at a time in history when a new dark age was on the rise and casting its shadow - when the intimate connection of people in society with one another and their future was becoming lost.

Judy Chicago's determination to do something profound to reverse the isolation in society that also affected women specifically, began to unfold in her thoughts as far back as 1971. This was also the time when great banner headlines were strung across the world that proclaimed that "the Earth has cancer and this cancer is mankind."

The image of the human being was being violently trashed at this time, more intensely then, than ever before. The year 1971 was the year in which the Bretton-Woods world-finical system was wrecked by imperial demands in order that the nations' national currencies could be used as private gambling chips by an imperial oligarchy of greed that subsequently squeezed enormous profits out of the nations, causing social consequences that are not easily repaired, and haven't been repaired to the present day. The world became looted to the bone in this manner, in the service of greed, while the image of mankind as a whole was being trashed.

Judy Chicago might not have been consciously aware of this political trend that began quietly in parallel with her unfolding idea for uncovering the growing isolation of mankind from its humanity. Nevertheless her idea unfolded against this historic background that became a trend that is now wrecking our civilization.

The physical work for her project, *The Dinner Party*, began in 1974. The project took 5 years to complete. Those years were a time of intense creativity for her, with the glow of an unfolding universal love that is evident throughout the project. Sadly, however, this same timeframe also brought to light a number of political movements that are totally opposite in nature and effect.

One of these political movements that Judy Chicago's efforts stood in opposition against, perhaps unknowingly so, which the art project no doubt has counteracted to some degree, was a three-pronged depopulation policy that began in the year the *Dinner Party* project was started.

One prong of this 'devil fork' was the first-ever world conference on population (read depopulation) held in Bucharest in 1974. The second prong was America's NSSM-200 policy that likewise began in 1974, which defined Third World population growth as national security threat to the USA. The third prong was the "manmade global warming" doctrine that also had its beginning 1974 and is now shutting down and curtailing economic development in many parts of the world.

The Bucharest conference had been built on the notion that the human population is a cancer that must be contained. The American NSSM-200 policy went one step further and defined Third World population growth as a security theraat to the USA, on the premise that the developing nations would be using up their natural resources for themselves, which the masters of empire demand must be preserved for the future of the empire. Under this policy Africa became one of the first major targets for controlled depopulation, with the result that AIDS erupted in Africa a few years later, after NSSM200 became policy. While it is impossible to determine if and to

what extend Judy Chicago's efforts to counteract the isolation of society from its humanity had an effect on thwarting the depopulation travesty, it is nevertheless interesting to note that her sensitivity sparked a 'healing' effort that coincided in historic time with the emergence of this extremely dangerous period in political trends that have so far not ended to the present day.

Had her efforts been 100% successful, to the fullest possible extend, the NSSM-200 policy for the destruction of the population of Africa might have been avoided. Thereby, the more than 25-million AIDS deaths that have occurred there, might not have occurred, including the future deaths that are yet to come until the AIDS disease is fully arrested. But can we say that her efforts had no effect? I don't think we can say this either. They might have had a major effect in spite of it all. Whatever counteracts the isolation of society from its humanity, even to some degree, does have an uplifting effect on civilization. The problem is that there is no empirical evidence possible that documents what the world would have looked like had her efforts not been made. Over a million people have touched by The Dinner Party exhibition, who took time out and made efforts to see it.

The historic timeframe in which Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" was created, also covered the period in which the DDT ban was unleashed. The DDT ban was imposed for purely political reasons and had no scientific imperative at all, as the man who enacted ban admitted in later years. The DDT ban had a political agenda that matched the imperial genocidal agenda. The DDT ban had opened the door for malaria to come back, which was soon thereafter killing more than a million people a year in Africa alone - one person every twenty seconds, most of them children. DDT had been a 'God-sent' to control the malaria carrying mosquitoes. With the aid of DDT, malaria had been nearly eradicated. Soon it was back with a horrendous death toll. After 35 years of killing people, with a wave of death that far superseded the Nazi holocaust, the USA has recently relented and partially lifted the DDT ban to combat malaria once again. The global warming project is evidently designed towards the same kind of end, to prevent the needed new renaissance from emerging that would enable society to seriously prepare itself for the next Ice Age that looms like a dark shadow already over its near future, for which worldwide intimate cooperation is absolutely essential.

And so, evidently without being aware of it, Judy Chicago has put her art on the line in a powerful manner to help roll back the increasing isolation of society from its humanity that would normally be deeply reflected to defend civilization in all of these areas. Judy Chicago now stands before us with a monumental challenge. She has been almost 'shrieking' through her work, to the blinded eyes and the deafened ears of society, saying, "You fools, can't you see your hypocrisy! Can't you see your smallness?"

Well, maybe a few people saw what she had laid before society. Evidently some people did see something, but far too few have. And so, because of society's general lack in its response to her outcry, the collapse of civilization that had began in the days when her "Dinner Party" was launched, continues unabated and is accelerating.

Judy Chicago had invited mankind to 'dance' with her in celebration of our humanity, but far too few have heeded her invitation. Thus society remains still largely isolated from its humanity, which makes the subsequent divisions in our present world evermore severe. This is ill-boding, for our future.

The current world-financial system is presently completely bankrupt and is hanging by the finest thread. It can be likened to the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York. From the moment on when the nuclear demolition charges were set off in the basement, as evidence suggests might have been the case, there was no way possible for anyone to save the towers and the people in them. Even though the towers had remained standing for a few seconds while the disintegration was unfolding, the people's doom had then already been cast. We are close to the same doom today in the world financial arena of private monetarism, overloaded with worthless debt, while the dice keeps rolling in the biggest gambling orgy of all times, the financial derivatives casino, generating evermore debt that can never be repaid, while the calls for mega-bailout operations are getting louder by the day.

We need a global bankruptcy reorganization before the house falls down. We need to replace the imperial system with a human system in order to keep people alive, pensions paid, wages protected, industries operating, and to give ourselves the needed credits to rebuild the lost industries in order for society to get itself on its feet again with universally affordable housing, transportation, clothing, food, and so on. Unfortunately nothing of the sort is happening, is it? There is not enough of the principle of intimacy left in society for it to rebuild itself. The rebuilding has to begin with the rebuilding of the principle of intimacy, banishing division and isolation. But this

won't be happening for as long as society remains effectively isolated from its humanity as human beings.

The Dinner Party as a work of art was the product of a large team of artists, workers, researchers, and contributors, coming together with a profound sense of cooperation. In its new home at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. * the cooperative achievement that resulted will remain on display as an enduring record of their devotion to the advancement of a profound spiritual idea, an idea of Truth. (* The Dinner Party at the Brooklyn Museum http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/)

Ironically, Judy Chicago's Dinner Party project was not a roaring success during the 41 years since it was completed. It had been 5 years in the making, was displayed in 6 countries, but it took afterwards 27 years to find a permanent home for it.

Over the years when the project was seen, it met with both rousing acclaim and hauls of rejections. However, it left few indifferent. It stirred something on the inside in the million people who have seen the exhibit of it. The art meant many things to many people, perhaps it might not have fulfilled the expectation of those who became involved with the project who had hoped for a revolution in thinking. This revolution remains still on the horizon, and will likely unfold silently.

For my review of the spiritual aspects that I recognize in the art, I created a scientific juxtaposition of it with another American artwork, one that focuses on the principle of intimacy within the feminine dimension from a strong scientific and spiritual platform. Its title is, [A Shine of Butterflies](#). For this purpose, I have placed a few representative samples of the images of the plates from the historic book, much reduced in size, together with sample stories relating to them, into a context where the images may be seen as becoming lifted off the plate onto a scientific and spiritual platform where the physical dimensions of achievements gain a spiritual significance. Evidently, behind every profound physical dimension stands a spiritual significance. As the butterfly lifts its wings, it lifts itself up with them, and uplifts whatever worlds we have attached to it symbolically. Thus sex becomes intimacy, an intimacy that uplifts the whole of mankind, and lifts civilization with it into the sphere of a renaissance.

Rolf A. F. Witzsche

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