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Arts

Artemisia Gentileschi and Her Times

An art exhibition celebrates Artemisia, a prominent female painter in the 1600s

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"Artemisia Gentileschi and Her Times:" an exhibition celebrating the unrecognised success of Artemisia Gentileschi, a female artist who was undervalued in her time, but managed to achieve recognition in the male-dominated art world of the post-Renaissance era.



"Ester and Assuero" by Artemisia Gentileschi.

by **Lucy Gomulka** - 12 febbraio 2017

On until May 7th, "Artemisia Gentileschi e Il Suo Tempo" ("Artemisia Gentileschi and Her Times", on view until May 7) is the **blockbuster exhibition at the Museo di Roma** in the Palazzo Braschi overlooking Piazza Navona. Even during her lifetime, Artemisia was already one of the first women artists to achieve recognition in the male-dominated post-Renaissance art world. In an era when female artists were limited to portrait painting and imitative poses, she was the first woman to paint major historical and religious scenarios. In 1616, she was the first woman to become a member of the Accademia del Disegno - the Drawing Academy - in Florence.



"Self-Portrait as Lute Player" by Artemisia Gentileschi

About one third of the 95 paintings on display (on loan from 80 different museums and private collections) are by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) in Palazzo Braschi's newly opened exhibition area. The other paintings were made by contemporary artists she knew or by younger painters she influenced. Some of the paintings are on loan from other museums in Rome and other cities in Italy: Bologna, Cerreto Guidi (a town 19 miles west of Florence), Cesena, Cosenza, Florence, Lecce, Milan, Naples, Novara, Pistoia, Venice and Vicenza. Several other paintings are on loan from private collections or from museums around Europe. Those pieces loaned from the United States are the "Danae" (c.1612) from the St. Louis Art Museum, a "Self-Portrait as a Lute Player" (c. 1616-1617) from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut, "Lot and his Daughters" (1620- c. 25) from the Toledo Museum of Art, "Ester and Assuero" (1626-29) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, all four being works of Artemisia, "Apollo and Marsia" (1616-1620) by Bartolomeo Manfredi from the St. Louis Art Museum, "The Sybil" (c.1618-21) by Orazio Gentileschi, Artemisia's father, from the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and "Anfitrite's Triumph" (c. 1648) by Bernardo Cavallino from the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.

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"Danae" by Artemisia Gentileschi

Like the earlier monographic exhibitions devoted to her (Florence 1991, The Metropolitan, Palazzo Venezia in Rome, St. Louis 2001/02 and Milan 2012), "Artemisia Gentileschi and Her Times" is biographical and chronological, but, in addition, this one includes works by other artists who influenced her or were influenced by her. The exhibition's five sections represent the different places she lived in: Rome (1593-1613), Florence (1613-1620), Rome again (1620-1627), after a brief time in Venice, Naples (1629-38), London (1638-1640) and Naples again (1640-53).

Artemisia was born in Rome in 1593, the oldest of four children and the only girl. Her mother Prudentia Montone died when Artemisia was 12. Her father was the well-known painter Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639), who was Artemisia's first teacher. He was a friend of Caravaggio, who heavily influenced Artemisia's style as did Annibale Carracci and the Bologna School confirmable in her first work, "Susanna e i Vecchioni" ("Susanna and the Elders;" 1610; in the Schönborn Collection in Pommersfelden and on loan here.)

In 1611, Orazio turned over Artemisia's training to his colleague Agostino Tassi, with whom he was working with on decorating the vaults of Casino delle Rose in Rome's Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi. During Artemisia's training with her new teacher, Tassi raped her. Afterwards, Artemisia continued to have sexual relations with Tassi with the expectation that they would marry and thus restore her dignity and her future. When Tassi reneged on this promise, because he was already married, Orazio pressed charges. During the ensuing sensational seven-month trial, **Wikipedia tells us**, "it was discovered that Tassi had planned to murder his wife, had engaged in adultery with his sister-in-law and planned to steal some of Orazio's paintings. During the trial Artemisia was subjected to a gynecological examination and torture through the use of thumb screws to verify her testimony". In the end, Tassi was sentenced to imprisonment for one year, although he never served time. The scandal that followed made it impossible for Artemisia to win aristocratic and ecclesiastical commissions in Rome; therefore, Orazio married her off to a much older and insignificant painter, called Pierantonio Stiattesi, and the couple moved to Florence.

Artemisia had been raped, and unsuccessfully prosecuting her rapist long overshadowed her talent and her achievements as an artist. Yet, in Florence, she was esteemed by her fellow artists, Cosimo II de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Christina of Lorraine, the Grand Duchess, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, the artist's great nephew, and Galileo Galilei. Here, she painted several versions of her masterpiece "Judith Slaying Holofernes" (on display at the exhibit) from the Uffizi in Florence and Capodimonte in Naples, while Caravaggio's version is shamefully missing for comparison). In fact, her notable works from this period are filled with defiant and violent women and explain why the great art historian Roberto Longhi wrote: "There are about fifty-seven works by Artemisia Gentileschi and 94% of them (forty-nine works) feature women as protagonists or equal to men." In addition, many are considered self-portraits.



"Judith Beheading Holofernes" by Artemisia Gentileschi.

In 1621, Artemisia returned to Rome to escape from her evermore debt-ridden husband and over the next decade, perhaps with some support from her father, gained the esteem of the so-called Caravaggisti: Carlo Saraceni, Bartolomeo Manfredi and Simon Vouet, all of whom have works displayed here. However, Rome was not as lucrative as she had hoped; therefore, Artemisia moved to Venice in search of richer commissions. One of her Venetian works, "Ester ed Assuero" – "Ester and Ahasuerus," – from the Met, proof of her assimilation of Venetian luminism.

Again, in search of new and more lucrative commissions, Artemisia moved to Naples in 1630. Jusepe de Ribera and Massimo Stazzone, both with paintings on display at the exhibit, were working there. Naples was a second home for Artemisia, and, except for a year-long stay in London to help her sick father, she remained in Naples for the rest of her life.

Artemisia Gentileschi, Caravaggio, Italian art, Italian Renaissance, painter, paintings

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