



Judy Chicago (Born 1939)

Study for The Dinner Party: Saint Bridget

Watercolour and pencil.

Signed, dated and inscribed Study for the Dinner Party – St. Bridget – 5th Century Irish saint, abbess, feminist – She was the goddess of milk and fire – Judy Chicago – 1975 around the circular edge of the design.

Dedicated For Kathleen and With appreciation & respect at the lower left and right.

275 x 275 mm. (10 7/8 x 10 7/8 in.) [image]

293 x 368 mm. (11 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.) [sheet]

ACQUIRED BY THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON.

A design for one of the plates for The Dinner Party, representing Saint Bridget (Brigid) of Kildare (c.451-525), one of the patron saints of Ireland, who founded several convents there. As the artist has written, 'Through Bridget the Celts maintained their religious ties to Mother Goddess worship, for she came to be associated with all the symbols that had formerly belonged to the Celtic goddess... Fire was holy to the Goddess, who was often depicted with a column of fire – an image of immortality which I incorporated into Saint Bridget's plate, painted in the colors of Ireland.'

The present sheet was presented by Judy Chicago to Kathleen Schneider, a young artist from Idaho who became part of the Women's Collective in Santa Monica that assisted in the production of The Dinner Party, working in particular on the stitching of the table runners and the embroidery. Schneider worked on the project for about a year between 1976 and 1977, sharing responsibility for much of the needlework with another assistant, Susan Hill. As Schneider later recalled, 'Helping to design runners with Judy was always the high point of my work at the studio... Working with Judy on this level, opening, exchanging ideas, mixing colors, and painting side by side, became a comfortable and stimulating experience.'

Schneider worked on the needlework runner for the Saint Bridget place setting, of which she recalled, 'In working on Saint Bridget's runner, we ran into a disagreement about translating a Celtic cross on the back. My feelings were in favour of a pierced and carved wooden cross – using this medium would make a place for all those intense religious feelings I'd had inside me all those years. Twelve years of Catholic schooling and my heavy religious childhood had almost been submerged until that day when, looking at symbols for the saints, it all came back. The wooden cross symbolized so much for me. After working on it the entire day, I was upset when Judy decided to change it because another woman said

she could knit a cross instead. I felt that it was partly my design as well as Judy's, and I didn't want to give up easily; my artistic pride came to the surface. But in such cases Judy had the final say, and I conceded – although not without letting my feelings be known. (Eventually, however, we used the wooden cross.)'

Provenance:

Given by the artist to Kathleen Schneider
Private collection, until 2012.

Artist description:

A leading American feminist artist, Judy Chicago is best known for her work examining the role and place of women in history and culture. Her masterpiece is *The Dinner Party*, a large installation which since 2007 has been in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum in New York. This immense collaborative project took five years to complete, between 1975 and 1979, and involved the assistance of over four hundred volunteers. The installation is in the form of a large triangular table, set with thirty-nine individual place settings, each representing a famous woman from history or mythology. Each place setting is made up of a plate, utensils, a goblet and an embroidered table runner.