



Title: *Immolation IV: Women and Smoke Series*

Artist: Judy Chicago

Date: 1972

Medium: Documentary Photograph

Accession #: 2002.21

Additional works in the collection by the artist? Yes No



Artist Statement:

“I am trying to make art that relates to the deepest and most mythic concerns of humankind and I believe that, at this moment of history, feminism is humanism.”

–Judy Chicago

Artist Biography:

In 1939 Judy Chicago (Judith Cohen) was born in Chicago. In 1969, rather than taking the name of a male, namely her father or husband, she assumed the name of her hometown. Her artistic career began when Chicago studied at the University of California at Los Angeles. Professional recognition started in the 60s when she crafted a number of minimalist sculptures. She also experimented with performance pieces called *Atmospheres* in which she used fireworks to make “drawings” in the sky. Her overall media varies. Her body of work includes painting, drawing, printmaking, china-painting, ceramics, tapestry, needlework, and most recently glass. Feminism influenced her work from an early point. At one stage in her career she employed the abstracted imagery of flowers to allude to a women’s femininity. Chicago has also made an impact on feminist philosophy with her written works and her time as an educator. Chicago is probably best known for her piece *The Dinner Party*. The piece exposed women’s absence from the telling of history. This work, and a number of her other works, were collaborations with groups of female artists and craftspeople who utilized media associated in a traditional sense with women.

SOURCES

Judy Chicago Atmosphere:

<http://www.artscenecal.com/articles/647-hal-glicksman-at-pomona>

Judy Chicago Biography:

<http://www.judychicago.com/about-judy-chicago/biography>

Judy Chicago Biography:

<http://www.bookrags.com/biography/judy-chicago/>

VOCABULARY

Performance art: Performance art can present itself in a variety of ways and can happen anywhere, for any length of time. The artist, with or without a group, presents a set of actions as art at a particular place and in a particular time to constitute the work. A performance piece is typically interdisciplinary.

Feminist art: Works with the goal of reflecting women’s lives and experiences, bringing attention to women within the context of art history, and increasing women’s visibility in the current art world.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

In the 60s, performance art projects began to emerge. Starting as a way to document the ordinary person’s everyday life, they quickly developed into metaphors for social change or subtle protests of political issues. In the 70s Judy Chicago took the medium and transformed it into an outwardly feminist process. The goal of her work as a feminist artist was to promote the visibility of women in the art world and the world at large. Chicago coined the term *Atmospheres* as a title for this new style of performance work. She produced these projects with colorful fireworks. The soft waves of color and light were designed to inject femaleness into the surrounding environment. She set these pieces in a variety of locations including parks, museums and beaches.

MEDIA DESCRIPTION

The **photograph** *Immolation IV: Women and Smoke Series* documents an **Atmosphere** by Judy Chicago. *Atmospheres* are Chicago’s style of feminist performance art. She uses fireworks as her medium to present a colorful array of light and atmospheric effects.

Completed Fall 2011, Caroline Keegan

WOMEN CONTRIBUTING TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF OUR WORLD

Activity Lesson Plan: K-5

Session Activity: This project will honor Judy Chicago's intention in her *Atmospheres*, that is to put more femaleness into the environment. Students will create artworks that honor women in their lives and those women's accomplishments.

Objective: Students will understand the general process of Judy Chicago's atmosphere projects.

Activity Procedure:

Students will first discuss the reasons Judy Chicago may have focused on female issues. Ask students to interview a close older female relative about her experience as a woman in the 1970s. How has the position and role of women changed? What opportunities do women enjoy today that seemed out of range for them in the 1970s? Discuss their findings. Look at Judy Chicago's atmosphere projects and discuss the way they effectively feminize the environment. Chicago's *Atmospheres* were a visual symbol for more female involvement in our public life. Why was it important for women to push female issues and acknowledgement?

Students will be asked to pick women from their personal lives they admire, women who have made a contribution to our public life through their work, professional or charitable. Each student will complete an artwork showing this woman and her work. The work will be displayed at the end of the project in a class exhibition titled *Woman Contributing to the Atmosphere of Our World*.

Materials: Research materials and materials for the style and technique of artwork each individual student chooses.



Judy Chicago, *A Butterfly for Pomona*, 1970

THE EVOLUTION OF PERFORMANCE ART

Activity Lesson Plan: 6-12

Session Activity: Performance art was a novel medium for artists in the latter part of the 1900s. Students will be guided in a discussion about performance art, Judy Chicago, and her contribution to the new genre. Students will create their own performance piece.

Class Discussion Topics and Activity:

The discussion should begin with an overview of performance art, happenings, and feminist concepts. Artists such as Allen Kaprow, Joseph Beuys and artists of the Fluxus Movement will be presented. Then, discuss Judy Chicago as an artist. What innovations did she contribute to performance media? Judy Chicago's performance pieces were referred to as *Atmospheres*. Look at these works and discuss their context and techniques. How did Judy Chicago change performance art? What new ideas did she bring to the genre? How successful were her pieces?

After seeing Judy Chicago's work students should develop their own plan as a class for a performance piece. Judy Chicago incorporated her feminist convictions into the work. Students may not utilize pyrotechnics in their piece as did Chicago but they can incorporate their convictions. Their piece, like Chicago's, should symbolize an issue, or issues that are meaningful for them.

1. Students will further research the performance art movement.
2. Students will research images, video, and information on Judy Chicago's *Atmosphere* projects.
3. Students, as a group, will discuss current social movements (such as feminism) and agree on a desired meaning for their work.
4. Students should determine the space they will use for their work (classroom, hallway, outside area) as well as script and media.
5. Students will video the performance, as Chicago did, to create a lasting record.
6. Students will write a narrative introduction to assist the audience with interpretation of the symbolic content of the performance.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS (K-5) Big Idea: Critical Thinking and Reflection

Enduring Understanding 1: Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent. VA.4.C.1.1 Integrate ideas during the art-making process to convey meaning in personal works of art (from Grade Level 4).

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS (6-12) Big Idea: Critical Thinking and Reflection

Enduring Understanding 1: Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent. VA.912.C.1.1 Integrate curiosity, range of interests, attentiveness, complexity, and artistic intention into the art-making process to demonstrate self-expression (from Grade Level 9-12).