



# Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist

*Gail Levin*

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## **Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist** Gail Levin

Born to Jewish radical parents in Chicago in 1939, Judy Cohen grew up to be Judy Chicago — one of the most daring and controversial artists of her generation. Her works, once disparaged and misunderstood by the critics, have become icons of the feminist movement, earning her a place among the most influential artists of her time. Early to reject the modernist move away from content in art, Chicago first mastered and then transcended modernism's formalist austerity, before blazing a trail to the new esthetic now known as postmodern.

In **Becoming Judy Chicago**, Gail Levin gives us a biography of uncommon intimacy and depth, revealing the artist as a person and a woman of extraordinary energy and purpose. Drawing upon Chicago's personal letters and diaries, her published and unpublished writings, and more than 250 new interviews with her friends, family, admirers, and critics, **Becoming Judy Chicago** is a richly detailed and moving chronicle of the artist's unique journey from obscurity to fame, including the story of how she found her audience outside the art establishment.

From her early training as a gifted child at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to the groundbreaking Feminist Art Program she created at Fresno State College in 1970–1971, Chicago has never feared to challenge the status quo. At a time when art history textbooks still omitted work by all women, she led her students on a remarkable journey during which they began to examine the meaning of being a woman, to explore women's traditional crafts, and to compile a history of women artists. For Chicago, no topic has been taboo—from menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth to men's abuse of power and the Holocaust.

Chicago has revolutionized the way we view art made by and for women. She has fundamentally changed our understanding of women's contributions to art and to society. Influential and bold, *The Dinner Party* has become a cultural monument. **Becoming Judy Chicago** tells the story of a great artist, a leader of the women's movement, a tireless crusader for equal rights, and a complicated, vital woman who dared to express her own sexuality in her art and demand recognition from a male-dominated culture.

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