



PRESS RELEASE

Judy Chicago's Birth Project: Born Again

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Internationally renowned artist, author, feminist, and educator Judy Chicago presents new imaginings of her groundbreaking work concerning the maternal body



Judy Chicago, *The Crowning NP 3*, 1983. Needlepoint over painting on mesh canvas, 35½ x 51½ inches. Hand painting assistance by Lynda Healy; needlepoint by Kathryn Haas Alexander, Collection of the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts

Pasadena, CA — Pasadena Museum of California Art is pleased to present Judy Chicago's *Birth Project: Born Again* curated by Viki D. Thompson Wylder. The exhibition reassembles approximately fifteen *Birth Project* works, examining both past and present attitudes towards female empowerment and sexuality while also underscoring Chicago's redefinition of the terms art and craft.

Between 1980 and 1985, artist Judy Chicago (b. 1939) and a team of 150 female needleworkers completed eighty-four textile and needle media works that analyzed the interrelationships between motherhood, maternity, femaleness, and gender. Chicago provided under-paintings, cartoons, drawings, mock-ups, color specifications, and written directions for the transformation of her images. Every needle-worker received public credit for her work.

The original *Birth Project* included images of childbirth that afforded a vision seldom seen in western culture since the Neolithic Age, when women embodied the many manifestations of creation itself. Yet, the work also portrayed birth as a physical, graphic reality beyond simplistic sentimentality. The presentation at PMCA offers a rare opportunity to revisit the project thirty-years later during a moment that highlights art and artist's role in the ongoing process of social change.

This new body of work is profoundly relevant as today's society experiences a renewed interest in maternal and female bodies. In contrast to political and scientific developments as well as cultural norms, which continue to emphasize women's bodies as commodities, all of the bodies portrayed in Chicago's work are empowered female symbols. Her imagery encourages viewers to perceive women in unaccustomed ways and offers women powerful symbols with which to identify. The *Birth Project* was designed by Chicago, and is now "born again" in this exhibition, as a continuing force for cultural change and aesthetic transformation.

Judy Chicago's *Birth Project: Born Again* is organized by Through the Flower in conjunction with the Albuquerque Museum of Art and the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts, curated by Viki D. Thompson Wylder, and accompanied by a brochure. The exhibition is supported by the PMCA Board of Directors and PMCA Ambassador Circle.

Judy Chicago's career spans five decades. Her art is exhibited in the US and abroad. She holds five honorary doctorates and she is the author of fifteen books, many published in foreign editions. In the early 1970s Chicago pioneered Feminist Art through a unique program for women at California State University, Fresno. From 1974 to '79, Chicago turned to women's history to create, with hundreds of volunteers, *The Dinner Party*. It found permanent housing in 2007 at the Brooklyn Museum as the centerpiece of the Elizabeth S. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. From 1980 to '85, Chicago worked on the *Birth Project* and while completing that series created *PowerPlay*, a series which brought a critical feminist gaze to the construct of masculinity. After eight years of work, the *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light* premiered in 1993 at the Spertus Museum in Chicago. *The Holocaust Project* features the merging of Chicago's painting with the photography of Donald Woodman. *Resolutions: A Stitch in Time* was Chicago's last collaborative project. Begun in 1994 with skilled needleworkers, *Resolutions* combines painting and needlework in a series which reinterprets adages and proverbs. More recently Chicago has focused on glass as a medium in series like *Heads Up*, done between 2007 and 2013. In 2011 and 2012, in multiple venues and events, including *A Butterfly for Pomona*, Chicago's first fireworks piece since 1974, Chicago's important contributions to southern California art were highlighted in "Pacific Standard Time," a Getty-funded celebration of the region's history. In 2014, Chicago's pyrotechnic *A Butterfly for Brooklyn* marked her 75th birthday with the applause of 12,000 people.

Viki D. Thompson Wylder, MFA PhD: Dr. Thompson Wylder is a Judy Chicago scholar who worked in the museum field for 26 years, primarily for the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts (FSU MoFA), where she curated and co-curated a number of exhibitions, including the Judy Chicago retrospective titled *Trials and Tributes*. *Trials and Tributes* traveled to seven additional venues from 1999 to 2002. The *Trials and Tributes* essay was edited for the catalogue of the 2002 survey of Chicago's career at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Thompson Wylder published articles for several other Chicago series and works. Thompson Wylder negotiated the acquisition of six *Birth Project* textiles as well as *Birth Project* studies and prints making the FSU MoFA the second largest museum collector of *Birth Project* art. In addition, Thompson Wylder teaches in the Women's Studies Program at FSU and serves as the Curator of Education at the FSU MoFA.

Related Programs

Unless otherwise noted, all programs are free with admission and reservations are not required.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT for *Judy Chicago's Birth Project: Born Again*

With the impending arrival of *Judy Chicago's Birth Project: Born Again*, the Pasadena Museum of California Art is thrilled to present a wide array of educational offerings and community engagement strategies to further promote this seminal exhibition, and to present supplementary in-gallery and offsite learning experiences, programs, multimedia tools, and educator resources. With these varied resources made available to the public, the PMCA's goal is to offer multiple entry points for learners of all types, continuing the all-too-necessary conversation surrounding feminism, gender, motherhood, creation, and otherness which Chicago and her collaborators prompted with the *Birth Project's* inception in 1980.

In-Gallery didactics

The Education and Engagement Coordinator, the Director of Exhibitions, and the Exhibitions Designer are working closely with Judy Chicago, Viki Thompson Wylder, Ph.D., and the Through The Flower team to extract key information from the exhibition's original wall labels and didactics to present the most vital information in a visually striking manner and direct attention to the more detailed wall labels and accompanying brochure, as well as a Family Guide, which will offer tips on how to talk to children about the topics and images presented in the tapestries surrounding birth and bodies.

Birth Stories

In the same collaborative spirit of the *Birth Project*, PMCA staff is collaborating with Elizabeth Bachner, owner of GraceFull Birthing Center, to collect and showcase birthing stories from real Californians. By placing these peoples' photos and stories directly in the gallery, on our website, and recording them with Elizabeth on her podcast, Big Birth Junkie, the aim is to realize the stories of the tapestries in concrete and specific examples, allowing viewers to make personal and relatable connections on every scale.

In-Gallery Educational Space

As the visitor finds their way from one work to another, these tapestries are certain to trigger a vast array of emotional and creative responses. In hoping to capture this spirit, an in-gallery educational enclosure, tentatively titled "The Incubator" will exist to create the time and space for visitors to reflect. This area will include bookshelves with books for readers of all ages, concerning feminist art, motherhood, and birthing, within a comfortable space to sit. Visitors can read, write and draw based on prompts surrounding the idea of birth and its many connotations, which they can display on a collaborative Birth Story board. This enclosure will also feature a comprehensive vinyl timeline to accessible define feminism and illustrate the key moments of its history. The timeline culminates not in a dropping off point; rather, it will lead to a mirror which reads "This is what a feminist looks like," encouraging all those who participate to truly consider what it means to be a feminist, and how their personal identity plays a pivotal role in this. The atmosphere will be womb-like in that one will feel safe and warm, visually, physically, emotionally, politically, and morally, encouraging honesty, illumination, and solidarity. Audio and video components of comforting ambient noise and/or a short film on Judy's work are also possibilities.

Bookstore Kids' Corner

The spirit of learning and creating will continue in the PMCA Bookstore, where a newly-erected Kids' Corner allows yet another comfortable and inviting space where parents and caregivers can spend time with their children to read storybooks that connect the aforementioned themes. This will also include simple, self-guided art activities that allow kids to make something themselves to take home. In a world where children may seem as a disturbance in the

formally quiet and restrictive museum setting, this corner allows for the chance to kids to be their active and creative selves without their caregivers having to worry.

Multimedia Resources

The PMCA website will be modified to include digital versions of all in-gallery didactics, as well as detailed lesson plans for educators, project ideas, birth story excerpts and recordings, and more. In conjunction, an audio tour of the gallery will be recorded and uploaded to a new digital platform accessible by smartphone.

Off-Site Events & Partnerships

The PMCA will facilitate at least one off-site ekphrastic writing workshop at GraceFull Birthing Center, along with an additional live taping of Big Birth Junkie in downtown Los Angeles. The museum will also continue to work with existing community partners such as the Playhouse District Association, Pasadena Unified School District, Wisdom Arts Lab, Self Help Graphics and more, while fostering new relationships with Women's Center for Creative Work, California Institute of the Arts, Pasadena Playhouse, and additional organizations.

Creative Workshops

The PMCA will partner with local artists and art nonprofits to facilitate creative activities for all ages. Family Day includes weaving and sewing activities for all ages, Children's Workshops offer textile-based crafts for kids ages 5 to 12, and paid adult workshops offer an opportunity for people ages 15 and up a change to learn more technically advanced weaving techniques and writing-based practices.

PMCA 1234 Programs

One third of PMCA's monthly outreach programs will be dedicated to *Born Again*: Second Saturdays include a panel discussion between contemporary artists, writers, and teachers about the beauties and challenges of working in the creative and intellectual fields while raising a family, along with a live recording of the Big Birth Junkie podcast. Free Third Thursday will include poetry readings, performances, and live music. Fourth Wednesday Wee Reads will provide free mini gallery tours, storytime, and an art activity for children ages 2 to 5.

Museum Information

MISSION

The mission of the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is to present the breadth of California art and design through exhibitions that explore the cultural dynamics and influences that are unique to California.

HOURS

Open Wednesday–Sunday, 12:00–5:00pm; third Thursday of each month, 12:00–9:00pm; closed Monday, Tuesday, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

\$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors (62+); \$5 for students & educators; free for PMCA members & children (12 & under); free the first Friday of each month (12:00–5:00pm); free the third Thursday of each month (5:00–9:00pm). Access for people with disabilities is provided.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

The Museum is located at 490 East Union Street. From the 210 Freeway, take the Lake Avenue exit. Go south and take a right on Union Street. From the 110 Freeway/Downtown Los Angeles, follow the freeway until its end, then take Arroyo Parkway and turn right at Colorado, then left at Oakland to get to Union Street. Free parking is available in the street-level garage at the Museum.

DOCENT TOURS AND GROUP RATES

The Museum offers docent tours on the second Saturday of each month (2:00pm; free with admission). Docent tours are also available Wednesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00pm, to private groups for a fee of \$75. A non-refundable deposit of \$40 is due two weeks prior to the scheduled date. Self-guided tours for K–12 students are offered for free. We regret that we are unable to accommodate docent tours for groups larger than 35 people. Before requesting a tour, please check the exhibition calendar to see which exhibitions will be available during your visit.

A discounted group rate of \$3 per person is available for groups of 20 or more (K–12 student groups are free). Please call to notify us at least one week in advance for these special admission rates. For any questions or to make reservations for a tour or group rate, call our Education & Engagement Coordinator, Leah Clancy, at 626.568.3665 x13 or email lclancy@pmcaonline.org.

For more information, please call 626.568.3665 or visit pmcaonline.org

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