

## 4100

### Theodora

**Judy Chicago (1980):** Theodora ruled the Byzantine Empire with her husband, Justinian. Her place setting is very regal and splendid. The plate simulates mosaic, its color drawn from the beautiful mosaics at the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, built by Theodora and Justinian in the sixth century. The plate sits on a halo embroidered in the basket stitch with Japanese gold thread and echoes the halo around Theodora's head in the Ravenna mosaic. The ceramics team worked for months to develop a method of making this plate, which cracked repeatedly in the kiln. This is a good example of the difficulties we encountered in making those plates that have different levels of relief. It took almost three years, and a team of seven ceramicists working together with me, to develop the necessary technology. For the Theodora plate, we eventually found a technique of laying a slab on the plate and cutting into it to form the many small tiles, which were later reworked with carving tools. At least five china-painted firings were required to create the intensity of that color and the luster of the gold. The illuminated capital letter on Theodora's runner represents the famous church Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. During her reign, Theodora implemented many laws that improved the position of women, including establishing the death penalty for rape.