

Gentileschi

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – c. 1656) was an Italian Baroque painter, today considered one of the most accomplished painters in the generation following that of Caravaggio. In an era when women painters were not easily accepted by the artistic community or patrons, she was the first woman to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno in Florence.

Artemisia was introduced to painting in her father's workshop, showing much more talent than her brothers, who worked alongside her. She learned drawing, how to mix color, and how to paint. Since her father's style took inspiration from Caravaggio during that period, her style was just as heavily influenced in turn. Her approach to subject matter was different from her father's, however, as her paintings are highly naturalistic, where Orazio's are idealized; and she gained great respect and recognition for her work.

She painted many pictures of strong and suffering women from myth and the Bible – victims, suicides, warriors.



01 *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* 1638-9



02 *Susanna and the Elders* 1610

The first work of the young seventeen-year-old Artemisia. At the time some, influenced by the prevailing misconceptions, suspected that she was helped by her father. The

painting shows how Artemisia assimilated the realism of Caravaggio (without being indifferent to the language of the Bologna school, which had Annibale Carracci among its major artists.) It is one of the few paintings on the theme of Susanna showing the sexual accosting by the two Elders as a traumatic event.

In 1611, her father, Orazio, hired the painter Agostino Tassi to tutor his daughter privately. During this tutelage, Tassi raped Artemisia. Another man, Cosimo Quorli, was also involved. After the rape, Artemisia continued to have sexual relations with Tassi, with the expectation that they were going to be married and with the hope to restore her dignity and her future. Tassi reneged on his promise to marry Artemisia. Nine months after the rape, when he learnt that Artemisia and Tassi were not going to be married, Orazio pressed charges against Tassi. Orazio also claimed that Tassi stole a painting of Judith from the Gentileschi household. The major issue of this trial was the fact that Tassi had taken Artemisia's virginity. If Artemisia had not been a virgin before Tassi raped her, the Gentileschis would not have been able to press charges. During the ensuing seven-month trial, 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 using thumbscrews to verify her testimony. At the end of the trial Tassi was sentenced to imprisonment for one year, although he never served the time. The trial influenced the feminist view of Artemisia Gentileschi during the late twentieth century.

Artemisia was surrounded mainly by the presence of males since the loss of her mother at age 12. When Artemisia was 17, Orazio rented the upstairs apartment of their home to a female tenant, Tuzia. Artemisia befriended Tuzia; however, Tuzia allowed Agostino Tassi and Cosimo Quorli to accompany Artemisia in Artemisia's home on multiple occasions. The day the rape occurred, Artemisia cried for the help of Tuzia, but Tuzia simply ignored Artemisia and pretended she knew nothing of what happened. Artemisia felt betrayed by Tuzia, and because Tuzia was the only female figure in her life, Artemisia's works contained a strong sense of the importance of solidarity and unity between women.

A month after the trial, Orazio arranged for his daughter to marry Pierantonio Stiattesi, a modest artist from Florence. Shortly afterward the couple moved to Florence, where Artemisia received a commission for a painting at Casa Buonarroti. She became a successful court painter, enjoying the patronage of the House of Medici and Charles I of England.

While in Florence, Artemisia and Pierantonio had a daughter around 1618, Prudentia, but who was also known as Palmira, which has led some scholars to conclude erroneously that Artemisia had two children, not one. Prudentia was named after Artemisia's mother, who died when Artemisia was 12. It is noteworthy that her daughter was a painter, trained by her mother, although nothing is known of her work.



03 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* 1614-20

Her best-known work is *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (a well-known medieval and baroque subject in art), which "shows the decapitation of Holofernes, a scene of horrific struggle and blood-letting". That she was a woman painting in the seventeenth century and that she was raped and participated in prosecuting the rapist, long overshadowed her achievements as an artist. For many years she was regarded as a curiosity. Today she is regarded as one of the most progressive and expressionist painters of her generation.



04 *Judith and her Maidservant* 1613-14

The research paper "Gentileschi, padre e figlia" (1916) by Roberto Longhi, an important Italian critic, described Artemisia as "the only woman in Italy who ever knew about painting, coloring, doughing, and other fundamentals". Longhi also wrote of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*: "There are about fifty-seven works by Artemisia Gentileschi and 94% (forty-nine works) feature women as protagonists or equal to men". These include her works of *Jael and Sisera*, *Judith and her Maidservant*, and *Esther*. These characters intentionally lacked the stereotypical 'feminine' traits—sensitivity, timidity, and weakness—and were courageous, rebellious, and powerful personalities.



05 *Allegory of Inclination* 1615

In Florence, Artemisia enjoyed huge success. and was the first woman accepted into the Academy of the Arts of Drawing. She maintained good relations with the most respected artists of her time.

She had a good relationship with Galileo Galilei, with whom she corresponded by letter for a long time.

She was esteemed by Michelangelo Buonarroti the younger (nephew of the great Michelangelo): busy with construction of Casa Buonarroti to celebrate his notable relative, he asked Artemisia to produce a painting to decorate the ceiling of the gallery of paintings. The painting represents an allegory of *Allegoria dell'Inclinazione*, "Allegory of the Inclination (natural talent)", presented in the form of a nude young woman holding a compass. It is believed that the subject bears a resemblance to Artemisia. Indeed, in several of her paintings, Artemisia's energetic heroines resemble her self-portraits.



06 *Saint Cecilia* c1616

The Patron Saint of music.



07 Lucretia 1620-21

Lucretia was an ancient Roman woman whose fate played a vital role in the transition of Roman government from the Roman Kingdom to the Roman Republic. While there were no contemporary sources, accounts from Roman historian Livy (Livy) and Greek-Roman historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus from the time of Emperor Caesar Augustus (23 September 63 BC – 19 August 14 AD) agreed that there was such a woman and that her suicide after being raped by an Etruscan king's son was the immediate cause of the anti-monarchist rebellion that overthrew the monarchy.



08 Annunciation 1630



09 *Lot and his Daughters* 1635-38

Two men arrived in Sodom and were given food and shelter by Lot. Some male citizens arrived at his door and demanded that the strangers be handed over so that they might 'know' them (Have sexual relations with them.) Lot refused, offering to hand over his virgin daughters instead, to do with them as they would. The men accused him of being judgemental and threatened to force entry to his house. However, the two guests dragged him indoors and revealed themselves to be angels sent to destroy the wicked city. They urged Lot, his wife and his daughter's to flee. However, on the journey his wife disobeyed the injunction not to look back and was transformed into a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters went to Zoar, but fearing to dwell there went to live in a cave. There the daughters thinking that no man would visit them there and they would remain childless, conspired to get their elderly father drunk and lie with him, that they might 'preserve the seed of the father,' which they did on subsequent nights. The older daughter conceived Moab meaning "from the father", father of the Moabites; the younger conceived Ben-Ammi, "Son of my people"), father of the Ammonites.



10 *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* 1638-9

In 1638 Artemisia joined her father in London at the court of Charles I of England, where Orazio became court painter and received the important job of decorating a ceiling (allegory of Trionfo della pace e delle Arti (Triumph of Peace and the Arts) in the Queen's House, Casa delle Delizie of Queen Henrietta Maria of France in Greenwich). Father and daughter were working together once again, although helping her father probably was not her only reason for travelling to London: Charles I had invited her to his court, and it was not possible to refuse. Charles I was a fanatical collector, willing to ruin public finances to follow his artistic wishes. The fame of Artemisia probably intrigued him, and it is not a coincidence that his collection included a painting of great suggestion, the "Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting".

The Self Portrait was probably produced during Gentileschi's stay in England between 1638 and 1639. It was in the collection of Charles I and was returned to the Royal Collection at the Restoration (1660) and remains there.

The scene depicts Gentileschi painting herself, who is in turn represented as the "Allegory of Painting"

The painting demonstrates rare feminist themes from a time when women seldom held jobs, let alone were well known for them. Gentileschi's portrayal of herself as the epitome of the arts was a bold statement to make for the period. It was very

controversial in its time, though the painting is today overshadowed by many of Gentileschi's other, more dramatic and raw scenes reflecting the artist's troubling younger years,



11 *Judith and Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* 1645

The precise moment painted takes place after the murder when her maidservant places the severed head in a bag, while Judith checks around her. It is the second of three paintings that Gentileschi painted of the same moment, using a similar design.



12 *Susanna and the Elders on a Balcony* c1652