

Judy Chicago – 'I'm an Artist and a Troublemaker' I TateShots_2017

Audio Transcript

A film supported by Bloomberg Philantropies

Judy Chicago:

“Hi Gary, I hate to tell you this. You must be getting a little tired, because there are now only three fingers on the hand you're working on.

I'm Judy Chicago and I'm an artist and a troublemaker.

Dan take a look and see what you think, he says because of the wall.”

0:34

Gary:

“Ok now i can see the fourth finger.”

0:34

Judy Chicago:

“Oh, okay, that's a huge relief.

I was invited by the head curator of tape Liverpool to participate in this 50 year celebration of the *Sergeant Pepper* album. When I was a little girl, my father who was a Marxist used to have these political meetings

in our house. And he used to have people sit in a circle, and they would discuss different topics, and he would go around the circle, and everybody would speak and he always included the women, even though this was like the 40s. My parents believe in equal rights for women. That's the good news I always say the bad news is they didn't prepare me for the fact that most other people in the world didn't agree with that.

What interested me and made me relate to the Beatles was that they kind of embodied a period of time where there was hope. I read something about how Sir Paul felt the song, fixing a hole actually grew out of feeling like he didn't fit in. I really really related to that because of course I had very similar experiences as a young woman, in a completely macho art scene in Southern California, where I was told repeatedly that I couldn't be a woman and artists too, even though, from the time I was a little girl, and started studying art, I wanted, not only to be an artist, but I wanted to make a contribution to our history.

When I was in graduate school, my painting instructors hated my sense of color. They also hated my imagery, which was very naturally biomorphic and kind of female centered. They used to say, 'Ach, woven brest!' like they were saying "that couldn't possibly be on a canvas!", but they hated my color.

My transition from my brightly coloured early work came as I moved out of graduate school, into professional practice because I knew that, Unless I suppressed, any indication on my gender in my work, I would be disqualified in the macho scene in Los Angeles. And since my professors had drummed in me this horror my color. I moved back from the kind of color I liked however, by doing that, I actually focused on form. I built big minerals sculpture I built my big paintings, where I was really working on form and without realizing it. I was creating the building blocks of my career. At that time, I could not see anything in my head, I had to do everything on paper, so I would lay out kind of sphere of color, and then I would wonder okay if I change one color or I move one color in this circle, How will that change how this circle feels visually and emotive like I was interested in learning how to make circular form pulse, open, close, turn, expand, contract as a way to talk about a lot of the feelings I was struggling with the time, both around my own sexuality about my place in the art world, about how to be a woman in that environment, how to be taken seriously how to navigate the constraints. Male minimalism, to make a place for my interests, As a woman, I mean that was what the 60s that my work in the 60s was about before I made the radical departure at the end of the 60s when I set out to create a feminist start practice.

4:26

My career is a kind of lesson plan for what it takes to push through the obstacles of those whose stories are not considered important.

4:45

When I was a child. I told you my father was a Marxist This was at a time, the height of McCarthyism. I was going to school, and reading these comic books that depicted Marxists and communists as these horrible bloated creatures who were killing beautiful blond, blue eyed boys, they are not in them.

5:09

But I know my father it'd be a wonderful person who was interested in trying to make a contribution to the world and who taught me that was my obligation.

5:18

And at 13 years old when my father died. I had to make a decision about whether to believe the world, or my own experience in a 13 I learned just because everybody says something doesn't make it true.

5:35

Now I'm done. Are you going to have me in tears.