

4085

Hypatia

Judy Chicago (1980): Hypatia, a philosopher, a mathematician, head of the University of Alexandria, and a powerful force in Roman society, would be better known if her works had not been destroyed in the burning of the famous library in Alexandria. Coptic imagery, incorporated here both in her plate and runner designs, is typified by the heavy black outlining, motifs like hearts, interlacing, and curly-headed goddesses that you see here. I incorporated goddess imagery into the illumination of Hypatia's name, and in the woven back of her runner, which depicts her death. She was torn limb from limb by a group of fanatic monks who felt threatened by her power as a woman and particularly by her contribution to a revival of goddess worship. As you walk around the table, the images begin to rise up from the plates. In Hypatia's plate, you can see the beginning of a slightly dimensional form, and an alteration of the edge. In the second wing, the images rise up, and go back down, while in the third wing, they become progressively more dimensional. This is a metaphor for women's desire to become free. But it is also a metaphor for women's experience as a symbol of the larger human experience. Because it is not only women who aren't free. Most people's lives are limited by their race, their class, or their life circumstances.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org