

ACCESSORIES

Judy Chicago Reunites With Dior for Handbag Project

● The artist is on a career high since her collaboration with Maria Grazia Chiuri for the set of her spring haute couture show.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

PARIS — Judy Chicago is back for a second collaboration with Dior — and this time, you can walk away with it.

The artist designed the monumental set for Maria Grazia Chiuri's spring haute couture show in January: a tent shaped like a goddess figure, filled with 21 banners embroidered with feminist messages. Now she is one of 10 artists tasked with customizing the Lady Dior handbag for the fifth edition of the Dior Lady Art project.

"I have actually not thought much about purses," Chicago confesses in a telephone interview from Belen, a small town 35 miles south of Albuquerque, N.M., where she and her husband, the photographer Donald Woodman, live and work in a historic red-brick hotel that once served as a boarding house for railroad workers.

"Usually, I end up with one purse and I use it for everything," she adds. "The problem with purses, particularly evening purses, you can't get anything into them:



Judy Chicago

either purses are so big, you can't find anything, or they're too small and they have no room. So I think the designer purses could use a little more thinking."

Still, the feedback from her initial collaboration with Dior in January was enough to convince Chicago to try her hand at something more portable.

"When Dior sent us the press [clippings] book, it was 1,000 pages long and from all over the world, which meant that my work reached a global audience. And, you know, I never thought about fashion as another possible mode of communicating to a wide audience," she says.

"I'm not an artist who is only interested in decoration. I'm interested in conveying meaning, and so I realized I could do that with a purse," Chicago adds. "Whatever technique I use, I want to make a contribution."

The artist is best known for her Seventies installation "The Dinner Party," which highlights the role of women in history and culture through elaborate dinner table place settings, dedicated to figures ranging from Boadicea to Virginia Woolf, featuring hand-painted plates depicting elaborately stylized vulvas.

Dior has adapted three of her spiral paintings from the Seventies for the project, using a dichroic treatment to give the surface of the bags a metallic or iridescent sheen. The works chosen are "Let It All Hang Out" and two paintings from her "Great Ladies" series, "Queen Victoria" and "Christina of Sweden."

"And I said that the titles of the paintings have to be on the bottom of the purse. And why did I say that? Because I thought, this is another vehicle for teaching women's history," she explains.

"My ideal client is walking down the Champs-Élysées or Madison Avenue with this big purse — because the 'Victoria' purse is quite large — and somebody says to her, 'Oh, my God, that's incredible. What is it?' And she says, 'That's an

interpretation of Judy Chicago's painting of Queen Victoria.' And they go home, and they look up the woman and they discover all about her," she explains.

Chicago hasn't had time to test her theory, since her samples have been whisked away for a shoot. "Although it would be absurd, if you saw where I live, there's no way I could take it for a walk here. We live in this little, tiny, semi-rural town. It would definitely be wasted," she says with a laugh.

She will present the bags alongside the banners from the Dior show in an exhibition at the Jeffrey Deitch gallery in New York beginning on Nov. 20. They will subsequently head to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., for its 2021 gala honoring Chicago and Chiuri.

"So what we started in Paris is having a really long life. I think that's fantastic," she enthuses.

A pre-launch event featuring all 10 participating artists is set to take place at the ART021 contemporary art fair in Shanghai, which will host a Dior Lady Art pop-up from Nov. 12 to 15. In addition to Chicago, the list consists of Joël Andrianomearisoa, Gisela Colón, Song Dong, Bharti Kher, Mai-Thu Perret, Recycle Group, Chris Soal, Claire Tabouret and Olga Titus.

The bags will officially launch early next year in a selection of Dior boutiques worldwide. Each design is limited to 100 copies, with prices ranging from 4,000 euros to 25,000 euros.

Chicago, meanwhile, is keeping up the momentum. At 81, she has never been busier. The Museum of Arts and Design in New York City will honor the artist with an online ball on Oct. 15 featuring a musical performance by Rosanne Cash and a special appearance from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

She was supposed to have her first retrospective this year at the de Young museum in San Francisco, but it's been postponed until November 2021. And she is creating one of her large-scale smoke sculptures for the opening of the Toronto Biennial of Art in September 2021.

In the midst of all this, Chicago is writing her memoirs for Thames & Hudson. "For the last six months, I've been hard at work on a new book called 'The Flowering: The Autobiography of Judy Chicago.' It'll be out in July of 2021. It's going to be published on my birthday, July 20, and it's a kind of summing up of my life," she explains.

"I just have a lot to say, I always have. And it's been hard for me. For a long time, I didn't fit in, because nobody wanted to hear what I had to say," she says. "Now, if I do a public lecture, usually somebody in the back says, 'Speak up, we can't hear you!' And I burst out laughing. For most of my career, people told me to shut up."



The Lady Dior bag designed by Judy Chicago.

BUSINESS

Esprit Annual Loss Nearly Doubles to \$515M

● The troubled company keeps shrinking its operations.

BY TIFFANY AP

SHANGHAI — Esprit's loss nearly doubled to 3.9 billion Hong Kong dollars, or \$515 million, for the year to June, a set of poor results that follow the sudden cancelation of a joint venture agreement to relaunch the brand under a new concept in mainland China and COVID-19-challenged operations in Europe.

Revenue was 9.9 billion Hong Kong dollars for the same period, compared to 12.9 billion Hong Kong dollars a year prior,

a decline of 21 percent when adjusted for foreign exchange fluctuations. Revenue from the first half of the fiscal year from July 2019 to February witnessed an 11 percent decline, which widened to the 41 percent decline from March to June 2020 as the pandemic took hold.

Although COVID-19 has battered brands all across the board, Esprit has been troubled for the last decade. It has witnessed its brand value decline precipitously despite a series of promised turnarounds from three chief executive officers as it struggled to evolve its identity amidst the arrival of fast-fashion giants H&M and Zara.

The brand signed a joint venture

agreement with Mulsanne Group last December to relaunch in mainland China, while announcing it would close the rest of its Asian operations by June 30. But the arrangement with Mulsanne was terminated abruptly on July 30, "due to a material breach of terms by the contract partner" and all its outlets in mainland China were also closed by the end of June. The company is "currently formulating a new strategy," it said in financial filings.

In March, it applied for bankruptcy protection for its six German subsidiaries.

The brand claims California roots — it

was founded by Doug and Susie Tompkins who also founded The North Face — but its biggest market today is Germany and has negligible e-commerce sales to the U.S. Its store network in Germany and in other European countries were subject to compulsory store closures beginning mid-March. The stores were allowed to reopen in mid-May, Esprit said, but "demand in the market remained suppressed compared to levels experienced at the height of the pandemic."

As of June 30, the firm has trimmed its staff to approximately 3,400 full-time workers, down from the more than 4,900 the same time a year ago.