



Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History

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In April 1996 Judy Chicago's controversial 1979 work, "The Dinner Party", will make its first appearance in Los Angeles. The reemergence of this piece, which has been in storage since 1988, signals a renewed interest in a cultural monument that has vexed historians and critics of contemporary art for nearly twenty years. A monumental table in the form of an equilateral triangle, "The Dinner Party" honours 1,038 women in Western history, 39 of whom are represented at the table itself by elaborate needlepoint runners and ceramic plates decorated with centralised, often vulgar motifs. When the piece was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, it drew the largest audience in that museum's history. It also engendered vehement negative responses, leading several other venues to cancel the exhibition. "Sexual Politics" places "The Dinner Party" alongside other important feminist works, from Louise Bourgeois's "Femme Maison" series of the mid-1940s to Judie Bamber's paintings of female genitalia (1994). The essays in this collection, accompanied by over 150 illustrations, provide a major re-evaluation of the feminist art movement. Segments from original interviews with feminists such as Lucy Lippard, Suzanne Lacy, Arlene Raven, and Miriam Schapiro are included, along with a timeline that traces the feminist art movement in relation to other cultural and historical events. For years "The Dinner Party" has revealed deep divisions both inside and outside the feminist movement. "Sexual Politics" raises fundamental questions about those divisions, and about what is at stake in the politics of identity in the 1990s.

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