

# Reframing Second-Wave Feminism Through Fashion Industry and Augmented Reality

## Recent Trends in Judy Chicago's Work

Margherita Fontana

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

**Abstract** This article discusses the artistic approach of feminist artist Judy Chicago and her recent practice of re-enactment as a form of reframing. Reframing was a key methodological feature of American feminist art in the 1970s, aimed at repositioning women's bodies and agency beyond patriarchal constraints. Chicago revolutionised minimalist aesthetics, domestic spaces and monumentality through a new understanding of women's experience. Her most recent work includes partnerships with the fashion industry to create *The Fertile Goddess* setting for Maria Grazia Chiuri's Dior and her first augmented reality installation, *Rainbow AR*, which continues the feminist rewriting process by exploring its possibilities and limitations in critical engagement with liberal feminism and progressive neoliberalism.

**Keywords** Feminist art. Judy Chicago. Augmented reality. Re-enactment.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Reframing from a Feminist Perspective. – 3 Reframing feminist art: Judy Chicago's plural aesthetics. – 4 Re-enactment and Post-enactment in Judy Chicago's Recent Work: The *Female Divine* Project and *Rainbow Ar*. – 5 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the contemporary artistic practice of feminist artist Judy Chicago (b. 1939), highlighting the recent process of reframing in her work, through re-enactment practices. Reframing is a concept particularly relevant to American feminist artistic research in the 1970s, which sought to reposition women's bodies and agency outside the patriarchal framework. Chicago's aesthetic inquiry, which dates back to the emergence of West Coast 1960s Minimalism, can thus be seen as an ongoing process of reframing that has involved the redefinition of 'male-oriented' art, domestic spaces and, more broadly, women's experience. Recently, Chicago, now considered a legendary figure in feminist art, has explored new avenues by collaborating with the fashion industry and creating her first AR installation. It is important to note that these new developments cannot be seen simply as attempts to follow current trends; rather, they represent a continuation of the feminist rewriting process which reveals its potentialities as well as its limitations, particularly in its critical engagement with liberal feminism and progressive neoliberalism.

## 2 Reframing From a Feminist Perspective

In order to provide a framework for analysing Judy Chicago's recent reframing operations, it is first necessary to introduce the concept of reframing from a feminist perspective. This field of analysis is broad and complex, and for the purposes of this discussion I will limit my references to the feminist interpretation of 'reframing' put forward by the philosopher, narratologist, curator, and artist Mieke Bal. Bal posits that framing, a term she borrowed from semiotics, is an effective act of understanding that results in a sudden change in the sense of the object under analysis, or in the emergence of a previously unacknowledged meaning. In Bal's account, 'reframing' "brings out possible meanings in an image that one did not think of before it was reframed in this way" (Bal 1996, 33). The methodology of 'framing' and 'reframing' needs to be contextualised within the broader concept of her idea of 'reading' images. It is widely acknowledged that Bal's intention here is not to reduce the meaning of images to linguistic

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terms, but rather to restore them to a layered conceptual status that requires a careful process of interpretation. In Bal's words:

Neither texts nor images yield their meanings immediately. They are not transparent, so that images, like texts, require the *labour of reading*. Many fear that to speak of images as texts is to turn the image into a piece of language. But by shunning the linguistic analogy (as in many ways we should) we also engage resistance – to meaning, to analysis, and to close, detailed engagement with the object. (Bal 2002, 26; emphasis added)

Bal proposes the use of the concept of 'reading' images to engage with political questions about the control of meanings, without oversimplifying the complex and multifaceted nature of iconic representations. To this end, the identification and examination of pertinent frames, encompassing formal, aesthetic and political dimensions, can serve as an effective analytical approach (Bal 1996, 39). From this perspective, 'framing' is even more significant from a feminist perspective. In her essay *Enfolding Feminism* (2001), dedicated to the Deleuzian concept of the 'fold' in art by women or representing women, she considers the imperative for feminist discourse to transcend the dualistic framework that perpetuates the separation of the object from the subject. Bal argues that this necessary overcoming of a two-sided perspective is essential for a new understanding of ontology and epistemology. As Bal asserts, "As long as the subject-object opposition remains in place, it is overlaid by the opposition between the (different, feminine) subject and the way it perceives the object: ontology and epistemology remain separate" (Bal 2001, 326). Given that the theoretical and ethical dimensions of 'enfolding feminism' are closely tied to Bal's 'framing' methodology, the latter can be regarded as a characteristic element of the feminist approach, encompassing both theoretical inquiry and artistic practice. Feminist art often employs active reframing techniques that can be interpreted from both deconstructive and constructive perspectives. These techniques allow patriarchal and heterosexist subtexts to surface and be critically examined, or alternatively, they allow feminist perspectives to assert themselves by making traditionally marginalised identities and experiences visible. Indeed, much of the feminist art produced in the Western world since the 1970s can be seen as a powerful form of reframing.

As noted by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, in the introduction to their seminal anthology *Framing Feminism*, "Whereas the majority of political movements has employed art and artists for propaganda purposes, feminism has worked to transform art – and artists themselves" (Pollock, Parker 1987, XIII), undertaking a rewriting, and thus a rereading, of the art historical discipline itself. Moreover,

the women's art movement was characterized by a true "pluralism", exemplified by the fact that there while some women artists engaged in the investigation of the potentialities inherent in the figurative and mythological tradition arising from goddess worship and "feminist primitivism" (Lippard 1983, 41-76), others were energetically advocating for their feminist ideals by actively participating in ongoing contemporary political battles, such as those surrounding the Artists' Union (Pollock 1986, 7).

Chicago's artistic practice emerged in the mid-1960s in the male-dominated art world of the United States, exemplifying the many tensions inherent to second-wave feminism and feminist art. Despite being sometimes criticized for being excessive and kitschy (For a critical account of the modernist and elitist undertone of those critics see Jones 1996, 87) her work is rooted in the process of 'reframing', which involves constructing apparent contradictions in order to reveal the true nature of female experience. Chicago achieves this through the re-appropriation of traditionally masculine crafts such as car hood paintings or pyrotechnics, or through the monumentalisation of feminine techniques. Her art strikes a balance between refinement and toughness which is ultimately intended to empower women.

### 3 Reframing Feminist Art: Judy Chicago's Plural Aesthetics

Before the Women's Movement burst into being, I had often tried to talk about the dreadful sexism of the art world, the response to which had invariably been some disparaging comment like: "What are you, Judy, some kind of suffragette?" But when I read the early feminist literature, I realized that I was not alone - not in my experiences and not in my anger - which I became determined to communicate, preferably through my art. (Chicago 1996, XI)

Judy Chicago's entire oeuvre has been described as characterized by the construction of a feminine, woman-centred vocabulary, a stylistic language that is personal but at the same time 'gendered' in order to confront contemporaneity. Although her womanly imprint is undoubtedly the best known - hence the sinuous shapes, the rainbow and pastel shades, the recurrence of symbolism linked to female genitalia, represented from time to time as flowers and butterflies - Judy Chicago's artistic investigation has also moved in the direction of caustic shock. Think, for example, of the research that the artist devoted to the taboo of menstruation (Røstvik 2019), producing one of the first works recognized as a crude and literal representation of a woman removing a tampon from her vagina, her photolithograph

*Red Flag* (1971). Chicago's artistic style can be placed on a spectrum that lies between the two poles represented by "L.A. Raw", from the title of the exhibition of the same name (Duncan 2012), and "Finish Fetish" (Rottmann 2021), a term that characterizes Californian minimalism and the shiny, slick appearance of much West Coast art. This aesthetic tends to constantly weigh opposing forces, including those of chaos and order, personal and collective, and control and freedom. Chicago's monumental project, *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), is a celebrated and controversial example of her multifaceted aesthetic. The work has been extensively studied for its incorporation of materials typically associated with women's craft and the domestic sphere, its collaborative nature, and its central core imagery (Chicago, Schapiro 1978). In particular, the porcelain plates depicting female figures erased by history occupy a central position in the artwork and have been the subject of intense critical analysis, as they are a variation on the theme of the butterfly-like vulvar shape that Chicago has consistently explored in her work.

Art critic Lucy Lippard, who maintains a close friendship with Chicago (1973), provides valuable insights into situating not only her work but also the recent re-framing operations, which have concerned important chapters of the artist's research. The reason for this lies in a certain complementarity that characterizes Lippard's cultural enterprise in relation to Chicago's. For although Lippard, trained on the East Coast in the circles of New York's political ferment of the Art Workers Coalition, shared with Chicago a fascination with cultural and essentialist feminism, she finally embraced the positions of socialist feminism. Furthermore, art critic Griselda Pollock has highlighted the common interests shared by Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard, who both published seminal books on the relationship between art and feminism in the mid-1970s. In 1976, Lippard published her *From the Center*, the first book to focus on recent art by women. A year later, it was Chicago's turn with *Through the Flower*, the autobiographical account of her career<sup>1</sup> as a feminist artist. According to Pollock, "Both Lippard and Chicago posed the question of a feminine aesthetic and wondered if there were stylistic features of art made by women in the past, for instance central-core imagery, which could now be consciously employed to express women's pride in themselves, their bodies and their sexuality" (Pollock 1986, 82). A remark made by Lippard in her essay *Sweeping Exchanges* clarifies one of the points of controversial convergence of this kind of progressive and political efficient feminism with contemporary progressive liberalism.

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**1** Judy Chicago's life is punctuated by a series of autobiographical texts which can be read as evidence of the emergence of the artist's feminist sensibility, but also of the profound change in her practical and theoretical horizons. See Chicago 1975; 1996; 2021.

While in the essay itself the art critic states that “feminism (and by extension feminist art) is hugely ambitious” (Lippard 1995, 363), in the notes she explains that the “distinction between ambition (doing one’s best and taking one’s art and ideas as far as possible without abandoning the feminist support system) and competition (walking all over everybody to accomplish this) is a much discussed topic in the women’s movement” (Lippard 1995, 365, fn. 9). As these quotations from Lippard summarize, feminism in the 1970s could also be seen as a movement based on the principles of self-awareness and ambition, which had a major political and social impact on women’s lives. In its white and middle-class matrix, it encouraged women to recognize their own value and potential and to pursue their goals with determination. However, it is precisely in its contemporary empowerment strategies that the movement encounters the pull of the market and prepares itself for commercial exploitation.

After three decades of debate (Jones 1996), the *Dinner Party* has been included in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum and the artist has recently received well-deserved recognition for her artistic merit. In particular, it is interesting to note how Judy Chicago is currently undergoing a historicization of her work through a series of re-enactments. For instance, *Womanhouse* (1972), a paradigmatic project of feminist artistic research, has recently been re-enacted, fifty years after its original creation. This ground-breaking feminist art installation, which transformed a domestic environment into an immersive feminist artwork, was created in 1972 by the student community of the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts in Los Angeles, facilitated by Chicago herself and Miriam Schapiro (Fields 2012). In 2022 at Chicago’s “Through The Flower” Art Space in New Mexico, the enterprise was commemorated and partially re-enacted under the new title *Wo/Manhouse 2022*. This updated version abandoned the gender separatism of the original installation, opening it up to artists across the gender spectrum in response to changing definitions of gender and inclusivity. In addition, Judy Chicago incorporated augmented reality technology for museum purposes for this iteration. The exhibition’s official website serves as a comprehensive documentation platform for Chicago’s work, allowing users to virtually experience selected rooms from the updated version of the installation.

As has been recently noted, engaging in the “re-enactment of art history has become common practice among artists and curators alike” (Baldacci 2022, 173-7). This trend manifests itself in a number of ways, including the staging of previously exhibited artworks, remakes of original works, and the creation of temporary and unfinished works intended for re-presentation, opening up opportunities for new or previously unexamined interpretations. In the context of Judy Chicago’s oeuvre, this phenomenon of re-actualization has taken place within the realm of feminist art, a time when ‘feminism’ has

been commodified and easily commercialized. This concern was previously identified by Lucy Lippard over twenty years ago, long before feminism became a ‘social media mood board’. As Lippard states in an article entitled *Scattering Selves*, which examines certain modes of feminist self-portraiture, “It’s a fascinating and occasionally depressing experience to watch the story of 1970s feminist art kaleidoscopically recalled/reinvented by its inventors, and manipulated and changed by those who were not there, often for personal motives that have nothing to do with what really went down” (Lippard 1999, 34). From this critical standpoint, I will now look at two recent examples of Judy Chicago’s reframing of feminist art: her collaboration with Dior on an immersive experience that harks back to and recreates famous work, and her use of contemporary AR technology to create an immersive and virtual version of her *Atmospheres*.

#### 4 Re-Enactment and Post-Enactment in Judy Chicago’s Recent Work: The *Female Divine* Project and *Rainbow AR*

The first recent case of reframing of Chicago’s work is provided by her collaboration with the fashion brand Dior. At the invitation of Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first woman to become the creative director of Women’s Collections, Judy Chicago designed the set for the Spring Summer 2020 Haute Couture show of January 21, 2020. In the garden of the Musée Rodin in Paris, visitors were invited to walk through a 250-foot-long Goddess habitable sculpture, *The Female Divine*. The immersive installation was intended to be both a tribute to Judy Chicago’s artistic research, an updated and ‘interactive’ version of *The Dinner Party*, and also a statement by creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri herself, to be understood in a broader project that could be entitled “What if Women Ruled the World?” (Chiuri 2021). The structure’s inner floor was covered in a regal mille-fleur design taken from *The Dinner Party*’s Eleanor of Aquitaine tapestry; two sets of banners embroidered with questions, in English and in French, pondered how society would be different if women were political and spiritual leaders, echoing the ensigns of the 1979 installation. Female students from the Chanakya School of Craft, a non-profit organization in Mumbai, India, which educates women in artisanal techniques traditionally associated with men, created each one by hand, adding an intersectional layer to the whole operation. Moreover, a banquet stood as a commemoration of the enterprise of *The Dinner Party*, the celebration and rewriting of Herstory. In Judy Chicago’s words, “I’m 40 years past *The Dinner Party*. [...] But the issue of changing attitudes toward women and imagining ‘the female divine’ is something that hasn’t happened yet, has it?”. The idea for a collaboration with Maria Grazia Chiuri’s Dior came about in 2019,

when the creative director began working with feminist artists and collectives to mark her position as the first woman at the helm of the fashion house. In Chicago's case, her contribution to the show is intended to be more than just creating a backdrop for the catwalk: "I was sitting in the show and I was thinking, 'Can art have any real place here, other than just as a background?' There have been a lot of artists who have worked with fashion brands, but they have largely been commercial ventures". The creative process finally shaped a sort of co-authorship: "We *made* art".<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not Chicago truly succeeded in avoiding reducing the installation to the demands of the market, we can gain an insight into the artistic significance of the project by viewing it as a 'reframing' of an earlier unrealised work. The *Female Divine* was in fact the final outcome of a project dating back to 1977 and originally titled *Inflatable Mother Goddess Playground*. Reminiscent of Niki de Saint Phalle's *Homen katedral* (1966), the original sketch envisaged the monumental representation of a Goddess, taking inspiration from the prehistoric figurines with rounded feminine forms, the so-called Venuses, in an inhabitable and inflatable tensile structure. The concept of a soft sculpture, a seeming contradiction, was intended to challenge traditional notions of femininity by drawing on the hypothesis of woman-centred ancient societies and Goddess spirituality (among others, Stone 1976). The reference back to *The Dinner Party* is not casual, since Judy Chicago initially conceived of the idea during research for her collective project, when she first encountered an extensive bibliography about matriarchal societies and ancient religions. The hypothesis of prehistoric woman-centred societies is still highly controversial, although archaeological evidence of non-strictly patriarchal cultures has been collected since at least the 1970s (Gimbutas 1991). The main obstacle to research on this topic seems to be its very ideological nature, in the sense that, although it was shaped by feminist cultural imperatives when it began, it still managed to emerge in an academic context dominated by men, who in turn conditioned much of the controversy surrounding it. It is for this reason that the phrase 'the myth of the matriarchal past', adopted by Cynthia Eller (2000) in her disputed essay (Dashú 2005), does not seem to tell the whole truth about the complexity of anthropological, archaeological and ultimately political issues that such a phrase underlines. As Coleman (2005) points out, although the differences between matriarchal, matrilineal and matrifocal societies were already being distinguished in 1976 (Stone), Eller sticks to the generic definition of

<sup>2</sup> All of the quoted statements by Judy Chicago are from an article written by Alice Cavanagh and published on January 20, 2020 (Cavanagh 2020).



‘matriarchy’ in her attack on what she sees as an essentialist myth. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Judy Chicago’s adoption of Goddess spirituality is the result of a rich, syncretic and profound study of a differentiated bibliographical corpus: the result is empowering for women, but it certainly does not run the risk of being conservative. That said, it is important to remember that *The Dinner Party* has been criticised for its white matrix: only two plates were dedicated to BIPOC people, and the one representing Black woman, was indeed the only one not representing a vulva – unconsciously fueling fears of Black sexuality (Walker 1982). Leaving aside for a moment the critical issues related to the aesthetic imagery of the Goddess, and in particular its association with so-called white feminism, it is nevertheless important to highlight the contribution that this iconography has made to several generations of feminist artists, who in some cases have even managed to free it from these constraints.

The burning question now is: what is left of that cultural and political undertone in this ‘post-enactment’? This category, recently formalized by Elisabetta Modena (2022) “relates to those instances of realisation that foresee the staging, the setting up or the concretisation of a work originally conceived in a specific situation, not realised, and then produced in another context, in some cases even by different people” (Modena 2022). The 1977 *Inflatable Mother Goddess* was indeed finally realised, but with a previously unimagined commission and context of execution. From ‘playground’, the womb of the Goddess becomes the theatrical stage for a Haute Couture show, finding place in Chiuri’s communicative strategy, which from the outset was based on the appropriation of the feminist agenda in the fashion industry.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Chiuri was responsible for promoting the slogan “We All Should Be Feminists” in the media – reproducing the phrase on the infamous 750-euro T-shirts. As summarized by Titton (2019, 752) that marked “the beginning of a systematic rebranding of Dior as a feminist luxury brand”, “symptomatic of a postfeminist commodity culture”. The quote originated from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s talk of the same title at TEDxEuston, an event set in London and dedicated to Africa, in December 2012, whose political stances were then criticized for promoting trans-exclusive liberal ‘feminism’ (Lascelles 2021). Chicago collaborated with Dior once again, creating a limited edition of handbags, adapting three paintings, *Let It*

**3** After collaborating with Judy Chicago, Chiuri curated the Dior Autumn-Winter 2020-21 show at the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris with the French feminist collective Claire Fontaine. At the time, the catwalk was filled with political and philosophical statements, including “I say I” and “We are all clitoridian women”, quoting Carla Lonzi. While the show was well received, it was also criticized for its cultural appropriation of historical feminism. Read for instance the political analysis of the art historian Elvira Vannini on the Italian blog “hotpotatoes” (Vannini 2020).

*All Hang Out, Queen Victoria, and Christine of Sweden*. The names of the paintings were written on the bottom of the \$8.500 bags, another controversial, yet powerful, way for Chicago to promote women's history and her own artistic legacy. This is particularly meaningful given the momentous significance that the artist herself attributed to her painting *Let It All Hang Out* in her biography.<sup>4</sup>

Reframing, through re-enactment and remediation, seems to return in Chicago's recent work in an 'episode' of her immersive and evanescent *Atmospheres*. This series of artworks can be interpreted as a manifestation of the feminist strand of immersive art, an attempt to 'feminise' the environment by permeating it with the presence of the feminine. These installations and performative operations are constructed around the use of pyrotechnics, which Chicago began exploiting in the deserts of California in 1967. A brief examination of the history of such interventions provides revealing perspectives on their actual 'framing'. Although Chicago conceived them as a feminist alternative to Land Art, with a softer and more ephemeral character than its predominantly male counterpart, which heavily modified the natural landscape, the interventions are now 'framed' differently. When they made their first appearance on the American contemporary art scene, they impressed for their unexpected character; Lucy Lippard describes perfectly their impact on the contemporary art scene, referring to the aforementioned tension, so typical of Judy Chicago's style, between chaos and order:

I was impressed with how controlled the *Atmospheres* were when I finally saw the documentation, having only heard about them before. I had pictured them as single puffs of colored smoke, but some are composed like paintings, in different colors and times and spaces, orchestrated clouds of chroma. (Jules Olitski once wrote that he wanted to paint in midair; Chicago did it.) In others, the landforms are carefully taken into account and made the vehicle for an ecstatic release of color. Lights emerge from pockets of rock or earth and create their own contours. The *Atmospheres*, too, turn out to be about control and beauty – two fundamental elements of Chicago's work, which imply a certain need for perfection, or survival. (Lippard 1976, 224-5)

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<sup>4</sup> Writing about *Let It All Hang Out*, Chicago remembers that "When finished, [it] caused me to break into tears. The painting was forceful yet feminine, two attributes I had rarely seen wedded together. Moreover, its open sensuality frightened me, as I was still struggling to become comfortable with my creative and sexual power. But my imagery was gradually becoming clearer, though it would still be some time before my forms were entirely consistent with my intent" (Chicago 1996, 32).

One of the latest *Atmospheres* is the smoke sculpture *Forever de Young* (2021), which Chicago created for her first full retrospective in 2021, curated by Claudia Schmuckli at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. According to the promotional material, the open-air exhibition was intended as a personal commemoration of the artist's legacy. The show, developed in conjunction with Pyro Spectaculars, featured a complex, almost pyramidal metal structure from which smoke bombs of various colours were gradually detonated. Apart from the enthusiastic crowd, the only sounds were the explosions of the pyrotechnics, which helped to create an atmosphere of anticipation. It is curious to note that the *Atmosphere* is a controversial operation today, especially because of its impact, which seems to go against an elitist approach to contemporary art which, while praising the activist and political implications of the artworks, seems to prefer more discreet methods.<sup>5</sup> To prove it, one can read the exchange that took place on the pages of *Artforum* between feminist writer Dodie Bellamy and Judy Chicago herself regarding the atmospheric performance: Bellamy accused the artist of creating a work potentially hazardous to health and overly polluting. Indeed, the smoke from the pyrotechnic installation engulfed the park in front of the museum, causing consternation and anxiety among ordinary people, families, and children spending time outdoors. Aside from the controversy – Chicago asserted that the smoke bombs used were safe for health and the environment – it is interesting to note how the writer tries to criticize the artist's work by attributing to it a disturbing, worrying character, reminiscent of a scenario closer to chemical warfare, “the rainbow herbicides of Vietnam” (Bellamy 2021), than to the triumph of joyful femininity, which is precisely one of the artist's aims. In Bellamy's words: “Instead of puffy crayon-bright clouds unfurling in the air, a murky gray mass of smoke swept down from the scaffolding and engulfed us. It stunk. I couldn't see more than a few feet in front of me. The crowd's anxiety was palpable. Many of us stumbled towards the pathway behind us that ran along the side of the museum, and rushed away” (Bellamy 2021). Chicago's answer makes clear some of the focal points of this operation, which intentionally aims

<sup>5</sup> In the case of Chicago's *Atmosphere*, controversy ignited following the cancellation of her performance at the Desert X festival in California's Coachella Valley in March 2021. The smoke sculpture was scheduled to take place at The Living Desert, a 1,200-acre nature preserve in Palm Desert. Following a campaign by local environmentalist and journalist Ann Japenga, who denounced the potential danger of the smoke sculpture to the environment and local wildlife, The Living Desert pulled out of the festival, leaving the performance without a venue. Chicago ultimately refused to relocate the artwork, reaffirming the safety of their working materials and their commitment to environmental issues from both an aesthetic and political perspective. For more details on the controversy, see the article published on March 2 2021, by Scarlet Cheng on *The Art Newspaper* (Cheng 2021).

to be disturbing and reminiscent of ecological crisis, a theme that pervades the artist's work at least from the 1970s: "These works can highlight the beauty of our environment, but they can also suggest a myriad of meanings including *sati* [a Hindu practice in which a widow sacrifices herself by sitting atop her deceased husband's funeral pyre], self-immolation, terrorism, and in relation to *Forever de Young*, performed just a few weeks ago in San Francisco, the terrible forest fires experienced in the Bay area".

Having offered insights into the potential 'reframing' of this artistic practice, it is worth noting that atmospheres have been artistically remediated through immersive technology. On November 10 2020, Judy Chicago ventured into uncharted territory launching *Rainbow AR*, the first digital smoke sculpture. Commissioned by Light Art Space (LAS) and produced by International Magic, the application allowed users to transport Chicago's atmospheres anywhere they wish. The framework is provided by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need to find alternative ways of connecting, being present and interacting with the landscape without physically gathering together crowds, with all the political controversies that entails. Accessible via smartphone, the app first provides the user with context by informing them about the *Atmosphere* series, functioning like a museological device, building a paratext to understand the work; after scanning their surroundings, the user can then place a smoke bomb with Chicago's name on it and watch the area fill with rainbow mist. The open-air performance is thus transferred to an enclosed domestic environment: feminization, the original artistic aim, is made ubiquitous, without any risk of contamination. The participants are then invited to take photos of their transformed environment, contributing online to the conversation and recreating a sense of community, even if from a distance. While AR technology may offer a convenient way to showcase her work, it also carries the risk of reducing her powerful feminist message to a purely aesthetic experience, divorced from its original context, which could depoliticize Chicago's art.

## 5 Conclusion

The two cases I have briefly outlined can provide clues as to some of the possibilities for reframing feminist art from the 1970s. In the case of both *The Female Divine* and *Rainbow AR*, we have seen an artist, whose place in the canon of contemporary American art has sadly only recently been recognized, at work with a social and economic transformation that becomes apparent from the point of view of the media used. In the case of the post-enactment of the *Mother Goddess Playground*, we witness the transformation of the original playfulness into a productive but also creative environment. In *Rainbow*

AR, the exuberance of real smoke is digitised into a virtual form that allows the sculpture to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

These practices of ‘reframing’ can thus be interpreted in a number of ways. They could be seen as evidence of the definitive popularisation of second-wave feminism, or as a sign of the waning of the political fervour that was central to the 1970s. Alternatively, they could be taken as evidence that feminist ideals have finally been subsumed by neoliberalism and its commercialised, heteronormative notion of ‘femininity’. I do not intend to belittle Chicago’s complex and crucial aesthetic and political enterprise by finding a definitive answer to the question of whether or not her art finally ends up being depoliticized, in a cultural context where “Not only has fashion embraced feminism, feminism has also become fashionable” (Titton 2019, 749). More humbly, I would only propose to keep a close eye on ‘reframing’ practices concerning political art, remembering how “[The] ideals of ‘diversity,’ women’s ‘empowerment,’ LGBTQ+ rights, post-racialism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism [can be] interpreted in a specific, limited way that [is] fully compatible with the Goldman Sachsification of the US economy” (Fraser 2019, 13).

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