

Judy Chicago

LewAllen Contemporary
Santa Fe

Judy Chicago's unshakable belief in what became *The Dinner Party* (1974–79)—permanently installed last spring in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum—is made plain in this revealing show of preparatory materials that was titled “History in the Making.”

Chicago spent two years studying china-painting techniques and working with a ceramist to create the three-dimensional porcelain plates representing the 39 guests of honor at her ceremonial table. The intricacy of her process was evident here in a variety of test plates bearing color wheels, lengthy written recipes for surface treatments, and early experiments with the butterfly/vulva symbol she developed. There were also study plates incorporating her colorful and graphic designs for five of the finished settings.

Unfortunately, there are few tangible materials left that shed light on the piece's extraordinary needlework, though this show included the black-and-white cartoons for the woven entryway banners, a pattern and weaving sample for them, and colored drawings for the illuminated capital letters on the runners at each of the place settings.



Judy Chicago, *Theodora Test Plate #7*, 1975–78,
china paint on porcelain, 14" x 14" x 1/2".

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Missing was a large-scale photograph of *The Dinner Party* installed, which would have provided a welcome reference for these fragments and hinted at the full work's enormous visual impact.

Although these works are studies, Chicago signed and dated them—she clearly knew *The Dinner Party* would someday be of historic importance. One can only hope that much of this material, like the installation itself, will find its way into a museum. —Hollis Walker