

Atmospheres

Between 1968 and 1974, Judy Chicago executed a series of increasingly complex fireworks pieces that involved site-specific performances around California. These early pyrotechnic performances incorporated colored smokes, magnesium flares and road flares in a series titled *Atmospheres*, whose purpose was to “soften’ or ‘feminize’” the environment, if only for a moment. With a small team of friends, Chicago created progressively more ambitious projects that transformed beaches, parks, forests, deserts, construction sites and museums with explosions of brilliant colors. The hues were organized according to the principles the artist was then developing to use color as a metaphor for emotive states.

During this period, Chicago produced fourteen *Atmospheres*, all of which were documented in photographs and are on view nearby.

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A Birthday Bouquet for Belen

A Birthday Bouquet for Belen celebrated both Judy Chicago's 80th birthday and the opening of the Through the Flower Art Space in her home of Belen, New Mexico. Collaborating with Pyro Spectaculars by Souza, the 40 x 100 ft. piece consisted of 13 rows of seven different colors of smoke and was laid out on Becker Avenue and Second Street. It required over 750 smoke bomb cannisters. Each row was hand ignited by Chris Souza and Mary Costa in ten-second intervals, with an additional firecracker component hand ignited after the smoke bombs were burning. The performance lasted about three minutes. The crowd sang "Happy Birthday" to Judy Chicago as she posed with the colorful smoke.

Belen, New Mexico is home to Through the Flower Art Space, a museum and gallery established by Judy Chicago and her photographer husband Donald Woodman. They also live in Belen, where they renovated and live in a two-story historic hotel.

To help support the opening of Through the Flower, Chicago launched a new wine in collaboration with Jaramillo Vineyards in Belen. Each bottle has a label featured with Chicago's signature and her artwork.

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A Butterfly for Brooklyn

In 2014, Chicago created her most ambitious pyrotechnical display, *A Butterfly for Brooklyn*, in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. The performance was an outdoor component of the exhibition *Chicago in L.A.* at the Brooklyn Museum. It also celebrated Chicago's 75th birthday. The work evoked one of her most well-known artistic motifs: the butterfly. A team of twenty-three pyro technicians under the guidance of Chris Souza ignited a monumental butterfly form in the park.

A Butterfly for Brooklyn brought swirling color and female-centered imagery to an audience of more than 12,000 people who—at the end of the twenty-minute piece—burst into spontaneous applause. “*A Butterfly for Brooklyn* is the most complex fireworks project that I’ve ever done and was created at a level that I could only dream of in 1974,” says Chicago.

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Disappearing Structures

Dry Ice Environment #1 & #2

In 1967, artists Judy Chicago, Lloyd Hamrol and Eric Orr installed *Dry Ice Environment #1* and *Dry Ice Environment #2*, at Century City shopping mall in Los Angeles. For one long day, a hazmat-clad team of Chicago, Hamrol, Orr and two assistants built an all-white, mini-village of nine ziggurats using thirty-seven tons of donated dry ice in the shadow of the department store. In the first performance, rows of stacked dry ice led people from the parking lot to the mall. In the second performance, the shopping mall environment was visually softened as bright pink flares turned the swirling plumes of the dry ice into a soft environment through which people walked as the harsh concrete structures disappeared around them. The gesture was intended to contrast between a minimalist piece and consumerism in America.

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Sublime Environment

In 2012, Judy Chicago revisited her work making dry ice ziggurats with *Sublime Environment* as part of Pacific Standard Time Performance and Public Art Festival. Chicago and twenty-four volunteers from Materials & Applications performed the work for the opening of the PST festival at Barker Hanger, Santa Monica, California. The format remained the same. During the course of one day, nine dry ice ziggurats were built outside a shopping arcade culminating with an illumination at dusk. As Judy Chicago says, “the large-scale installation used twenty-five tons of dry ice and hundreds of road flares, to ‘subvert’ the art fair: visitors left the commercial space in favor of walking through the wafting pink smoke generated by the sublimation of the ice.”

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Disappearing Structures

Be No More

For the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's inaugural Birthday Bash, Judy Chicago's team, Pyro Spectaculars by Souza, and a crew of over twenty volunteers installed the immersive dry ice and road flares work, *Be No More*, in the museum's Howard Street corridor. Requiring 80,000 pounds (forty tons) of dry ice, the work was part of SFMOMA's celebration for the one-year anniversary of the museum's expansion. *Be No More* was an unusual dry ice piece by Chicago. The dry ice blocks were used to spell the word, *Truth*. At dusk, the words were illuminated with road flares that reflected in the side of the museum and - as a metaphor for the political reality at the time - "Truth" slowly disappeared. This work was an iteration of the dry ice environments that Chicago began making in 1967 as a metaphor for what she saw as a new reality. In the 2017 version of *Be No More*, forty tons of dry ice sublimated into the surrounding area. The resulting fog was intended to "disappear" the environment, replace hard edges of architecture and concrete with illuminated smoke, and create a visual metaphor for a contemporary reality.

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Coveralls worn by Donald
Woodman during the **Be No More**
performance at San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art, 2017

Cotton and polyester

A Purple Poem for Miami

In 2019, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami presented a site-specific performance by Judy Chicago in the Miami Design District Jungle Plaza titled, *A Purple Poem for Miami*. The piece was presented as part of ICA Performs, the museum's signature platform for the development of new and recent works from leading performance artists. *A Purple Poem for Miami* expanded upon Judy Chicago's earlier *Atmospheres* performances with the use of colored smokes to "soften and feminize" the environment.

Staged by Pyro Spectaculars by Souza, *A Purple Poem for Miami*, was Chicago's sixth major art installation. The elaborate piece took the form of a four-tiered rectangular structure that supported the timed release of red, blue, and purple smoke, flares, lances, strobes, mines, and fireworks. It filled Jungle Plaza with swirling plumes of intensely colored smokes interspersed with pyro effects creating an explosive performance lasting nearly five minutes.

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Pyro Spectaculars by Souza

Judy Chicago met Chris Souza in 2012 while looking for a pyrotechnics company to help stage *A Butterfly for Pomona*, her first fireworks performance piece since 1974. As Judy says, “It was the luckiest day of my life.” Chicago and Souza have since collaborated on several projects including *Be No More*, *A Butterfly for Brooklyn*, *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, and *A Purple Poem for Miami*.

Pyro Spectaculars has been a family-owned enterprise for over 100 years. The family patriarch, Manuel de Sousa (the family name was later Americanized to Souza), immigrated from the Azores to the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1900s. Manuel began making fireworks out of his home and firing shows for Portuguese community festivals. To carry on the tradition, Manuel entrusted his son Alfred with the family’s recipe book of pyrotechnic secrets. When WWII broke out, Alfred was recruited by the United States Army who valued his skills in chemistry and pyrotechnics. After his service, Alfred began to produce fireworks shows throughout California.

The third generation of Souza pyro technicians descended from Alfred’s son Bob Souza. In 1979, Bob launched Pyro Spectaculars by Souza, marking the end of a cottage business and the beginning of a modern pyrotechnic enterprise. From its humble beginnings at local street festivals almost 80 years prior, the family trade has become one of the largest fireworks display companies in the world.

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Mary Costa with Judy Chicago at Orange Show Speedway, San Bernardino, CA, 2019.
Mary Costa was the first woman to become a licensed pyrotechnician in California.

Chris Souza with Judy Chicago at Orange Show Speedway, San Bernardino, CA, 2019.
Chris Souza is a sixth-generation member of Pyro Spectaculars by Souza fireworks family and the son of Mary Costa.

Women & Smoke, California

In 1970, Chicago pioneered the first feminist art program at California State University, Fresno (then called Fresno State College). She soon began to involve students in her performances, producing eight pieces titled *Women and Smoke*. Her goal with this series was to explore the painted female body in relation to the landscape in order to create meaningful visual archetypes. These early works were focused on re-creating early, women-centered activities like the kindling of fire or the worship of goddess figures.

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**Sublime Environment, from the
series, Three Performances, Los
Angeles, CA, 2012**

Created for the Getty Institute,
Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival
Photographer: Donald Woodman

Photographic print

Nye + Brown

**The DeFlowering of
Nye + Brown – Fireworks
Performance – 7:30 PM, from
the series, Three Performances,
Los Angeles, CA, 2012**

Created for the Getty Institute,
Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival

Signed poster

**A Butterfly for Pomona, from
the series, Three Performances,
Los Angeles, CA, 2012**

Created for the Getty Institute,
Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival
Photographer: Donald Woodman

Photographic print

From left to right:

A Butterfly for Brooklyn, April 26, 2014

Photographer: Ben North

Digital images

Footage from the documentary
A Butterfly for Brooklyn by Kate
Amend and Joan Churchill, 2015

Footage from **A Purple Poem for
Miami** performance at Jungle Plaza
by Donald Woodman, 2019

Running time: 9 minutes, 47 seconds

A Purple Poem for Miami Commemorative Print, 2019

Original photographer: Apolo Gomez
Digital files prepared by: Donald Woodman
and Apolo Gomez

Photographic Print

Left, top to bottom:

**Smoke Hole #1,
Northern California beach**

Smoke Hole #4, Oregon beach

Middle:

Smoke Hole #5, Washington pond

Right, top to bottom:

**Smoke Hole #6, Rain Forest,
Olympic Peninsula, WA**

Smoke Hole #7, Washington forest

All from the series **Northwest
Coast Atmospheres, 1970**

Prints from slides

**Immolation, from the series
Women and Smoke, 1970-1972, 1972**

Photographer unknown

Vintage print

**Goddess With Flares, 1971, from
Women and Smoke, from the portfolio
Atmospheres, printed 2020**

Exhibition print

From left to right:

Garden Smoke Folio Page

**Garden Smoke,
Entrapped by the leaves 4/12**

**Garden Smoke,
Hindered by the Light, 8/12**

**Garden Smoke,
Enclosed in a Trellis, 9/12**

**Garden Smoke,
Limited to a Walkway, 10/12**

All from the
Garden Smoke portfolio, 2020

Photographer: Donald Woodman

Archive prints

On Fire at 80, 2020

Photographer: Donald Woodman

Archival inkjet print

Custom Judy Chicago **Big Sky (“Evening”)** Wallpaper, 2021

Wallpaper Collaboration between Judy Chicago
and STUDIO PRINTWORKS

**Butterfly for Oakland, 1974,
Lake Merritt, CA, from the portfolio
On Fire, printed 2018**

Exhibition print

**Butterfly for Pomona, 2012, Pomona
College, Claremont, CA, from the
portfolio **On Fire**, printed 2018**

Exhibition print

Multi-colored Atmosphere, 1970,
from the portfolio **On Fire**, printed 2018

Exhibition print

**The Deflowering of Nye + Brown,
2012, Culver City, CA, from the
portfolio **On Fire**, printed 2018**

Exhibition print

**Sublime Environment, 2012, Barker
Hangar, Santa Monica, CA, from the
portfolio **On Fire**, printed 2018**

Exhibition print

Immolation, 1972, from Women and Smoke, from the portfolio Atmospheres, printed 2020

Exhibition print

Immolation was taken in the California desert during the Vietnam War. The title, *Immolation*, refers to the historical Hindu practice of sati, in which a widow sacrifices herself on her husband's funeral pyre. The title and the cross-legged pose of the figure suggests the famous photograph of the Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức, who self-immolated to protest the South Vietnamese government in 1963. Chicago was interested in the whole practice of immolation, forced and chosen. As she says: "After all, one could say up to that point women's art and women's history had been immolated."

Chicago created *Immolation* when she led the country's first feminist art programs, initially at Fresno State College and then at California Institute of the Arts. She began to do a series of *Atmospheres* called *Women and Smoke* and her students would participate by painting their bodies to match or contrast with the colors of the smoke. The woman in the photograph is Faith Wilding, a student of Chicago's who went on to become a well-known cyberartist.

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**Smoke Bodies, 1972, from
Women and Smoke from the
portfolio Atmospheres, printed 2020**

Exhibition Print

**Be No More, 2017, San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art, from the
portfolio **Atmospheres**, printed 2020**

Exhibition print

Diane Gelon with Judy Chicago at the *Be No More* performance, San Francisco, CA, 2017. Diane Gelon organized the volunteers for *The Dinner Party, 1979* artwork and its subsequent exhibition tour. Friends with Chicago since the 1970s, she is also President of the Board of Chicago's non-profit organization, Through the Flower.

1. Orange Atmosphere, Brookside Park, Pasadena CA, February 1969 – October 1975
2. Smoke Gun Atmosphere, Brookside Park, Pasadena CA, March 1969 – March 1970
3. Yellow Atmosphere, Brookside Park, Pasadena CA, April - July 1969
4. Purple Atmosphere, Santa Barbara Beach CA, May – July 1969
5. Desert Atmosphere, Palm Desert CA, June 1969
6. Trancas Beach Atmosphere, Trancas Beach, Malibu CA, August 1969 – March 1970
7. Santa Barbara Museum Atmosphere, Santa Barbara CA, August – September 1969
8. Multi Color Atmosphere, Pasadena Museum, Pasadena CA, January – March 1970
9. Mt. Baldy Atmosphere, San Bernardino County CA, February 1970 – October 1975
10. Fresno State College Atmosphere (Disappearing the Art Building), Fresno CA, April 1970
11. Pink Atmosphere, Cal-State Fullerton, Fullerton CA, April 1970 – May 2014
12. Bridge Atmosphere, Cal-State Fullerton, Fullerton CA, April 1970
13. Campus White Atmosphere, Cal-State Fullerton, Fullerton CA, April 1970 – May 2014
14. A Butterfly for Oakland, Lake Merritt, Oakland CA, September 1974 – September 1975

ADVISORY

**This exhibition contains nudity.
Some content may not be appropriate
for younger viewers.**