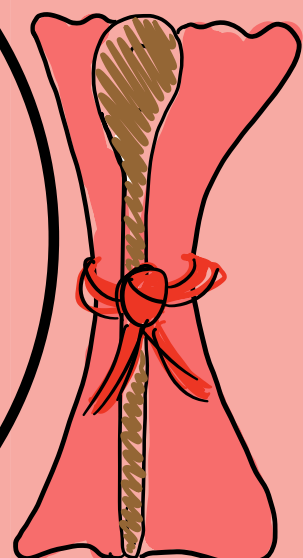
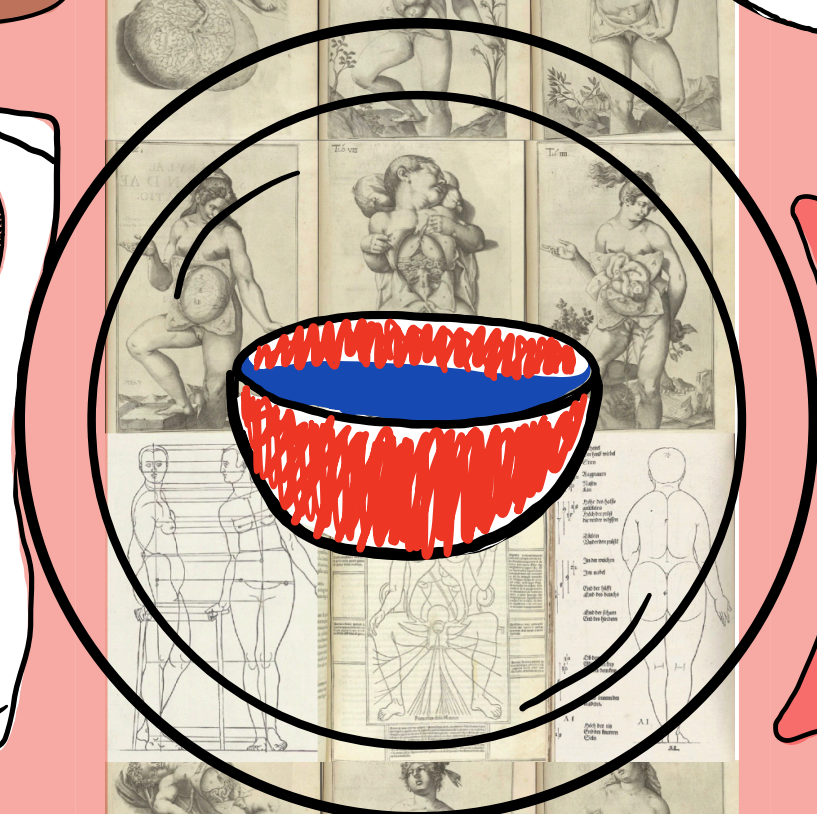
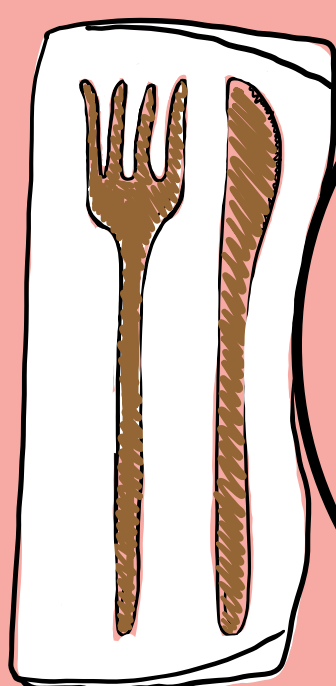
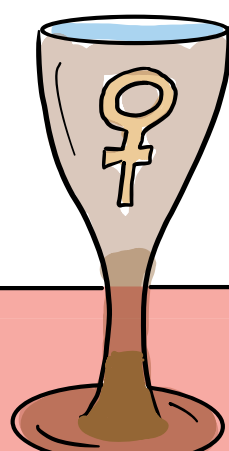
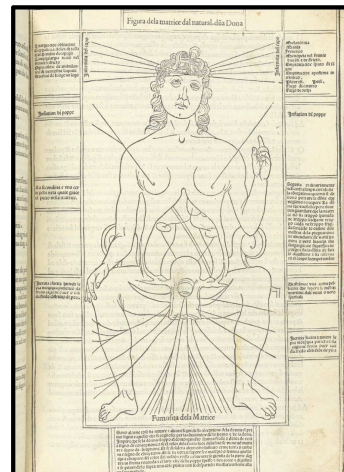
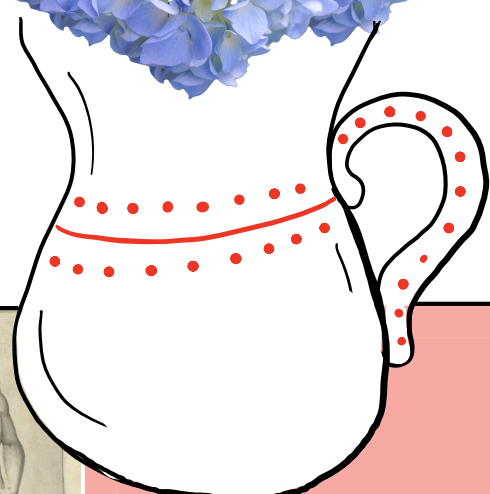
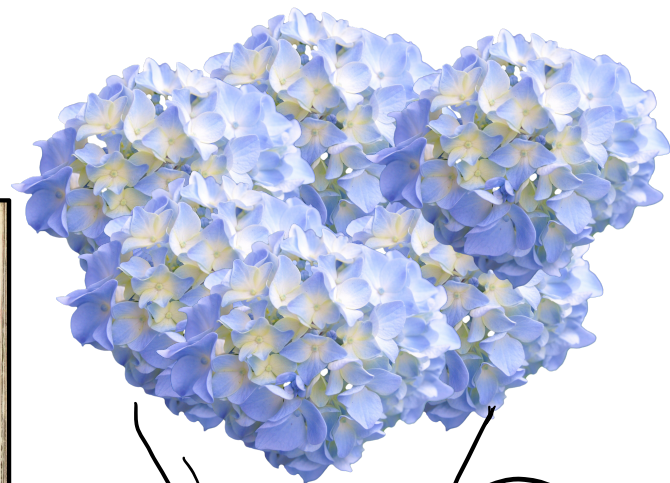
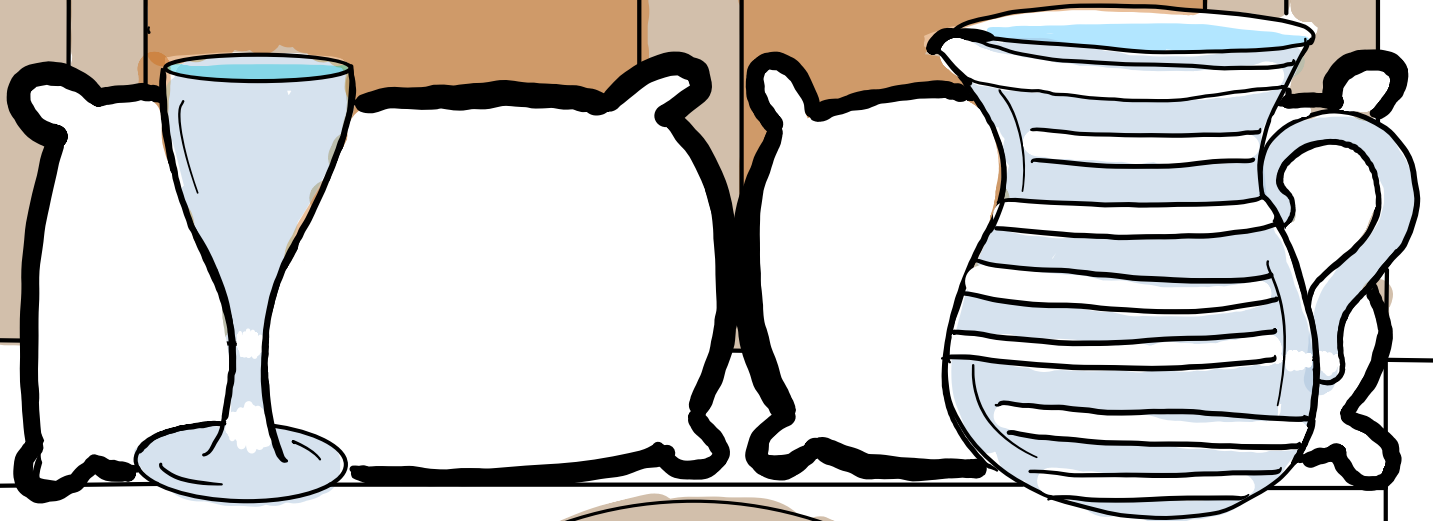


MIDWIVES

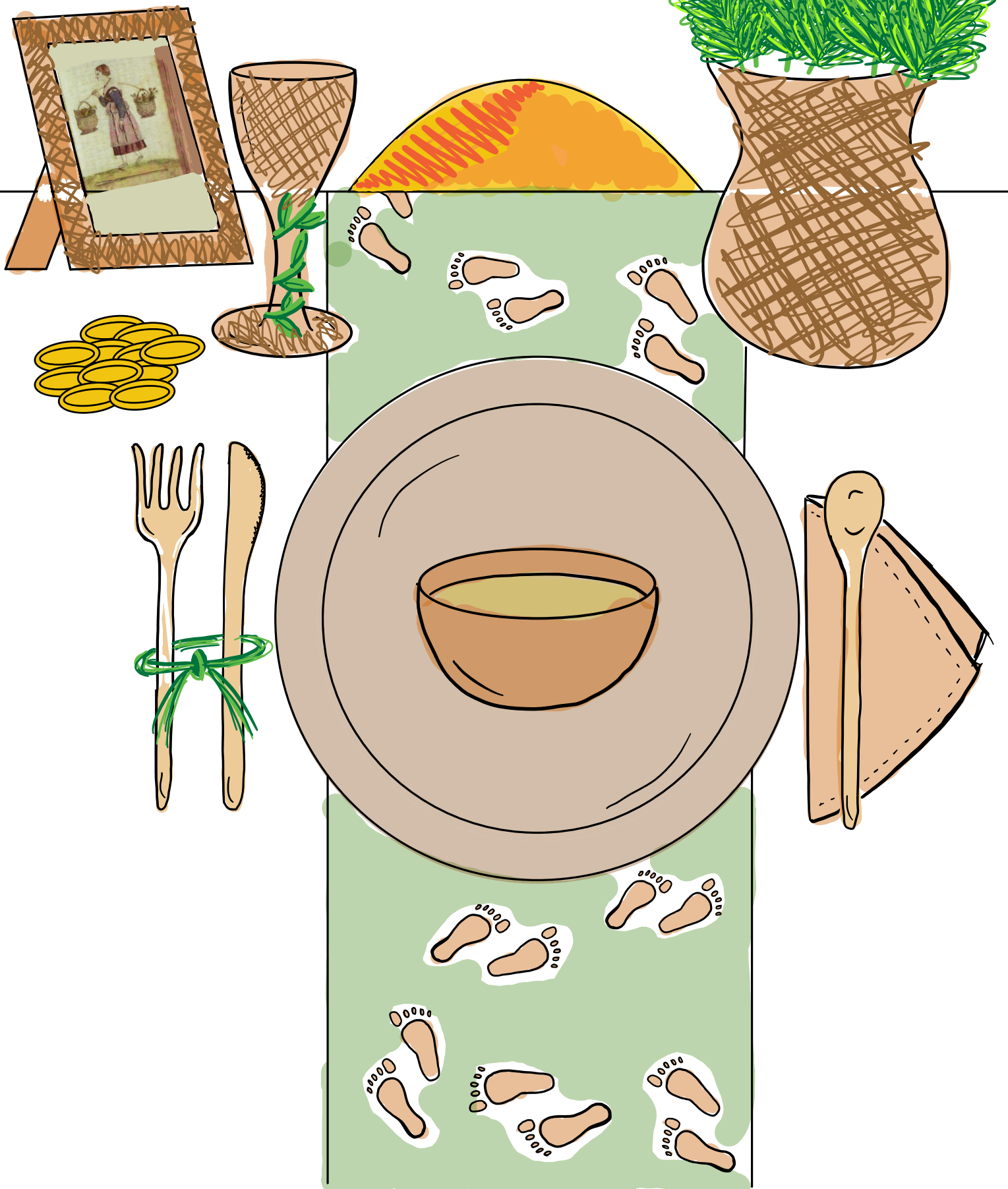


NURSING CARE

(DOMESTIC WOMEN)



HERB WOMEN



Samantha Lee

12/1/21

History of Medicine - Fall 2021

A Ceremonial Banquet for Women in the History of Medicine

Judy Chicago's 1970s feminist project, *The Dinner Party*, featured a triangularly formed table containing thirty-nine place settings. As a ceremonial banquet, each place setting commemorated a woman of impact not often mentioned in history as a tribute to her indelible impact on society. Inspired by Chicago's admirable work, three place settings were crafted to commemorate notable female roles in the history of medicine who are also often forgotten from the narrative of medicine's long history. Unfortunately, unlike Chicago, these place settings are unable to be attributed to specific individual women by name because individual female names are rarely mentioned in the texts and historical evidence gathered to date by historians. Therefore, each place setting has been attributed to the female roles in medicine described in the historical evidence available and provides tribute to the enduring impact of the countless unnamed women in the history of medicine who played the following key roles: midwives, nursing care, and herb women.

Upon examination of the midwives' place setting, the color red appears as the dominant color to represent the large amount of blood these women dealt with on a daily basis in their jobs. As the primary caregivers during birth, midwives would have most likely been bathed in the color of blood by the conclusion of their job and spent large portions of their day looking at blood as they aided with all the stages of birthing a child. Hence, the white cloth on the left and red napkin on the right illustrate how their extra cloths would have appeared before and after their job respectively. Since they primarily cared for women during birth, a feminist symbol adorns the wooden chalice and purple flowers represent abundance of fertility - both items that may have been found in the homes of the well off families midwives served, especially since

parties were often thrown while the mother was in labor. Another noticeable feature of their setting includes the variety of diagrams of female anatomy both hung on the wall above and stitched together as the table runner. Each illustration shows how the medical views of female anatomy changed throughout history and highlights the organs and bodily features midwives specialized in. A few of the images also include the anatomy of a human infant, illustrating how midwives not only had to be aware of the female anatomy, but also the infant anatomy as they brought new life into the world.

The place setting for domestic women who cared for loved ones in the home are given the title “Nursing Care” to honor their daily efforts often unrecognized in historical sources. In the few historical depictions we have access to, these women are nearly always pictured as standing or sitting next to the patient’s bedside while administering care. Therefore, the foundation of these women’s place setting is a bed to illustrate the balancing act of taking care of both patients and their home was often centered around the bedside. Between the laundry, cooking, and preparation of home remedies, these women had their hands full as they navigated caring for their patients based on their personal past experiences or remedies passed down through the generations. The small plate with leaves depicts many home remedies originated with local herbs or herbs grown in the domestic woman’s garden. Such cures may have been mixed in with soups or broths as shown by the wooden bowl with a green liquid inside. A large part of caring for patients in bed would have also included doing a lot of laundry to ensure everything was kept relatively sanitary so a pile of folded laundry is located under the bowl. Additionally, the stark white napkin and pillows are left intentionally blank as they were not even given a formal title in any historical source. Instead their role is assumed to be part of the general

“female” role in society with minimal recognition of their extraordinary efforts to care for and heal countless women, children, and men.

The last table setting is set for the herb women who collected a variety of plants and walked miles back and forth between the surrounding foliage and their home dwellings. To emphasize the large amount of walking these women endured, the table runner includes wandering footsteps to represent their long walks scouring for the correct herbs and their long walks back and forth to the market to sell their herb-based remedies. Along these journeys, herb women most likely collected their herbs in baskets as illustrated in the photo pictured on the top left of the place setting. Therefore, the basket woven chalice, vase, and picture frame emphasize a large portion of these women’s lives was spent carrying these baskets back and forth. Upon collection of their variety of greenery, similar to the variety of greenery incorporated throughout the place setting, these women would have prepared their herbs to sell at the market. Using modest kitchen tools, similar to the wooden fork, knife, spoon, plate, and bowl pictured, a variety of herb-based remedies were prepared and used either for their personal needs or to sell. Despite their simple lifestyle, these women were able to monetarily profit from their efforts to provide for their families - an opportunity not often granted to domestic women throughout history.

Throughout the process of crafting these three place settings, there was a unique opportunity to truly attempt to walk a mile in the shoes of the countless women who have served as midwives, nursing caregivers, and herb women. While there is no replacement for a primary source like an interview transcript that would shed light on their daily plights, setting the table for each women’s role allowed space for empathy with the likely daily predicaments they faced. Despite these women not receiving the recognition they deserved during their lifetime, these place settings aspire to honor their truly unfading impact on the history of medicine.