

## **CHICAGO COMES TO MIAMI BEACH!**

### **JUDY CHICAGO: JEWISH IDENTITY**

**Convention-shattering artist's work opens Sept. 8**

“Jewish Identity” is a retrospective exhibition of 50 works from throughout Judy Chicago’s career to explore the impact on her own identity of her Eastern European Jewish roots and Jewish cultural and politically activist upbringing. Born Judith Sylvia Cohen in Chicago to socialist-leaning parents who each descended from a long line of rabbis, she began drawing when she was 3 years old and attended art classes two years later. She legally changed her name in 1970 to assume her own identity and express her independence from patriarchal-derived names and solidarity with the feminist movement. Judy Chicago’s art evokes the quest for human freedom and tolerance.

Judy Chicago’s artistic message inspires and enlightens visitors of all faiths for the benefit of mankind. Topics in this installation include art about life and holiday cycles, feminism, Holocaust, and multiculturalism. The artworks in various media have been touring since early 2007, drawing large audiences. The show provokes discussion and engenders rich dialogue on what it means to be Jewish and the ways in which art, identity and culture inform and respond to one another. Many of her works were born as reflections on power and powerlessness and the roles of men and women.

The artworks in the show are on loan from the LewAllen Contemporary Gallery in Santa Fe, NM and were selected by Laura Kruger, curator of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum in New York, and Gail Levin, acclaimed scholar and author of the 2007 biography *Becoming Judy Chicago*.

An educator as well as an artist, Judy Chicago has been a feminist artist since the 1960s. “I can no longer pretend in my art that being a woman has no meaning in my life,” Chicago realized.

Convention-shattering feminist artist, author and social activist Judy Chicago is well known internationally as the creator of *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), an epic, room-sized installation of 39 place settings. The butterfly motif is key to the central core imagery that Chicago used to dedicate each to a famous woman in history, demonstrating that women have a place at the table. Part of the retrospective is a place setting for Judith, who was responsible for saving the Israelites from Assyrian aggression during Biblical times. During a ten-year tour of museums throughout the world, this exhibit was viewed by more than one million visitors, many who will attest to its transformative effect on their lives. *The Dinner Party*, which has become an icon of the women’s movement, is now permanently installed in the Brooklyn Museum.

Even with her family background and her art statements as a woman, Chicago’s commitment to her Jewish heritage was tenuous until she visited the Nazi death camps. Researching the Holocaust, she discovered that stories of women who perished were

largely excluded from the vast literature. The result, after eight years of traveling and reading, was *The Holocaust Project* that she executed in collaboration with her husband, Donald Woodman, and some of these pieces are part of the exhibit.

Chicago has been named by *Reform Judaism* magazine as one of the “Eight Jewish Women Who Changed the World.” She has devoted nearly all her career to projects that were motivated by the desire to bridge differences, promote equality and foster mutual respect among groups whose differing life experiences were mediated by culture, geography, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and all the many other attributes of human individuality. Chicago has challenged conventional thinking about art and about the role of women. It has indeed been her mission to create art that helps “to make the world whole.”

The exhibition will be on display at the Jewish Museum of Florida until Feb. 7, 2010. The Museum will present a series of public programs that relate to the exhibit themes. Sponsors for this exhibit include Funding Arts Network; Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation Inc., Stephen Cypen, president; and World Erotic Art Museum – Naomi Wilzig.

All photos copyright Judy Chicago:

***Bury the Hatchet, 2000.*** In Chicago’s utopian vision, a Jewish woman flanked by a Christian and a Muslim cleric come together to metaphorically end their disagreements.

***The Creation, from the Birth Project, 1983.*** For Chicago, childbirth is a metaphor for creation in the large sense - the female as the source of life and the feminine as the affirming life principle. Here a woman literally gives birth to all of Earth’s life forms.

***Rainbow Shabbat, from the Holocaust Project, 1993.*** To conclude this exhibition, Chicago wanted an image of hope, a vision for a future in which people are joined together across differences in age, gender, race, faith and culture to live in harmony with one another and the natural world. She chose to represent this vision in a large stained glass installation, "Rainbow Shabbat: A Vision for the Future," because in her words, "Light is Life."