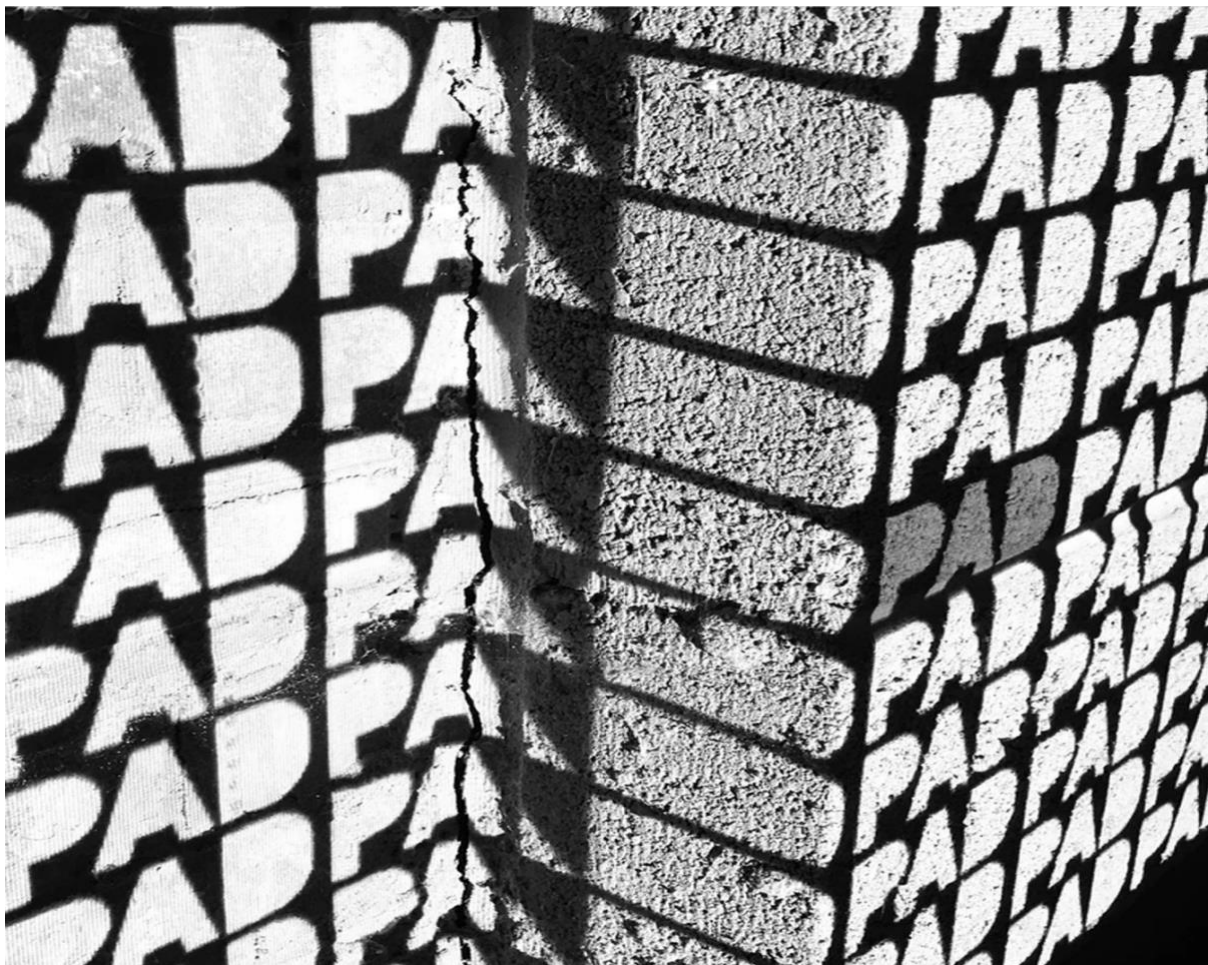


Assessing the Cultural Impact of Artemisia Gentileschi and her Synchronous Deviation from Artistic Norms and Expectations of Women Artists of the Baroque Period

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The aim of this paper is to explore and evaluate the legacy of Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) within art history, with reference to twentieth century feminism, in order to fully assess her significance and cultural impact as a woman artist. This research will explore the impact of Gentileschi within her own era in order to build a foundation of understanding which will focus on the lasting legacy of Gentileschi in contemporary society.

To analyse the significance of Gentileschi's cultural impact, we must first understand the climate of Baroque Italy as it pertains to the woman artist. In this era, beginning in the late sixteenth century, to operate as a woman artist in the Baroque was both rare and not without its challenges. Becoming a gentlewoman, who additionally painted, facing the societal limitations that came alongside this, namely a lack of access to artistic education and being primarily limited in genre and access to resources was one of the few options available to women who pursued an artistic path (Lucie-Smith 1999 p.115). Harris (2010 p. 4) describes the conditions for women artists effectively: *'We must never forget how different the lives of all women were five centuries ago, and how social customs denied them access to much more of the culture of artistic practice than the chance to draw the male nude from a live model'*.

Harris' statement suggests that whilst being denied access to nude models was an issue for women artists, the restrictions they faced ran deeply into an inherent lack of access to an entire artistic culture including access to viewing classical art works and a lack of access to the same tutorage as male artists. A woman could operate as an artist and be regarded as just less than respectable (Lucie-Smith, 1999, p.115).

This paper will discuss the women artists working before and alongside Artemisia Gentileschi and the artistic climate in which these women operated. Progressing onto an analysis of Gentileschi's practice regarding proto-feminist attitudes, the impact of her early life and sexual assault by Agostino Tassi (c.1580-1644) on her

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practice and her societal image as a practicing artist; an evaluation of the radical steps and processes taken by Gentileschi that deviated from traditional Baroque artistic narratives is explored. Ultimately contributing towards the assessing of her cultural impact within the Baroque period.

Preceding Gentileschi were Lavinia Fontana (c.1552-1614) and Sofonisba Anguissola (c.1532-1625), both of whom are excellent examples of how women artists operated in the cultural climate of Baroque Italy. Fontana, born in Bologna, was trained by her father much like Gentileschi, one of the only ways to receive an artistic education for a woman of this era.

It is in Fontana's self-portraits that the strategies taken to navigate societal expectations around gender and the arts can be seen, specifically in her 1577 self-portrait (Figure 1) in which she is seen sat at the clavichord, a chaperone present, an empty easel in the background sharing traits with Anguissola's self-portrait and establishing the artist as an educated gentlewoman (Chadwick, 1990, p.82.). Artists like Anguissola and Fontana utilised these strategies in their portraits in order to establish their right to operate as women artists, as Chadwick (1990, p.76) states of Anguissola:

Her self-portraits return the focus of painting to the personal, which cannot be read as heroic, or larger than life, or divine. Instead, they reveal the inner attributes of modesty, patience, and virtue.

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Figure 1 Lavinia Fontana, *Self Portrait with The Clavichord*, 1577

Whilst Fontana and Anguissola stress the image of the refined, moralistic female artist, Gentileschi, according to Hessel (2022 pp.35), would produce imagery of ‘*dark backgrounds infused with stunning light effects*’, ‘*blood-ridden biblical and mythological subject matters*’, ‘*vigorous realism*’, ‘*triumphant women*’, and ‘*striking psychological and emotive expression*’. There is a clear difference between the work of Anguissola and Fontana when compared to Gentileschi despite their working close together in time. This suggests the influence of external factors on Gentileschi that perhaps did not apply to Fontana and Anguissola.

All three artists were trained by their fathers, however Gentileschi originated in Rome rather than Bologna. The difference in location meant Fontana and Anguissola operated in a climate that allowed for a university to educate women since the Middle Ages. Bologna also had a female painter as its patron saint: Caterina dei

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Virgi. Gentileschi, however, originated in Rome, a city with no such liberties (Chadwick 1990 p.78). Rome had a number of artistic advantages such as access to Renaissance art and architecture, and classical ruins, though this would not have advantaged Gentileschi as access to such was restricted for women (Hessel 2022 p.17).



Figure 2: Sofonisba Anguissola, Self Portrait with Clavichord, 1561

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Additionally, Gentileschi's training under her father (a known follower of Caravaggio) suggests she had influences of the Caravaggist style, specifically chiaroscuro lighting, early on in her training. Treves (2020) suggests that for women artists of the time, it was virtually impossible to break free from the genre of still life, yet Artemisia did so under the influence of Orazio and in turn Carravaggio. Treves (2020) argument has merit, but was this the sole reason that Gentileschi was able to branch out from still life?

According to Chadwick, (1990 p.67) women of this era could have an intuitive knowledge of painting but lacked the technical training and awareness of the 'laws' of such a practice. Locker (2016) suggests that Gentileschi was deliberately daring in her choice of subject matter, tackling the genre of historical and mythological works, and selecting the most dramatic subjects within this; the most difficult area for a seventeenth century painter to tackle (Locker, 2016).

When one considers the sheer emotionality in the work Artemisia produced, could it be considered as evidence of this 'intuitive' element of painting? Combined with the technical training received under Orazio, perhaps it was both of these aspects that equipped her with the tools to branch out of the societal expectations of women artists to remain within still life.

The question remains, if Gentileschi was advantaged with this women's 'intuitive' knowledge of painting (Chadwick 1990 p.67), where is it evident within her works? Chicago (1999 p.46) states that Gentileschi was unique in the way she inserted herself into a pre-existing narrative set in Baroque art by male artists, bringing a female perspective into this narrative. The narrative in question being a range of biblical and mythological imagery of highly dramatized, heroic women (Chadwick 1990 p.96), a narrative invented and sustained by men (Chadwick 1990 p.100).

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Referring to Judy Chicago (1999 p.46) for Gentileschi to insert herself into this narrative and to present a uniquely female viewpoint bordered on the radical. Hessel (2022 p.38) puts forth that Gentileschi '*tackled biblical and mythological stories in a way male painters never could*'. What could fuel a woman artist of the time to tackle this narrative, and what events, in turn, could this '*intuition*' draw from to create unique and impactful works?

As a teenager, Artemisia Gentileschi was raped by fellow artist and friend of her father Agostino Tassi. This event would progress into a very public trial that attracted monumental levels of attention to Artemisia (Lucie-Smith 1999 p.47). According to Edward Lucie Smith (1999 p.47) Tassi's assault on Gentileschi has been central to the way her work has been interpreted raising her to the status of '*feminist icon*'. The effect that this event had on Gentileschi's legacy will be explored in greater depth in this paper.

Firstly however, the effect of the rape on her social profile within her own contemporary society should be explored. Moreover, the presence of this event within her artworks should be analysed starting with (Figure 3) '*Judith Beheading Holofernes*'. According to Parker and Pollock (1989 pp. 21) the rape had a significant effect on Gentileschi's public profile, her works and life as a woman artist meant she could not be categorised as the '*usual feminine stereotype*' i.e., the pre-existing expectations for a woman artist at the time much like Fontana and Anguissola, meaning she was at risk of her assault being weaponised to place her into the opposite classification for women during that time; '*whore*'. This classification allowed explanation for such '*problematic*' and '*violent*' images painted by a woman (Parker and Pollock, 1989, p. 21).

Greer, cited in Chadwick (1990, p. 96) suggests that the publicity surrounding Artemisia brought on by her rape trial, removed many remaining obstacles for her career. There is no doubt that the publicity of the trial brought significant attention to Artemisia. However, is it not reasonable to question the positive impact of this on her

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career? At its core the case covered the sexual assault of a young woman, perhaps to focus on how it positively affected her career is to be ignorant of this fact.

Cohen (2000, pp. 66-67), states that to analyse the way the rape moulded Artemisias' reputation in Baroque Italy, one must understand the mentality towards the concept of sexual violence in this era.

In Gentileschi's time, the body was not viewed as intrinsic to a sense of self, and male aggression was primarily accepted as a natural act of dominance; Therefore, the psychological notion of rape being a violation of the self, (Cohen 2000, pp.66-67) would not have been present in Artemisias era, her main concern would have been with social standing and honour rather than a sense of violation. Yet when one considers the sense of '*intuitive*' and emotional knowledge within paintings by women, as discussed by Chadwick (1990, p.67), one does wonder about the presence of feminine rage and of the rape in Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings.

The Myth of Judith centres around her seduction and assassination of enemy general Holofernes via a brutal beheading in his military camp, a popular subject in Baroque art (Chadwick, 1990, p.103). Many elements of this piece suggest the influence of a personal narrative, of the assault; Chadwick (1990 p.102) refers to a '*ferocious energy and sustained violence*' in this piece seen in the dynamic spurts of blood emerging from Holofernes' neck and the use of a pinwheel composition made up of the thrusting arms and three heads to clearly demonstrate '*female physical power*'. The violence of the image has caused many writers throughout art history to find the presence of Gentileschi's sexual trauma in the work (Chadwick 1990, pp. 102). These elements indeed suggest that Artemisia '*intuitively*' painted this trauma into the work.

However, Locker (2016) brings forward many elements of Gentileschi's work in this piece that suggests a higher technical ability and understanding of culture than what one would expect for a painting fuelled by rage or vengeance. The attention to detail in the '*gentleness*' of the fabrics is juxtaposed against violent pools of blood and dramatic lighting demonstrating the artists skill and technical ability (Locker 2016).

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Also, there is a theatrical element to the piece in the harshness of the facial expressions and the aggressive arc of the blood (Locker 2016). Not only is skill and technical ability demonstrated through this, but Locker (2016) also speaks to the fact that this nods towards Artemisia's cultural knowledge and adaptability to changing tastes of patrons; the arcs of the blood follow some of the recent scientific writings of Galileo at the time suggesting Gentileschi had an awareness of scientific advancements as well as cultural.



Figure 3: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1618

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This notion of adaptability is further evidenced when comparing Figure 3 to Gentileschi's earlier version of the work (Figure 4). The earlier piece, painted shortly after the assault by Tassi, features less violence both in the facial expressions of the women and in the patterns of the blood (Locker 2016). According to Locker (2016), there is little evidence to suggest any significant moment in Artemisia's life that might have fuelled an increase in drama from the first painting to the second; from this one might wonder which assessment has more weight- Chadwick's (1990 pp.67) notion that women artists had an intuitive painting knowledge where their technical and cultural education lacked, or Lockers suggestion that Gentileschi's work shows more of an '*exquisite*' technical ability and skill in adapting to the tastes of patrons than her sexual trauma.

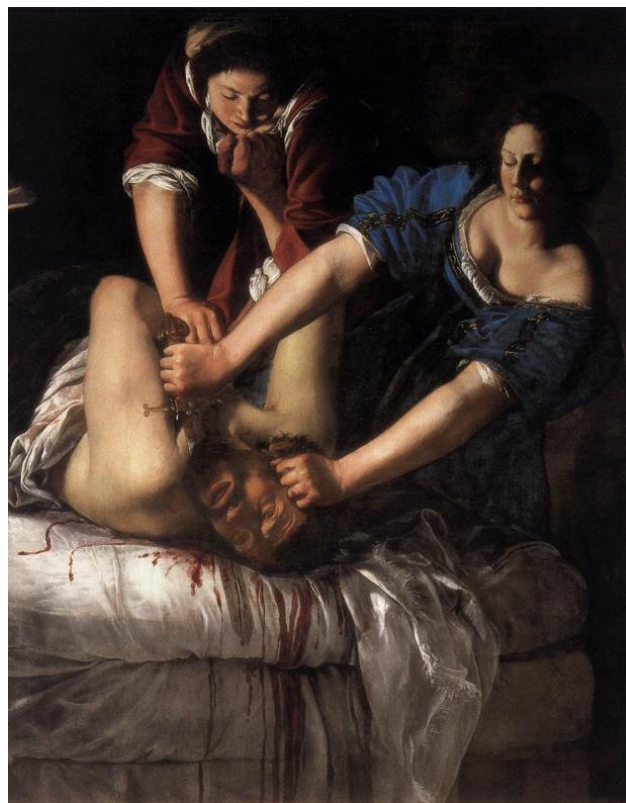


Figure 4: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1612

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Whilst it remains in question how much Gentileschi's rape by Tassi influenced her practice, there is evidence to suggest that she was deviating from certain norms in Baroque art in a way male artists did not; and thus, had a significant cultural impact (Chicago 1999, pp. 46) and perhaps demonstrated a proto-feminist mindset. As previously discussed, Artemisia tailored her subject matter to be as dramatic as

possible, whilst simultaneously developing her practice to match the tastes of her patrons (Locker 2016); and was unique, according to Chicago (1999, pp. 46) in the adapting of traditional artistic narratives to be solely her own: *'But the most significant reason for her greatness is that she was one of the first women to twist mainstream art practice to include her own perspective as a woman, not only by focusing upon and honouring biblical heroines, but also by interceding in traditional narratives to present a uniquely female viewpoint'*.

Whilst Chicago's statement seems to cement the notion of a proto-feminist mindset on Gentileschi's behalf, it also suggests a clever self-insertion into these *'traditional narratives'* that demonstrates Artemisia's cultural knowledge. This is most evident in her work *'Self- Portrait as the Allegory of Painting'* (Figure 5). In this piece Artemisia portrays herself as *'Pittura'*, a representation of painting as the female form, a concept which first appeared in the early sixteenth century (Garrard 1980 pp.97). In this piece, the *'daring'* element of the subject matter that Locker (2016) refers to is evidenced in an alternate way; Gentileschi combines the tradition of self-portraiture with the traditional narrative of the allegory but simultaneously broke this tradition by inserting herself as the figure *'Pittura'* (Gouma- Peterson & Matthews 1987 pp. 337). Where this is *'audacious'* (Garrard 1980 pp.97), is that Gentileschi painting herself as *'Pittura'* approached the narrative in a way that no male artist could. As Garrard (1980 pp. 97) puts it: *'By joining the types of the artist portrait and the allegory of painting, Gentileschi managed to unite in a single image two themes that male artists had been obliged to treat separately'*.

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Sutherland Harris (2010) compares Artemisia's 'Allegory of Painting' (Figure 5) and another by Elisabetta Sirani (Figure 6), another female artist operating in Gentileschi's time. There are fundamental visual differences between the two works that demonstrate the ways Gentileschi was deviating from traditional Baroque narratives. Garrard (1980 pp. 106) lists the elements of Gentileschi's 'Pittura' that align with the traditional narrative of the subject matter but are radicalised by the artist using these elements for a self-portrait; the frenzied state of Artemisia/ 'Pittura' represents the divine frenzy of creation the allegory is typically represented as being in, by depicting herself in such a state, Gentileschi is cementing herself as a talent perhaps warranting divine influence. This deviates from the traditional male artists self-portrait, in which the appearance of an intelligent, cultured gentleman was essential (Garrard, 1980 pp. 106).

Sirani's version of 'Pittura' differs from Gentileschi's in numerous ways, the most prominent being that she painted 'The Allegory of Painting' as the figure Clio; whereas Gentileschi made no illusions about her allegory being a self-portrait, Sirani layered hers with another additional subject matter leaving its nature as a self-portrait in question (Sutherland Harris 2010 pp. 9). Where Sirani's 'Pittura' is elegantly clothed and refined, Gentileschi's is wild and frenzied, perhaps demonstrating again a deviation from the expectation placed upon women artists; One need only look at the self-portraits of Anguissola and Fontana and their depictions of refined, intelligent woman artists to see where Gentileschi's 'Self-Portrait as The Allegory of Painting' differs.

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Figure 5: Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as The Allegory of Painting, 1638

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Figure 6: Elisabetta Sirani of Bologna, *The Allegory of Painting as Clio*, 1658

The third work of Gentileschi's that should be explored when considering her cultural significance in Baroque Italy is one of the earliest pieces created by the artist.

'Susanna and The Elders' (Figure 7) was created when Gentileschi was just seventeen years of age; predating the assault by Tassi. The story of Susanna, from the book of Daniel, follows a young woman (Susanna) who is falsely accused of adultery after two men (The Elders) discover her bathing and attempt to blackmail

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her for sex. Whilst Susanna was a common subject matter within Baroque art, Gentileschi defers from tradition and chooses to paint from the viewpoint of the young Susanna over the encroaching Elders (Hessel 2022, p. 37). This is reinforced by Chadwick (1990, p. 97), who discusses that it was common practice for artists to focus on depicting the pleasure of the Elders not the vulnerability of Susanna due to rape and seduction having little distinction between them in this era, '*the expressive core of the picture is in the heroine's plight, not the villains anticipated pleasure*' (Gouma Peterson and Matthews, 1987, p. 337).

Despite the fact that this work was created prior to the rape, an argument can be made for Tassi's presence in this work. Locker (2016) and Hessel (2020) mention that although he had yet to assault Artemisia, Tassi was frequenting the Gentileschi household at the time Figure 6 was painted. Perhaps this suggests this piece was a reflection of Artemisia's own fear and vulnerability, in the presence of her future attacker. Alternatively, Locker (2016) states that Artemisia was depicting her frustrations existing as a woman in the seventeenth century; a woman feeling victimised in a world that prevented her from demonstrating her talent or power. It is in this interpretation (Locker, 2016), that a proto- feminist mindset is perhaps the most present.

Locker (2016) also refers to the work as one of the first great nudes in the Baroque period. Considering Chadwick's (1990 pp. 97-98) analysis of the work's composition, Gentileschi's skill, and deviation from the ways male artists approached similar narratives, becomes evident; For example, Gentileschi takes the traditional setting of the garden exchanging it for the enclosed, restricted space of the frieze, Susanna is naked rather than being suggestively draped in fabric (See Figure 8, Tintoretto's version, for example). These changes alongside the triangular composition of the heads, emphasise the vulnerability of Susanna as the '*object of the conspiracy*' of the Elders, drawing the viewer in as a third conspirator, they are made to observe her in her vulnerable state (Chadwick 1990 pp. 97-98).

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Perhaps one could again suggest a proto-feminist mindset in this work, was Gentileschi playing into the terrifying notion that the Elders would conspire to potentially harm Susanna, and, building on Chadwick's (1990 pp.97-98) argument, by bringing in the viewer as a third conspirator, they could? Does this then reflect her feelings of vulnerability in her own home or does this demonstrate her ability to create artwork that resonated with the women of her time aligning more closely with the likes of Locker (2016)?



Figure 7: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and The Elders*, 1610

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Evidence suggests that Gentileschi's cultural impact within her own time extended to that of celebrity (Locker 2016). Not only did she enjoy the patronage of the Medici family and the Spanish royal court, the demand to consume Artemisia extended beyond patrons acquiring works by her, there was a demand for works of her also. Locker (2016) discusses a famous Vouet portrait of Gentileschi in which the artist strategically praises her using symbolism, the use of the medallion depicting the mausoleum directly references Artemisia of Halicarnassus Gentileschi's namesake, the mausoleum is considered one of the great wonders of the ancient world and the implication is that Vouet communicates that Artemisia Gentileschi creates great wonders much like her namesake.



Figure 8: Tintoretto, *Susanna and The Elders*, 1555

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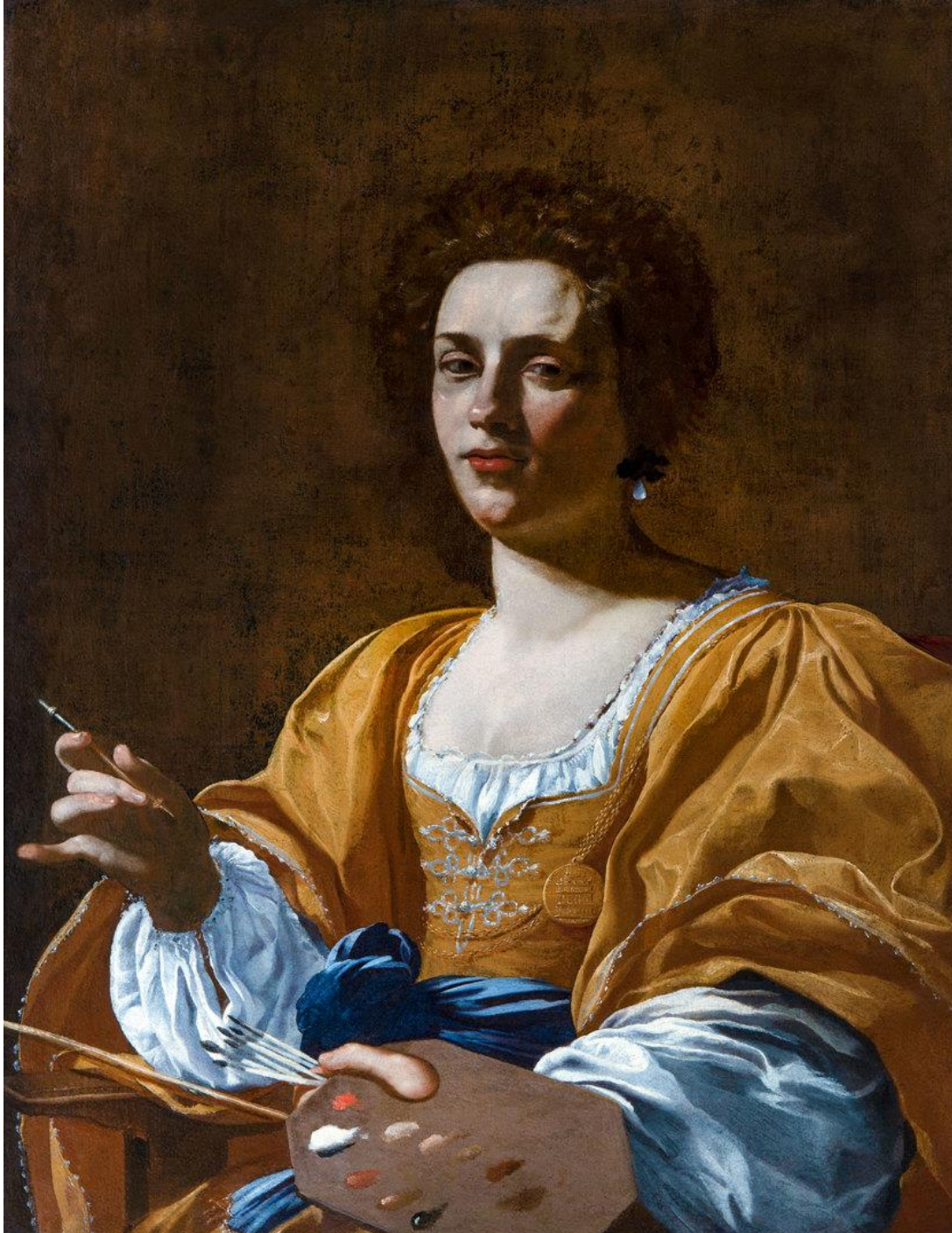


Figure 9: Vouet, *Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi*, c.1625

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However, there is a counter argument to be made here. Despite Vouet's portrait of Artemisia serving as evidence of her incredible fame, Chadwick (1990 pp.19) discusses a phenomenon concerning women artists that is applicable to the fame of Gentileschi:

The bizarre but all too common transformation of the woman artist from a producer in her own right into a subject for representation forms a leitmotif in the history of art. Confounding subject and object, it undermines the speaking position of the individual woman artist by generalizing her. Denied her individuality, she is displaced from being a producer and becomes instead a sign for male creativity.

This notion of the woman artist moving from practitioner to muse (Chadwick, 1990, p.19) brings into question whether Gentileschi's fame was as beneficial as one might initially think; does this bring the proto-feminist sensibility of Gentileschi's career as an independent, practicing woman artist into question?

Sutherland Harris (2010 p.5) describes Gentileschi as '*an artist now so famous it is hard to imagine that she did not enjoy similar fame in her lifetime*'. As discussed, the artist's fame in her own era was explored, but one cannot ignore Artemisia's fame in contemporary society. Chapter 2 will aim to explore and evaluate the resurgence of Gentileschi's fame through the feminist art movement of the twentieth century, analysing which elements of her lifetime carried through to bear the most weight upon her legacy. This will primarily cover the elements of Gentileschi's practice which resonated the most with feminists of the twentieth century, the actions taken by these feminists to resurrect Artemisia into the canon of art history, focusing on artist Judy Chicago, a re-examination of the rape by Agostino Tassi and how this has impacted Gentileschi's legacy, ending on an examination of the recent show at the National Gallery (London) dedicated to her.

To understand why Artemisia had a resurgence in fame, starting with the feminist art movement of the twentieth century, it must be understood why she was forgotten by art history at all. There are many roots to this issue, Chadwick (1990 pp.15)

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discusses the flaws within art history that have led to a general forgetting of women artists suggesting the problem began in the Renaissance in which a culture permeated in Italian cities of celebrating the achievements of male citizens over female. Chadwick (1990 pp.15) goes on to state:

Our language and our expectations about art have tended to rank art produced by women below that by men in “quality”, and thus their work is often of lesser monetary value. This has profoundly influenced our knowledge and understanding of the contributions made by women in painting and sculpture.

Interestingly, Parker and Pollock (1989 pp. 3) suggest that the abandonment of women artists in art history is a recent thing, stating that up until the nineteenth century they were acknowledged, and it is only modern writers who have vehemently denied their existence. Perhaps, like many other women artists, Gentileschi was simply a victim of this. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, there is another element to this which Parker and Pollock go on to explain (1989 pp. 21); historians are ‘*discomforted*’ by Gentileschi’s ‘*dramatic*’ and powerful women- the nature of her works prevents her from being described as what Parker and Pollock call ‘*the usual feminine stereotype*’ meaning she could not be categorised as a passive feminine figure.

Artemisia’s work did not conform with the expectations historians had for a woman artist of her era i.e., the likes of Fontana and Anguissola, thus they used the categorisation of ‘*whore*’ in order to explain the problem of such violent images created by a woman (Parker and Pollock 1989 pp.21). Considering the above, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the art historical amnesia surrounding Artemisia Gentileschi goes beyond her simply being a woman artist; perhaps there is an intent to this erasure.

If Gentileschi did not meet the expectations of art historians as ‘*the usual feminine stereotype*’ (Parker and Pollock 1989 p.21), feminists were determined to have her established as a feminist artist. Hammond, cited in Gouma-Peterson and Matthews

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(1987 p. 334) defines a feminist artist as one who makes art '*that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture*'. When considering Gentileschi's work, there is evidence of her fitting this definition. As evaluated previously, there is much evidence in the artists body of work to suggest a presentation of feminine power and assertion that disrupted Baroque narratives surrounding women within the artistic context. Additionally, Gouma-Peterson and Matthews (1987 pp.351) go on to evaluate the role of feminist art historians as those with the goal to uncover female artists from history, analysing the work of these artists from the female viewpoint with the aim of understanding the roles women have been assigned in history, history being a timeline of '*male genius*'. When one considers the requirements to be categorised as feminist artist and the aims of feminist art historians, it is understandable that they were drawn to Artemisia Gentileschi in order to resurrect her as an '*artistic amazon*' (Cohen 2000 pp.47).

There are two key instances in which Artemisia was brought forward by feminists in order to reassert her into the canon of art history. One was the exhibition 'Women Artists 1550-1950' which introduced Artemisia to an entire generation of feminists and was, perhaps, a pivotal stage on the journey to her legacy as a proto-feminist artist being established. Hessel (2022 p. 16) describes this show as the first-time women were ever recognised for their contributions in art history for 400 years. For Artemisia to be included in such an exhibition one can discern two things; Artemisia was deemed to be an artist of significance warranting a place in this exhibition, and that Artemisia received a notable amount of publicity due to her inclusion in this show. This publicity is evident in later homages to the artist such as Lapierre's 2001 Novel, in which she prefaces the text by stating her '*love affair*' with Gentileschi first began when the author encountered her work in the '*stunning*' exhibition (Lapierre, 2001, p. xiii). Lapierre's novelisation of Gentileschi will be explored further in this paper.

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The second key instance in which feminism brought Artemisia Gentileschi forward into the canon of art history, was her inclusion in the Judy Chicago work 'The Dinner Party' (1974- 79). The installation work aimed to honour the great women of history with thirty-nine being honoured with a seat at the table, and a further nine-hundred and ninety-nine women acknowledged throughout the installation.

Gentileschi was given one of thirty-nine place settings at the table of 'The Dinner Party' in which Chicago honoured Artemisia whilst inherently linking her to the character of Judith (who also had a seat at the table). Chicago discusses the use of imagery and symbolism to directly link the two women; the combination of a sword and paintbrushes to decorate Artemisia's name reflect the sword used as the capital letter of Judith's name, and the pomegranate on Artemisia's runner speaks to the coins on Judith's (Chicago, 1996, p. 97). Chicago's decision to link Artemisia and Judith so directly, could imply the significance of Artemisia's works depicting Judith on the modern feminist artist. Gentileschi's technical ability is also honoured in the '*twisting and turning forms of the plate image*' which '*represent the Baroque style typical of Artemisia's paintings*' (Chicago, 1996, p. 97).

The influence as artist and perceived proto-feminist that Gentileschi had on Chicago and other feminists stems from her dramatic subject matter and from the fact that she was one of the first women to make a living from her artwork remaining unconfined by the still life genre favouring traditional narratives and inserting a female viewpoint into these (Chicago, 1999, p.46). The influencing factors that Chicago describes suggests that the elements of Gentileschi's practice explored previously, with particular reference to the insertion of female narratives into subjects matters typically explored by male artist, enhanced by dramatic imagery, scenes of violence, and emotionality had a clear impact on Gentileschi's legacy within feminism.

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However, and perhaps unfortunately, Judy Chicago's focus on Artemisia Gentileschi is inherently linked to her rape by Agostino Tassi. In her book 'The Dinner Party' (1996) the first thing Chicago mentions about Artemisia is the fact that she was raped, Parker and Pollock (1989, pp. 21) suggest that Gentileschi cannot be truly appreciated as an artist until one abandons

this disturbing fascination with her life' meaning her assault. Chicago herself describes the way the rape is referenced in Gentileschi's place setting at 'The Dinner Party' 'the engulfing forms of the velvet on the runner top are intended to suggest the protection her devoted father had vainly tried to provide for his talented daughter (1996 pp.97)

likely referring to the lengthy rape trial discussed previously. Chadwick's argument (1990, pp.96) negates this, suggesting that the trial had far more to do with Orazio Gentileschi's honour and legal property (his daughter) being damaged than the welfare of his child. Perhaps Chicago's inclusion of this symbolism meant to represent Orazio's protection of Artemisia victimises her in a way that potentially detracts from the feminism of Chicago's homage to her.

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Figure 10: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: Artemisia Gentileschi Place Setting* (1974 – 1979)

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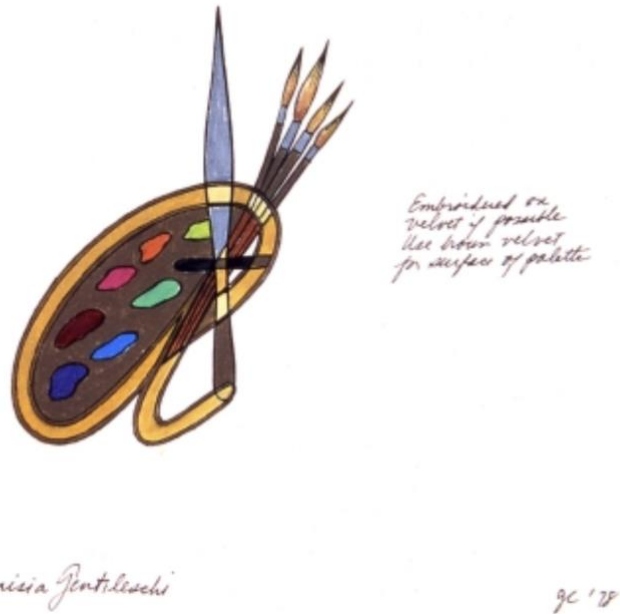


Figure 11: Judy Chicago, *Drawing for Artemisia Gentileschi Illuminated Letter on Runner*, 1978

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Figure 12: Judy Chicago, *Judith Place Setting* (1974-1979)

Edward Lucie-Smith states that ‘*The documents concerning the trial have been extensively published and have raised Artemisia to the position of feminist heroine*’ (1999, pp. 47). This notion of the publicity of the rape trial being so impactful that it lasted all the way to 20th century feminism serves as concrete evidence that the rape has had a tangible impact on Artemisia Gentileschi’s legacy. Cohen (2000, pp. 47) speaks to this:

Artemisia Gentileschi continues to be represented as strongly defined by her sexuality. Incomplete and anachronistic readings of the records from the 1612 trial for her rape have underpinned an image of Artemisia as, in the older treatments, a flirt and vamp, in more recent ones, a feminist and resister of male violence...Not only did Artemisia Gentileschi suffer sexual violence in the past, but also, because of these judicial documents, her reputation continues to be violated in the present by an overly sexualised interpretation.

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Earlier in the paper it was posited that not only was there a demand for work by Artemisia Gentileschi but also for work of her. This demand, as Gentileschi was resurrected into popularity by feminists such as Chicago, seems to have become a lasting part of her legacy. This part of Gentileschi's legacy, is again, seemingly directly linked to her rape and to her relationships with men. Olsen Lent's (2006) analysis on the fictionalisation of Artemisia explores the ways in which the artists relationships with men have been overdramatised in contemporary media. For example, Olsen Lent (2006, p.212) suggests that the creativity of women in fictional media must be explained as a manifestation caused by male mentors whose '*vital essence*' is necessary to motivate female creatives. This concept is evident in Alexandra Lapierre's 'Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness' the writer's novelisation of Artemisias life. In the prologue of this text, Lapierre (2001 pp. 6) describes Artemisias relationship with her father as intense and toxic:

At a time when daughters belonged to their fathers, when art was a matter of life or death, when the dagger and the paintbrush were found in the same hands, both Artemisia and Orazio were prepared to kill in order to prove their superior talent...Was there parricide? Incest?

The above demonstrates what Olsen Lent (2006, p.212) discusses, Artemisias historically documented training by her father is overdramatised into an extreme, borderline incestual relationship in order to justify her existence as a woman artist. A woman's '*creativity as exceptional and the result of male influence*' (Olsen Lent, 2006, p.214).

The culmination of Artemisia Gentileschi's legacy in contemporary society can be found in the recent National Gallery exhibition of 2020. Hessel (2022 p. 10) refers to this show as the galleries first show dedicated entirely to a historical female artist. It included numerous works by Gentileschi, and also included several of her handwritten letters. The inclusion of the works and letters, as Treves (2020) suggests, brings forward the artists forceful personality; there was an expectation

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that a significant portion of those attending this exhibition did so based on the infamous knowledge of Artemisia's rape, the intention of the curatorial team was to confront viewers with this expectation with thirty of the artist's strongest works (Treves 2020).

This notion of confronting pre-existing expectations of a woman artist perhaps suggests a feminist sensibility. However, the decision to try and bring out Gentileschi's forceful personality (Treves 2020), serves as further evidence for the overdramatization of a woman artist in order to justify the intensity of her works. One must ask the question why the curators chose not to allow Gentileschi's artworks speak for themselves, why not use her artistic skills as the sole tool to bring out this forceful personality? Whilst referencing fictionalised characterisations of Artemisia Gentileschi, Olsen Lents' (2006, p. 214) assessment appropriately outlines the wider treatment of Gentileschi throughout the areas explored in this paper, namely themes of art history, feminism, and the contemporary creative community:

In fact, the popularity of fictionalising Artemisia Gentileschi's life may rest on the ease by which it could be moulded to popular conventions. By exaggerating the emotional aspects of her life, they reinforce familiar ties between creativity and passion, reiterating women's creativity as exceptional...as well as resonate with contemporary desires for emotional relevance and accessibility.

The purpose of this paper was to explore Artemisia Gentileschi's legacy as a woman artist, her cultural impact in both the Baroque and contemporary society. The research laid out in both chapters of this dissertation has provided a significant amount evidence nodding towards the fact that Gentileschi has indeed had an impact within both art history and culture through feminism.

The research undertaken has established that Artemisia was deviating from both traditional artistic narratives and expectations of women artists in the Baroque era. By comparing Gentileschi to Fontana, Anguissola, and Sirani it has been established that her approaches to self-portraiture presented a uniquely female

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perspective (Chicago, 1999, p.46). As is evident in 'Self-Portrait as The Allegory of Painting' and the way Gentileschi approached the subject that male artists simply could not do (Garrard, 1980, p. 97). Furthermore, she approached the notion of 'Pittura' in a way female artists also did not. For example, when one compares Gentileschi's piece to Sirani's the differences between Artemisia's frenzied and divinely influence figure and Sirani's refined figure of elegance demonstrates that Gentileschi was inserting a unique element into her practice (Sutherland Harris, 2010, p.9). *Susanna and The Elders* demonstrates the proto-feminist mindset within Gentileschi's artwork, the vulnerability of Susanna demonstrates Gentileschi's own knowledge of the vulnerability and frustrations of women within her own era (Locker 2016).

It was also established the full effect that the rape by Tassi had on Gentileschi's societal image and artistic practice can only be speculated. Some suggest that the publicity brought on by the extensive court trial may have removed the remaining obstacles for Artemisia to establish her own public image (Greer, cited in Chadwick, 1990 p.96). However, to suggest so is to perhaps ignore the very real sexual assault that the trial covered. The presence of the assault within Gentileschi's artwork remains up for debate, whilst there are those who suggest the violence of works like 'Judith Beheading Holofernes' demonstrates a want of vengeance (Chadwick, 1990, p.102), others suggest the piece demonstrates more evidence of Gentileschi's cultural and artist knowledge, and adaptability to emerging sciences and changing tastes of patrons (Locker 2016).

Gentileschi's fame in the Baroque is also established in works such as her portrait by Vouet (Figure 9), which praises Gentileschi in a way that demonstrates she was much admired by fellow artists of the time (Locker 2016).

However, as stated by Chadwick, the benefits of this come at a cost, and the transition of woman artist to muse is not necessarily a positive thing (1990, p.19).

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The paper also has demonstrated that despite her being forgotten by art history, Artemisia Gentileschi was resurrected by feminist art movements of the twentieth century, arguably shaping her contemporary legacy. The exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950* is credited by Lapierre (2001, p.xiii) as being the cause of the authors obsession with Gentileschi eventually leading to the novel 'Artemisia: The story of a battle for greatness'. The emphasis feminists such as Judy Chicago placed on Artemisia Gentileschi as a survivor of rape protected by her father has had an evident effect on the way Gentileschi is approached in the contemporary artistic community. Judy Chicago established Gentileschi as famous for her survival of rape and directly tied this concept to the Judith paintings (Chicago, 1996, p.97) in 'The Dinner Party' (1974-79). This mindset is also evident in the National Gallery exhibition which was curated in a way that almost emphasised Artemisia as a passionate creative fuelled by her relationships with men over her talent as an artist.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest the cultural and historical impact of Artemisia Gentileschi. Despite her peak of celebrity in the Baroque followed by her absence in art history, Gentileschi was resurrected by the feminist art movement in twentieth century which shaped contemporary approaches to her. The positivity of this remains in question; continued emphasis on her rape by Tassi, especially by feminists, shaped scholarship on Gentileschi in a way that inherently links her legacy to Tassi, a link only severed in the likes of Locker (2016) who discusses the rape but questions its significance, and Cohen who directly combats this overemphasis on Artemisia's sexual trauma. Indeed, as stated by Cohen (2000, pp. 52-53):

More recent feminist approaches to Artemisia, though drawing different conclusions, often continue to put sexual experience, specifically rape, at the centre of her identity and achievements. Blaming the victim became celebrating the victim...Artemisia is now a heroine, a triumphant resister of patriarchy.

All of this evidence points towards the fact that a substantial contribution, and therefore impact, has been made by Artemisia Gentileschi in terms of art history,

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feminist sensibility, and painterly skill. As Locker (2016) stated, Gentileschi scholarship is still in its infancy and thus it's reasonable to assume that further evidence of this impact will come to light as time progresses.

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Figure 7: Artemisia Gentileschi (1610) *Susanna and the Elders*. In Hessel (2022) *The Story of Art Without Men*. London: Hutchinson Heineman p. 36

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Figure 9: Vouet (c.1625) *Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi* [online image] Available from: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/artemisia/artemisia-in-her-own-words> [Accessed 13 January 2023]

Figure 10: Judy Chicago (1974-79) *The Dinner Party: Artemisia Gentileschi Place Setting*. [online image] Available from: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/artemisia_gentileschi#:~:text=Artemisia%20Gentileschi%20at%20The%20Dinner%20Party&text=The%20plate%20is%20surrounded%20by,often%20associated%20with%20the%20artist [Accessed 13 January 2023]

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Figure 12: Judy Chicago (1974-1979) *Judith Place Setting* [online image] Available from: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/166073> [Accessed 13 January 2023]

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