



ETN Textile Forum No 2 2009

When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Threads

Curated by Allyson Mitchell.

February 12- September 7 2009

Textile Museum of Canada, 55 Centre Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

<http://www.textilemuseum.ca/>

In considering Judy Chicago's place in art history, certain aspects have been emphasised and others overlooked. To talk about the work in this show, you can focus on the material and the women who actually fabricated her work. The subject matter is more important than the quality of Chicago's drawing. To call them crude is to suggest they have more interest than they do, to call them simple suggests a stylistic approach which they do not have. This however has had no particular effect on her career and becoming an Icon as a feminist artist, a female artist, and artist in the still male dominated art world.

This exhibition focuses on the labour-intensive nature of implementing Chicago's work. The work has been executed in textile form by a number of skilled women. This is a survey exhibition including work from **the Birth Project** (1980-1985), **the Holocaust Project** (1993) and **Resolutions: A Stitch in Time** (1994 to present). The subject matter for the Birth Project may once have had power and caused sensations, but now it seems slightly quaint in its flowing, flowering and dated almost psychedelic appearance.. The filet crochet piece "**Birth**" 233.7 x 565 cm, 1984, by **Dolly Kaminski**, like all the imagery in the Birth Project, has a nod towards the rotund Venus of Willendorf and any number of other archaic fertility "goddess" that inspired a major feminist imagery. Familiar domestic products of table cloths, drapes, pillow fringes and shawls done in a white filet crochet in cotton yarn are completely subverted in this piece. One is drawn in by the rich blackness of the pulsing, waving lines of "pain", "blood flow" and "placenta" emanating from the crotch of the awkwardly foreshortened reclining female body floating over the base grid of the crochet construction. This piece is fully realised in that the technique and drawn line work together.

Also from the Birth Project, **Birth Tear/ Tear** 1984, which is magnificent yet diminished by its presentation, is created in Macramé, with mixed threads executed by **Pat Ruby – Baese**. Made of fine yarn/ thread tightly knotted, this is the finest piece of Macramé I have ever seen, its dense thick richly coloured sculptural quality bring the image to a point of abstraction where the beauty of the knotting is breath taking. Unfortunately this is rendered mute by being mounted on fabric 106.7 x 426.7 cm (42 x 55 ½ “) the colour of dried blood rather than floating free on the wall where the pure elegance of the workmanship could be seen. Granted efficient safe hanging is necessary to the longevity of a piece of art, but this piece would be better served floating over a light background in a shadow box.

Chicago and weaver **Audrey Cowan** created the modified Aubusson tapestry: “**The Fall**,” for the **Holocaust Project**. It stands out as a marked change in her design vocabulary. Using a number of Art Historic references include the stylised imagery of Soviet propaganda, and German Dada with a Leonardo’s Vitruvian Man. The various styles in Chicago’s hands end up looking like a high student’s school comic book, though it lacks the frantic energy of teenage angst and is just limp. The tale as told, moving from warring barbarians at one end, through the crucifixion of Christ, the Renaissance and birth of science to the Industrial Revolution, to the Nazis throwing people into gas ovens on the other, is vast in scope. It doesn’t have the strength that official propaganda art has, it doesn’t represent the subject matter with any seriousness, and, frighteningly, it can be misread. This piece woven in wool and silk in the grand tradition of depicting historic events misses the mark completely in its lackadaisical, weak drawing.

This exhibition is a turning back of a page in some ways, but it is also an opportunity to re-engage in a dialogue. The new generation of female artist working with textiles and fibres, have little knowledge of how attitudes towards woman’s creative work have changed in both academia and the “market place” of corporate, institutional, commercial and public galleries and museums over the past forty years. Curator **Allison Mitchell** has, by placing the Judy Chicago exhibition, together with “**She Will Always be Older Than Us**,” a group exhibition of five younger female fibre artists, challenges us to address or rather re- address the feminist inquiry into cultural production.

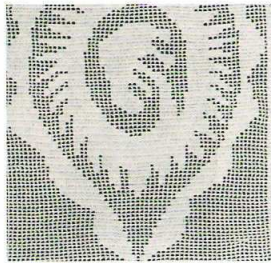
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PREVIEW



Photo: Through the flowers Archive



WHEN WOMEN RULE THE WORLD: JUDY CHICAGO IN THREADS

Exhibition from February 12 until September 7, 2009, at the Textile Museum of Canada, in Toronto, (<http://www.textilemuseum.ca/>)

"Birth", 1984; 565 x 233,7 cm filet crochet (sample left), executed by Dolly Kaminski

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Left: "Birth tear/tear", 1984; 427 x 107 cm, macramé mixed, executed by Pat Ruby
Below: "The Fall", 1993, 549 x 137 cm, Aubusson tapestry technique, woven by Audrey Cowan

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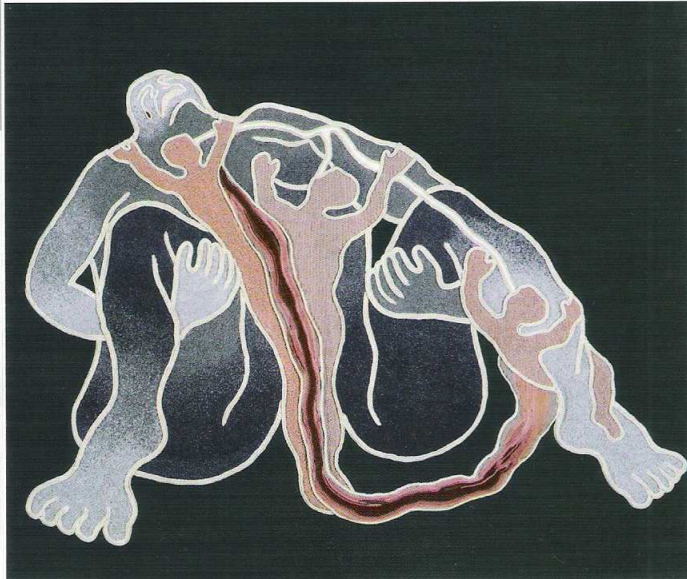


Photo: Through the flowers Archive

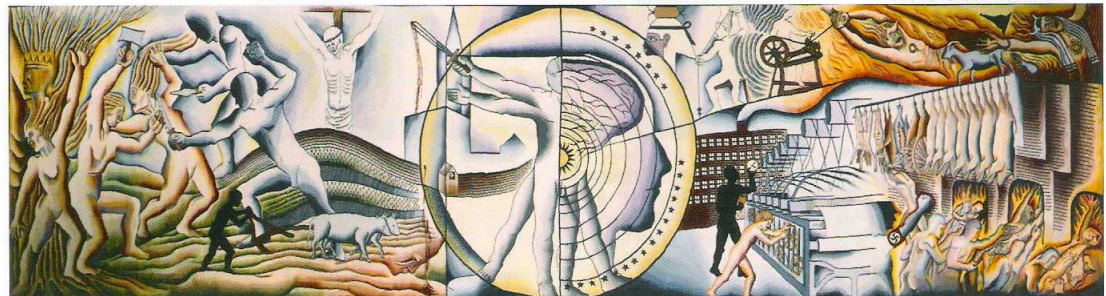


Photo: Donald Woodman