

JUDY CHICAGO'S Dinner Party: another look

THE DINNER PARTY: FEMINIST FAST FOOD OR A FUNERIAL FEAST?

The museums have a problem. Money . . . or so goes the rumor. The public has now suffered through Dresden's gold, Tut's Treasures and China's Mysteries, not necessarily in that order. But what could possibly prepare us for the glories of . . . The Dinner Party. Christo's Curtain perhaps provided a warning, but after all, is it anyone's fault he wanted to display the world's longest known lingerie item? Anyway it was amusing to drive around Marin County in the spring and watch all that cloth blowing around. There was something almost magical about it, especially if you managed to avoid talking to the workers in Christo T-shirts. Judy Chicago has spared us even this dubious honor. All the clones who participated in her repast are visible only as photographs, video or names on a sheet. How convenient! Especially for Judy Chicago.

The show certainly provides food for thought. Too bad it doesn't nourish on other levels as well. Place settings at a triangular table. Is this an altar or is it McDonald's? When, if ever, would anyone want to eat from a cunt? Particularly a ceramic one. You might hurt your mouth. Or if you're a man, having sex with a ceramic vagina might seriously damage your vital parts. It would definitely be very cold, and the damn thing might break just when you were starting to get aroused. But then, most of the women represented in the Dinner Party are dead anyway. How would Queen Elizabeth Regina feel about being depicted in an art piece as a cunt? Most likely if she knew about it, she'd do more than turn in her grave, she'd do somersaults. Most likely the same is true of a good many of the other women depicted. Women viewing the dinner party, be glad you're not dead. Who knows what form your genitals might assume? Men, pray Judy C. doesn't decide to go on to your sex for dessert.

The nausea experienced at a first viewing of The Dinner Party is reminiscent of that felt when inadvertently finding oneself as a guest at a Reverend Sun Moon dinner. The Moonies do serve actual food, but the rhetoric served with the meal is on a par with Chicago's.

Peter Max showed his products at museums several years ago. Judy Chicago's piece for some strange reason conjures up ghosts of that experience. Perhaps it was the fact that the shrine was signed and dated—on a cornerstone of fired clay, with a copyright no less. Who does that cover? Only Judy herself or her helpers, some of whom paid her to be allowed the privilege of working on the piece. Who would want to copy it anyway, or could?

Architecturally it is supposed to be a temple. A shrine of worship. Why does a woman have to portray women as gods? Isn't it enough to portray them as women? Is it because her chosen goddesses are dead? Who needs to view Georgia O'Keeffe, Emily Dickinson or Sacajawea as entities to be whispered about at a distance, as essences to swallow wafers and drink sacrificial wine to appreciate? I'd really rather think of them as blood and guts women who lived, loved and struggled with the business of life as we all do. In any case, for a shrine it bears an unfortunate resemblance to the Grauman's Chinese Theater—the stars' hands and feet in cement—of Hollywood fame. Perhaps it is really a funeral parlor, or maybe it's only a Wedding Chapel in

Las Vegas. It certainly isn't Chartres, or Notre Dame de Paris. But then Notre Dame was the product of a real religious movement and not just an artistic attempt to cash in on a political movement whose vitality has been in question for quite some time.

Probably few people today would fail to pay lip service to Feminism, but as a movement in American society, it has long since been sapped of energy by a splintering off of special interest groups. If anything, Chicago's piece is a mortuary, the death knell of a movement, a housing for the dead souls of a formerly vital force. Aside from that, it neglects as many women as it includes. If one is going to create a shrine to Eternal Womanhood, how is it possible to arbitrarily include some and leave out legions of others? Granted it would be difficult to depict 50 per cent of the world's population in an art piece, and therein lies some of the absurdity of the venture. In fact, it is pathetic that Chicago has only been able to glorify the women she has. Does this imply that there are that few women in the annals of history who deserve the status of Goddess? This writer finds a male equivalent of the Dinner Party difficult to conceptualize. Chicago's Dinner Party is a sin of omission as well as a dirge.

But let us take heart. . . she has sold the idea to museums. With any kind of luck in five or ten years, we may be blessed with International Dinner Party Food Chains. One can but wonder what the main course will be. Shark steak perhaps, or maybe just Tunaburger. Pretty fishy in any event, no doubt.

—Irene Dogmatic

REPERCUSSIONS FROM THE DINNER PARTY

In San Francisco, Maria Manhattan served up *The Box Lunch* at The South of Market Cultural Center on 13, 14 and 15 of July, honoring 39 women of dubious distinction, such as Rosemary Woods, Lucy Ricardo, Henny Youngman's wife, Minnie Mouse, and many more. An extensive documentation of the trials and sacrifices of Maria Manhattan and staff was exhibited. There also was a special section depicting famous box lunches, and a video piece featuring interviews with Maria Manhattan and a few of the thousands of peons who helped her put this show together. All tax deductible donations in the amount of 39 cents, \$3.90, or more were made out to Les Nিকেettes, a feminist performance group in the Bay area.

■ Graffiti taken from the women's room at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art during the exhibition of *The Dinner Party*:

Think about it. J. Chicago does a show of 39 clit plates—the same as 39 dick plates to me! Poor taste! They both taste good to me! While dicks might feel better, you must admit, clits look better. That's not where it's at.

Dear Judy: Why does a woman's identity have to be through her vagina? A man's identity is not through his cock. You think not? Ask a man sometime.

Don't take J.C. seriously. We know that women are still and always will be the greatest common factor.

On this china throne has sat many an unsung heroine.