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Artemisia: A Reflection of Women's Rights

by

Julie McGrath

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History
at
Lindenwood University

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
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Julie Elizabeth McGrath

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Artemisia: A Reflection of Women's Rights

Julie McGrath, Master of Arts in Art History, 2019

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This thesis will analyze and document the historiographic perspective of Artemisia Gentileschi and the changing perspective of the artist and her artwork since the 1960s. The research will explore the changing of perception of Artemisia through various methodologies to understand the evolution of her story. By looking at the change from modernism to postmodernism, I will explain how the latter opened up the feminist movement and methodology, and how the four waves of feminism have directly impacted the perception of her life and her body of work. Without these changes, scholarship would not have developed a greater understanding of Artemisia and the understanding of her work that continues to be celebrated in the twenty-first century. Though this celebration was long overdue as her work and life was scrutinized prior to the 1970s.

This work is significant to the field of study regarding Artemisia because it differs from the typical scholarship connected to the artist. Typical scholarship that is connected to Artemisia explores the influence of her personal experiences, more specifically the rape and trial. Others explore the impact of her gender or the comparison of her father's work. More recently, scholarship has begun to focus on the recent understanding of her intellect and possible feminist ideals. However, there has been little focus on how we have arrived at this modern-day Artemisia.

Furthermore, I will connect the perception of Artemisia's work to the development of women's rights as they expanded throughout the 1970s, 1980s and through modern day. Each wave of feminism, and the expansion of women's rights, has provided a new, more in-depth understanding of Artemisia that is reflective of the current political situation. The thesis will also explore her depictions of Judith, Susanna, Cleopatra, and Lucretia as they have been viewed throughout the course of history. In reviewing these works we can gain a deeper understanding of her voice in a broader spectrum by looking at four heroines. The understanding of each has come with the growth of the female voice and the understanding of women in society.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to my three sons, Christopher, Matthew and James, in hopes that they understand the importance of continuing education. I am thankful they have been patient and understanding through three Masters programs. I am thankful they understood when Mom was up late writing or working hard on Sunday afternoons. Always keep reaching, dreaming, learning and growing, my loves.

I also want to give a big acknowledgment my friends and family for emotion support and all of the cheerleading through the way. I could not have done it without you. Through pregnancy, birth, overloads and extensions, thank you for always keeping me on track and positive. Thank you all for taking on the stress with me and helping me to the finish line.

I give a special thanks to the library staff at Pensacola State College for buying a lot of books regarding Artemisia Gentileschi to aid in my studies.

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Introduction

The seventeenth-century artist Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) has become a figure that history and popular culture will not soon forget. As an artist, she produced some of the most notable compositions of the seventeenth century. Her subject matter, imagery and narrative have become revered and noted for their exemplary technique and have become crowning achievements of the baroque period. Since her rediscovery and the evolution of her analysis, she has become a new “Old Master” of the era.¹ As the first female accepted into the Accademia dell’Arte del Disegno in 1616, she stood strong among her peers, producing artwork that rivaled her male contemporaries.² Her female subjects held a confidence far different than her male contemporaries’ depictions of fragile heroines. However, it is because of her gender and social constructs and modernist ideology that we have long misunderstood Artemisia and her work.

Artemisia has a renewed appreciation in the twenty-first century that began its development in the 1980s. Prior to 1970, her story was lacking in documentation and was limited by scholars that understood the roles of women within the confines of the seventeenth century. Her story has evolved and become more understood as the rights of women expanded and their voices grew in the 1970s and 1980s. The patriarchal society reflected in modernism, and the repression of women throughout time, led to further obfuscation of Artemisia and her narratives. The repression of women and the power struggle in history has long been a problem in our greater understanding of the roles of women throughout time. The power struggle created negative associations with powerful women, while gender-based stereotypes prevailed in the

¹ Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 4.

² Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1978), 119.

annals of history.³ As culture shifted, and new methodologies arose with new constructs and new ideologies, a more accurate representation of the artist came to light. Her work has continuously inspired investigation, but it has also become a reflection of the culture through the continuously changing scholarship that surrounds our knowledge of Artemisia.

Artemisia Gentileschi was born to Orazio (1563-1639) and Prudentia Montone Gentileschi (1575-1605) in Rome, Italy.⁴ Artemisia's mother died when Artemisia was twelve years old, leaving Artemisia and her brothers to be raised by their father, Orazio, an established artist of the sixteenth century. Orazio aided in the development of Artemisia's artistic education during her adolescence.⁵ The young Artemisia shared an interest in similar subject matter as her father and crafted her style on his examples and teaching. During this time in her life, Artemisia was raped by her teacher, Agostino Tassi (1578-1644), a man that had been brought into the workshop and her life by her father under the guise of her tutor. The rape was followed by a public trial that would take place in 1612 after a false promise of marriage.⁶ These events would invariably impact Artemisia's life, her artwork, and the theories and criticisms of her work.

As previously noted, her father was a well-known artist during the sixteenth century and aided in the development of Artemisia's artistic education during her adolescence. His notoriety and this education would benefit her ability, but would later cause hinderance to the correct attribution of her work. Orazio's established style, catalogue and influence on his daughter saw commonalities in their styles as Artemisia learned much of her compositional constructs from

³ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 21.

⁴ R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 3.

⁵ Anne Sutherland Harris, *Women Artists*, 118.

⁶ R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi—A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968), 153.

him.⁷ Like most artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, they created work with similar subject matter. The baroque period was dominated with religious paintings and depictions because of the Counter Reformation. The focus on religiosity contributed to the subject matter of their work and the continuous focus on similar stories and scenes, which also had similarities in layout, style and subject. Artemisia followed in her father's footsteps, entering into the art world, but quickly building a portfolio and style that rivaled his and with size, skill and scale. Their work would later be the focus and subject of several exhibitions and would help lead feminist theorists to the rediscovery of Artemisia in the 1970s, as they themselves were finding their voice within the pages of history and scholarship.

There are several factors that led to biased and stereotypical readings of Artemisia in art historical scholarship. For years, scholars and historians had incorrect dates of her birth causing several works to be incorrectly attributed to her father.⁸ Her gender also led to bias in early scholarly investigation of her. Her rape and the trial that followed generated more confusion with her statements during the trial, specifically regarding her intelligence. These statements were later assessed and used to denigrate her intellect.⁹ These reports easily swayed modernist scholars and confirmed their expectations of the roles of women in the period that led to credit for her innovations being given to her father. The information garnered from the rape trial also lent itself to psychoanalysis and the exploration of her psyche, a further construct of a patriarchal society.¹⁰ Due to these considerations, the historiography of the artist has several different

⁷ Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 5.

⁸ Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 5.

⁹ Jesse Locker, *The Language of Painting*, 7.

¹⁰ Broude and Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art*, 11.

versions of Artemisia, each reflective of the roles of women throughout history but especially when a treatment was published.

Her rape and the public trial would be a watershed moment in Artemisia's life and one that overshadowed much of her work until the twentieth century. Aspects of the trial would also problematize a full understanding of Artemisia. In the years that followed her death, the trial dominated and dictated the way her work was received by scholars and historians. The rape trial in 1612 remained steadfast in the pages of history and overshadowed her talent so much so that "her life was overshadowed by the scandal generated by the court action she brought against Agostino Tassi, a painter from Perugia who raped her."¹¹ However, it would be this trial and this event in her life that would provide a means to connect her to the twenty-first century and the rights of women, specifically the "Me Too" movement that has been so significant to the rights of women in the twenty-first century.

However, regardless of the rape or trial, it was with her father in his workshop, that she developed her craft and skill that would leave historians and critics in awe for centuries after her death.¹² Though her work is extraordinarily important to the understanding of the arts in the seventeenth century and the image of women in art, it is the studies of her life and her work that have become a substantial and direct reflection of the culture and the social changes of women throughout time.¹³ As the analysis of her work evolves, so too does the culture and the growing acceptance of culture and gender theories with each respective cultural analysis.

¹¹ Marco Bussagli and Mattia Reiche, *Baroque & Rococo*, (New York, Sterling), 57.

¹² Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press), 16.

¹³ R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi—A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968), 153.

During her life, Artemisia became one of the most well-known baroque painters of the seventeenth century because of her narratives and subject matter that did not conform to the typical depictions of the day by her male contemporaries. Over the course of her lifetime, she lived in Rome, Florence, London, and Naples, continuing to evolve her talent and compositions as she traveled.¹⁴ Artemisia quickly established herself within the art community and made a name for herself based on her skill and unique ability to craft the female form with such power and assertiveness. She was an accomplished painter, finding work throughout the seventeenth century while maintaining a name within her field throughout much of her life, working for the King of England, as well as the Medici family.¹⁵ The Medici were among the most illustrious patrons of the arts and commissioned work from the most well-known artists of the time. She was celebrated for her work, though as Mary Garrard explored, her work was not taken seriously as contributing to the field because of her gender. As Garrard argues: “Artemisia was a celebrity whose achievements were lauded extravagantly, but who was not taken seriously as an artist, an equal among equals, either by her contemporaries or by subsequent historians.”¹⁶

These aspects of her life are important not only to the understanding of Artemisia, but to understanding the development of scholarship that accompanies her story. Looking back through the theories of her life, it is clear that much of this information was not known or not considered because of her gender. Benedetti frames the issue as follows: “Only since the advent of gender criticism, however, has Artemisia’s importance as a woman artist been fully established, to the point of making her a landmark figure and her story an almost emblematic tale of fall and

¹⁴ Ibid., 153.

¹⁵ *Italian Women Artists: from Renaissance to Baroque* (Milano: Skira, 2007), 49.

¹⁶ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 4.

redemption.”¹⁷ It would not have been acceptable behavior for a woman of the seventeenth century, or the subsequent periods that followed, to behave in such a manner. It was not until the late twentieth-century movement and women’s rights, as well as the inclusion of Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique*, did society consider that there may have been some notable women in history, and that quite possibly these women have been overlooked. From that point forward, scholarship on Artemisia began to change and evolve as the social and political climate does, as well.

¹⁷ Laura Benedetti, “Reconstructing Artemisia: Twentieth-Century Images of a Woman Artist,” *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 1 (1999), 42.

Literature Review

There have been several significant scholars who have contributed to the literature surrounding Artemisia Gentileschi. However, three were pivotal in the exploration of attributions, narratives and feminist ideology, and prove the most relevant here to understanding the development of her feminist scholarship and her reflection of women throughout history. Throughout the early twentieth century, our understanding of Artemisia began to expand. Longhi (1916), Bissell (1968, 1999), and Spear (1971), began to explore a deeper understanding of Artemisia.¹⁸ Each scholar was male in gender and perspective, though each brought a significant change to the study of Artemisia and her work. There is often a misconception that Artemisia is only understood through ardent female scholars and their scholarship proved that wrong. Each applied different methodologies to her work and arrived at a similar understanding. Using historiographic and feminist methodology, all scholars noted the significance of her role in art, her talent and her impact on the world of art.

Though her life story has been the subject of novels and movies, it is the growth of her portfolio that has become most impressive. Throughout the years her catalogue raisonné has grown with reattributed work and our knowledge of her is now based off of corrections and new theories. These corrections and theories have been discovered, explored and further expanded upon as the development of theory, women's rights and new methodologies have paved way for a more diverse and open dialogue.

Our initial understanding of her developed late with Anna Banti's novel, after her husband Roberto Longhi, wrote an article in 1912 addressing both Artemisia and her father

¹⁸ Garrard, *Artemisa*, 4.

Orazio.¹⁹ The article reintroduced Artemisia to scholars and historians and connected her to Caravaggio, a relationship and connection that would last long into the history books for her similar style.²⁰ However, no scholar preceding Longhi would mention her significance with the spreading of Caravaggio's style and tenebrism until Anne Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin readdress this concept in 1977.²¹ Longhi attributed about fifty-seven works to Artemisia, and in the early 1960s one third of those remained in her catalogue.²² As her art most often was credited to her father, as a women artist, during that time could not conceivably create so much. However, Longhi, praised her and her abilities, not deterring from her talents or shifting the credit to her father.²³ He inspired the writings of his wife in 1947, which sparked a great interest in Artemisia during the 1980s again creating a need for further exploration. However, after Banti's novel was initially published in 1947, Artemisia was left dormant for years. Banti's novel was an interesting version of Artemisia's story creating a dialogue between the author and the artist sporadically throughout the novel. However, the most significant element of her novel was the storyline of Artemisia, introducing her marriage, motherhood and life on a level that readers could connect to as Banti often connected her to her contemporary period. Though the novel was created during the first wave of feminism, this storyline of Artemisia was most connected to by the women of the second and third waves of feminism.

Linda Nochlin addressed such an issue in her famous treatment "Why Are There No Great Female Artists?" Her work explores the limitations not only on art, but on other fields as well and creates a broader understanding of the limitations we have been offered in our history

¹⁹ Mann, "Orazio and Artemisia", 249

²⁰ Ibid., 249.

²¹ Harris Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, 119.

²² Mann, "Orazio and Artemisia", 249.

²³ Ibid., 249.

books. The limitation of information was widely introduced during the height of modernism and the focus on the role of the white male of the upper class.²⁴ Prior to this period, there had been reference to Artemisia, though limited and often accompanied by information of Orazio or Caravaggio. It was not until three significant exhibitions that we saw her staying power rise. Her work did not take full shape in the twenty-first century until it was shown in a *Women of Art* exhibition. Prior to 1977, her work had been seen with her father's. The dual exhibitions often called a more judgmental audience that speculated and criticized the duo ushering in the concept Bal presents of "antivisualism."²⁵ Her work was then continuously compared to her male counterparts in three consecutive shows. Her feature in the *Women of Art* was significant because she was within the setting of other great female artists, with differing imagery and subject matter. The exhibition took place during the rise of the second wave of feminism with the growing rights and voices of women. As this cultural growth rose, so did the interest in Artemisia.

Along with these exhibitions, another scholar was instrumental to understanding the artist. Marry Garrard has been one of the guiding lights with early Artemisia research. Her work was part of a driving force to better understanding the artist as new documentation and information began to surface in the 1980s and 1990s. Though Garrard used feminist methodology to review much of Artemisia's oeuvre, her work was expansive and covered not only feminist theory but also the issues with connoisseurship, the problems of the modernist theory, and limited scope of the early male historians.

²⁴ Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" *Aesthetics*, (January, 1971), 46-51.

²⁵ Mieke Bal, *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 129.

In Garrard's book *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, the author explains the intricacies of Artemisia's female representations and the importance of her work as a revolution of the female form. Garrard writes, "In the context of such pictures, Artemisia's stereotyped female characters and her radical expressive rehearsals of male and female roles stand out- at least as revolutionary, and it is tragic that today no more than four or five works can be identified from her second Roman period, which was perhaps her greatest period of creative achievement."²⁶ Artemisia's female subjects stepped out of the gender stereotypes and took on roles that separated them from suppression and gender-based roles. She brought a freedom, power and liberation to her female subjects.

She goes further to outline the "scholarly neglect" of Artemisia that has made our understanding of this artist so challenging.²⁷ This neglect has created many challenges in fully understanding her range of talent, body of work, and story of her life. Though she had been one of the leading artists of her time, scholars provided little information that did not connect to Artemisia and her work. Early historians, from the 1700s and 1800s were brief and often incorrect in their statements about Artemisia, as Garrard notes: "Lanzi (1828) similarly relied upon Averardo de' Medici (who owned) a now lost Suzanna by Artemisia), yet he could name only two of her paintings, and he asserted boldly, as did Walpole (1762) and other writers, that she was best known for her portraits-a dimension of Artemisia's oeuvre that is presently represented by only two examples."²⁸ Small fractions of information appeared about Artemisia in

²⁶ Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press), 72.

²⁷ Garrard, *The Image*, 4.

²⁸ Garrard, *Artemisa*, 3.

the 1960s and continued to until the 1980s when her work was explored by Judith Mann for inaccuracies in attribution.

These small fractions and scholarly neglect owe much to the roles of women within the parameters of the scholarship. In the 1930s, she was absent from the pages of history, as it would have been salacious to think of a woman included in such a role. The fractions of information that continued to appear lead to incorrect assumptions again because of her gender as well as her now infamous rape trial.²⁹ These small pieces of information and these little glimpses of Artemisia align with the first wave of feminism. Though women may have won the vote they still were regarded as secondary within society.

Though Garrard's work is more radical in position, it has been a leading voice that has helped shape the understanding of Artemisia and her work. She has been criticized for her focus and appreciation for Artemisia her writing has helped shape our knowledge of her life and helped created a more in-depth narrative of her work.³⁰ Mann and Bissell have both generated catalogue raisonnés that have explored and detailed the growth of Artemisia's catalogue since the 1960s.³¹ Though these scholars disagree on some attributions, their work directly shows the connection between the growth of her work, the growth of our understanding of who she was an artist and the development of our society.

Like Garrard, Mann was an integral part of Artemisia's rediscovery and understanding. She was also engrained in feminist ideology, however, her research focused on a historiographic approach that also combined gender studies and feminism. Unlike Garrard, she did not focus

²⁹ Barker, *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, 11.

³⁰ Barker, *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light*, 167.

³¹ *Italian Women Artists: from Renaissance to Baroque*(Milano: Skira, 2007), 54.

entirely on the feminist narrative of Artemisia's work. However, Mann was a key scholar in assessing and analyzing her work and attributions. The leading issue in Artemisia studies has been attribution of her work, Mann was integral in making corrections to Artemisia's catalogue and recovering attributions outside of the feminist prose.

Following the father-daughter exhibition at the St. Louis Art Museum, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy*, Mann further examined the contributions to world of Artemisia and the controversy surrounding her art in the scope of Orazio's. Though rooted in feminist ideals, Mann looks at Artemisia from a historiographic methodology that enables us to understand Artemisia and her intent without reliance on feminist subject matter and reexamines the contributions of Garrard and Bissell without the confines of the second wave of feminism and the Civil Rights impacting her thought process. Mann wrote her analysis in a culture that was gaining momentum toward equality and the fight for women's rights had been achieved with the third wave of feminism. Women scholars were equal to male, women had the same rights as men, and female artists had been rediscovered and the world was accepting them with such embrace and positivity. Mann's catalogue though different from Ward Bissell was not driven solely on one visual and one ideal. Feminism and the depiction of strong females was not the central focus. Mann's catalogue after the St. Louis Exhibition looked at works like Cleopatra and attributed them to Artemisia based on skill, not subject matter.

Mann began the comparison of her artwork with skill and technique and argues that the famous *Susanna* was Artemisia's heroine and not Orazio, "Similarities in the handling of paint, the definition of drapery, and the choice of the palette, confirmed in many people's minds that Susanna belonged in the accepted autograph oeuvre of Artemisia."³² The exhibition served as a

³² Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 185.

point of reference for many scholars and historians. Seeing the two groupings of *oeuvres* together generated a mass of criticism and a renewed interest in both artists. However, Artemisia was the main focus leaving historians with a heightened interest and need to understand her work and life further. This exhibition was also the catalyst for many to urge a previous understanding of the work of the two Baroque artisans. This exhibition was the cause for many to question the attributions of both artists and also reinvestigate the work of Artemisia.

Her time in Naples was significant, though until recently little was known about the length of her time there and the work she created. The father daughter exhibition revealed much about Artemisia, as this phase of her career showed her growth and maturity as an artist. It showed the development of important donors and her church commissions. Scholars like, Riccardo Lattuada felt this stage was of primary focus in Artemisia's work. In looking at pieces such as, *Portrait of a Lady* (figure 1), the sitter's power comes through clearly without an act of sacrifice, death or violence. In looking at the *Penitent Magdalene* (figure 2) Artemisia's mature style is clear once again. Both paintings were attributed to other artists based on location and damage. However, scholars like Bissell adamantly believed the *Magdalene* was created by another artist strictly based on location and subject matter, despite having never seen it in person, "Neither Contini nor Bissell had seen the picture first hand, and they both believed the *Magdalene* was unlocated."³³ Bissell's early assessment lacked proper analysis and yet it still impacted our knowledge of her work. He has since changed his analysis of *Magdalene*. These early attributions and incorrect attributions show the impact of the early feminist ideology that focused only on Artemisia's very powerful heroines.

³³ Mann, *Taking Stock*, 81.

Bissell was the third of the most important scholars to expand the discourse on Artemisia. He was a key figure in the reassessment of Artemisia, though like Garrard, Bissell was a feminist scholar deeply rooted in the ideas that Artemisia solely depicted women of power. His work focused largely on the reattribution of her work and the exploration of her narratives based on strong female leads. Bissell work was key in discovering some of Artemisia's lost pieces, like *Aurora* (figure 3). Bissell explored the ideas of Artemisia and her training from Orazio and helped make distinctions to their separation of style and catalogues. Unlike, Garrard Bissell was more focused on learning the facts of her development from a formalistic standpoint. He welcomed the training from Orazio and made connections to her growth apart from his work and guidance. However, like Garrard, Bissell he focused only on feministic narrative. He found it difficult to attribute works to Artemisia that did not hold the strong heroic female narrative like *Cleopatra* or *Magdalene*. Yet, like Mann he made major contributions to understanding Artemisia's full range of work. He also made significant connections to Artemisia and Caravaggio and their combine impact on the world of art in the seventeenth century.³⁴ Bissell, like Longhi, acknowledged the impact of the two artists, as most scholars had grouped Artemisia in with his followers, the Caravaggists. Instead Bissell gave Artemisia as much credit as he had Caravaggio in creating a new platform for artists to explore within the world of tenebrism.³⁵

Mieke Bal goes further to explore the phenomena that is Artemisia in her book *The Artemisia Files*, and explores the legend that began to precede her truth. Though there was limited information about the artist, stories and theories about Artemisia and her work often blurred the truth of her that does exist. In reviewing six different essays Bal begins to separate

³⁴ R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi—A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968), 153.

³⁵ Laura Benedetti, *Reconstructing Artemisia*, (Durham, Duke University Press), 3.

fact from fiction and broaden our understanding of Artemisia with a balance of respect and equality that approached her work on a bias level. Bal approaches the understanding of Artemisia in a similar manner to Barker and Mann. The collection of essays validates Artemisia's talent and significance in the seventeenth century, but also explores the misconceptions about her life and story. Bal includes an essay from Griselda Pollock, that focuses on the often-romanticized version of Artemisia's life, specifically regarding Agnes Merlet's romanticized film, *Artemisia*. Bal also includes two separate essays that discuss the ideas of comparison and she raises the concept of antivisualism.³⁶

Bal noted that while the feminist waves were the most valuable to her overall judgement, they too skewed the way in which we see and understand her work.³⁷ Aside from the cultural influence the visual influence and settings that her work was often presented as an additional challenge in the overall understanding of her work.³⁸ She included a reference to one of the most significant statements of Richard Spear, he once theorized the understanding of Artemisia depended on who were talking to and who was the author. This further validates that continuous change in rhetoric of Artemisia throughout the years. It also depended on the visual experience and the setting. Bal further includes Nannette Salomon's findings note that, there were two specific moments that significantly impacted our understanding of Artemisia. The first and most obvious is the rise of the feminist movement and that continues through all three waves. Second, was the impact of Vasari on Artemisia and the understanding of art history and art criticism.

³⁶ Mieke Bal, *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*(Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 131.

³⁷ Bal, *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking*, 137.

³⁸ Bal, *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking*, 131.

Sheila Barker also introduced the ideas and significance of Vasari and how he directly impacted our knowledge of artists during the 1500s and created the standard for which art would be discussed for the centuries that followed. Vasari's writings focused predominantly on male artists, though, he did include a reference to Sofonisba Anguissola, and mentioned her "ability to portray things from life."³⁹ This small but important reference to a female artist gave recognition to the fact that there were female artists working around this time. However, his brief mention of women set the tone for further scholarship regarding female artists, that they are secondary and only small fractions would be sufficient when addressing their work. Furthermore, his overall criticisms allowed a distinction and evaluation to be recognized by his audience, upper class, white male, who tended to focus most of their scholarship, attention and focus in general to the leading male achievers.⁴⁰

In conjunction with the discoveries of Artemisia, Garrard and Norma Broude go further to expand the understanding of feminism and art history. Through several different texts the writers explore the significance of feminist art and feminist theory to broaden our understanding of the history of art and the impact of social and cultural shifts within society. Their work has aided a further understanding of the evolution of feminist theory in art throughout the Renaissance and into postmodernism. The reflection of the methodology is clear in the analysis of the art in each movement, and the growth of feminism through the years. It is important to note that these writings are most helpful when exploring the concepts of Artemisia because her work connects to feminist theory above all. Though there are several avenues of methodology that can help navigate Artemisia's body of work, and feminist theory was most significant to

³⁹ Sheila Barker, *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy Careers, Fame, and Collectors*(London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

finding Artemisia's voice and expanding on her narrative. It is because of the evolution of women in our culture that we have been able to more widely understand Artemisia. Garrard and Broude were integral roles in making this connection and formulating a better understanding of Artemisia in connection to the change from modernist theory through postmodernism, pluralism and feminism.

Though it is not only feminist theory that has helped in articulating Artemisia's voice. By using a historiographic methodology, as well as feminist ideals, Elizabeth Cohen further explored Artemisia's very public rape trial. Cohen's "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," helps separate preconceived notions of scandal and sexuality. Though Cohen's factual presentation of the trial includes many of the statements made by Artemisia herself that have left scholars puzzled or incorrect. Her presentation of the trial was simply to dispel all misconceptions of Artemisia and her connection to Tassi. This connection is the same connection often exploited and romanticized. She explores Artemisia as a woman, artist and great talent ready to create for the world, "In the limelight of gender studies, Artemisia has been resurrected from obscurity as an artistic amazon, a heroine of resistance to patriarchy, a potent woman whose work recognizes and lauds her own kind."⁴¹

Jesse Locker's work further explores these misconceptions that have been developed from the trial and Artemisia's statements, however, he does not specifically focus on the rape or trial. He briefly references the trial because of her statement of illiteracy, "However, his work specifically validates to her intellect, abilities, and literary prowess. He further solidifies her intellect through her understanding of literature, mythology, and Ovid."⁴² His work challenges the

⁴¹ Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (2000), 47.

⁴² Sheila Barker, *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light*, 91.

understanding that Artemisia was illiterate and destroys the notion that she may have been the unintelligent girl, as early scholars had deemed her. Locker uses paper trail of various writings that have begun to appear about Artemisia and who she was outside of her art. He explores textual documentation that has both been reviewed and some new information that has surfaced within the context of her personal life. He explores her friendships and connections to poets, writers and playwrights creating a solid understanding of her status and role within society. The writings validate her status and her role within society throughout her life and connected her to some of the early feminist ideology of the proto-feminist movement.⁴³

Each scholar noted above contributed to the narrative of Artemisia's life that we understand in the twenty-first century. They each gave life to her work and further connected her to the narrative of the liberation of women and growth of women's rights. Each explored her work within the context of her travels, her talent, and helped scholarship and history understand her intelligence. Though few focused on the trial they helped clarify those assumptions that her work was strictly autobiographical or a reflection of revenge that had long plagued her body of work. Their contributions have broken the misconceptions of Artemisia and created a more consistent narrative of her work and her voice.

Methodology

When beginning the investigation and exploration of Artemisia, her life and her scholarship, it is important to note that there are several versions of Artemisia that have developed throughout the years, decades, and centuries. These variations of her have become

⁴³ Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 70-71.

clear reflections of the societies, cultures and ideologies that they were born from. Though her work is most often associated with the feminist movement and feminist theory, her *story* takes shape and expands with the roles of women throughout history and comparably much of the theory and methodology derived over the years. Still today, we are learning a new voice, a new tone of Artemisia as we are developing a new language for women in our current climate. The understanding of Artemisia has been slow and progressive, as the rights of women have been slow but steady to change and expand. Today, she is more influential than she was in the seventeenth century. Her story and its changing narratives correlate to the changing roles of our society. Fortunately, Artemisia is still educating us on the roles of women and our stance in society with her powerful figures.

The evolution of feminism and gender studies since the 1960s has afforded a new lens through which past female artists, like Artemisia, can be assessed. In looking at the change from modernism to postmodernism, it is clear that postmodernism opened up the ideology for other narratives and methods of thought.⁴⁴ As postmodernism explores the concepts beyond one narrative, including pluralism, and looking at theory and method through many lenses and acknowledging that there are many narratives and the world and our cultural was multidimensional, helped the rise of feminist theory in art.⁴⁵ More specifically, the inclusion of feminist theory and feminist theory on art, greatly impacted how the roles of women in society began to change and how this change is evident in the changing perception of her work.

Furthermore, the perception of Artemisia's work has continued to evolve as the development of women's rights expanded throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and though to today.

⁴⁴ Broude and Garrard, *Expanding Discourse*, 2.

⁴⁵ Broude and Garrard, *Expanding Discourse*, 5.

With the developing rights and voices of women within society comes new analysis or scholarship of her work, as well. As the voice and rights of women began to expand, so did the understanding of her work. Though her work is predominantly feminist in narrative, looking at this body of feminist scholarship can provide a holistic understanding of the evolution of women's rights throughout the years.⁴⁶

During the early years of the scholarship on Artemisia, in the early 1900s, women's rights were growing, during the first wave of feminism. It was then that Roberto Longhi mentioned Artemisia when documenting Caravaggio. It is in this minor inclusion that we can see this growth in the discussion of Artemisia as early as 1912.⁴⁷ The methodology that follows Longhi connects to the changing rights of women and aligns with each wave of feminism during contemporary scholarship. However, because of the varying methodologies and theories prior to this, and the changing tides of social constructs, it has taken centuries to uncover her true story, and even longer for historians and scholars to understand her full impact on the world of art.

Early scholars were biased in their understanding of Artemisia because she was a woman and a woman with a history. She was noted for her portraits by the seventeenth-century biographer Filippo Baldinucci, a subject that was typical for female artists.⁴⁸ Another publication from 1715 had a reference to Artemisia and her work, though she was noted as "Sofonisba Gentileschi." The name was a combination of hers and Sofonisba Anguissola's, a Renaissance artist, also female, who worked around the same time as Artemisia.⁴⁹ Thus, we can see that her individuality was not clear cut in early, contemporary treatments. She was treated as "hors de

⁴⁶ Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

⁴⁷ Mann, "Orazio and Artemisia," 249.

⁴⁸ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622*, 4.

⁴⁹ Locker, *The Language of Painting*, 15.

combat” a Renaissance term that referenced women that lacked intelligence.⁵⁰ As Garrard notes, she was not included by Aldo De Rinaldis in his 1929 treatment of Neapolitan painters, and she was still not included in several publications during the 1970s that focused on Caravaggio, while including Orazio Gentileschi without any reference to Artemisia.⁵¹

Her treatment in scholarship started slowly with brief inclusions, primarily of the trial that consumed several years of her life. However, in the historiographic view of the development of the scholarship of Artemisia, we can make clear connections to the hardships of women and the expansion of women’s rights throughout the centuries in conjunction to our understanding of Artemisia. As we saw the growth of the feminist voice in scholarship, we gained a deepening understanding of Artemisia. As women became more prominent in society with a louder voice and more rights, our understanding of Artemisia expanded, and her voice began to speak louder. In the twenty-first century, women gained a louder voice with the “Me Too” movement, and Artemisia’s paintings of Judith flooded popular culture. Her work, though created in the seventeenth century, has been a mirror of the development of women’s rights throughout history continuing into the twentieth century. She has now created a voice of power in the twenty-first century.⁵²

Throughout much of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, scholars have understood Artemisia for her feminist ideals and unique depiction of women, screaming liberation and often sacrificing themselves for the cause. It was during these times that we saw the most drastic change in women’s rights. The *Feminine Mystique* came out in the 1960s and connected with the

⁵⁰ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵² Rory Cooke Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2016), 125.

second wave of feminism as they gained momentum for liberation and equality. The roles of women in society were reconsidered as was the inclusion of new investigative studies of women throughout history. Feminist theory began as postmodernism ushered in new ways of theory with new concepts that addressed all genders and races.

As postmodernism developed on the heels of modernism, it opened up the fields of thought and possibility beyond the limited scope of the upper-class male. It challenged gender-based notions and the ideas of societal order. The understanding of Artemisia changed with the thought and logic due to the postmodernist and poststructuralist methodology and theory as did the voice of women in society. As Garrard and Norma Broude note, “The postmodern consciousness that representations, especially of the body, are steeped in gender assumptions, and that these play a powerful role in the production and perpetuation of ideological gender attitudes has strongly informed the work of feminist art historians.”⁵³ This new lens has helped look at Artemisia’s figures with a clear perspective. Her work was not defined by the male gaze and her figures were not exploited by their gender. The feminist scholars understood their body language and the stories they had been trying to tell for centuries.

Though her story has been a challenge to fully unveil, postmodernism ushered in new waves of theory with multidimensional narratives and constructs to reevaluate her work and reconsider its meaning. Although her rape had been the leading discussion of Artemisia, we have seen the veil of stigma dissipate and her work with her voice has begun to take the lead. Prior to postmodernism, her work was assessed and was analyzed by male historians, who made gender-based assumptions about her work and its narrative, arguing much of it belonged to her father’s

⁵³ Garrard and Broude, *Expanding Discourse*, 7.

oeuvre.⁵⁴ Initially, the rediscovery of her work in the 1960s was met with these stereotypes and assumptions by a patriarchal society and created limitations that hindered the greater understanding of her work, talent and intent, “In the case of Artemisia Gentileschi, gender considerations, both those applying her time and those subsequently imposed, further problematize the issue of oeuvre formation.”⁵⁵ Information from her rape trial in 1612 was used to assess her entire body of work. These methodologies created limited ideologies and wrapped theories around her rape, gender, and the common idea that women were secondary and problematic.⁵⁶

Modernist theory lent itself to an understanding and analysis that connected to a patriarchal society.⁵⁷ The postmodern ideology though limited in its scope and understanding of feminist theory, broke the limitations of the patriarchal strong hold on society and its fabric and allowed the growth of feminist thought. The broadening understanding of gender studies deepened the resolve to find a better more factual and equal understanding of history. Though the push of the postmodern theory with the integration of gender studies did create a “fracturing” of the feminist agency it did broaden the scope of multifaceted methodology.⁵⁸ However, the fracturing caused a displacement of the main focus on inequality, breaking up the agency of feminism. Thusly, the fracturing has redirected the analysis and understanding of the experience of a woman to the experience of women.⁵⁹ With each fracturing and each wave of feminism, we have discovered a new layer of Artemisia.

⁵⁴ *Italian Women Artists: from Renaissance to Baroque* (Milano: Skira, 2007), 55.

⁵⁵ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622*, 2.

⁵⁶ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 4.

⁵⁷ Garrard and Broude, *Expanding Discourse*, 21.

⁵⁸ Garrard and Broude, *Expanding Discourse*, 5.

The waves of feminism play a significant role in understanding Artemisia and also understanding the evolution of her story. The first wave of feminism fell in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and found its roots in the right to vote as well as women's suffrage.⁶⁰ The second wave began in the 1960s and often is connected to Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*.⁶¹ The second wave continued into the 1980s and addressed the inequality and oppression women were still experiencing. During the second wave, women held one of the most significant demonstrations in history, the "Women's Strike for Equality." The strike was nationwide, as women all over the country expressed their outrage at the stereotypes of gender roles and the oppression of women in society and in the workforce.⁶²

During the second wave two groups emerged, one radical and one for equal rights. Both groups sought to make a difference in different ways to gain equality.⁶³ The radical group sought to break the binds of the patriarchal society with radical change and radical reform and included all women in their fight. However, the women in the equal rights group sought to gain equality through more formal tactics and policies though they were limited in their acceptance of women of all sexualities. The third wave followed the second with a motion to end the hostility of feminism and the backlash that occurred with the second wave. The third wave also included women of all cultures, races and classes as the first two waves were represented largely by white women of the middle to upper class.⁶⁴ Banti's novel fell within the first two waves of feminism,

⁵⁹ Broude and Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, 2.

⁶⁰ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 51

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁴ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 103.

an important observation to the progression of Artemisia and her rediscovery.⁶⁵ It was not until the 1980s that Banti's novel was appreciated and understood as the second wave feminists sought to end equality even in the pages of history.⁶⁶

Through the change in culture and the inclusion of the Civil Rights movement the first wave of the feminist movement began and there was a significant change in the perception of her work and a greater understanding of her intent, her role and her impact with the rise of feminism.⁶⁷ Also, the integration of feminism, specifically the second wave in the 1970s, readdressed the scholarship of Artemisia and her work become the topic of conversation and study, and her voice and narrative changed. This change would not have been achieved without the rise of the female voice in society and in scholarship.

Artemisia was not the only female artist of this time, however, her work differed in its narrative and its voice and set her apart. Her inclusion of emotion and raw power separated her heroines from that of others, like the work of Lavinia Fontana. She not only told the stories of women in history she told of their power and strength.⁶⁸ She focused continuously on the central female heroine, "Of nearly sixty paintings she is believed to have completed, over forty had women in central roles."⁶⁹ Though her paintings have remained the same, the scope of this narrative has continued to change over the years. Each finding of Artemisia, has changed with expanding voice of women throughout time.⁷⁰ The early developments from Roberto Longhi in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁶ Benedetti, *Reconstructing Artemisia*, 7.

⁶⁷ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 65.

⁶⁸ R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné*, 117.

⁶⁹ Theodore Rabb, *Renaissance Lives: Portraits of an Age*, (New York, Basic Books), 183.

⁷⁰ Sheila Barker, *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy Careers, Fame, and Collectors* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 167.

1912 revealed her power and talent but this was thwarted in the 1960s by Rudolf and Margot Wittkower and she was completely removed from many pieces of scholarship in the 1960s as noted above. These negative connections connect to the development of the second wave of feminism as the women's liberation movement was beginning. Scholars wanting to silence women in contemporary culture silenced Artemisia instead.

Looking at the overview of methodology, in the early years of her rediscovery, scholars doubted her skill and still believed her work to be largely reliant on her father's aid and direction with no concept of her vast artistic portfolio.⁷¹ The early writings about Artemisia from the 1960s deemed her lascivious and quickly disregarded her achievements and talents, as noted by Judith Mann and also through poetry included by Bissell in his 1999 catalogue. Artemisia was stereotyped for her determination, "as it assumes that a woman who had succeed in a male profession necessarily exploited her gender, if not her sexuality."⁷² It was difficult for early scholars like Rudolf and Margot Wittkower to comprehend a woman could gain such momentum, at a time when women had little freedom in the seventeenth century.⁷³ During this assessment it was the early 1960s and women's rights were developing, with the second wave of feminism fast approaching.

Though modernist scholarship was still in circulation and many still believed her talent and creativity to be slight and that much of the work attributed to her was in fact crafted and directed by Orazio.⁷⁴ Orazio was male and giving credit to him would seem appropriate and

⁷¹Garrard and Bourde, *Expanding Discourse*, 247.

⁷² Sabrina Deturk, Keith Christiansen, and Judith W. Mann, "Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 1 (January 2003), 250.

⁷³ R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi—A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968), 155.

⁷⁴ Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi," 153.

logically given the time frame. However, the second wave of the feminist movement helped revealed a different reality that played out in the seventeenth century. Orazio may have guided Artemisia in her early years but her impact on the world of art was undoubtedly one of the most significant of the Baroque period as first noted by Keith Christiansen in his review of the “Gentileschi Exhibition.”⁷⁵

The research of Artemisia reflects these changing roles of theory and connects to the ideas of feminism, and more specifically, as Garrard notes, the ideas of power and agency. It was during this time that Pope Urban VIII, publicly made patronizing and derogatory comments regarding female artists during the seventeenth century, not only comparing their work to men’s work but also further expanding an idea of their arrogance.⁷⁶ These preconceptions and misconceptions generated a difficult environment for the growth of women as well as limited their recognition of achievements. These ideas also followed the women artists through history and scholarship, creating a negative initial understanding.

Artemisia was in fact dealing with power in the male dominant world of the seventeenth century and her time in Venice was consistent with some of the leading proto-feminists of the 1600s in Italy.⁷⁷ Recently Jesse Locker has introduced the idea that Artemisia was quite possibly part of the proto-feminist movement of the seventeenth century, a fact that Bissell addressed in 1999 when noting her possible feminist undertones and Sheila Barker also references in 2017.

Artemisia was struggling with the power within this culture and trying to find an agency for her ideology and voice. However, it was quite possible that she did have an agency of women

⁷⁵ Christiansen, “Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition,” 102.

⁷⁶ *Italian Women Artists*, 49.

⁷⁷ Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting*, 74.

with the same ideals while she was in Venice.⁷⁸ Her possible encounters with Arcangela Tarabotti and Lucrezia Marinelli indicate her awareness of feminism ideals and its presence within Venice while she was there. These women sought to break the binds of gender inequality as early as 1654.⁷⁹ This would connect Artemisia to the very beginnings of feminism. However, her time in Venice is still under investigation as Jesse Locker is still uncovering information about Artemisia and her time there. This information also includes several new pieces of art to include in her growing oeuvre.

Since Artemisia's rediscovery in the late 1960s, she had been the subject of controversy, scrutiny and reawakening over the last 50 years. Once absent in the history books, bound by a rape trial that would haunt her existence long into her afterlife, Artemisia's catalogue raisonne has continued to evolve as has our understanding of her and her impact on the world of her. There are volumes of books that explore the now infamous rape trial and many that delve further into her any psychoanalytical presence of autobiographical traces in her work.

Scholars and historians generated a story of her life and her work that solely focused on the rape of Artemisia. During the early scholarship, Artemisia's work was acknowledged but not without her dependency on her father and cause for concern regarding her past. It is not that Artemisia Gentileschi had long been a mystery to the history of art, it is her story that has remained a mystery due to its continuous changing and reassessment. Her artwork during the seventeenth century was revolutionary in its impact on the world of art during the time of her life and art thereafter. However, it was the ideology and the methodology that was imposed onto Artemisia and her work that made any public knowledge of her challenging. The idea of a free

⁷⁸ Sheila Barker, *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

thinking, hardworking, intellectual woman was simply not considered because of the scholars analyzing her and the time period being considered. When her work was considered it was either connected to her father or her rape and deemed “revenge art.”

The understanding of Artemisia has grown exponentially since the development of postmodernism and feminism. Postmodernism gave a voice to a multidimensional understanding of people, experiences and cultures. It allowed the flourishing of feminism and opened the doors to embrace a greater understanding of people beyond the white male perspective. Though, as previously mentioned, the pressure of gender studies fractured the feminist movement it did play a large role in deciphering much of what we know about female artists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods.⁸⁰ Gender studies explored the ideas of gender and the response to the world “from the position of gendered experience.”⁸¹ For women this role and response becomes clear in the ideals set forth by society. Gender then becomes conflicted with the needs and wants of the artist and what society expects. This conflict deeply impacted the understanding of Artemisia and her artwork. She broke the confines of a typical seventeenth century woman. Though, she was not singular in her actions and voice, she was one of the few growing proto-feminists in Italy during the seventeenth century.

The early years of feminist methodology surrounding Artemisia were the most significant to changing our understanding. However, these early scholars also created some turbulence in the story of Artemisia. They focused largely on a narrative that surrounded the powerful heroines. They did not consider the *Cleopatras* or *Penitent Magdalene* because they lacked the

⁸⁰ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 2.

⁸¹ Barker, *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, 16.

theatrics of her active, strong and powerful women. The feminist scholars view Artemisia's work with such fervency and vitality they focused only on the works that were of powerful, heroic women and did not attribute any work that did not obtain these visuals. Works like, *Cleopatra*,

There remain basic issues of attribution and dating, and these are best dealt with in the context of a full-scale, monographic exhibition, where pictures can be compared directly. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a case in which an exhibition could contribute more fruit- fully to shaping our views of an artist. The fact that the author- ship of a picture of the quality of the *Cleopatra* (cat. nos. 17, 53) is still the subject of debate-it is catalogued here under both Orazio and Artemisia-testifies to the problems that attend the study of her paintings.⁸²

Though feminist theory has been significant in expanding our knowledge of her catalogue it did created a limited scope of understanding her work based on subject matter and representation.

In recent years, using the historiographic approach that included feminism and gender studies, Artemisia's life and contribution to art has become more widely understood in its totality. With a more expansive investigation by scholars like Jesse Locker and Mieke Bal who have further evaluated her significance in the world of art proving that her intent and impact is not defined strictly by feminism. Sheila Barker has further explored the roles of gender and the impact that has had on our understanding of Artemisia. The roles of gender impacted the perception of women during the seventeenth century and also the scholarship of women who stepped out of the expected roles of women.

In using a historiographical approach, we can explore the various methodologies that have been used to explore Artemisia's works of art the growth has both helped gain a deeper understanding of her work and her life. Through these various methods the growth of her oeuvre has become a spectacular catalogue with her *Susannas* and *Judiths* as major figures within her

⁸² Mann, "Orazio and Artemisia," VIII.

body of work. As postmodernism gained momentum it ushered in psychoanalysis, gender studies and a feminist examination of her work. All theories reflective of the culture in which they existed. However, both have gone through scrutiny and criticism regarding attribution and intent.

Her work was reintroduced with the 1976 “Women Artists 1550-1950” exhibition that showcased six of her pieces. One of the pieces on display was her Uffizi *Judith*.⁸³ This exhibition though limited in size was one of the most significant in her reintroduction to the art world. The Uffizi *Judith* then began to filter into textbooks, and Artemisia began her dissemination into the pages of history. It was during this time that the second wave of feminism was underway and the understanding of women, the roles, rights and the inequality was a large focus of study during this time. Women had won the right to vote in 1920 during the first wave, when Longhi had acknowledged her talent and her impact to the world of art.⁸⁴

Prior to feminism and the exploration of gender studies, modernism and postmodernism dominated the landscape of methodology, theory and culture.⁸⁵ While modernism did depart from its more formalistic roots it was limited in scope and offered more connection to the dominant role of the upper-class white male.⁸⁶ It is during this time that much of the roles of women were still marginalized and suppressed. Following modernism, postmodernism ushered in a new wave of theory that allowed the parameters of feminism, gender studies and race and ethnicity to be explored.⁸⁷ Though feminist ideology had long been a part of society and a

⁸³ Mann, “Orazio and Artemisia”, 249.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Women Artists*, 118.

⁸⁵ Mary D. Garrard, *ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI AROUND 1622*(BERKELEY, LOS ANGELES U.A., CA: University of California Press, 2001), 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

growing voice, postmodernism allowed for feminism to expand further into the arts and humanities, giving it a voice for methodology and criticism.

Her appearance in the *Women Artists* exhibition in 1976 reopened the dialogue on her work and reintroduced popular culture to her Uffizi *Judith*. With the new wave of feminist scholars her work began a reexamination. Feminist historians challenged the misconceptions of her work and her methodology. The new shift moved from the modernist to feminist analysis with the introduction of postmodernism. Postmodernism ushered in Pluralism and garnered a cultivation of a deeper understanding of those beyond the white male.

Inequality had been recognized, as was the concept of suffrage, during the first wave, and finding these themes within her work during the 1970s aligned with the Second Wave.⁸⁸ The second wave brought forth liberation and Artemisia was the face of liberation with her heroic women and canvases of martyrdom and liberation once again finding these themes within her work. This new wave of thinking allowed Artemisia's work to be more widely accepted and understood.

There have been many challenges to the understanding of Artemisia and her work. The role of women in society and the desired role of women in society became the first and more likely obstacle to understanding Artemisia. As Mary Garrard notes, "The very existence of female artists was deeply problematic for male artists, as can be seen in the theoretical claims designed to contain them."⁸⁹ With the roles of women, the challenge of psychoanalysis, and postmodernism and poststructuralism both aided and hindered the development of the

⁸⁸ Miriam Schneir, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Random House, 1972), xiv.

⁸⁹ Broude and Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, 4.

Artemisian movement. Along with these theories and studies her life and role as a woman fundamentally deterred our understanding of her role in society as well as correct and true attributions of her work.

Though Artemisia was an exception to the rules of women in the seventeenth century.⁹⁰ Her work is largely reflective of the growing voice of women in the twentieth and twenty-first century. However, as Garrard noted: “taking gender into account in the study of Artemisia Gentileschi involves not only deviation from a rhetorical norm in her reinvention of female characters but also realizing the risk of imposing gender-stereotyped expectations on her.”⁹¹ Although, some women did have the same successes and the same abilities, to work freely and opening as an artist, she was one of the first women to make such a significant impact.⁹² She was one of the first to rival the male artists in work, talent and commissions. She was one of first individuals to spread the Caravaggist style that ran through the course of the seventeenth century with such fury. As explained by Harris, Nochlin and Longhi, that it was because of Artemisia that his style and tenebrism travelled through Italy and Europe.⁹³

Her life has become the subject of novels and movies as we all marvel at the phenomenon that has been rediscovered from the seventeenth century. As more information about the artist continues to surface along with corrected attributions the full range of the artist comes into alignment with social constructs. It is because of the shift in culture that these new attributions are widely accepted by scholars. Incorrect information and gender-based theory blinded many from truly seeing her power and her talent. As a testament to that fragility, Locker notes that:

⁹⁰ Sutherland. Harris Nochlin, *Women Artists* 118.

⁹¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622*, 6.

⁹² Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, 119.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

“the state of Artemisia scholarship is such that a single document can alter substantially our understanding of her work and her career.”⁹⁴ The scope of Artemisia has drastically expanded over the years, though each find brings us closer to each new version celebrated within its respective culture.

In recent times historians, producers and authors have looked further into Artemisia’s story and have developed a softer interpretation of her narrative. While some approach her work with the intent to explain her intelligence and technical skill through paper trails and written documentation of her contribution to the arts, other scholars have focused on her voice without the hard focus on feminism but with the inclusion of the culture it was created in and the story it conveys.

Contemporary movies and novels have romanticized Artemisia’s involvement with Tassi, some have fictionalized a relationship between the two. Initially, she was dubbed a vengeful woman in history, creating revenge on her canvas. Early scholars believed Artemisia, images show purely an act of revenge on canvas, “A young woman experiences rape followed by public torture and humiliation. Shortly afterward, she paints her first version of a scene depicting a woman decapitating a bearded man.”⁹⁵ It was this revenge and her love life have been the stories most explored regarding Artemisia. However, her story has changed throughout the years, consistently painting in a different light with a different motive. In contemporary adaptations of Artemisia, we have seen a new interpretation of her life and more specifically her story of Tassi. In looking at these various depictions of her we are seeing a softer story of the event that would move into the realm of romance. These new stories of her life create a romance that takes the

⁹⁴ Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 2.

⁹⁵ Quinn, *Broad Strokes: 15 Women Who Made Art and Made History*, 25.

place of the rape trial, skewing the truth and ultimately making some connections to the inaccuracies of the historians from the 1970s and early 1980s. The film in 1997, *Artemisia*, creates an Artemisia that loves Tassi and protects in through the trial. Susanna Scarparo explores these false representations of the truth and sheds light on this new idealized and romanticized treatment of Artemisia we have seen throughout the years. She specifically looks at Anna Banti's writings and novel regarding Artemisia. These are concepts that did not stay in the 1940s but also continued into modern day as noted by Susan Felleman in "Mud, Lust, and Abject Desire: Myths of Origin and the Cinematic Object." Books like *Blood Water Paint* from 2018 and movies have fictionalized and sensationalized their relationship further. Additionally, this is a focal point that Cohen explores as well in her research of the trial. Artemisia's heroines take a backseat most often to the story of her life. The rape trial has consumed much of our knowledge of Artemisia. However, Cohen's research has revealed the truth behind their "relationship" that has since been idealized and romanticized.

Regardless of the various methodologies and theories, Artemisia Gentileschi has become a pivotal figure in art history. Her heroines and visual narratives have created a powerful voice that has expounded the constraints of time. Women of the twenty-first century have found their voice within the seventeenth-century master. Though her work has transcended time and is a mirror that reflects the growth and changes of society, Artemisia and her body of work have become a reflection of culture and a reflection of Women's Rights throughout time.⁹⁶ As we see the growth of her body of work and the increasing attributions, we can make direct connections to the growth of the roles of women in society. Specifically looking at her *Judith*, *Cleopatra*, *Lucretia* and *Susanna* we can see the perception of these two heroines evolve and expand

⁹⁶ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 10.

throughout the years and centuries. The understanding of each has come with the growth of the female voice and the understanding of women in society. These pieces of information have helped steer the study of Artemisia further with each aspect of her life a significant factor in the many different fields of methodology that flourished on the heels of postmodernism.

Analysis

As we move through the twenty-first century, we are developing a deeper understanding of Artemisia and her work. The growing research into her work in the early 1980s paved the way for deeper introspection of authorship without the constant reference to the rape. Her work instead was not entirely void of “revenge” but held more of an introspective dance around empowerment and knowledge. Indeed, Artemisia was an educated woman, and in looking through her body of work we can make clear connections to her intelligence and education through the stories and images she shares. Through the range of scholarship beginning in the 1970s we can understand the growth of the female voice and understand the range in liberation Artemisia was exploring during the seventeenth century.

Instead of a purely violent and a psychoanalytical interpretation of her work, scholars started to understand the growth of her heroines in context to their time of creation. Research began to focus on her need to create to inform her audience of the ideas of suppression and liberation from another vantage point. She produced work from Biblical stories, mythological stories, and historical content. She used these moments to create compositions that captivated her audience and draws them in to become active participants in the scene she has created. Garrard has note, for instance, an echo of Artemisia’s art in the work of famed Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn: “Several of Rembrandt’s naturalistic female nude images of the 1630s bear suggestive resemblance to the *Lucretia*, *Susanna*, and *Cleopatra*.”⁹⁷ Though the perception of her work is changing her impact on women of contemporary society will continue experience her liberation with a greater understanding of her life and the roles of women.

⁹⁷ Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 72.

Artemisia adopted the popular subject matter of the times. Much of the Baroque period corresponds to religious imagery and iconography found within the canvases and wood panels, however, her execution and depiction, and ability to create a narrative, was the element of her work that made her stand out amongst the crowd. Her powerful heroines held a power and a confidence far different than her male contemporaries' depictions of fragile heroines. Her ability to utilize female models from her own form created a deeper understanding of the female figure that extended beyond her male counterparts. Her subjects were martyrs, saviors, rulers and warriors. They were not passive, posed or inactive. Each of Gentileschi's heroines was emotional and determined and told a story with emotion and narrative.⁹⁸

Her crowning achievements reside in her female subjects. Gentileschi has created over 40 masterpieces that chronicled the stories of women in history and religion. Though her stories share the same subject matter that was popular in the seventeenth century her content focused on different aspects of these stories. Her most well-known pieces share the stories of Susanna, Lucretia, Cleopatra and Judith. Each woman majorly impacted religion and history yet their painted narratives never shared their triumphs until Artemisia began retelling their truths.⁹⁹

Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* (figure 4) has become one of her most widely known works. Though the painting has long been under scrutiny and for years was attributed to her father, Orazio Gentileschi. The story of *Susanna* is one that can be seen as far back as the Early Christian period.¹⁰⁰ It was not until the Renaissance that the depiction of Susanna turned from "lamb" to seductress. In the Renaissance period we see *Susanna* with the pureness of Mary, ultimately turning slowly into a very seductive Magdalene surrounded by erotic depictions that

⁹⁸ Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists*, 119.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁰ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 185.

only enhance this theory. The depiction of the seductive Susanna shows the elders peering at her though little compassion is left to the young woman as she seems unbothered. As Garrard describes, “[Cavaliere] D’Arpino’s Susanna (from 1727) poses seductively for the viewer, who is encouraged by her overt gaze to imagine himself in the fortunate position of the approaching Elders, though he is evidently much more welcome.”¹⁰¹ The erotic overtones of the subject matter blur the moral of the biblical lesson. However, Artemisia’s depiction of the story directly conveys the compassion the viewer should be feeling for this young woman.

Artemisia shows the pain of the peering eyes. Her work went beyond erotic overtones that had been created during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The female nude with the leering men gave artists an opportunity to create an image that bordered on pornography without being offensive. In focusing more on the eroticism, the lesson was lost, and the compassion was never understood. Through the specific arrangement of her composition Artemisia retold the story with an emotional aspect that clearly strikes the viewer. Unlike her peers, Artemisia brought the leering men closer to Susanna with them, intruding on her space, as Contini and Solinas describe: “By using a vertical format and placing the elders so that they seem to press down upon Susanna, Artemisia developed the most compelling image to date of Susanna’s psychological distress.”¹⁰²

In other depictions, the elders are off in the distance almost safely distant. Artemisia’s elders cross the lines of personal space. While they are not touching her, the danger and unwanted gaze is clear and direct. Though the composition was one that was learned from her father’s instruction, the tight grouping of figures further indicated the unwelcomed advances.

¹⁰¹Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 188.

¹⁰² Roberto Contini and Francesco Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, (Milan, ORE Cultura), 53.

The elders stand over her peering down upon her causing her to cower and wither below them. As she blocks the burning gaze viewers can see her pain. Tintoretto's version painted in oil on canvas during in the Mannerist period 1555 (figure 5) showed a Susanna that seemed not to care or notice the peering old men with the purity of Mary.¹⁰³

Artemisia's interpretation was different because it tells the story with the emotion of the story clearly illustrated. The many other depictions show the story with the intent to include erotic subject matter. Little was left to the emotional impact of this moment on this young woman and how severe the violation of even a gaze can be. Garrard argues that "Artemisia's Susanna presents us with an image rare in art, of a three-dimensional female character who is heroic." In prior depictions there is a switch from pain to pleasure but we can see the refocus in Gentileschi's work. We can also make the connection to the rights of women and the roles of women in art. Susanna was sexualized and scandalized without voice, even in the Biblical story. Her truth was not revealed until the lies of the men were discovered. It was not her voice that saved her. Here we can see the imposing patriarchal forces imposing on women, their bodies and their rights.

Susanna and the Elders was such a significant piece of art in Artemisia's portfolio because it established her skill and her weight as a true artist during the Baroque period. She presented an image of Susanna unlike any they had seen before. Her *Susanna* was the victim and that was clear. She was not blissfully unaware like so many *Susanna*'s that had been crafted before her.¹⁰⁴ Artemisia's *Susanna* made her audience feel and understand the pain of her experience, "Artemisia understood its efficacy in communicating visually the heroine's anguish

¹⁰³ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 186.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 191.

as she realizes her powerlessness against her adversaries.”¹⁰⁵ The correct attribution was not only important to Artemisia’s portfolio but also to the investigation of her life. Her father’s training in this painting is clear through the play of light and shadow and the degree of naturalism, as Contini and Solinas set out: “Artemisia’s *Susanna* exhibits close stylistic affinities with the work of her father Orazio, whose *David with the Head of Goliath* was painted at roughly the same time.”¹⁰⁶

However, *Susanna* being one of her earliest pieces helped historians and critics understand the path of her career, her early talents and the evolution over time. The importance of properly attributing the *Susanna* painting is significant to her portfolio as well as her development as an artist. This painting is a significant piece of Artemisia’s portfolio and the incorrect attribution impacted the research surrounding her development as an artist, “ Though young, Artemisia shows a handling of anatomy that is already sure. And in this, her first professional picture, she already stakes out her vision of the ideal heroine.”¹⁰⁷ Though she had created at least five *Susanna*’s in her career, it was the visual impact of the 1610 that made such an impact as one of her earliest works.

Susanna and the Elders is one of many that have been wrongly attributed to Orazio. One of the biggest issues in the research and methodology of Artemisia is her connection and often confusion with her father’s work. The two worked together as Orazio began training Artemisia at an early age. In fact, Contini and Solinas note: “So close she was in emulating her father that key pictures from the early seventeenth century have at different times been attributed to both her

¹⁰⁵ Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Bridget Quinn, *Broad Strokes: 15 Women Who Made Art and Made History*, (San Francisco, Chronical Books), 27.

and her father.”¹⁰⁸ Much of Orazio’s work predating 1610 can be assumed that Artemisia had some involvement in. After looking through the works of Artemisia and Orazio side by side Roberto Conti theorizes, “Nonetheless the objective fact remains that the chronology of Orazio’s work is strongly threatened by the presumptive construction of the segment corresponding to his daughter’s absence from Rome.”¹⁰⁹

However, when looking to Artemisia’s Roman period it is clear she had her own voice and distinctive style. As Garrard asserted, “In the context of such pictures, Artemisia’s unstereotyped female characters and her radical expressive rehearsals of male and female roles stand out at least as revolutionary, and it is tragic that today no more than four or five works can be identified from her second Roman period, which was perhaps her greatest period of creative achievement.”¹¹⁰

While many scholars like Bissell, believe that Orazio was the driving force behind Artemisia and her momentum, others believe she was the driving force for them both. This significant overlap in styles has made attributing paintings correctly a challenge for historians. There is no doubt Artemisia’s development was guided by Orazio but her skill was far superior to his. She had the ability to tell a narrative and convey the correct positioning of the figures to accurately convey the feeling and emotion while also telling the story accurately and according to narrative as we can see with her *Susanna*. “It is significant that few other artists actually depicted the heroine dipping her foot in the water; usually the fountain was there to symbolize the erotic pleasure garden.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁰ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 72.

¹¹¹ Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 53.

Artemisia's composition of her *Susanna* followed a similar style to Orazio, however, it was the emotional narrative that only Artemisia could create that helped solidify Artemisia's role as one of the leading artists of the seventeenth century. Though the attribution was originally given to Orazio based on incorrect dates this painting shows a clear and direct connection to the two artists, who are so frequently pitted against each other. It was not unusual for Artemisia to use compositional techniques learned from Orazio; as Mann shared, "The *Susanna* is controlled by Orazian principles of centralization and compactness, with his elders in echoing positions compressed into a semi-circular configuration that arches over the young woman as a graphic equivalent of her entrapment."¹¹² What differs between the two artists is the raw emotion during this moment of violation that only a female could render. This composition specifically connects to the growth of women as the understanding of *Susanna* has evolved throughout the years with Artemisia's scholarship. Women in the twenty-first century can now not only identify with Artemisia's life and experience but with Susanna's, as well.

The two heroines Cleopatra and Lucretia were popular subject matter during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The women's' stories both included suicide to escape lives tarnished by men. Lucretia's story involved her ultimate transformation into savior of Rome. Her rape by the son of an Etruscan king lead her to her suicide and thereby the change of Rome from kingdom to republic.¹¹³ Cleopatra also had an impact on Rome and its people with her relationships with Caesar and Mark Anthony. Instead of being ruled by the tyrannical Octavian she chose to end her life.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Lucretia acts against a ruling family of Rome. The

¹¹² Mann, *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*, 19.

¹¹³ Virginia Brilliant, Kimberly L. Dennis, and Mary D. Garrard, *Dangerous Women* (New York, NY: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, Florida International University in association with Scala Arts Publishers, Inc., 2018), 40.

depictions of both women have varied largely in history. Artemisia's versions of both take away the erotic overtones, as she had done with *Susanna* and focused on the action of their heroic sacrifices. Both suicides are major contributions to the records of history and both deaths impacted the future of their people.

Many artists have focused primarily on Cleopatra as a temptress and seductress with her immoral and enchanting ways, Artemisia focused on the queen, the connection to the goddess Isis and her path in Egyptian mythology, "Alternatively, envisioning Cleopatra's grasp of her snake, Artemisia may have been inspired by a distant iconographic cousin of Isis and Ariadne—the allegory of Dialectic."¹¹⁵ In her two depictions Artemisia shows the queen grasping the snake (figure 6 and 7). She is holding the snake with no bite indicated, though she is naked with breasts exposed. Artemisia used the "Sleeping nymph" pose and showed the queen reclined, emotionless, peaceful but in charge. The queen is in charge of her fate and aware of her actions. Artemisia's painting recalled the Hellenistic interpretation of the statue of *The Sleeping Ariadne*. She showed the queen reclined, emotionless, peaceful but in charge. with her arm around her head in pure relaxation.¹¹⁶

Her connection to the Hellenistic Ariadne also connects to the story of a woman abandoned by her love. Her first *Cleopatra* shows a deep representation of a woman that is in charge of her fate. While the snake is also a phallic symbol, we can make many connections to the afterlife and patriarchal suppression. Isis was often connected to the Egyptian queens and a death by snake would be the ultimate connection to the deity and her place with Osiris. We can also make many connections to Artemisia's life and her control of her fate. We can further

¹¹⁴ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 271.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

explore the idea of liberation and freedom under the male dominant landscape. Both she and *Cleopatra* have freed themselves from a world of male domination, though Cleopatra's ending was more tragic.

In both of her depictions of Cleopatra, Artemisia honors the connection to Cleopatra's godlike persona, the deity queen who would not submit to Octavian, "The historical Cleopatra's death was her moment of ultimate triumph, in a sense quite different from Lucretia's model of absolute self-sacrifice."¹¹⁷ She instead like a true Egyptian queen took herself beyond the control of Augustus and led herself to her god like status beyond the grave. With such triumph Artemisia honors the queen without scandalizing her or creating an overly dramatic image of the moment she took her own life.

In the second *Cleopatra*, we see the inclusion of the flowers near the snake. As the story goes Cleopatra had the snake smuggled in, in a basket of figs. Here Artemisia depicts the basket of flowers showing a very specific connection to the concept of rebirth and life beyond the mortal earth. Each of these pieces of iconography further solidifies and validates Artemisia's intelligence. An unintelligent woman would not be able to make the symbolic connections or the references to mythology.

Lucretia (figure 8) was depicted similar to Cleopatra in that Artemisia went beyond the rape scene that was most commonly depicted. Instead she showed her taking her life in the ultimate sacrifice for Rome and her family. It was her death that led the rebellion that led Rome into a republic. She saved Rome from the violence of the Tarquin reign.¹¹⁸ The moment before her death shows the young woman in control and clutching the blade before plunging it into her

¹¹⁷ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 276.

¹¹⁸ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 231.

breast, “Lucretia for instance, clutches both breast and sword with an anxious energy that doubles the tension shown in her face.”¹¹⁹ Her versions are twenty years apart and differ greatly in presentation and impact, “Artemisia’s second *Lucretia* is without question more sophisticated in style and composition, and richer in color harmony, and expressively more grand than the ungraceful and abrasive Genoa version.”¹²⁰

In her early work, we are presented with the tenebrism and chiaroscuro of Caravaggio with the dark background highlighting this woman plagued with a choice. In her newer interpretation the viewer is given a bit more to ponder. The heroine is seated with the blade in one hand and her other hand outstretched in deep contemplation of her choices. Both *Lucretias* play with the idea of pride over shame and the victim who is also the heroine takes control of her own destiny ultimately taking control of history and the great city of Rome as well. In Titian’s (figure 9) and Biliverti’s work we see the moment of rape. Lucretia is the victim, clearly attacked by Tarquin. The story of Lucretia and her assault never hides the idea that she was a victim and highlights Tarquins violence. However, though she was a victim she was also in some ways the savior of Rome. Artemisia’s *Lucretia* shows the ultimate act of heroism (though unnecessary) her death became the savior of Rome and its people. Many have compared this moment and the inspiration in depicting this moment to Jesus and his moment in the Garden.

The first *Lucretia* is interesting to scholars because of the awkward and anxious composition Artemisia provided. Though the second shows her clear development of narrative and skill, her first shows the emotion of this moment best, “As an artist Gentileschi relied upon her own gender identification with Lucretia to transform the character entirely, from a two-

¹¹⁹ Mann, *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*, 100.

¹²⁰ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 235.

dimensional emblem of virtue (or sexuality) into a naturalistic plausible, living expression of perpetual dilemma, both physical and metaphysical, social and private, that is faced by women who have been raped.”¹²¹ Her hand gripping her breast and the positioning of her nipple have a clear connection to the many depictions of the nursing Virgin Mary.

Unlike Cleopatra, Lucretia was a victim. In the many depictions we see before this, she is a victim. Often shown with her eyes fixated to the sky or ceiling above her, seemingly searching for hope or protection from the heavens.¹²² Artemisia’s Lucretia is not a victim but a martyr of sorts. In both depictions she clutches her blade and knowingly looks above fully aware of her fate, not searching for answers. Artemisia’s Lucretia was a savior for herself and for Rome. She places her alone, with the focus entirely on Lucretia and her act of martyrdom. She shares this woman, the savior of her people, acting courageous and selfless for her people.

Artemisia’s most recognized heroine is *Judith* (figure 10). Judith has long been Gentileschi’s most well-known heroine as Artemisia created at least seven different depictions of her. Judith was the savior of her people as she beheads the Assyrian general, Holofernes.¹²³ In *Judith Slaying Holofernes* Gentileschi depicted this event during and after the beheading. Her heroine differed drastically from all other *Judiths* created before her. Also, it is this painting that critics believe make connections to Tassi and her rape. Gentileschi’s *Judith* was determined, strong and involved, “With determined, unemotional expression, the two women go to work with the strength and skill of butchers as they behead Holofernes, who is writhing in mortal fear.”¹²⁴ Looking at Caravaggio’s *Judith* (figure 11), we can see a beautiful woman seemingly repulsed

¹²¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 232.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 228.

¹²³ Kevin R. Brine, “The Judith Project,” *The Sword of Judith*, January 2010, 7.

¹²⁴ Weidemann, Larass, and Klier, *50 Women Artists You Should Know*, 18.

by this bloody act. Caravaggio's Judith was beautiful, dainty and still poised while chopping off the head of this general. However, Artemisia showed power and bold attitudes of her female characters. She knew their pain and she knew their power and did not focus entirely on feminine qualities, "The four major *Judiths* of Artemisia Gentileschi present a concept of the heroine that differs significantly from the types we have traced. In each of her interpretations of the theme – the character of Judith is an individualized figure who is neither glamorous nor manly, and who is convincingly engaged in specific action."¹²⁵

Though his *Judith* stayed true to the story the idea that this young woman would decapitate a man seemed unlikely. Her pose and reaction also greatly disconnected to the image shown. If she were there to save her people she would look more like Gentileschi's *Judith*. Gentileschi's *Judith* has been long discussed because of her true involvement in the act of decapitation. She was deeply involved in cutting off his head with such determination. "However, Artemisia may well have come to her own interpretation without relying on Caravaggio's rendition, since her painting really shows how two women could work together to overpower a muscular military man while his does not."¹²⁶ Artemisia depicted *Judith* several times including paintings of the heroine and her maidservant shoving his head into a sack upon their escape from this tent. This Judith is always sure of her actions, determined to save her people. Artemisia's creation has no doubt and is not scared of what she is or has done. Artemisia presents the viewer with Judith the savior not Judith the meek.

In looking through these female figures, learning their narratives and seeing the expanding scholarship of Artemisia's, there is a clear connection to the impact of feminism and

¹²⁵ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 303.

¹²⁶ Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 58.

the growing voice of women. Each depiction can be connected to the suppression of the female voice, a lack of rights and the sexual assault that was often present in the lives of many women, then and now. Artemisia has become an advocate for change and equality both through scholarship but as a visual representation of power that we have fought tirelessly to obtain. Both in the seventeenth century and the twenty first century she is known for her power and her leading heroines.

It was not merely Artemisia's talent that transcended her to be hailed as one of the great artists of the Baroque period; it was also her ability to create power and raw emotion that transcended her well beyond her contemporaries. Gentileschi worked within the same parameters, created the same subject matter but told the stories differently. She created women that were powerful and told their stories with more emotion and more power than any other artist had before her. Her narrative expanded as the catalyst for feminist thought expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. Artemisia, in her life and through her work changed the perception of women in the seventeenth century and in the twenty first century she continues to impact us with her growing catalogue and increased awareness of her contributions to the field of art in the 1600s and beyond.

In each painting, Gentileschi builds a composition through arrangement, pose and the play of light and dark to engage her viewers and make them see and feel the power of her heroines. Male artists of the Renaissance and the Baroque period painted women in a way that was safe, acceptable and within the gender norms. Their heroines were not in action but merely posed for the moment with their hair carefully arranged and their beauty on display. These heroines lack any concern about the happenings around them. Caravaggio's *Judith* seems repulsed by her actions and Tintoretto's *Susanna* has no care or maybe no understanding of what

is heading her way. Gentileschi's characters are strong, aware and ready to react. Her Susanna shows the pain that even roaming eyes can inflict. Her Judith shows the power and determination of a woman protecting her people.

Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is far more impactful than Caravaggio's because of the raw emotion and the connection to the Biblical story. If Judith had been saving her people, she would act with the same confidence power Artemisia had depicted in her Uffizi *Judith* and the same determination as her Pitti *Judith*. Gentileschi stayed true to the story regardless of the intensity of the moment depicted, "Artemisia chose to underscore the realism of her compositions in an unflinching style that does not spare the viewer's feelings."¹²⁷

Her feminist ideals did not end on the canvas. Artemisia had a full understanding of the art market and gender roles and her sheer determination and voice made her a well-respected name in Rome and Florence during the seventeenth century. Unlike any other female artist of her time she made sure she was paid the same if not more as her male counterparts, "That she was eagerly sought after was clear, as was her ability to set her fees, like other major talents, according to the number of human figures in the picture."¹²⁸ Her bold and determined personality helped her create a new space for female artists, "With her free-thinking, strong and winning personality, Artemisia managed to pave the way to a new profession for other women as well, something that went beyond her merits as a painter, and this is another reason why we should admire her."¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Marco Bussagli and Mattia Reiche, *Baroque & Rococo*, 57.

¹²⁸ Theodore Rabb, *Renaissance Lives: Portraits of an Age*, 190.

¹²⁹ Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 18.

Conclusions

Artemisia Gentileschi has become a household name during the twenty-first century. Her work will appear in 2020 in an exhibition in London at the National Gallery. She has been the focus of popular culture and her story has once again been shared as the developments of the Women's Rights and MeToo movement expanded for women of the twenty-first century. Her exhibition in 2020 will now showcase around 35 paintings; 25 of those have been universally accepted as her work, a number close to Longhi's original count back in the early 1900s.

Artemisia was one of the best-known artists of the seventeenth century and was sought out by many for commissions and admiration by a vast range of people. As Contini and Solinas have noted, "Brimming with sensuous *Lucretias*, *Cleopatras*, and *Danaës*, antique stories about women cloaked in an aura of diluted Caravaggiosim, but always replete with her evident emotional realism, Artemisia's canvases were all the rage in the short range of the Bolognese [Pope Gregory XV, Ludovico] Ludovisi."¹³⁰

The talent of Artemisia work was not only in her skill but also in her execution of the content she created. Like many before her and after her Artemisia depicted biblical stories as well as historic subject matter. She retold the story of *Cleopatra*, *Judith*, *Susanna* and many more with such emotion her viewers were able to emotionally connect with her subject matter. These narratives have been connected to the power of women and women through history. She was no stranger to the hardships women endured and the amount of work they needed to create to even be considered on par with their male counterparts. Instead of the fragile, beautiful heroines her counterparts created before her and around her.

¹³⁰ Contini and Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 58.

Her achievements are so closely aligned with the goals of women in the twenty-first century. Bissell points out that her legacy began simply with her name: Artemisia was the goddess of war, hunting, virginity and freedom from men. This title paved the way for the future ahead of her. Artemisia was a twenty-first century woman living in the seventeenth century. She was a mother, painter, and wife before gaining independence from her marriage. Artemisia stepped beyond her social constraints and created a life, so modern scholars were not ready for her, but the world is today.

Artemisia has become a significant name in the pages of history and her work has been admired and respected by women of the twenty first century, “Fascinated by her work and her exceptionally strong character, we try to turn her into a contemporary woman, just as Anna Banti did in her famous novel.”¹³¹ Artemisia was a rare example of a women during her time. She was a woman that Betty Friedan could connect to with *The Feminine Mystique*.¹³² Artemisia was not confined to the home. She moved, explored, painted and learned. She resided in Florence, Venice and Naples. She traveled to London, Rome, Florence and Naples. She painted for the King of England and the Medici family. Her work was celebrated during her life and continues to be once again in the twenty first century.

¹³¹ Mann, *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*, 41.

¹³² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

Figures

Figure 1. *Artemisia Gentileschi, Portrait of Noble Woman, oil, 1630s. New Jersey.*

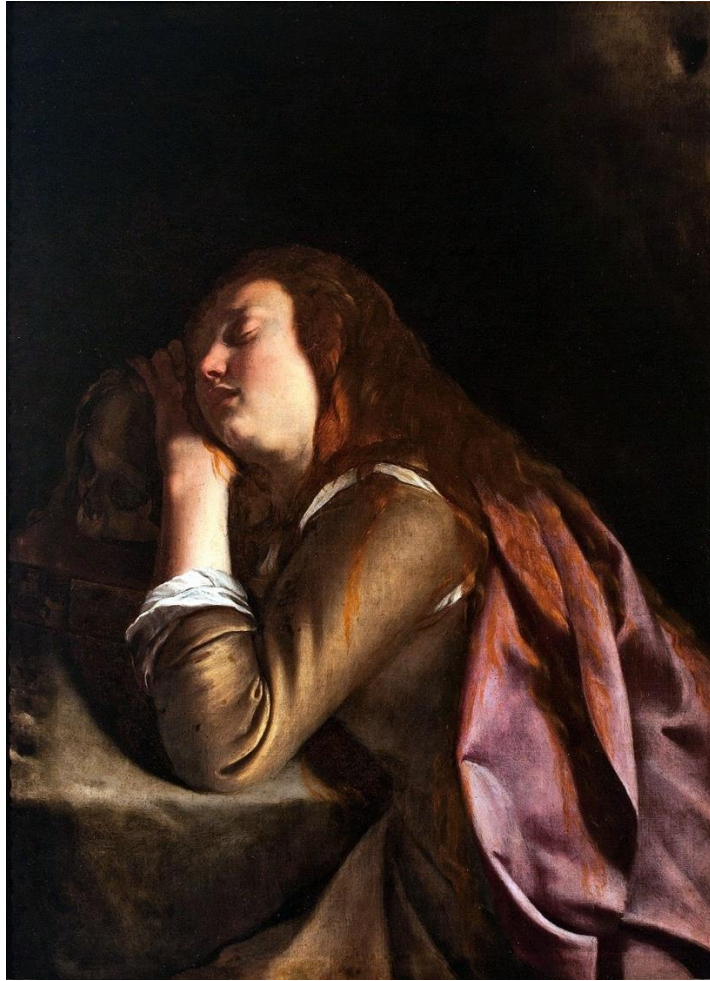


Figure 2. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Penitent Magdalene*, oil on canvas, 1625. Seville.

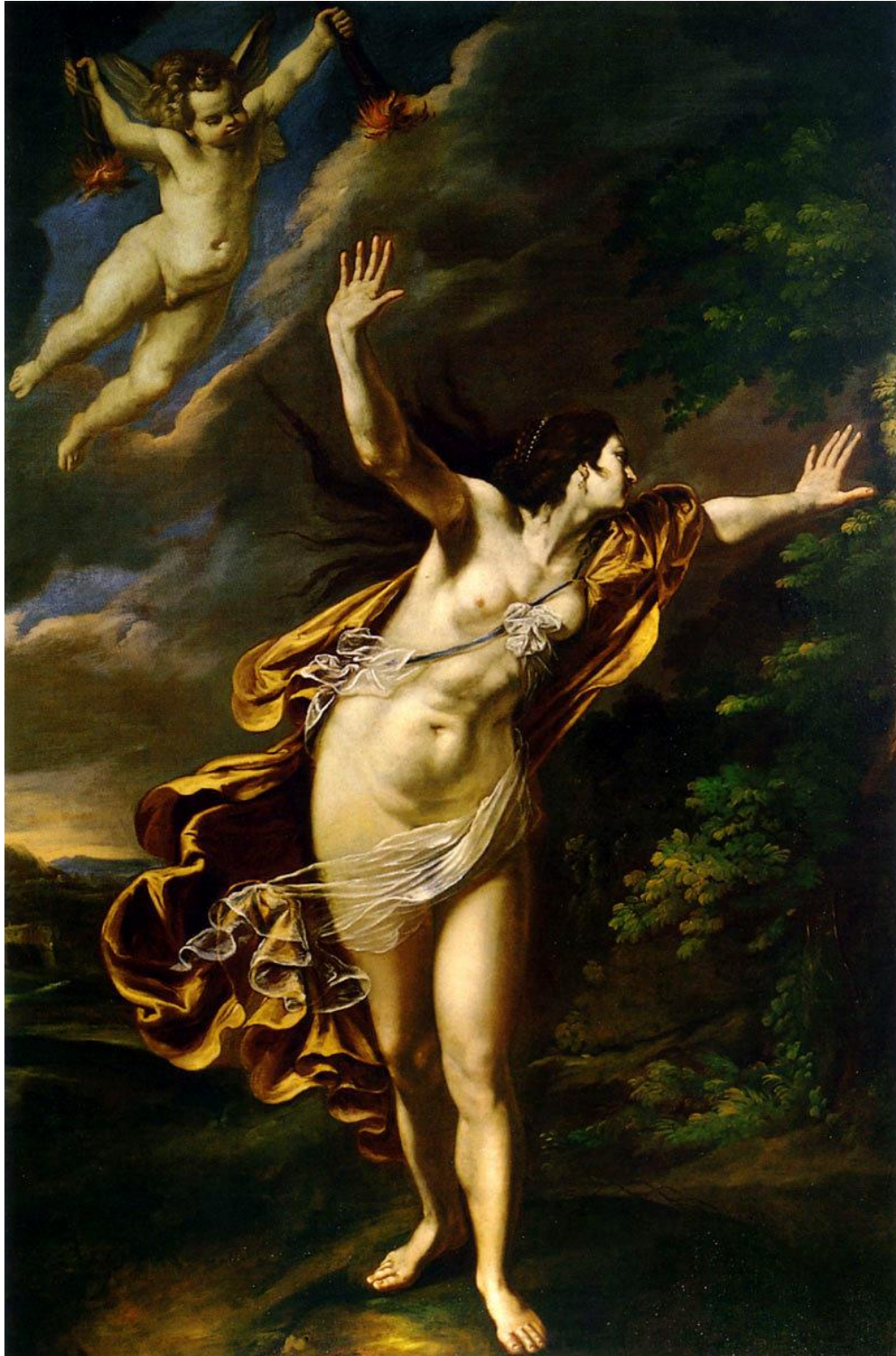


Figure 3 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Aurora*, oil on canvas, 1627. Rome.



Figure 4. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, oil on canvas, 1610. Germany.



Figure 5. Tintoretto, *Susanna and the Elders*, oil on canvas, 1555. Vienna.



Figure 6. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Cleopatra*, oil on canvas, 1621. Milan.



Figure 7. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Cleopatra*, oil on canvas, 1630. London.



Figure 8. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Lucretia*, oil on canvas, 1611. Genoa.



Figure 9. Titian, *Lucretia*, oil on canvas, 1571. Cambridge.



Figure 10. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, oil on canvas, 1620. Uffizi.



Figure 11. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, oil on canvas, 1598-1599. Palazzo Barberini.

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