

Who is she? A goddess, a ritual object, a votive offering, significance of goddess images has acquired a life and a vehicle for working magic or fulfilling wishes, a talisman mythos of its own apart from the archaeological record. for protection, a teaching or initiation device, or simply the embodiment of a cultural ideal of the female form? The identity of these ancient nude female figurines is an The Fertile Goddess includes nine ancient female figurines ongoing question. Their breasts, bellies, buttocks, and from the Museum's collections, one of which, made by thighs are always emphasized or portrayed schematically and, except for seated figurines, none of these figurine people living in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and Syria in the late fifth millennium B.C.E., is the oldest types were made to stand, suggesting that they were sculpture in the Brooklyn Museum. The exhibition explores originally in prone positions when used, or were carried or the role of such figurines as a source of inspiration for Judy required supports. Despite stylistic variations in different cultures over time, similar conventions for such figurines Chicago's depiction of the Fertile Goddess, the second place setting in The Dinner Party. The tenth figurine, persisted for millennia throughout the ancient world. The same figurine types are often found in tombs and in made by Chicago in 1977, is a contemporary evocation of the very oldest female forms from the Paleolithic Period, domestic and sacred contexts, suggesting they functioned such as the iconic Venus of Willendorf. on multiple levels for the living and the dead. The current use of the term "female figurine," as opposed to "idol" or In creating the imagery for the Fertile Goddess place setting, Chicago was galvanized by the feminist re-

"goddess," acknowledges the many functions and meanings that have been ascribed to ancient female figurines. examination of ancient female figurines in the 1970s and scholarship that understood them as symbols of women's — Madeleine E. Cody, Research Associate in Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, and Maura prestige and power in the ancient world. Feminist and Reilly, founding curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler gender theory have influenced archaeology considerably Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum since Chicago created The Dinner Party. A new wave of archaeologists who apply innovative methods to the study and excavation of these figurines often challenges previous interpretations and nomenclature. Nonetheless, Judy Chicago (American, b. 1939). The Dinner Party (Fertile Goddess thirty years later, for many feminist artists and scholars, Fertile place setting), 1974–79. Mixed media: ceramic, porcelain, textile. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. © Judy Doddess (as well as practicing Wiccans and Neo-Pagans, the Chicago. Jook Leung, 360VR Studio photograph

THE FERTILE GODDESS

