

Judy Chicago: Dry Ice, Smoke, and Fireworks Collection CAE2002

Introduction/Abstract

This archive contains materials from Judy Chicago's work with dry ice, smoke flares, and fireworks to create distinct bodies of work spanning from 1967 to 2019. Materials include limited edition prints, photographs, digital images, slides, 16 mm films, correspondence, technical drawings, maps, notes, maquettes, garments, presentations, and press materials.

Biographical Note: Judy Chicago

Judy Chicago is an artist, author, feminist, educator, and intellectual whose career now spans five decades, and during that time she has remained steadfast in her commitment to the power of art as a vehicle for intellectual transformation and social change and to women's right to engage in the highest level of art production.

She was born Judy Cohen in 1939 in Chicago, Illinois, in the last year of the Great Depression. She grew up in a liberal environment; unusual for the time, her intellectual Jewish parents both worked to support their two children and openly articulated their left-wing politics. Chicago began drawing at the age of three and attending classes at the Institute of Chicago starting in 1947. In 1957 she enrolled at UCLA where she majored in art and minored in humanities.

Judy Chicago was one of the pioneers of Feminist art in the 1970s. Inspired by the women's movement and rebelling against the male-dominated art scene of the 1960s, which lionized the Minimalist work of artists like Donald Judd, Chicago embraced explicitly female content. Creating works that recognized the achievements of major female historical figures or celebrated women's unique experiences, Chicago produced a rich body of work that sought to add women to the historic record and, more generally, to enhance their representation in the visual arts. Chicago also pioneered Feminist art and art education through a unique program for women at California State University, Fresno.

In 1974, Chicago turned her attention to the subject of women's history to create her most well-known work, *The Dinner Party*, which was executed between 1974 and 1979 with the participation of hundreds of volunteers. *The Dinner Party*, with which she is often narrowly identified, has been the subject of countless articles and art history texts and is included in innumerable publications in diverse fields.

In addition to a life of prodigious art making, Chicago is the author of numerous books. In 2018 she was named both one of *Time Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People" and a 2018 "Most Influential Artist" by *Artsy Magazine*. In 2019, she received the Visionary Woman award from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

Scope and Content

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 that were organized according to the principles the artist was then developing in order to use color as a metaphor for emotive states.

During this period, Chicago produced fourteen *Atmospheres*. These were documented by still photographs and film footage that were combined to create a fourteen-minute DVD with a narration about the history of the artist's exploration of fireworks. In 1970, Chicago pioneered the first feminist art program at Cal State Fresno (then called Fresno State College) and soon began to involve her students in her fireworks performances, producing nine 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. All but one of these was documented with 16 mm film, which has been turned into a twenty-minute silent DVD. In addition, these performances were documented by dozens of slides.

In 1974, *A Butterfly for Oakland* was commissioned by the Oakland Museum as part of the museum's Sculpture in the City project. Presented on the shores of Lake Merritt, this piece was the largest and most technically challenging Chicago had undertaken. For the first time, she utilized a technique called lance work, which is a traditional, labor intensive method of building a framework to support the fireworks effects. This foray into creating a recognizable image with fireworks was to be the artist's last pyrotechnical enterprise for several decades. The record of this piece was later discovered by a curator at the Oakland Museum who created an exhibition about it in 2014.

Until 2011/2012, little attention was paid to this aspect of Chicago's oeuvre but that changed with the advent of Pacific Standard Time (PST, the Getty funded initiative documenting and celebrating southern California art from 1960-85). In conjunction with PST, the Getty mounted a performance festival and Judy Chicago was invited to pick up where she had stopped in the 1970's with both fireworks and dry ice, another ephemeral material that she had employed.

In the 1960s, prior to working with fireworks, the artist had used massive quantities of dry ice with a subversive purpose in mind, one that was not understood for almost forty years. Working with two other artists, she used thirty-seven tons of donated dry ice to create two different pieces in the shopping mall of the newly developed Century City. In the second of these, the uninviting environment was visually softened as bright pink flares turned the swirling plumes of the sublimating dry ice into a soft environment through which people walked as the harsh concrete structures disappeared around them. ('Sublimation' is the term for the disintegration of the dry ice).

For the PST Performance Festival, she did another dry ice installation, which took place at the Barker Hanger at the Santa Monica airport on the opening night of the L.A. Art Fair. With the small architectural firm, Materials and Applications, Chicago created the *Sublime Environment*, a large-scale installation using twenty-five tons of dry ice and again, hundreds of road flares, to 'subvert' the art fair in that visitors left the commercial space in favor of walking through the wafting pink smoke generated by the sublimation of the ice.

By this time, it had become impossible to find colored smokes so the artist had to learn a new visual vocabulary involving aerial fireworks, which she employed for the first time in *A Butterfly for Pomona* at Pomona College. Although the technology of fireworks had changed by then, lance work had remained essentially the same. Working with Chris Souza and his mother, who are part of a six-generation fireworks family (Pyro Spectaculars), the artist created a gigantic butterfly form that filled the football field—that most male of sites—transforming it into a metamorphizing, erupting, female-centered image to the delight of twenty-two hundred viewers.

She was also invited to design a new fireworks piece for the opening of "Deflowered", a survey show of her early work at the now defunct Nye + Brown Gallery in Los Angeles. Utilizing the back of the gallery as a canvas,

Chicago created a series of petal forms in fireworks that erupted into colorful special effects around the back entrance to the gallery. These three performances were documented by extensive still photography and a 14-minute video that includes both music and narration.

Perhaps it was PST that initiated a growing interest in Chicago's ephemeral work as unknown film footage from the *Women and Smoke* series was included in Philipp Kaiser's "Ends of the Earth", exhibition which took place in 2012 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, then traveling to the Haus Der Kunst in Munich. Kaiser's inclusion of Chicago's work led to his writing the first scholarly essay on her performance pieces, which was published by Scala as part of the 2019 comprehensive monograph on her work.

In 2014, the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum organized the exhibition, 'Chicago in L.A.', which highlighted her 1960's and 70's paintings and sculptures and included a digital slide show about Chicago's fireworks, thereby introducing many viewers to her early work. In conjunction with the show, the artist created her most ambitious pyrotechnical display in Prospect Park (which is close to the museum). *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. This work was extensively documented by both still photography and video along with a 20-minute DVD that included a narrative discussion of the significance of the butterfly in Chicago's work.

That year, the artist also resumed doing small-scale pieces in her backyard in New Mexico, in part because colored smokes became available again. The first was a holiday video in the garden of the Belen Hotel, where she and her husband/collaborator photographer Donald Woodman live and work, again incorporating a painted female body; a red and green 'gif commissioned by the 'London Guardian.' A few years later, also in the garden, Chicago and friends did a private smoke piece that was connected to a presentation of the "Butterfly for Brooklyn" video at the local library. On July 20, 2019, Chicago created a 'Birthday Bouquet' of colored smokes in the street to commemorate both her 80th birthday and the opening of the Through the Flower Art Space, a center for educational resources and creative hub for residents and visitors that features changing art exhibitions, a video and book library, and an exhibition of Chicago and Woodman's life and work in Belen.

In 2017, Chicago was invited to present a dry ice piece at SFMOMA in San Francisco as part of the one-year celebration of their new building. Working with Chris Souza of Pyro Spectaculars and a volunteer team of participants, she and Woodman built a 20-ton dry ice installation that spelled out "Truth" in a walkway adjacent to the building. At dusk, the words were illuminated with road flares that reflected in the side of the museum and - as a metaphor for an unfortunate current political reality - "Truth" slowly disappeared.

In 2019, in conjunction with the Miami ICA exhibition, "Judy Chicago: A Reckoning", the artist presented *A Purple Poem for Miami* in the Design District's Jungle Plaza. For this piece, Chicago employed a hand-built vertical structure of four tiers to support the fireworks which included road flares, colored smokes and a variety of fireworks effects. By this time, Chicago and her collaborators had decided to re-introduce the intimacy of her earliest pieces by hand-lighting the road flares, eliminating most aerial effects and emphasizing a more human scale. Unfolding over a period of twenty minutes, the piece gradually built from the ground upwards through a spectral series of colors to explode at the top and then quietly extinguish.

This archive contains materials from Judy Chicago's work with dry ice, smoke flares, and fireworks to create distinct bodies of work: *Dry Ice*, *Atmospheres*, *Women and Smoke*, and *Smoke Sculptures*.

Materials include limited edition prints, photographs, digital images, slides, 16 mm films, correspondence, technical drawings, maps, notes, maquettes, garments, presentations, and press materials.

Inclusive Dates

1967 – 2020

Bulk Dates

1969 – 2019

Quantity / Extent

2 cubic feet

Language

English

Arrangement

Series 1-10 in this archive are organized by bodies of work or project, which are further arranged by date. Series 11 is organized by subject.

- Series 1: Dry Ice (1967 – 2017)
- Series 2: Atmospheres (1969 – 1974)
- Series 3: Smoke Holes and Northwest Coast Atmospheres (1970 – 1975)
- Series 4: Women and Smoke (1969 – 2019)
- Series 5: *A Butterfly for Pomona* (2010 – 2012)
- Series 6: *The DeFlowering of Nye + Brown* (2012)
- Series 7: *A Butterfly for Brooklyn* (2014)
- Series 8: Belen Atmospheres (2014 – 2019)
- Series 9: General Smoke Tests (2016)
- Series 10: *A Purple Poem for Miami* (2017 – 2019)
- Series 11: General Press and Outreach (2012 – 2020)

Related Archive Collections

CAE1042: *Lita Albuquerque: Stellar Axis*

Related Publications

Broude, Norma, Mary D Garrard, and Judith K Brodsky. *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*. New York, NY: H.N. Abrams, 1994.

Chicago, Judy, Donald Woodman, and Ben Uri Art Gallery. *Judy Chicago*. Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2012.

Chicago, Judy, Carmen Hermo, Ane Pasternak, Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, and the Brooklyn Museum. *Judy Chicago: Roots of The Dinner Party*. New York, NY: Salon 94, 2018.

Chicago, Judy, Alex Gartenfeld, and Stephanie Siedel. *Judy Chicago: A Reckoning*. Miami, Florida; Munich, Germany; New York, NY: Institute of Contemporary Art; DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2018.

Chicago, Judy. *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2014.

Chicago, Judy, Frances Borzello, and Jane F Gerhard. *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History*. New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2014.

Chicago, Judy and National Museum of Women in the Arts. *Judy Chicago: New Views*. New York, N.Y.: Scala Arts Publishers, Inc.; Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts (U.S.), 2019.

Watson, Esther, and California Institute of the Arts. Feminist Art Program. *Womanhouse*. Valencia CA: California Institute of the Arts, 1972.

Container Listing by Series:

CAE2002/1 Series 1: *Dry Ice*, Folders 1-14, 1967 – 2017

Series 1 contains materials from Judy Chicago's *Dry Ice* body of work, where she "softened" or feminized" the landscape by placing blocks of dry ice and sometimes colored flares in remote natural areas or open public space. As the dry ice evaporated, Chicago photographed the vapor and the human interaction with the work. There are four projects represented in this series: "Disappearing Structures" (folders 1 & 2), "Sublime Environment" (folders 3-6), "Disappearing 100 Boxes" (folder 7), and "Be No More" (folders 8-14). Materials include slides, vintage prints, digital images, and video. Folders are organized chronologically by project and are further arranged by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 1-1 *Disappearing Structures*, Century City Los Angeles, CA: *Dry Ice Environment #1*, Images, 1967
- 1-2 *Disappearing Structures*, Century City Los Angeles, CA: *Dry Ice Environment #2*, Images, 1967
- 1-3 *Sublime Environment*, Santa Monica CA, Model, 2011
- 1-4 *Sublime Environment*, Santa Monica CA, Tests, 2011 – 2012
- 1-5 *Sublime Environment*, Santa Monica CA, Event Images and Video, January 19-20, 2012
- 1-6 *Sublime Environment*, Pacific Standard Time, Press Materials, 2011 – 2012
- 1-7 *Disappearing 100 Boxes*, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn NY (Unrealized), Site Visit Images, Drawings, and Model, 2013
- 1-8 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Contracts and Logistics Correspondence, March 2017
- 1-9 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Design and Model, 2017
- 1-10 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Materials and Site Research, 2017
- 1-11 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Dry Ice Test, Belen, NM, March 2017
- 1-12 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Volunteer Meeting, April 25, 2017
- 1-13 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Construction Images, April 26, 2017
- 1-14 *Be No More*, SFMOMA, San Francisco CA, Event Images and Video, April 26, 2017

CAE2002/2 Series 2: Atmospheres, Folders 1 - 14, 1969 – 1974

Series 2 contains materials for fourteen Atmospheres projects created from 1968 – 1974, and the video created in 2016 of all the projects. This body of work is one in which Chicago worked with colored smoke as a gesture of liberation. Materials include slides, prints, event invitations, film, diagrams, research, maps, correspondence, floorplans, layouts, notes, and supply lists. Folders are organized chronologically by project.

CAE Box 185

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

CAE2002/3 Series 3: Smoke Holes and Northwest Coast Atmospheres, Folders 1-9, 1970 – 1975

Series 3 contains materials from a trip up the Northwest Coast of America in 1970, while placing smoke in various natural orifices along the way. In 1975, Judy Chicago created a series of eight panels (one for each individual project) with handwritten texts of the works. Materials include slides and a film. Folders are organized chronologically by project.

CAE Box 185

- 3-1 *Smoke Holes #1*, Beach, Northern CA, Images, September 1970
- 3-2 *Smoke Holes #2*, California/Oregon Border, Images, September 1970
- 3-3 *Smoke Holes #3*, Beach, OR, Images, September 1970
- 3-4 *Smoke Holes #4*, Beach, OR, Images, September 1970
- 3-5 *Smoke Holes #5*, Pond, WA, Images, September 1970
- 3-6 *Smoke Holes #6*, Forest, WA, Images, September 1970
- 3-7 *Smoke Holes #7*, Rain Forest, Olympic Peninsula, WA, Images, September 1970
- 3-8 *Smoke Holes #8*, Vancouver BC, Canada, Images, September 1970
- 3-9 *Northwest Coast Atmospheres*, Various Locations, Images, 1971 – 1975

CAE2002/4 Series 4: Women and Smoke, Folders 1-10, 1969 – 2019

Series 4 contains materials for the eight projects of the Women and Smoke body of work, which focused on female power and early women-centered activities such as the kindling of fire or the worship of goddess figures. Materials include slides, vintage prints, negatives, contact prints, film and video. Folders 1-8 are

project based, while folder 9 contains the videos for select Atmospheres and *Women and Smoke* works. Folder 10 is also project based. Folders are arranged chronologically by project.

CAE Box 185

- 4-1 *Women Creating Fire*, Fresno CA, Images, February 1969 – April 1992 (1st image is scouting. Event images are July 1970)
- 4-2 *Woman with Orange Flares*, Los Angeles CA, Images, September 1970
- 4-3 *Woman Bathing*, Fresno CA, Images, 1971
- 4-4 *Woman Dancing*, Los Angeles CA, Images, 1971-1972
- 4-5 *Woman with Liquid Smoke*, Los Angeles CA, Images, 1971-1972
- 4-6 *Bride with Liquid Smoke*, Los Angeles CA, Images, 1971-1972
- 4-7 *Smoke Bodies*, California Desert, Images, 1972
- 4-8 *Immolation*, California Desert, Images, 1972
- 4-9 *Atmospheres and Women and Smoke*, Compilation Videos, 1968 – 2017
- 4-10 Harper's Bazaar Photo Shoot and Article, Miami Beach FL, 2019

CAE2002/5 Series 5: A Butterfly for Pomona, Pomona College, Claremont CA, Folders 1-3, 2010 – 2012

Series 5 is a single project series and contains materials for the 2012 work titled *A Butterfly for Pomona*, which was also part of the Pacific Standard Time exhibition in 2011-2012. Materials include design documents, slides, digital images, a compilation photograph, and video. Folders are organized chronologically by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 5-1 Site Visit, December 14, 2010
- 5-2 Design, 2011
- 5-3 Event Images and Video, 2012

CAE2002/6 Series 6: The DeFlowering of Nye + Brown, Los Angeles CA, Folders 1-4, 2012 – 2017

Series 6 is a single project series and contains materials for the 2012 performance titled *The DeFlowering of Nye + Brown*, which was also part of the 2011-2012 Pacific Standard Time exhibition. This series also contains a combined video of the three performances created in 2012 for the Pacific Standard Time exhibition. Materials include a design document, slides, digital images, and video. Folders are organized chronologically by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 6-1 Design, 2012
- 6-2 Event Images, Video, and Ephemera, 2012
- 6-3 Press and Media, 2012 – 2017
- 6-4 Video of Pacific Standard Time Exhibition Performances, (Sublime Environment, A Butterfly for Pomona, and The DeFlowering of Nye + Brown) 2014

CAE2002/7 Series 7: A Butterfly for Brooklyn, Prospect Park, Brooklyn NY, 2014, Folders 1-4, 2014

Series 7 is a single project series and contains materials from the 2014 *Butterfly for Brooklyn* performance held in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York as part of the Brooklyn Museum exhibition. This was Chicago's most

complicated performance as of 2020, requiring 43 technicians to execute successfully. Materials include design drawings, correspondence, research materials, budgets, schedules, slides, digital images, and video. Folders are arranged chronologically by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 7-1 Proposal, Design, and Schedule, 2014
- 7-2 Installation Images, 2014
- 7-3 Event Images and Video, 2014
- 7-4 Press and Media, 2014

CAE2002/8 Series 8: Belen Atmospheres, Belen NM, Folders 1-9, 2014 – 2019

Series 8 contains information about three performances held in Belen, New Mexico, in 2014 and 2019: Garden Color (folder 1), Holiday Video (folder 2), A Birthday Bouquet for Belen (folders 4-5 and 7-9). Folder 6 contains the photoshoot images taken for the Purple Magazine article published on September 1, 2019. Folder 10 includes press materials for both the “A Birthday Bouquet for Belen” and “On Fire at 80” article by the New Yorker. Materials include technical drawings, slides, digital images, video, and press materials. Folders are organized chronologically by project.

CAE Box 185

- 8-1 *Garden Color*, Images and Video, November 26, 2014 – July 15, 2015
- 8-2 *Holiday Video*, Images and Video, December 9, 2014
- 8-3 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, Research and Design, 2019
- 8-4 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, Smoke Test #1, April 6, 2019
- 8-5 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, Smoke Test #2, April 24, 2019
- 8-6 “On Fire at 80” Photoshoot, May 29, 2019 – September 3, 2019
- 8-7 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, Construction and Installation, July 2019
- 8-8 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen*, Event Images and Video, July 20, 2019
- 8-9 *A Birthday Bouquet for Belen and “On Fire at 80,”* Press Materials, July 25 – September 1, 2019

CAE2002/9 Series 9: General Smoke Tests and Technical Information, Folders 1-4, 2016

Series 9 contains general fireworks information and digital image files for various smoke tests conducted in 2016. Materials include digital images and video. Folders are arranged chronologically by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 9-1 Fireworks Test Information and Correspondence, 2016
- 9-2 Smoke Tests, Belen NM, July 2, 2016
- 9-3 Smoke Tests, Belen NM, October 12, 2016
- 9-4 Pyro Spectaculars Smoke Tests, Rialto and Lucerne Valley CA, October 20, 2016

CAE2002/10 Series 10: A Purple Poem for Miami, ICA Miami FL, 2019, Folders 1-10, 2017 – 2019

Series 10 is a single project series that contains materials related to the Performance *A Purple Poem for Miami* and the corresponding exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami (ICA Miami) titled *Judy Chicago: A Reckoning*. Folders are organized by subject and by natural progression of the project.

CAE Box 185215

- 10-1 Budget and Proposal, 2017 – 2018
- 10-2 Smoke Test, ICA Miami, Miami FL, March 20, 2018
- 10-3 Smoke Test, Orange County Speedway, San Bernardino CA, September 25, 2018
- 10-4 Smoke Test, Belen NM, October 19, 2018
- 10-5 Logistics and Design, 2018 – 2019
- 10-6 Conversation with Alex Gartenfeld from ICA Miami, February 21, 2019
- 10-7 Installation Images, February 22-23, 2019
- 10-8 Event Remarks, Images, and Ephemera, 2019
- 10-9 Event Images and Video, 2019
- 10-10 Exhibition and Performance Press, 2019

CAE2002/11 Series 11: General Press and Outreach, Folders 1-2, 2012 – 2020

Series 11 contains materials related to presentations and general press coverage. Specific press coverage or specific talks for events have been included with the appropriate event in prior series. Materials include digital images, video, and webpage captures. Folders are organized by subject.

CAE Box 185

- 11-1 General Press Materials, 2012 – 2020
- 11-2 Nevada Museum of Art Presentation, January 24, 2019