

From the Field by Leslie C. Sotomayor

Implementing the Judy Chicago Art Education Archive in the University Classroom

Teaching a sixty-student Women's Studies 100 level class this semester, Women and Gender: Art, Literature and Popular Culture, I choose to use the Judy Chicago Art Education archive in my curriculum. As a foundation the students explored the website <http://judychicago.arted.psu.edu/living-curricula/teaching-with-collection/from-the-field/> watched videos embedded in the wide range of topics, and participated in a talk I organized in conjunction with the Special Collections at Penn State. This facilitated a strong foundation and offered hands on approach with the living archive. It also facilitated discussion with the Special Collection staff and fellow peers about the archive. The talk was geared at understanding what feminist art means with Chicago's work beginning in the 1960s, the variety of collaborative projects that she has orchestrated, and how to use the Special Collection at the Paterno Library for the student's individual research projects. Chicago's work was contextualized within U.S. history and the relevance and significance in North American culture.

The students were assigned to continue researching the online and the Special Collections living archives and choose one piece to write a critical analysis/reflection of the feminist art piece. Their attention was also directed to the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State where Chicago's triptych piece, *Power Play*, is exhibited. Among the popular artworks chosen by students to write their feminist art critique on were; *WomanHouse*, *The Dinner Party*, and *The Birth Workshop*. One of my students chose *Envisioning the Future-Future B Slides*, where she discussed:

“It is still hard to see females in the political world such as the government because it is still male dominated and especially white male dominance. It is rare to see African American or Hispanic females political leaders in the government now as well because the females that are in the government is white dominated. I think this is where we have discussed about white supremacy and the 3 P's; Power, Privilege, and Position come into play throughout Judy's work. When I seen the image with the female in the middle of the field, I thought about how it relate to the name of the collection which brought back slavery to mind. Last thing we discussed in class was about a female's body shape/body figure plays a role in how a female represents herself and how race plays a factor into that as well and used Nicki Minaj and Saartjie Baartman which was the first thing that I thought about when I saw the last image in blue.”

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Bringing the correlations from Judy Chicago's art pieces that are contextualized in various points of history and bridging connections to the present, is the point of this feminist art critique assignment. How does art history and social movements, such as Judy Chicago's work, exist, shape our society, culture, and perceptions? How may we highlight them through the visual arts and dialogue? In Silva's paper she makes a

compelling connection from Chicago's work to class discussions, readings, and contemporary women in society and popular culture. Similarly, Aliesha Koss, another student from the class critiques Karen LoCoq's and Nancy Youdelman's *Leah's Room*. She states,

"Leah's Room puts on display the way women have been marginalized and dictated into being ashamed of their individualized beauty. They have been taught that they can only fit in if they are part of society's social script."

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This analysis of one's performance of gender roles in society and the correlation to guilt, shame, and marginalization illustrates oppression of hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity. The class extended into discussions of men's role within feminist art as they read, listened and responded to questions under the topic of "What about Men?"

<http://judychicago.arted.psu.edu/dialogue/>

Discussions in class emerged through the online resources about men's role within feminist conversations and how can male roles be challenged in order to evoke transformation through men. Students watched Donald Woodman's clip

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3L5Qedn_eI and Jonathan Katz's

https://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue?language=en

How should young males be guided as children in order to counter act the male-normative script? What is our role as women within the hyper-masculine world? How do male artists work within the framework of feminist art? These questions were part of the classroom discussions, which were meant with responses and stories about the men in the students' lives. The double standards that are many times present, how strong-female voices are sources of agency, and the role and responsibilities that we each have to not perpetuate violence and sexism. For example, one student commented on the Dialogue Portal III, remarking to her surprise Donald Woodman's support and advocacy for feminist and his feminist art partner:

"Yes as women we can fight and make a difference in the world we want to live in, but it will not truly be transformed unless we have a diversity of supporters, which include men. In the video we watched Judy Chicago's husband was extremely supportive for his feminist wife and the feminist community. This really surprised me, which showed me how rare it is to find men that support feminism. Men are a huge key aspect in equal rights between men and women."

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To create, model, and resist with solidarity and community building beginning within our own lives and selves, is a strong component, which students have continued to discuss.

How can I make a difference today? How can I teach another? How will that in turn break the cultural and societal normative one step at a time? These are the lingering questions that we are still discussing in our classrooms to be active in the now in practical ways.