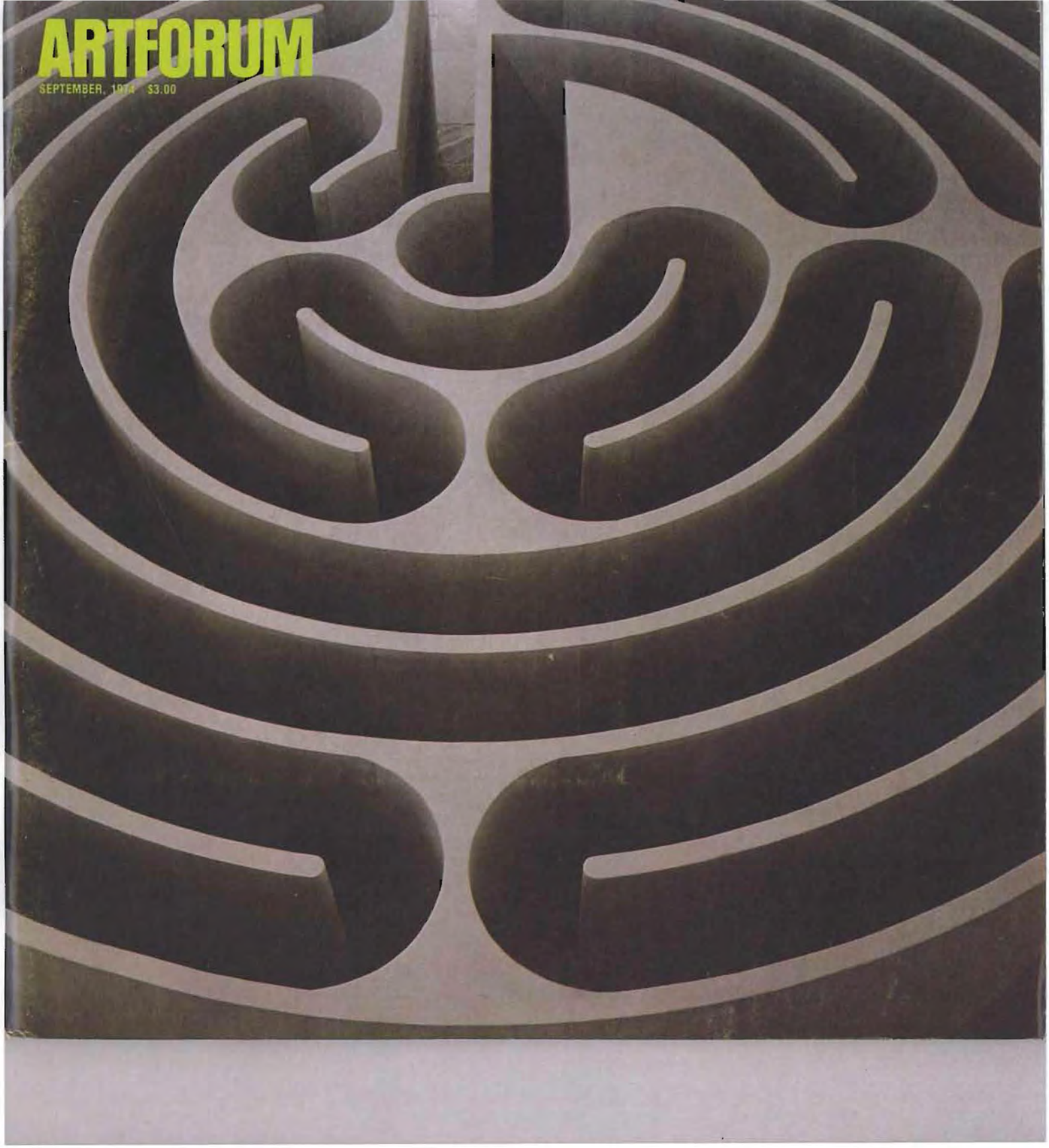
ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER, 1974 $3.00



ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER, 1974

Cover: Robert Morris, *Labyrinth* (detail), 1974, Masonite and wood, 96" high, 360" diameter.

Publisher ..... Charles Cowles
Editor ..... John Coplans
Senior Editor ..... Robert Pincus-Witten
Managing Editor ..... Angela Westwater
Associate Editors ..... Lawrence Alloway
(Books) Max Kozloff
Rosalind E. Krauss
Joseph Masheck
(Film/Performance) Annette Michelson
(West Coast) Peter Plagens
Production ..... Tanya Neufeld
Circulation ..... Lawrence M. Londino
Business Manager ..... Marian Conner
Editorial Assistant ..... Alan Moore

Volume XIII, No. 1, September, 1974. Published ten times annually except July and August by ARTFORUM, EDITORIAL OFFICE, 667 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021. Telephone: (area code 212)838-6820.

Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. U.S. and Canadian newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, 155 West 15th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S. and Canada, one year $22.50. Student rate $17.50, by direct application only. Other countries, add $3.00 postage. Single copy $3.00 prepaid. ARTFORUM is delivered by airfreight to Europe.

SUBSCRIPTIONS &
ADDRESS CHANGES
Artforum, 155 Allen Blvd.
Farmingdale, N.Y. 11735

ADVERTISING, U.S.A. & Canada
Barbara Pallenberg, 667 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10021
838-6822

ADVERTISING, Europe
John H. Liesveld, Jr.
rue de la Tourelle
Saint-Martin-de-Nigelles
28130 Maintenon, France
(37)64.56.24

Artforum is indexed in the *Art Index*. For back issues, complete volumes and *Artforum* index write: Laurence McGilvery, P.O. Box 852, La Jolla, Calif. 92037.

Judy Chicago, *Atmosphere*, 1969.

Judy Chicago, Talking to Lucy R. Lippard

*You've been showing your work for about 11 years now, but there's never been an article on it, so let's start from scratch.**

OK. When I first started my professional life, in 1963, I was making these very biomorphic paintings and sculptures; I went to auto-body school, because I wanted to learn to spray paint, and because it seemed another way to prove my "seriousness" to the male art world. While I was there, I put my very sexually feminine images on this car hood, which in itself is quite a symbol. Over the next few years, I retreated from that kind of subject matter because it had met with great ridicule from my male professors. There was no radical departure, just a slow moving away from a content-oriented work to a more formalist stance; then, much later, a slow moving back.

In 1965 I did *Rainbow Pickett* — six differently pastel-colored beams, progressively larger in size, leaning against the wall. From 1966 to 1967 I made a number of sculptures, some very large, like the cylinders which filled a room in the Los Angeles County Museum's "Sculpture of the Sixties," and some very small rearrangeable game pieces. I also did some environmental pieces with Lloyd and Eric Orr. By this time I'd stopped using color, because I wanted to force myself to develop the form in the sculpture and, more negatively, because I felt forced to deny parts of myself, as I couldn't seem to fit into the existing structures. It's no accident that it was during this whole period when I was least overt about my womanliness — 1965 — that I made my reputation as an artist. It was a period in L.A. when no women artists were taken seriously. The men sat around Barney's and talked about cars, motorcycles, and their joints. I knew nothing about cars, less about motorcycles, and certainly didn't have a joint. They would not have appreciated my stories about my experiences with various joints, to say the least. A lot of the women artists I've talked to since had little conception that their isolation had anything to do with the fact that they were women. I refused to believe there was something wrong with me personally, and I think that saved me.

Still, as my own level of achievement rose, my career didn't go along with it. When I was twenty-three, I was an up-and-coming young artist and so were a number of other women. As I went along, there were less and less women. As I started getting better and the careers of most of my male peers were going up, mine was sort of staying at the same place. I found I could get somebody to really respond to one work; they'd think that one was fantastic and I'd get a whole lot of feedback. But no comprehension of my work in terms of a whole series of ideas. I began to realize that a woman can do a single thing — that's sort of an accident; but if she makes a coherent body of work that means she has to be taken seriously in terms of ideas, and that moves into another place in the art world.

When did you get back to color?

I'd reacted against having the color on top, like in *Rainbow Pickett*. In the fiberglass cylinders, the color was right *in* the surface. I couldn't have a lot of colors because it was too expensive, so I tried to make a color which, when light hit it, would seem to change. When I began the domes in 1968, I'd arrived at three as the irreducible number of units I could use and still get the sense of relationship; it's also the primary family unit. With the domes I was trying to explore my own subject matter and still embed it in a form which would make it acceptable to the male art world — that 60s' idea of formalism. It was so frustrating in the art world. I moved outside for technical advice; I went to the DuPont people. They were always fascinated by a woman doing these things, so there was probably a little sexist bargaining going on, but I got by.

I began to lay out the spray patterns for the domes on flat plastic sheets and that led me back into painting. I wanted a framework which would be a parallel to the sense of risk I felt in the subject matter, so I chose a way of working that had a high degree of technical risk. For the next few years, the pieces were phenomenally hard to make. The solvent for the paint was the same as for the plastic. If I made a mistake, I couldn't take the paint off or I'd lose the plastic too. They could be lost at any moment, which also reflected my status as a woman artist. It had to do with violation too, because in some instances I could have gotten the paint off, but I couldn't stand to rub this lacquer thinner into the surface and see it get all gooey. It was somehow like my own skin.

Throughout this period I was also discovering that I was multiorgasmic, that I could act aggressively on my own sexual needs. The forms became rounded like domes or breasts or bellies and then they opened up and became like donuts, and then the donuts began to be grasping and assertive. I went from three forms to four and started the *Pasadena Lifesavers*. I was developing color systems which made forms turn, dissolve, open, close, vibrate, gesture, wiggle; all those sensations were emotional and body sensations translated into form and color. I called them lifesavers because in a way they did save my life by confronting head-on that issue of what it was to be a woman. And at the same time (January 1969), I started doing the *Atmospheres*, flares of colored smoke outdoors and in the landscape. They're all about the releasing of energy.

And about the releasing of energy in nonobject terms — something you don't have to worry about or be responsible for after you've done it. You act it out and it goes away, right? And, then in 1970 you went to Fresno to start the Women's Art Program.

Yes. I lived away from Lloyd for a year and tried to begin to undo the damage I'd done myself competing in the male art world. I wanted to make my paintings much more vulnerable, much more open. The *Fresno Fans* are based on a body gesture, reaching from the center core or protuberance or slit, from flesh to sky, like *Desert Fan*. "How do you fit a soft shape into a hard framework?" was what I wrote on one drawing. The confrontation really came in *Flesh Gardens* the same year, where simple rigid structures melt into very soft sensations. It had to do with feminine and masculine, open and closed, vulnerable and rigid. But the paintings were still very formalized, the content still indirect.

Do you equate the incredible compulsiveness involved in that technique with the attention to detail and obsessiveness in women's work in general?

*The original taped conversations from which these texts were excerpted took place in Georgetown, Maine, September, 1973; they were revised by artist and author in Los Angeles in February, 1974. The italicized notes in the middle of the article are by LRL.

Judy Chicago, *Pasadena Lifesavers #4*, 1969, acrylic lacquer on acrylic sheet, 5' x 5'.

Absolutely. Also, never allowing myself to make a mistake in being a superwoman in male society in order to avoid being put down.

Is it also a discipline and framework to work against? Is that part of the hard-soft thing?

It's very complicated. There are parts of it that have to do with struggling against the confines of the male structure and another part to do with the establishment of a new structure. By then, I had also gotten to the point where I was very good with a spray gun. It's difficult to work intuitively with a spray gun if you're dealing with forms, especially balancing a carefully sprayed and rigid surface against a soft overlay, which I could do later. There's something fantastic, though, about that process, about playing on that edge; you can just push it and lose it. It's so tempting, because it's trying to pursue perfection, like the perfect orgasm, perfect pleasure, and you know you always have to stop just before it's perfect; you know if you just go one more second and try and make it perfect, you'll lose the picture.

But recently you've been working on canvas instead of plexiglass.

I didn't want to hide the image behind a lot of transparency and reflectivity; I wanted it right out in the open and very plain. Canvas is much softer and more receptive too. It doesn't fight me. Anyway, I had kept on thinking that if my work got better, everything would change. I wanted it to be seen as a body, so I had this big show at Cal State Fullerton. I also changed my name at that time from Judy Gerowitz to Judy Chicago, after my hometown. I wanted to make a symbolic statement about my emerging position as a feminist. And I wanted to force the viewers to see the work in relation to the fact that it was made by a woman artist. Now I can see that the years of neutralizing my subject matter made it difficult to perceive the content in my work. Even for women.

I believe that if one allows oneself to meet my paintings on an emotional level, one can penetrate the plastic and the formalism and find that soft center I was trying to expose, though with difficulty. But I wasn't prepared for the total misunderstanding that greeted the show in 1970. I had to face the fact that my work *couldn't* be seen clearly in the male art world with its formalist values. So I was faced with a real dilemma. I wanted other women to profit from what I'd gone through and I wanted men to change their conception of what it was to be a woman, of how to relate to

Judy Chicago, *George Sand in the Reincarnation Triptych*, 1973, a/c, 5' x 5'.

women, through my work. But where was I going to go? There was back to art-making as it was done in the male community, or what? I thought I'd have to go off and exist as a recluse as O'Keeffe had done, simply wait for my work to be understood, but I didn't like the prospect. I think O'Keeffe was our real pioneer, the first woman to stand her ground and make a form language that could deal with the whole range of human experience. However, I think her work paid an enormous price because of her isolation. There's something almost inhuman about it. I picture her as a kind of iron rod — grim, straight, determined.

And she doesn't want to think of herself as a woman artist at all.

I don't blame her. Who *wants* to deal with one's situation as a woman artist? I felt the only thing I could do was to commit myself to developing an alternate community based on the goals and ideas of women, built out of all I'd discovered from our own heritage. So I went to Fresno and set up the women's program and a year later brought it back to L.A. and set up the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts with Mimi Schapiro. These programs were the first step in building an alternate art community. We went from education to exhibition space to consciousness-raising in the community, and then, finally, this year, to establishing a coherent alternative, the Women's Building, which allows us to deal with the whole process — education, exhibition, criticism, documentation of feminist values. . . .

Didn't you give up art at some point, though?

At Fresno I found that the most natural and direct way for the women to get at their subject matter was to act it out, and I worked with theater and film. I thought to reveal my content directly I'd have to stop painting and sculpture completely. I came back to L.A. and gave up my large studio and worked in a house space. I cut off my hair. I did the Tampax lithograph and then the menstruation bathroom at Womanhouse.[2] I started writing my book.[3] I had already started to lecture and get out into the world. I was trying to violate all those preconceptions about what you're supposed to be as a woman artist, and I was opening up areas of material I could then begin to deal with visually.

Moving into the world helped me discover that people didn't drop dead when I expressed my struggles and experiences as a woman and that gave me a tremendous sense of confidence and turned my whole sense of self around. When I went back into my studio I went back in a whole different way. I wasn't there to get approval, but because I wanted to express certain things I thought and believed. I realized that I could use the form language I'd already developed to make clearer images. So I plowed right back in, trying to speak more specifically about my subject matter. I'd gotten this image about where I was. I hadn't really moved to the other side. I was pushing at the boundaries, internalizing the idea that a woman could shape values,

shape culture, upset society. To me, the flower in O'Keeffe stands for femininity, so moving through the flower is moving into some other place. With the *Through the Flower* series, I started to build on other women's work. Like the grid in the *Fleshgates* is built on Mimi Schapiro's paintings; I related to it as a kind of imprisonment. I wanted my work to be seen in relation to other women's work, historically, as men's work is seen. What we're really talking about is transformational art. In the *Great Ladies* series, begun in 1972, I tried to make my form language and color reveal something really specific about a particular woman in history, like the quality of opening, and blockage, and stopping, the whole quality of a personality. The *Great Ladies* are all queens — Christina of Sweden, Marie Antoinette, Catherine the Great, and Queen Victoria. There's a level of literalness in them, and a level of emotional meaning.

It's one thing to have art that's just illustration, but it now seems clear that if it's "readable" on several levels, it's fuller, more communicable. What led to the writing on the canvas?

As I went along, I began to be dissatisfied with the limits of abstract form language. I wanted to combine the process of working and the thoughts I had about all these women I was reading about, to force the viewer to see the images in specific context and content. So I began to write, at first on the drawings, which I'd done before but never brought all the way into my work. I thought it was fantastic when people told me it made them feel like they were right there with me while I was making the work. For me the real crux of chauvinism in art and history is that we as women have learned to see the world through men's eyes and learned to identify with men's struggles, and men don't have the vaguest notion of identifying with ours. One of the things I'm interested in is getting the male viewer to identify with my work, to open his eyes to a larger human experience.

In the *Reincarnation Triptych*, each 5' canvas is an inside square in relationship to an outside square; each is named after a woman whose work I really identify with — Madame de Staël, George Sand and Virginia Woolf. The border around each picture has 40 words on it about the woman. The change in the nature of the image in the three paintings reflects two things — the change of consciousness through the last 200 years of women's history, and a stage in my own development. In *Madame de Staël*, the inside square is very bright; it's in front of a much softer color, hidden and protected by the bright one. It says "Madame de Staël protected herself with a bright and showy facade" and it stands for me protecting myself with the reflections and transparencies and fancy techniques in my earlier work. In *George Sand*, the inside and outside are more at odds, like the inside wants to come out and the outside is stopping it. A strong orange glow in the center represents her/my repressed energy. In *Virginia Woolf*, the central square is just a shadow behind the other. At first, I wondered if the third painting should have no square at all, and I decided that would be dishonest. I didn't come out of all that struggle undamaged.

That triptych is a real summation for me. I made these paintings 20 years after my father's death and ten years after my first husband's death. It's really connected to rebirth. After that, I did the *Transformation* paintings, first the *Liberation of the Great Ladies*, and then *The Transformation of the Great Ladies Into Butterflies*. The writing between each set of images refers to my own feelings and is aimed at being embarrassing and exposed, because real feelings are embarrassing in our culture. Now I'm about to make a change in my work; it's overlapping. Probably because of my experience with so much death, I can't stand to separate. I always have to start something while I'm ending something. So for a year I've been studying china painting. Ten years ago I was in auto-body school — an entirely male-dominated scene — and now I'm studying china painting — an entirely female-dominated scene.

And the images are closely related.

Yes. The main difference is that the butterfly images ten years ago were imprisoned images, and the new ones are liberated images. This decade of my life has really been about that.

II

Chicago's leadership in the feminist art world has led to an Amazonian public image and expectations that she is further along in her struggle than she could in any realistic way have been. When I went to California to see the new work for the first time outside of slides, I went with a certain trepidation, afraid of not liking it as much as I wanted to, because of the gap I had previously found between her ideas and her objects — a gap inevitable and still present, though narrowing, because of the grand scope of those ideas; a gap that is partially the result of her integrity, persistence, obsession, her refusal to do anything half way. It has, she knows, slowed her down, and that has made the gap obvious outside her own community in a way that might seem unnecessary, since she is intelligent and art-knowledgeable and could have done things otherwise, abruptly imposing her ideas on her work rather than allowing the work to absorb the ideas at a more natural pace. Given her own code, she could only do what she has done.

Judy Chicago, *Veiled Fan (Fresno Fan Series)*, 1971, acrylic lacquer on acrylic sheet, 5' x 10'.

Judy Chicago, *Fleshgate 2*, 1972, acrylic on paper, 2' x 2'.

I went and looked, and we talked about the gap — a somewhat agonizing experience for both of us. But looking, I realized that the new work made much of the older work look almost sterile, which meant to me that what I'd hoped would happen was happening. George Sand, *for instance, is a truly impressive painting by any*

standards, with a sparkling clarity and an easy, not rigid, compactness. The extremely subtle colors are less luscious, more grayed, than before; the handwriting here and in the other two paintings is an integrated formal element as well as the purveyor of added information. George Sand is in the middle of the triptych and it crackles, where Madame de Staël, before it, preens, and Virginia Woolf, after it, smoulders.

Scrutinizing my reaction, I see that I like the puritan note in George Sand — the grays, the simultaneously immediate and reserved impact, and I suspect that some of the problems I've had with Chicago's work in the past are temperamental ones. I've never been particularly involved with color art (too pretty, decorative, not "hard" enough — results of temperament? ignorance? art-world conditioning?) We have a different experience of sexuality, as everyone does, and she is trying to make her own sexuality act as a metaphor for the metaphysical condition of an entire sex, an entire social potential. That is quite an undertaking.

* * *

I saw a new series of what were to be prints, but remain working drawings because the man running the workshop irrationally decided not to go ahead with the project after two months of work. Chicago was distraught, and consigned her despair to the drawings — a group of six Compressed Women Who Longed To Be Butterflies — each one an entirely different image and different color scheme based on a circle beginning to open up into winglike halves. Each already contained writing in the form of a very regular script worked into the images, about these women (some historical, some fictional), as well as marginal notes about the technical execution of the projected prints, which would not have appeared on the finished product. Now they contain as well the angry annotations of a foiled artist concerning the events leading to their abortion. These, ironically, enhance their effect. Where they would be the usual beautifully finished products as prints, the circumstances of their extinction have lent a warmth and passion always present at the core of Chicago's art, but not always fully accessible to the viewer of the completed work.

A second drawing series, done around the same biographically dismal time, are on the theme of rejection (the artist's own, by a Chicago dealer who "adored" her slides and promised a one-woman show but failed to "respond" to the paintings when they arrived, and so canceled it). "How Does It Feel To Be Rejected? It's Like Having Your Flower Split Open," is written on the top and bottom margins of the image, which is of just that. Here again, what is beautiful for me is not merely the visual attractiveness (Chicago is a mistress colorist), but her acceptance of, or insistence on, the honesty of a life element without the consequent devaluation of the image itself into sentimentality.

* * *

I am beginning to see that although I have been put off by a certain harshness and

Judy Chicago, *Mirrored Domes*, 1969, acrylic sprayed with acrylic lacquer, 30" x 30" x 30".

Judy Chicago, *Let It All Hang Out*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 80" x 80".

tightness in some of Chicago's earlier work (Pasadena Lifesavers, despite their gentle color, and Through the Flower, despite its clear content), she will have been wise to retain that quality rather than to abandon it. Those polarities are important. My own taste leans to works like Desert Fan, with its horizontal expansiveness, the way the soft and floating color simply disappears into the open air. At their best, Chicago's paintings are both tactile and ephemeral. Reincarnation Triptych is tightly controlled but also, somehow, relaxed — something to do with expansiveness again, or continuity, with the way the ripples in each painting reach the border, but even then you have to go on, reading words around the edges, turning (the way the Pasadena Lifesavers turned retinally) and leading back into the center, where it all began. In Let It All Hang Out too, the hard divisions are overcome by intensity; it is knife-edged, but it literally breathes in its gill-like center section. What I tend to focus on, then, is the vibrations between centering and expansiveness — the same feeling I get from an empty land or ocean horizon over which the light is concentrated on one point. The ease with which some of the softer works are executed is voluptuous, but that ease is deceptive; all the paintings still employ extremely complex and usually systematic spectral mixings and crossings. Others are repellently, rather than welcomingly, tactile, an aspect that is more effective in Heaven Is for White Men Only — a brutal and disturbing painting, with flesh turned metallic like hate and hostility.

* * *

I was impressed with how controlled the Atmospheres were when I finally saw the documentation, having only heard about them before. I had pictured them as single puffs of colored smoke, but some are composed like paintings in different colors and times and spaces, orchestrated clouds of chroma. (Olitski once wrote that he wanted to paint in mid-air; Chicago did it.) In others, the land forms are carefully taken into account and made the vehicle for an ecstatic release of color. Lights emerge from pockets of rock or earth and create their own contours. The Atmospheres too turn out to be about control and beauty — two fundamental elements of Chicago's work, which imply a certain need for perfection, or survival. I can see this as a metaphor for the depth of her commitment to the process of art-making as well as to her content; still, perfection always carries with it the inherent danger of blandness, of the too perfect. There is also a basic problem about "opening up" from so controlled

a base as a means of establishing "new structures," given all the ultra "free," magnificently or uselessly sloppy art there has been in America for the last three decades.

I am still in some senses caught between the two aspects of Chicago's work that are her own Scylla and Charybdis; seeing it as "Art" as I have been trained to recognize it, and seeing it as a feminist myself, deeply committed to the possibility of women playing a major part in freeing "Art" from the idiot products of its own incestuous conduct; this too involves training, if of a more voluntary type. I am wholly sympathetic to her struggle to integrate these two aspects and I love and admire the artist as a person. Such personal "admissions" will be seen by some as damaging, which just goes to show how far from emotional realities art criticism has drifted. It is an admission I might have made about most of the art and artists I've written about in the past, but did not, for obvious reasons.

So if Chicago's art is not yet "universal," neither is much (or anything?) else being made today. Like all art, for better or worse, it depends on the particular education, experience and insights of the viewer. It may be that she is as subversive in that private place from which real art has always come, a place which makes its own goals, as she is in her role as feminist spokeswoman. She is putting herself in the position of trying to make a truly private art truly public — a highly vulnerable and generous position. The rewards are just beginning to come in from the female community in terms of communication — supposedly the prime point of art in the first place, but much neglected at the moment. Last fall's show at Grandview, in the new Woman's Building, where she wrote on the walls and around the paintings in the same fine script found on the work itself, was received with great emotion and enthusiasm by men and women alike.

III

I see the development of abstraction as very important in the development of a female point of view in art. Before that it was simply not possible to deal with certain areas of experience and feeling. Ruth Iskin has written about how when women began to be able to study from the nude, they didn't reverse roles and deal with the male figure as a projection of their own sexuality, as men had. They dealt with women as people and simply left that area alone. I couldn't express my own sexuality by objectifying it into a projected image of a man, but only by inventing an image that embodied it. That is basically a feminist posture, and I don't think it was possible before the development of abstract form. And of course only by exposing the most truly human inside us will we be able to reach across and bridge the terrible gap between men and women which is 5,000 years big — the years men have been dominant over women.

As you know all too well, a lot of people see your work as just more abstraction of a type they're already familiar with instead of as dealing with any new content in any new way. In the most superficial terms, the color and technique are "California things"; a Chicago friend says your obsessiveness is "a Chicago thing," and so on. How do you deal with that?

It's not only the making of art but the perception of art that is too formalized in our tradition, and has to be opened up to a new human dimension. I had one problem making my art accessible to my nonart female audience, and another in terms of the art audience. I want to make some new bridge between artists and community. And I want to demystify the process of making art.

What about your emphasis on central imagery, or "female imagery," which is wildly controversial, to put it mildly?

In my mind if something wasn't named it didn't exist. I wanted to name the subject matter I was involved with. Other women told me they too were trying to deal with subject matter about their own identities, behind a kind of neutralized abstract structure. I never meant all women made art like me. I meant that some of us had made art dealing with our sexual experiences as women. I looked at O'Keeffe and Bontecou and Hepworth and I don't care what anybody says, I identified with that work. I knew from my own work that those women were doing. A lot of us used a central format, and forms we identified with as if they were our own bodies. I'd say the difference between *Pasadena Lifesavers* and a Noland target is the fact that there is a body identification between me and those forms, and not between Noland and the target. I really think that differentiates women's art from men's.

At least that particular kind of identification with a central image is closed off to men, simply because their body forms don't contain.

Reading and studying for the past five years in women's history and literature and art, I discovered a coherent body of information, a whole subcultural perception of the world that differs from men's. Once I established this context, I could plug into it, into a dialogue with those other women. What has happened to all of us over and over is that our work has been taken out of our historical context and put into some mainstream context it doesn't belong in; then it is ridiculed, or incorrectly evaluated. It's also important to remember what the climate was when I said women made art different from men. That was a real tabu. Everybody flipped out.

In New York, it's still 99 percent tabu, even though everybody has to admit a woman's biological and social experience is entirely different from men's in this society and since art comes from inside, it must be different too. But people are still ashamed to say they're women people.

I've done a lot of thinking about why there's resistance to the idea. I think it's unconsciously based on the notion that if women make art differently from men it means that women are in actual fact independent from men. And if you are invested

Judy Chicago. Butterfly Drawing (Study for china painted plate), 1974

in the structure and values that male dominance has provided, even if you're involved in being dominated, or if you want validation from those institutions that have grown out of that structure, then you don't want to recognize that women exist separately from men. I didn't have to go outside the structure of art to understand the whole value structure of the society, because what subject matter and what forms are important, and what the nature of art is and who defines it and who makes it, and how much it costs, are simply projections of the male value structure. If we as women challenge those values in our art, then we are challenging the whole structure of male dominance. That means you have to move outside of the structure of the art world, because you don't get brownie points for telling men to fuck off.

The way women have been oppressed has revolved around our sexuality, either by turning us into sexual objects altogether or by denying our independent sexuality. Men's work in this area is not informed by that incredible urge to say "I am, I am, I am, and this is who I am," which is basic to a lot of women's work whether they work abstractly or figuratively. Our sexual identities are very basic to our whole perception of the nature of reality. To change that basic ordering of things, to reevaluate what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, actually leads you into a reevaluation of everything. The problem for women's art, and certainly the problem for "high art," lies at this point of confrontation with society. If it is not perceived that my work is about the nature of women, then all the other things that are in my art are invisible. That's where the value confrontation has been so frustrating for me.

You have to remember, I observe as an artist; I look at work in terms of content and subject matter. I feel very alienated from most art that's made; it exists in narrow strata and does not come out of the depths of human emotion and experience. I can't relate to work that is cerebral and has to do with process or the nature of art. That's dehumanized. And I want to continue my struggle to eliminate that dehumanization from my work, because I know it's still there.

A lot of the work you find dehumanized and still neutralized, I find very moving, because I see so much neutralized work. There is plenty of women's art that formally resembles men's art, but often there's a very different aspect under there somewhere. That's what gets to me. I want to find out what that is, that sensibility which exists even in the "middle ground" women's work you find it hard to deal with. I want to try to be more specific about that, find ways of looking at women's work that provide insights and make more people aware and able to deal with it, even if no conclusions are drawn. I don't really care about conclusions, or theories; they contradict each other too convincingly, too easily.

There's a difference between female point of view and feminine sensibility. You're talking about feminine sensibility, something about the female personality structure that informs the works.

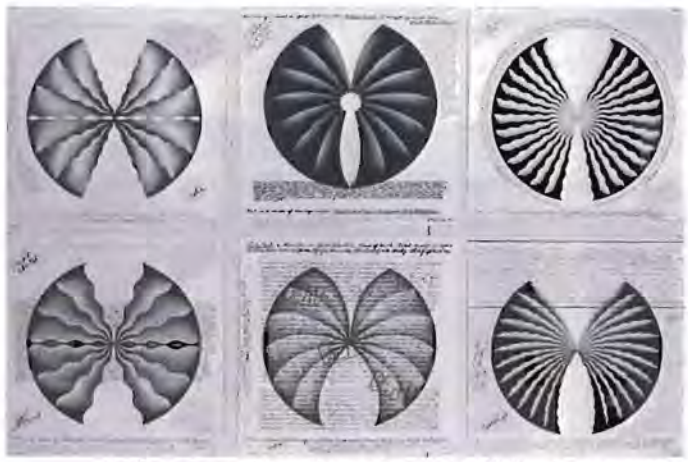
I'm also curious about how much of that is conditioning, and how much is highly conscious female, i.e., feminist, point of view. I think it's going to be years before we can really put our finger on female sensibility. I like the idea of isolating it, but once I do, I may just be isolating what's happened or happening to women, rather than what we are.

Absolutely, But of course you could say the same thing about men.

On the other hand, we may be seeing female sensibility in a purer and more innocent form right now, because *of the isolation of women until now.*

What we're really talking about is not the subject matter, but where the approach to the work is conditioned. Those women involved in weaving and sewing and all — that's informed by feminine *sensibility,* by role conditioning, and a certain sensitivity to surface, detail. You see it in writing too. My investigation of women's art has led me to conclude that what has prevented women from being really great artists is the fact that we have been unable so far to transform our circumstances into our subject matter. That is the process of transformation men have been able to make while we have been embedded in our circumstances, unable to step out of them and use them to reveal the whole nature of the human condition. I feel that I'm just about to make that step, but it wouldn't be possible without the alternate structure of the Woman's Building.■

1. Lloyd Hamrol, sculptor and the artist's husband.
2. An entire house remodeled and made into environmental art by the students and artists of the Feminist Art Program in 1971–72.
3. *Through The Flower*, to be published next year by Doubleday.



Judy Chicago, *Compressed Women Who Longed To Be Butterflies*, 1973–74, six drawings each 23" x 23".

Judy Chicago, *Female Rejectees Drawing*, 1974.