

## UNSAFETY FIRST

Inspections make author feel more insecure than ever

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## Venue

SECTION

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Friday, October 27, 2006



Judy Chicago collaborated with glass artist Vicki Leon on the carved, laminated and painted "Arcanum in Shades of Gray" (2000), a four-panel work etched for a New York exhibition on female body builders.

# 'What lies below'

Artist explores deeper and deeper territory with her glass work

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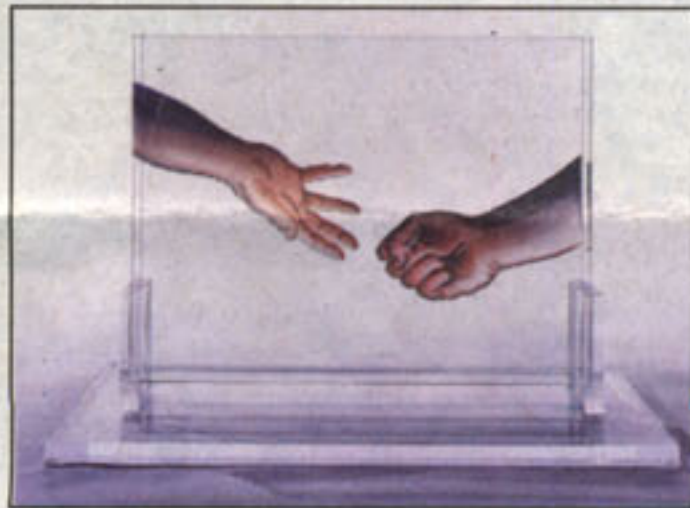
If light is life, the transparency of glass can birth a rainbow.

Judy Chicago mines this medium in a suite of work cast, stained and fused, exclusively from glass.

This weekend, LewAllen Contemporary premieres Chicago's latest pieces in multilayered depictions of the human hand. The exhibit also encompasses a retrospective of her work in glass.

Glass is nothing new to the artist best known for "The Dinner Party," Chicago's monumental ceramic and textile tribute to women throughout history. For her 1979 feminist landmark, rife with symbols of female sexuality, she hired traditional china painters to teach her an art form often dismissed as a "ladies' hobby." More than 400 female artists contributed to the piece honoring 39 iconic women from the pharaoh Hatshepsut to Virginia Woolf.

Driven in part by the male art establishment who rejected her, Chicago reacted



Judy Chicago's "Double Clear" pairs an opened palm with a clenched fist.

by producing a series of mammoth projects. There was "The Birth Project," (1985) "Powerplay," (1982-87) the "Holocaust Project" (1985-93) and "Resolutions: A Stitch in Time," (1994-2000) each showcasing her fluency with a staggering variety of materials.

As her exhaustive, emotionally draining work on the "Holocaust Project" came to a close, Chicago decided to end the series on a positive note. She developed

"Rainbow Shabbat: A Vision for the Future," its stained-glass centerpiece a triptych of hope. It marked the first time she had ever worked in glass.

### A collaboration

Captivated, Chicago started taking classes in glass painting. In the '90s, she met glass artist Vicki Leon, who said she knew of a technique that would complement Chicago's

### If you go

**WHAT:** Judy Chicago: "Chicago in Glass"

**WHERE:** LewAllen Contemporary, 129 W. Palace Ave.

**WHEN:** Reception 5:30-7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 3. Through Dec. 31.

**CONTACT:** 988-8997 or [www.lewallencontemporary.com](http://www.lewallencontemporary.com)

convention-shattering imagery. The pair collaborated on the carved, laminated and painted "Arcanum in Shades of Gray" (2000), a four-panel work etched and painted with sprayed acrylic enamels for a New York exhibition on female body building.

"I sort of began to understand how you design for glass etching," Chicago said in a telephone interview. The artist lives in the Belen Hotel, which she restored with her husband, photographer Donald Woodman. "We used crystal

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# Artist's 'Dinner Party' Exhibit To Show Again

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clear glass. I was discontented with it because (the paint) isn't permanent. It doesn't really fuse with the glass. I like it when the color and form are inseparable."

So in 2003 she set out for an artist-in-residence program at the Pilchuck School of Glass, near Seattle, the legendary studio founded by Dale Chihuly. For the first time, she experimented with casting molten lead crystal. But meeting Ruth and Norm Dobbins in Santa Fe would prove pivotal to her work.

"They are probably the world's experts in glass etching," Chicago said. "I told them what I was interested in. Nobody knew if it was possible to etch glass and then paint it with glass paint and then fire it. We started a journey that took us to the Czech Republic for casting. It's been a tremendous discovery in terms of developing a language of glass."

The Dobbins own and operate Aliente Etched Glass and Dobbins Studios on N.M. 14. Norm had been refining glass techniques and teaching from 5,000 to 6,000 people across the U.S. and the world for more than 30 years.

"She saw that there were things that could be done in glass that she hadn't

imagined," he said.

The three decided to collaborate when Chicago returned from Pilchuck.

"She comes up with the sketches and the designs," Dobbins said. "We'll make modifications as far as what's possible in glass. I'll carve them to shape them, then we give them back to her and she and Ruth paint them with glass paint."

## Pushing limits

Now 66, Chicago is known for pushing her materials past the edge of their known use. She once took classes at an auto body school to learn spray painting.

"I don't do it on purpose," she said. "I do it as a form of inquiry. I approach materials differently than a lot of artists. I'm interested in them as a way to express ideas. I wanted to put the technical at the service of meaning."

For her three-dimensional cast pieces, she turned to Prague. Chicago molds her designs in clay or wax to create a three-dimensional relief. A Prague casting facility creates a mold of her piece, then casts it in glass.

"We carve musculature and bone tissue, then give it back to her and she paints it again," Dobbins said.

With the Dobbins, Chicago launched a series of fused glass panels depicting close-ups of hands stripped down to X-ray imagery of the

musculature and skeleton.

Chicago was drawn to the hand motif for its multiplicity of gestural meanings. In "Flayed Arm," the skin peels away to expose raw and throbbing sinew. In "Double Clear Handout/Handsoff," she pairs an opened palm with a clenched fist.

"You could say that that's the whole choice we have in the world," she said. "It's a very elegant image that has layers of meaning."

Chicago's complex process took the three artists about 2½ years to refine into finished pieces, Dobbins said. She's known for collaborating with others whose expertise can help her produce her vision. For Dobbins, the learning process has been reciprocal.

"She's experimentive," Dobbins said. "She doesn't ever say anything is impossible. I'd say, 'You can't do that in glass' and she'd say, 'Why not?'"

In 2007, Chicago will travel to New York for the opening of the permanent housing of "The Dinner Party" as part of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum. She says her feminist perspective has broadened since she completed that seminal work in the '70s. It echoes still in her glass work.

"It's all about seeing through the surface to what lies below," she said.