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Artemisia Gentileschi: A Deeper Look into Burghley House Susanna

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Introduction

Artemisia Gentileschi's work has recently come to light and has inspired many contemporary artists and art historians, especially in recent generations. Her art is continuously being uncovered, and one aspect of understanding Gentileschi's work is analyzing how her artistic traits were utilized to benefit herself and her career. Much of this is studied by art historians, but due to her drastic changes throughout her career, some still dwell on what is to be considered her original work. One of the biggest reasons for this is because only a few dozen of her paintings are fully recorded and recognized as hers; which allows some insight into her stylistic decisions within her career which caused an interest in her work by contemporary researchers. Due to the fact that many paintings of hers are still being discovered by art historians, it becomes challenging to determine whether or not certain works should be attributed to Artemisia. As she grew and her patrons changed, so did her style as we see with many artists. Looking deeper into her decisions regarding her art and career will be a tool I utilize to determine my argument against some within the scholarly community. This is subject matter produced by Gentileschi that is gaining contemporary recognition and evidently, deserves more attention. As is unsurprising, women in the West were typically disregarded and seen as second-class citizens especially during the 17th century. Bringing attention to female artists, particularly within the 17th century, allows for context regarding the lives they lived and how this can translate to the modern feminine person.

One of Artemisia Gentileschi's most famous subjects is that of *Susanna and the Elders*. A religious narrative that expressed the painful hardships of the female experience; although it wasn't perceived this way at the time, it was famously popular amongst wealthy male patrons as it was a message of self-restraint. She painted this story three to four times in her life, each

within drastically different periods. Again, because of the continual discussion amongst professionals, there are some controversies when referring to her career. Many art historians, such as Mary Garrard and R Ward Bissell, ask if they're all hers to begin with, and why they look so different compared to her most famous works within the early stages of her career. Those who question her art base their ideas on the suggestion that she is limited in her range, but as we examine her later work, we can determine that this simply isn't true. Much of this speculation stems from the fact that Artemisia's style changes dramatically as she ages, which is a trend that we can see with many other artists as well.

Gentileschi studied under her father, Orazio Gentileschi, throughout her youth in Rome during the early 17th century. Within the work of Gentileschi, there is a focus upon the female subject, fabric, and lighting. She was a follower of Caravaggio, who inspired Artemisia to replicate realistic representations of women and men throughout her work. Gentileschi experienced a traumatic assault within her earlier years by Agostino Tassi, a colleague of Orazio, which caused a trail insinuated by her father in which they won. Artemisia moved around Italy and even found herself in England working for the clergy and other nobility, causing her to experience a new sense of culture which is reflected within the progression of her work. Some scholars have suggested this had a great effect on her and the works she was creating. Throughout this discourse regarding the authenticity of Gentileschi's painting, I will reference many of the works dedicated to her, while focusing on *Susanna and the Elder's* (Burghley House, 1622), in favor of Gentileschi by assessing her themes, techniques, and compositional traits to determine that this is indeed a portrait by Artemisia Gentileschi.

Susanna and the Elders; Schönborn Collection, Pommersfelden

The first rendition of Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* (1610) (fig.1) was the first piece she created that gained her recognition. Her father, Orazio Gentileschi¹, who was a painter himself, trained Artemisia from a young age. As mentioned before, she was also heavily influenced by Caravaggio², but many critics forget to mention this and give more credit to her father and other artists, like Guido Reni and Agostino Carracci³. For women during this time, there were little to no opportunities for academic learning, this was especially prominent within professional painting. Women born into money, or those who had fathers that could guide them, were able to gain professional artistic training. Otherwise, many women were unable to pursue these aspirations due to a lack of opportunity. Orazio aided her through this painting but it is noted that this work is an Artemisia original. We can determine this by looking to certain details of the fabrics, and concrete bench behind her. Her signature is prominent in the left-hand corner amply identifying this to be hers, something regularly seen in her other works as well.

Gentileschi projects the emotions of Susanna heavily as she's expressing intolerance for these men's actions. This is something Gentileschi herself was able to relate to as she was a woman of the early 17th century and encountered a similar experience to Susanna. Within the catalogue of the 2001 exhibition in New York and St. Louis demonstrating Artemisia's work states,

"Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* (1610) reflects the same critical issues and demonstrates

¹ "Italian painter, active mainly in Rome, where he settled in about 1576. After working in a Mannerist style he became one of the closest and most gifted of Caravaggio's followers." Ian Chilvers. "Gentileschi, Orazio." *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 2015, The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists, 2015-05-21.

² "Caravaggio humanized divine individuals by rendering them as lower-class folk. In this manner, Caravaggio critiqued and subverted the pristine, idealized figures of the Italian Renaissance and Roman classical traditions." *Caravaggio Biography, Life & Quotes*. The Art Story. Accessed April 20, 2022. <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/caravaggio/life-and-legacy/>.

³ Barker, Sheila. "The First Biography of Artemisia Gentileschi Self-Fashioning and ProtoFeminist Art History in Cristofano Bronzini's Notes on Women Artists," *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 60, no. 3 (2018): 405-36.

the closeness of father and daughter at the moment of her artistic debut”⁴ What does this have to do with the series of *Susanna* and the life of Artemisia? It allows an understanding to some of the context within Artemisia's life during the first painting she created and gained recognition from. This quote from the catalogue curated by Keith Christensen and other prominent art historians, in the 2001 exhibition glamorized this aspect of her relationship with her father, when in reality it was likely an unhealthy situation she was forced into. This becomes clear based on the men Orazio was inviting into his home as guests.

There's a lot of history between Artemisia and her father Orazio, and due to the rape and trial,⁵ he continued to aid her in decisions in order to preserve her worth his overbearing need to control her continued far into adulthood. The “closeness” they endured had mostly to do with the fact that Orazio was a widower and having a daughter during this period was likely challenging for him. A lot of social pressure came from the purity of a daughter, and thus he kept her away, training her through the processes of painting. Judith Mann writes in her essay “Sexuality and Sexual Violation: *Susanna* and *Lucretia*”, “Male control of female sexuality is the key feature of all patriarchal cultures, invariably supported by a sexual double standard.”⁶ It is no secret that we see this continually within Western societies and it remains true in our modern societies as well. Much like *Susanna*'s story, in which she is punished for the acts of these men, Artemisia and her family struggled after exposing the gruesome acts of Tassi. This is a big reason so many compare these two women, and why many modern feminists believe that her *Susanna and the Elders*

⁴ Christiansen, Keith., Mann, Judith Walker, Gentileschi, Orazio, Gentileschi, Artemisia, Museo Di Palazzo Venezia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. 275-278, 296-299, 355-358, 424-426. New York : New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2001.

⁵ Barker, Sheila. "THE FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI SELF-FASHIONING AND PROTO-FEMINIST ART HISTORY IN CRISTOFANO BRONZINI'S NOTES ON WOMEN ARTISTS." *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 60, no. 3 (2018): 405-36.

⁶ Mann, Judith W. "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures." *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 71-107.

(1610) reflects her own emotions. Quickly after the trial, Gentileschi married and fled Rome to live in Tuscany for almost a decade.

Susanna and the Elders (1610) shows a young woman, with starkly pale skin and a white cloth upon her leg, sitting at the forefront of a cement bench. Behind her are two older men climbing over this wall to better “examine” Susanna. Her face shows disgust as she moves toward the left of the painting, attempting to remove herself away from these men. The sky behind them is a pale blue, with loose brush strokes depicting the clouds above. At her foot, the viewer is able to see a small representation of the fountain at which she was bathing, which allows us to piece together her placement. Artemisia’s focus regarding the composition is affixed to Susanna whose body occupies most of the canvas’ space. The detailing around her face and throughout her posture is the most intriguing aspect that is reviewed time and time again by art historians. Looking into the influence of Artemisia's "Pommersfelden" version of *Susanna* allows us to fully understand the beginning of her career. Artemisia was working closely with Orazio in his workshop; she didn’t leave her home much besides visits to church with her brothers and chambermaid. It is thought that Artemisia gained a lot of her inspiration from the work she encountered by Caravaggio within the church she frequented as a child and young woman. While looking at her earliest and most popular work, we must understand that Orazio likely helped her throughout the process. Although it is possible that he was fairly busy, as he needed assistance from other artists such as Agostino Tassi to complete many of his works during this time, we can see his influence in her work from this period. The suggestion that Orazio was likely working closely with Artemisia at this time does not diminish the influence and decisions she made throughout this painting. There are plenty of elements that represent her style; such as the female figure's body, positioning, expression, and the draping of fabrics. Throughout her career,

Artemisia recreates a similar female figure who is thought to be representative of herself, as she likely used a mirror to practice facial features and bodies. As mentioned before, women did not have access to a lot of the time resources as their male counterparts. This included models, and in the early parts of her career we can see, a similar character is represented many times.

With all of this being said, looking deeper into *Susanna* (1610) is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the developments within her style and techniques. The emotion Artemisia was able to convey gained the attention of many contemporary art historians, and presumably caught the attention of some people of the 17th century as well. It wasn't until a few years later where she began to complete work without the help of Orazio and gained more interest in the work of Caravaggio. This included deep shadows, harsh spot-lights, alongside a close, cropped canvas typically focusing on one main figure. *Susanna* (1610) was completed in the workshop of her father, and is speculated to have been completed alongside his own hand as previously mentioned. There has been discussion surrounding this because of the similarities within the work of Orazio and that of Artemisia within the beginning of her career. Features such as the jewel tone colors of which were commonly used within his works. For example, in his piece *Madonna and Child* (1609) (Fig.3), similar colors like the blues, reds and bright whites are utilized. The folds of each textile are also a fairly noticeable piece to both of these works, especially as we see advancements throughout Artemisia's paintings. During these early stages of her career though, Orazio was heavily influencing her structure as he was her instructor within his personal workshop as well as her father. The water furthers this idea since *Susanna* (1610) was her first professional work of art, it is likely that Orazio was guiding her through the painting process. Keith Christensen mentions in his reflections after the 2001 Metropolitan Art exhibition of Artemisia's work, that there are too many stylistic choices in the Pommersfelden *Susanna* that

it is fairly likely he was working closely with his daughter. He writes, “That single, deft, brushstroke used to create the ripple of water along the edge of the pool is something that comes from long practice and is precisely analogous to Orazio's treatment of the river Jordan in his *Baptism of Christ* for Santa Maria della Pace, Rome.”⁸

Throughout discussions regarding Artemisia, a regularly resurfacing proposal is that she represents herself frequently in her artwork. The reason it's so important to understand her Pommersfelden rendition is because many modern art historians believe it is a reflection of herself, while referring back to her trial against Tassi. The story of Susanna and the Elders is a lengthy and old tale, originally presented by the Greeks and Jewish lore and later interpreted by Christianity. Susanna Drake mentions in *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts*, that there was a lot of purposefully negative description to show their [Christian] “enemies” [Jewish people] as sexual predators in her book regarding this interpretation.⁹ In other words, they twisted the story to promote the idea that being Jewish was unacceptable, and Christianity was the only answer. Over time as this story was reinterpreted by Christians, it became a tool for men in power to remind them of how not to behave which was another tactic used to reinforce the patriarchy and promote the ideas of God. Victim-blaming was also considered an acceptable reason to begin painting female nudes more often, and other stories like that of Bathsheba and Susanna allowed for a normalization of this subject matter. Many artists recreated this story for commissions, much like Artemisia, as she recreated this piece around four times throughout her life. Susanna was meant to represent a lesson of purity amongst women

⁸(Fig.2) Christiansen, Keith., Mann, Judith Walker, Gentileschi, Orazio, Gentileschi, Artemisia, Museo Di Palazzo Venezia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*.275-278, 296-29

⁹ Drake, Susanna. *Slandering the Jew : Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts*. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion Ser. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

because she was assaulted by these two men, and then blamed for it thereafter because of her seduction. Due to the events experienced by Artemisia within a similar time frame of her creating her first recognizable piece of art, the drastic expression on Susanna's face is another key factor in this discussion. Therefore, we see art historians like Mary Garrard who have presented the idea of these incidents coinciding.

Many modern feminists concentrate on this traumatic event she endured to explain the reasons for the emotional subjects like that of her first painting, *Susanna and the Elders* (1610). Mary Garrard's chapter in her book *Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622*, focusing on the Burghley House *Susanna* (1622) shows this pattern of thinking as she writes about the Pommersfelden (1610) *Susanna*, "[this painting] reflects a rare visual expression of female victimization, metaphoric testimony to the artist's own resistance to the sexual harassment she endured from a community of Roman males in the year preceding her rape by Agostino Tassi."¹⁰ It is easy for the modern feminist to concentrate heavily on this idea that her work was meant to represent that of what she was experiencing during this time of her life. Although we don't know whether or not this was the purpose of the strong visual expression Susanna holds in the Pommersfelden depiction, it inherently discredits the abilities Artemisia had as a young woman in the world of painting to communicate such intense feelings through a work of art.

There are other features of this reality to deconstruct, it is not unlikely that Gentileschi utilized her trauma while working throughout her career. There is no exact timeline dictating when she was assaulted by Tassi, but it is known that the trial came after this artwork had been completed. By this point Tassi was a regular in the Gentileschi household as he worked closely with Orazio as his landscape artists, he was around her frequently and likely groomed her as she

¹⁰ Garrard, Mary D. "Sexuality and Sexual Violation: Susanna and Lucretia" Essay. In *Artemisia Gentileschi and Feminism in Early Modern Europe*, 69–94. London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2020

was interacting with him as an artist as well. Susanna and Artemisia's stories do coincide slightly because of the trauma endured by older men in their lives who had harmed them in a sexual manner. This likely had a great effect on her life moving forward. This being said, many modern feminists spend most of their time dictating the type of feminist she was. Unfortunately, this was not the purpose of Artemisia's work, because of the reality of women's rights during this time.

Deconstructing Mary Garrard's Proposal; 2001

Around 1620, Artemisia returned to Rome from Florence with more recognition for her work, and this is the period in which the Burghley House (1622) is thought to have been painted. Before deconstructing the theories of Mary Garrard, we must first understand the composition of Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* (1622) (Fig.4). One of the most widely debated topics regarding this work is the fact that based on the paintings we can confirm to be hers; art historians wonder why her style changed so drastically during this point in her career. Much of what she was creating was heavily influenced by the typical traits of the Baroque era, meaning, darkly lit with deep contrast and a spot-light effect on the subjects continuously represented aforementioned. This was used in order to convey a specific point in Biblical time with an overly dramatic effect which patrons of the time enjoyed. Not only this but one of the most recurring themes throughout this era of art was to introduce these Biblical characters as if they were everyday people. The *Susanna* (1622) still utilizes a lot of the deep contrast and spot-light effect also seen in her earlier work, but the mood of the painting is far different. Susanna does not look as aggressively uncomfortable and glances upwards, likely looking for salvation, a pose Susanna is typically placed by many other artists of this time. For example, when we look to Peter Paul Rubens' *Susanna and the Elders* (1607) (fig.5) Susanna has a similar reaction to that in

Artemisia's representation of the Biblical figures. She looks upwards, not towards these men but beyond their glance. She is looking to God for help at this moment. Artemisia includes a lot of other natural elements to this piece, something we don't often see in her earlier work. She included trees, a bright blue sky, a fountain with putti¹¹, and flowing water, many elements which are referred to in the story of Susanna. Gentileschi didn't often incorporate such components in her paintings; she typically had simplistic backgrounds which allowed the viewer to focus on the subject.

Mary Garrard was the first to present the idea that the Burghley House *Susanna* was not in fact Gentileschi's, as she argues in her book *Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*. Other studies, such as Garrard's "Artemisia's Hand" and Judith Mann's "Identity Signs; meanings and methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's signatures" discuss whether this is a piece by Gentileschi by looking at signature choices used throughout Gentileschi's career. Due to the recognition her work had during this time, *Susanna* (1622) stands out to art historians like Garrard and Bissell. This is because her strokes are looser than her typical work, some features of the anatomy are different from what we can confirm to be hers by this time, and the overall mood of this work is earnest compared to her 1610 *Susanna*. There are other works to reference as well, like her *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612-13) (fig. 6) and *The Penitent Magdalene* (1615-17) (fig.7) both of which grab the attention of the viewer either due to a strong message, impressive brush work, or simply because of the subject matter itself. Although *Susanna* (1622) is nothing but skillful, it does have differences from her other works at this time. Garrard writes in her book about the possibility of a later hand "fixing" some of the

¹¹ "Unwinged, often obese, male child found in Classical and Baroque sculpture (frequently on funerary monuments)" "Putto." *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*, 2021, The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture, 2021-03-25.

aspects of this portrait and it might have been forged. Characteristics such as the fountain to the left, one of the Elders in the background, and even her signature were thought to be revised later in time. She writes, “Infrared reflectography and radiography show that the left side of the picture, and other areas have been completely repainted. Susanna was originally positioned before a balustrade, not a stone wall.”¹² Unfortunately, there is no evidence Garrard gives as to which artist might have later revised this depiction of Susanna, so it is possible Gentileschi did it herself at a different point in time.

Artemisia and Revisions

To understand why Artemisia would revise an earlier work, we can consider Keith Christensen’s analysis of x-rays of Artemisia’s paintings in “Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition” from 2004 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this study he deconstructs many of Artemisia’s works in order to better understand her process, and from this we are able to better reflect upon the creative choices she was making throughout each painting, specifically while looking at *Susanna* (1622). Deconstructing the process of Artemisia’s work invites the viewers and art historians to recognize the reasons why she was changing her style throughout her career. This is particularly important because as time progressed, so did the taste of the patrons she was painting for. Christensen writes while referring to her piece *Madonna and Child* (Galleria Spada, Rome) (fig. 9), “The Spada picture, which appears as the work of Artemisia in 1637 list of paintings, was heavily reworked by the artist. This is evident from even a cursory examination of the surface of the painting, but the X-ray made at the Metropolitan establishes beyond any question that the present composition is painted over one almost identical

¹² Garrard, Mary D. *Artemisia Gentileschi around 1622 : The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*. California Studies in the History of Art. Discovery Series ; 11. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

to the Pitti picture.”¹³ Although this pair of paintings were created more than ten years after her second rendition of Susanna, it’s evidence that she was likely to be continuously reworking her original work, a common practice for artists throughout time.

Another detail that aids in interpreting this, is the suggestion that someone reworking an Artemisia during or soon after her time was fairly unlikely. The popularity of Gentileschi did rise during her life and career, but not enough for people to recreate or rework her paintings for a profit in her name. Although there are replicas at this point in time, it wasn’t necessarily to obtain a Gentileschi piece, but rather for the configuration of the painting she originally fabricated. For example, *Penitent Magdalene* (Seville) (fig. 10) is an example of a painting that, only recently gained confirmation regarding its authenticity. *Mary Magdalene as Melancholy* (Museo Soumaya) (fig. 11), although looks strikingly similar to the original piece, is likely to be a replica. Jesse Locker, a prominent analyst regarding the life and work of Artemisia, has recently uncovered, along with Sheila Barker, what is likely to be the original version of this work of art¹⁴. Since this painting in particular gained popularity during her career, a handful of artists went on to reproduce this style of Mary Magdalene (c.1625). Magdalene was highly popular amongst both patrons and artists because of the storyline regarding her life with Jesus. There are endless portrayals of Mary Magdalene, so it's not surprising that this painting in particular gained a lot of traction. Due to the Magdalene’s pose, and the compositional balance of the piece, it is unsurprising other artists and patrons gained an interest in recreating this piece in order to gain capital.

¹³ Christiansen, Keith., Mann, Judith Walker, Gentileschi, Orazio, Gentileschi, Artemisia, Museo Di Palazzo Venezia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. 275-278, 296-29.

¹⁴ Locker, Jesse, and Sheila Barker. “Has a Long-Lost Artemisia Been Found?” *Apollo Magazine*, April 29, 2022. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/artemisia-gentileschi-rediscovered-magdalene/>.

Although this did happen within her career, there are not similar cases in regards to her work until recently, and since *Susanna* (Burghley House) is dated, signed, and representative of her stylistic attributes, it's peculiar to discredit Gentileschi's capacity concerning this painting. Garrard also mentions in her book referencing the engraving portrait (fig. 12) by Jérôme David, that she was likely mocked for being a female artist writing, "To call Artemisia a 'marvel' in painting hints at her exceptionality as a female, a little like applauding the dog who can walk on its hind legs."¹⁵ Referring to this engraving, the writing which surrounds the portrait indicates that her career is a "marvel" which in reality stands for the fact that she gained recognition for being a woman who painted, rather than praising her for the art she was creating.

The Feminine Body

Looking deeper into these articles; *The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity* and *Artemisia's Hand* by Garrard, she elaborates further in what would be considered a true Gentileschi piece based on some of her recurring artistic traits, which are present in other earlier works such as *Susanna* (1610) and *Penitent Magdalene* (ca.1615) that are seen in *Susanna* (1622) as well. Garrard fixates on the bodies of Gentileschi's subjects, mainly referring to their upper bodies. Artemisia portrays her female subjects with strong and realistic anatomy. At this time, mainly men were considered the artistic geniuses, but they typically avoided had anatomically correct female subjects; this is because women were hardly allowed to be professional models for men until this time due to the ideas of modesty. Garrard writes in reference to her and her father's work, "Artemisia's women have normal human hands that function as signs of female agency; Orazio's women have feminine hands, signs of female

¹⁵ Garrard, Mary D. *Artemisia Gentileschi around 1622 : The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*. California Studies in the History of Art. Discovery Series ; 11. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

passivity.”¹⁶ Women were not allowed to be nude models for men due to overbearing western and religious traditions, and many would base their forms off of either masculine bodies or heavily idealized feminine bodies. For Artemisia’s representation, we can see a far more realistic portrayal, and as time progress through the 17th century, we see more male artists begin to trifle with accurate female forms. She goes on to explain, “Artemisia never painted a female figure who did not have at least one, and usually two, visible hands.”¹⁷ This is relevant to *Susanna and the Elders* (1622) because both hands are visible, Susanna’s arms are strong, and her body is portrayed more realistically despite her positioning. Having two hands present in a picture cues the viewer to understand that the subject is a powerful one even though her posture and view are somewhat passive. We can see in many of Orazio’s portraits such as *The Lute Player* (fig. 13), where half of one hand is present. It causes the girl to look delicate, and draws the viewer's eye to focus more on the instrument and drapery, rather than the girl herself. Many women painted by men either hide one or both hands in order to lessen their strength in the piece and the viewer sees them as an object rather than a formal subject. Artemisia depicts nothing but powerful and vocal women in her work, even in moments that aren’t meant to be quite as emphatic.

Artemisia's work is notorious for what modern artists and illustrators might call “same face syndrome” where she is familiar with her own features which she then translates many times throughout her portraits. This is not necessarily a negative trait because many female artists had either themselves, daughters, or sometimes paid models and friends since resources were limited during this time. We see in multiple paintings including, her first version of *Susanna* (Pommersfelden), *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (Pitti), *Susanna* (Burghley House), and *Esther*

¹⁶ Garrard, Mary D. “Artemisia’s Hand” Gentileschi, Artemisia Mann, Judith Walker, and St. Louis Art Museum. Essay in *Artemisia Gentileschi : Taking Stock*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005.

¹⁷ Garrard, Mary D. “Artemisia’s Hand” Gentileschi, Artemisia Mann, Judith Walker, and St. Louis Art Museum. Essay in *Artemisia Gentileschi : Taking Stock*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005.

Before Ahasuerus,¹⁸ all the subjects represented have similar, if not the same, hands and facial features depicted. As the viewer and researcher, this hints toward a woman who repeatedly referenced her own body. In comparison to her *Susanna* (1622), we see other pieces created around the same time, *Lucretia* (1621) (fig. 14 and *Mary Magdalene as Melancholy* (ca. 1620's) that represent similar facial features and elements that could lead art historians to believe that she did indeed either use herself as a reference or someone close to her that modeled frequently. We can note, specifically in the facial features; the pointed nose, low brow, and heart-shaped lips. These are all stylistic choices we see several times throughout her paintings, and seems to be the most likely reason her portraits look similar in her earlier career. Some examples of what art historians have to base this theory on are pieces like, *Portrait of Artemisia* (fig. 15) by Simon Vouet. Similar features mentioned before such as her low brow, curly hair, hooded lids, and cupid's bow are repeatedly seen throughout the works of Gentileschi. Having this outside perspective by Vouet regarding her physical qualities allow for a better understanding of her personal work. Since many facial features that we are familiar with in Gentileschi's work are present, it suggests she is representing herself throughout her work. Another guide we have for this idea is a *Portrait Engraving of Artemisia Gentileschi* (ca. 1628) created by Jérôme David as mentioned above. Although this portrait is heavily stylized, we can see her curly hair, soft jaw, small heart-shaped lips, and other traits that are representative of Artemisia Gentileschi.

Although it is somewhat understandable that Garrard might be skeptical of Gentileschi's *Susanna* (1622), there is overwhelming evidence that she had a hand in creating this piece. It could be possible that another artist "fixed" her painting at a later time, but as there is no

¹⁸ Christiansen, Keith., Mann, Judith Walker, Gentileschi, Orazio, Gentileschi, Artemisia, Museo Di Palazzo Venezia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. 275-278, 296-299, 355-358, 424-426. New York : New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2001.

evidence to this, and many artists reworked their own art, there is no backbone to this claim. As we look further into her later career as well, *Susanna and the Elders* (Brno) (fig. 16) is a perfect example of the transition to a completely different style in order to please patrons and current taste within the middle of the 17th century. We also see in this version that she mastered backgrounds similar to *Susanna* (1622), or at least worked with other well-known painters; elements such as the trees and the cauldron to the left all showcase her efforts to gain skills around compositional aspects within her work. There is also a clear difference in the backgrounds of *Susanna* (Burghley House) and *Susanna* (Brno) because the 1622 version was the beginning of the steps she took towards these features within her paintings. Overall, Mary Garrard has brought a lot of important information to light regarding the life of Artemisia Gentileschi, but her proposal for this painting is overall incorrect. At this point, many people within the research of Artemisia agree with this argument. Gentileschi's timeline and artistic features give a lot of evidence to this being her original work, and many points made by Garrard are contradictory to her own claim.

Gentileschi or Lomi: Signatures

Another piece of evidence to consider is her use of signatures. Gentileschi is well known for her interesting and unique signatures she often incorporated within her paintings. Some scholars have argued people could have been falsifying her name since her death by adding an Artemisia in the corner, but this is fairly unlikely since many early critics and artists barely approved of her work simply because she was a woman.¹⁹ Artemisia Gentileschi's manipulation

¹⁹ Bissell, Ward R. *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. p. 42-43, 348-355.

of her viewers, patrons, and art historians has been proven by her intricate signatures always prominently placed within her paintings. Artemisia has many examples of her artistic choices regarding signature, for example in her *The Penitent Magdalene* (Pitti) (fig.8) the words “Artemisia Lomi” are boldly added to the outside of the chair. “Lomi” is the Florentine version of Artemisia’s last name, and because she spent time in Tuscany for almost 10 years, she had gained recognition by using this variation. She painted this in a stark gold, which coincides with the decoration of the red and gold seat. This is a common practice of Gentileschi’s; she frequently created a signature that caught the eye of the viewer in order to gain traction and acknowledgment around her artwork.

In *Susanna and the Elders* (1622) we can see her signature hidden beside Susanna’s knees. It’s challenging to see without proper equipment, but Mann writes “Susanna is a cautionary tale reminding us that when we look at signatures, we must be certain that they are part of the artist’s work and not that of a later disciple, dealer, or owner.”²⁰ She points out that art historians like Garrard and Bissell²¹ have rejected this as a Gentileschi piece, but Mann includes due to the possibility of later revision that other features of this painting could have been reworked as well. We can look at the other *Susanna*’s created by Gentileschi and recognize a theme throughout all of the pieces. She chisels her signature into the balustrade²² behind each representation of Susanna. The only conflicting characteristic to the Burghley *Susanna* is that she included both “Gentileschi” and “Lomi” as her signature. Garrard points to *Susanna* (1622) as an

²⁰ Mann, Judith W. "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures." *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 81.

²¹ Bissell, Ward R. *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. p. 42-43, 348-355.

²² “a railing supported by balusters, especially an ornamental parapet on a balcony, bridge, or terrace.” “Balustrade.” Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed May 19, 2022.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15070?redirectedFrom=balustrade#eid>.

anomaly because of the placement and style of her signature. Due to her move to Tuscany after her marriage she began using both her Roman name, Gentileschi, while in Rome and her Tuscan name, Lomi, while in Florence. Throughout her career she used both of these names regularly, but hardly ever together in the same portrait. Mary Garrard adds to this discussion by saying, “No other painting signed by Artemisia includes both names Gentileschi and Lomi.”²³ She then goes on to discuss that after the X-rays performed on this rendition, we see another place where her signature was added previously. Garrard even goes on to mention that within the x-rays there is evidence that “Artemisia Gentileschi” was likely to have been painted on the original design under what is visible today. Although this doesn’t contradict Garrard’s initial idea that a second artist might have replaced her signature, it was likely Gentileschi who completed the “first rendition.” This shouldn’t take away from the authenticity, for at this point in her career she was well known in both Florence and Rome. She gained a lot of popularity during her time away from Rome, and when she returned from Tuscany there were plenty of friends, and patrons who knew her by either name. I believe that a strong aspect regarding this shift in her technique is due to this time of travel in her life. Throughout the beginning of her life as a young girl and into womanhood, her father and family sheltered her. I brought this to light when analyzing *Susanna* (1610) because of how influential this was to her artistic development. On the other hand, her cultural competence was beginning to expand and create a new viewpoint for her as well as her artwork.

Due to her position during this time, Gentileschi did not have the fame of artists like Michelangelo or Caravaggio, or other artists she was inspired by. She, of course, was well known, but this didn’t mean other artists were going out of their way to fake an “Artemisia.” The

²³ Garrard, Mary D. *Artemisia Gentileschi around 1622 : The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*. California Studies in the History of Art. Discovery Series ; 11. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

only time this is a feasible proposal is in a more modern context, where there are many people forging well known artists for a profit. A more likely scenario, as mentioned by Garrard in her book, is the idea that someone might have fixed it for modesty's sake. She delves deeper into the patrons who were collecting Burghley *Susanna* and explains that it was most likely obtained by Charles I of England's collection around the 1630's. This, unfortunately, doesn't correlate with the date represented on the painting itself which could indicate another artist's hand contributing to the work.

As I mentioned before, there were artists who recreated compositions of Gentileschi's but this was a common technique practiced amongst artists during the 16th and 17th century. It also allowed more patrons access to compositions they had an interest in. Including her signature would not have been likely as well, as patrons were less interested in Artemisia as they were the compositional arrangements she was producing within her work. Many Baroque painters like that of Peter Paul Rubens, a Flemish artist within the same period, repeatedly copied and reproduced the compositions of other famous painters and sculptors. This practice showed an appreciation for the artist they were reproducing. Not only this, but many artists collaborated in order to create a more respectable and compelling piece of art so it is not an uncommon practice. Collaboration is a technique Gentileschi is seen heavily participating in around the 1630's when we can see she regularly begins to incorporate more landscapes throughout her work.

Gentileschi's signatures have intention as she was building a name for herself; it's possible what she endorsed was purely for aesthetic purposes, however, this proposition has a further meaning. In Judith Mann's "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures," she states, "it seems far more likely that she knowingly exploited her signature and presentation not only to identify herself as the painting's creator, but to manipulate

her public toward an understanding of her abilities and even her gender.”²⁴ Referring back to the way women were treated as artists during this time, it would make sense that as a businesswoman, she would be enforcing the notion that she was just as talented as the men in her field. Mann emphasizes the importance of recognizing that not every artist’s signature is to be considered genuine; but rather because of the implications of the work itself and the form of the signature we can conclude that this is likely to be a piece by Artemisia.²⁵ To Garrard’s point, regarding the idea that two last names determine this to be a false representation of Artemisia’s work, there simply is no evidence to support this claim other than the possible fact that this is her only painting with both of her last names. Artemisia’s work was in a transitional phase during the 1620’s, we inevitably see a shift toward new stylistic choices within her work. According to Christiansen regarding these claims by Garrard, “there is really no consistency in Artemisia’s signatures; of the seventeen signed works believed to be autograph, there are fourteen different variations.”²⁶ In other words, its difficult to determine that this isn’t an original Gentileschi piece because of her one-time use of both last names. Christiansen also mentions the importance of the mane “Lomi” in Tuscany, and how she gained many patrons and colleagues under this name. Gentileschi’s work is still being discovered globally, as mentioned before, Locker and Barker have recently determined the original version of *Penitent Magdalene* (Seville) –the painting that many people were reproducing decades later–so it is not surprising that this artist would have been maneuvering her career in this way.

²⁴ Mann, Judith W. "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures." *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 71-107.

²⁵ Mann, Judith W. "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures." *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 71-107.

²⁶ Christiansen, Keith., Mann, Judith Walker, Gentileschi, Orazio, Gentileschi, Artemisia, Museo Di Palazzo Venezia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. 355. New York : New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2001

Continuously Adapting

Artemisia's stylistic choices changed throughout her life as she began to expand her cultural palette. Rome and Venice had greatly different artistic ideals and she was influenced by both. At this point she had explored Florence, but re-established herself and her family in Rome in 1620. She was only here for about a decade, and travelled to Venice in 1626. By broadening her artistic experiences, and exploring the techniques of Florence, her style begins to expand as well. Although, as noted, there is a chance that *Susanna* (1622) was retouched, she was moving beyond the aesthetics her father facilitated while establishing her style in her early career as an artist. Many people focus on Gentileschi's earlier work, because there are a lot of progressive emotions which are popular amongst contemporary aesthetes. *Susanna* (1622) can still be considered within the time frame of her earlier art, but at this point she has been exposed to different cultures within Italy and gained more patrons. Bissell writes in his book "Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art," "It was also during the 1620's that the artist established her reputation as a portraitist and acquired a subspecialization- that of rendering the female nude... Tackling new subjects and facing increasingly classicizing tastes, Artemisia again adjusted her style."²⁷ He goes on to recognize numerous paintings where she inevitably made changes in order to please the patrons, even regarding her earlier works.

Susanna (Burghley House) does not gain as much recognition as her *Susanna* (Pommersfelden) because many focus on Pommersfelden due to the expression and emotions of *Susanna*. She's obviously uncomfortable, moving away from the men peering over her naked body which is far different from typical representations of this story by other artists of the time.

²⁷ Bissell, Ward R. *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. p. 42-43.

Some scholars, such as Garrard, detect a feminist perspective onto this character and recognize this as her first official piece of art. When we look at *Susanna* (1622) we can see that there is an emotional shift in Susanna from the 1610 model. In Garrard's book including the chapter "Sexuality and Sexual Violation: Susanna and Lucretia" she writes about how powerful *Susanna* (1610) is, "considering the gender of the artist, the painting more fundamentally involves the inner experience of sexuality -- what it feels like to be a girl becoming a woman."²⁸ This piece is a lot easier to unpack and create narratives upon because of all the trauma Artemisia had experienced during this time. There is a lot more emotion expressed from a feminist perspective, while *Susanna* (1622) might have been painted in order to please a patron, the community at the time, or referring to the Biblical tale. Although she was back in Rome at this point, she still had outside connections and people were beginning to know her name. For example, Gentileschi befriended Galileo Galilei, they sent letters to one another. Connections like these were seen in her works as well, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Uffizi) (fig.17) exhibits Galileo's parabolic law²⁹ within the blood that sprays from his neck. Understanding her connections with people throughout Italy exhibits the influence on her and the work she was creating in order to better create a composition. In comparison, her idol Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598-99) (fig. 18), this scene displays the blood shooting straight out from his neck in an almost comical and unnatural manner. There is also seen a projection of the male gaze heavily influencing the female subject within Caravaggio's painting which we do not see often in

²⁸ Garrard, Mary D. "Sexuality and Sexual Violation: Susanna and Lucretia" Essay. In *Artemisia Gentileschi and Feminism in Early Modern Europe*, 69–94. London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2020.

²⁹ Galileo discovered the law of free falling which he determined by rolling a ball on an inclined surface, this in turn gave him data which concluded that if there was nothing to stop this ball from falling, it would never stop falling. Not only was this discovered in this way, but he also realized that for example, if something was thrown across a room it would fall with a curved path which is caused by gravity pushing it downward: Drake, Stillman, and James MacLachlan. "Galileo's Discovery of the Parabolic Trajectory." *Scientific American* 232, no. 3 (1975): 102-11.

Gentileschi's work. This developmental part of her life and career translates a lot into the rhetorical aspects of her work from then on.

As Artemisia's life evolved and she became more exposed to different parts of the world, her art was continuously changing. As previously introduced, she was extremely sheltered and learned based on the limited access she was given by her father during her childhood. Throughout her early years we see a lot of repetitiveness with her pieces but as she begins to expand her experiences, she changes her work to fit cultural norms. Artemisia also had a way with her patrons that allowed her access to opportunities that many women didn't receive during the later period of her life such as the studio she owned.³⁰ Luckily there are many letters uncovered that express her determination when it came to the communication between her and her patrons. Through her contemporary biographies and correspondence, we can understand the shifts she was required to make in order to continuously gain the attention of those interested in her art.³¹ Her later years were far more challenging because of this lack of interest, and it was far harder for her to have a consistent flow of money to support herself. Thus, it is imaginable that she was forced to change her stylistic techniques in order to continue her career and keep up with the new, younger artists. Although these hardships affected her artwork, she still kept elements unique to Artemisia. As mentioned before; hands, expressive signatures, and female features are all consistent within her work, including her *Susanna and the Elders* (1622).

³⁰ Treves, Letizia. "Artemisia Gentileschi." Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 - 1654 or later) | National Gallery, London. The National Gallery. Accessed May 31, 2022. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/artemisia-gentileschi>.

³¹ Gentileschi, Artemisia, Barker, Sheila, Gentileschi, Orazio, Bronzini, Cristofano, Stiattesi, Pierantonio, Balducci, Filippo, Medici, Averardo De, Da Morrona, Alessandro, J. Paul Getty Museum, Issuing Body, and Pallas Athene, Copyright Holder. *Lives of Artemisia Gentileschi*. Lives of the Artists (Pallas Athene (Firm)). London : Los Angeles: Pallas Athene (Publishers) ; J. Paul Getty Museum, 2021.

When we look into her much later work representing Susanna once again, we can see a huge shift in what she's producing. Unfortunately, Artemisia didn't live a full life as she only reached the age of 60, but she was painting up until her death. In her last known painting, *Susanna and the Elders*, dated 1652, (Bologna) (fig. 19), we can see a drastic difference, yet many similarities between the 1610 version. Susanna looks like a realistic portrayal of a woman, with curves and folded skin, she has strong forearms. All of which are traits of Artemisia's, similar to 1622 where Susanna, although distraught, she is still powerful. Beyond this, we can once again acknowledge the impeccable details regarding the fabrics involved, and the balustrade in front of which Susanna sits, a characteristic within all of her Susanna paintings. These noticeable characteristics, including other features of the background, are not as detailed as *Susanna* (Burghley House), but still include clouds, trees, and a multitude of leaves as background work. Another technique that we can see a shift in is the lighting Gentileschi utilizes, within the beginning of her career she uses a spotlight effect. This causes the viewer's glance to fixate on the subject as we see in *Susanna* (1622), and many Baroque artists of the time were using this approach. In her early *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Naples), we can see a light source to the left which highlights the brutal murder of Holofernes. In comparison to her late *Susanna*'s in Bologna or Brno, which use a softer lighting for the background which creates a typical representation of this story seen in the later 17th century.

Gentileschi also has many other pieces from the end of her life that incorporate a lot of these elements. For example, we can see the pieces *Bathsheba* (Ohio) (fig.19) and *Bathsheba* (Potsdam) (fig.20), which include many of the elements we see throughout her earlier works as well, such as the bathing bowl and balustrade, but also incorporates architecture, and natural components. Gentileschi's work never focused heavily on landscapes and backgrounds as we can

see throughout her earlier pieces, and later in her career she gained assistance in completing these works of art as she was aging. These examples included more landscape and architectural elements compared to *Susanna* (1622) and she was able to work closely with other artists because she had gained more of a reputation for herself by this time.

Looking at her later career encourages recognition for a visual representation of the changes she had to make in order to gain popularity among patrons. As a woman, she wasn't seen in the same light as her male colleagues and only gained some praise early on simply because she was a woman in the realm of painting. Understanding Gentileschi's work is important for modern artists and lovers of the art because it gains access to the perspective of this great artist, and allows credit to one of the greatest female artists of the early 17th century, even from a contemporary perspective.

Conclusion

Artemisia was fairly privileged due to the training she had through her father, and credit can be given to him, but overall Artemisia grew her own image and honed in on her brand allowing her to gain patrons and admirers of her work. She struggled throughout her life as well as her career, but still managed to create a name for herself. It is exciting to watch Gentileschi's development throughout her lifetime, and the controversy regarding *Susanna* (1622) allows for further discussion and analysis of her work. Gentileschi was strategic with her reputation and luckily gained enough traction to continue painting for her entire life, allowing us in the modern world to reflect and appreciate the great works of Artemisia Gentileschi.

With its incredible treatment of composition, light, and the female form, there is no doubt that this rendition of *Susanna and the Elders* (1622) is by Gentileschi. Mary Garrard has contributed an unbelievable amount of research regarding this artist which in turn has allowed

this debate to occur. Garrard's ideas in regards to Gentileschi have undoubtedly developed the feminist movement; creating the narrative that women of the 17th century had more autonomy than they actually did which doesn't incorporate the context of the time and how this influenced the decisions they made throughout their careers. Due to these suggestions, there is more credit to the trauma of the artist rather than the artist herself in her creative endeavors. Garrard's interpretation of Gentileschi's work, specifically regarding her argument against *Susanna* (1622) with the context of her other works up until this point, it is logical to acknowledge the experiences of Artemisia's early years. They likely guided certain executions within specific paintings, but it's also important to recognize the context in which Artemisia was creating. She was pleasing her supporters in order to gain further recognition. Gentileschi was modifying her style as time continued in order to maintain patrons and money, as the end of her life inched closer her struggles increased. The work of Gentileschi is gaining the acceptance and accreditation she has always deserved, and it will be exciting to see what the future holds for Artemisia Gentileschi.

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(Fig 1) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1610. *Susanna and the Elders*. Oil on canvas. Schloss
Weißenstein, Pommersfelden. https://library-artstor-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/asset/AIC_880036.



(Fig. 2) Gentileschi, Orazio, 1607. *Baptism of Christ*. Oil on canvas. Santa Maria della Pace.

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(Fig. 3) Gentileschi, Orazio, 1609. *Madonna and Child*. Oil on canvas. National Museum of Romania. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/orazio-gentileschi/madonna-and-child-1609>



(Fig. 4) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1622. *Susanna and the Elders*. Oil on canvas. Burghley House, Stamford, Lincolnshire.



(Fig. 5) Rubens, Peter Paul, 1607, *Susanna and the Elders*. Oil on canvas. Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



(Fig. 6) Gentileschi, Artemisia, c. 1612-13. *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. Oil on canvas. Museo Capodimonte, Naples.



(Fig.7) Gentileschi, Artemisia, c.1615-18. *Penitent Magdalene*. Oil on canvas. Palazzo Pitti, Uffizi, Florence.



(Fig.8) Close up of *Penitent Magdalene* c.1615-16, “Artemisia Lomi” Signature.



(Fig. 9) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1613-14. *Madonna and Child*. Oil on canvas. Galleria Spada, Roma.



(Fig. 10) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1622-25. *Penitent Magdalene*. Oil on canvas. Private collection.



(Fig. 11) Attributed to; Gentileschi, Artemisia, ca.1622-25. *Mary Magdalene as Melancholy*. Oil on canvas. Museo Soumaya, Mexico City.



(Fig. 12) David, Jérôme, c. 1628. *Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi*. Engraving. The British Museum.

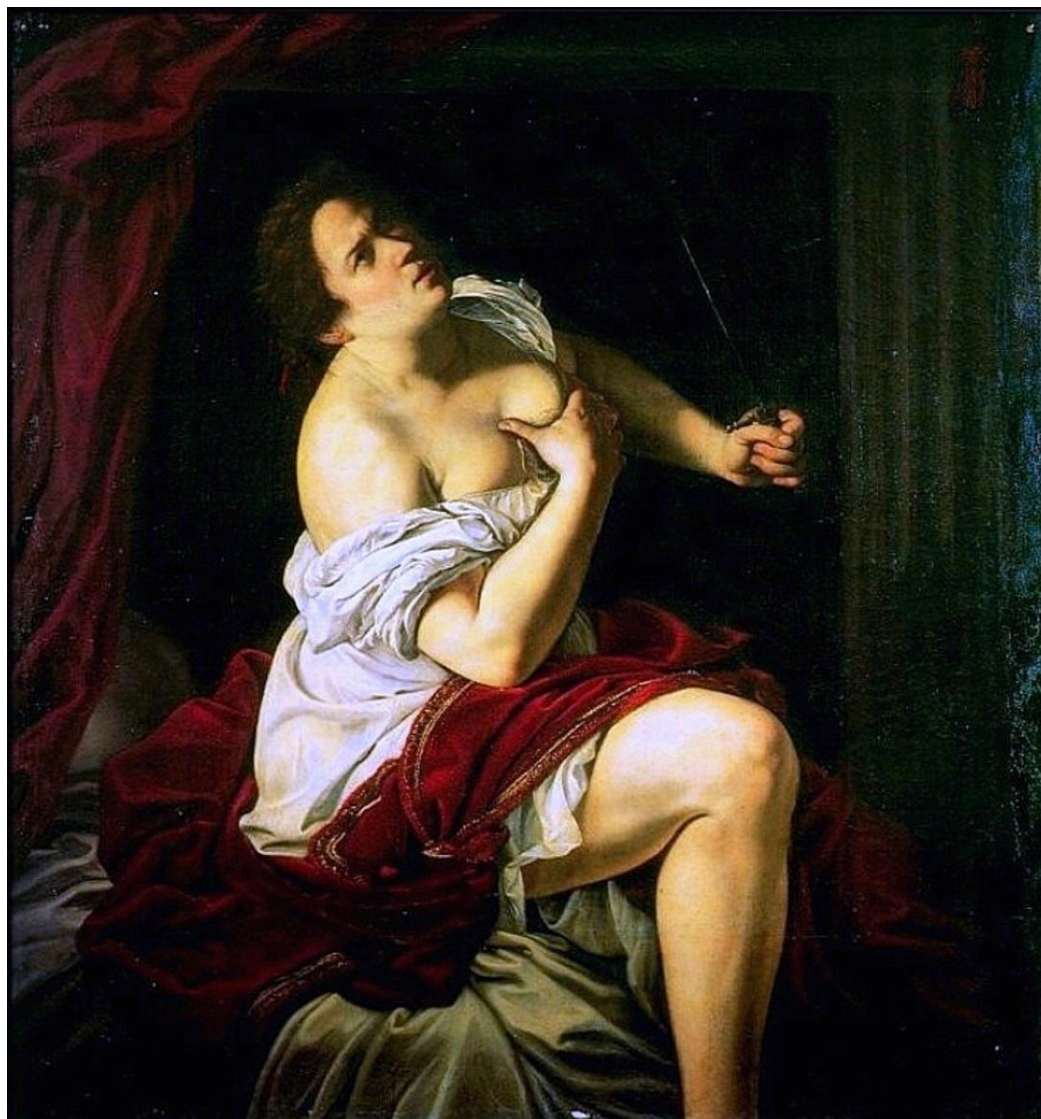


(Fig. 13) Gentileschi, Orazio, ca.1612/20. *The Lute Player*. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46434.html>.



(Fig. 14) Gentileschi, Artemisia, c.1623. *Lucretia*. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

<https://www.artemisiagentileschi.org/lucretia/>



(Fig. 15) Vouet, Simon, c.1623/26. *Portrait of Artemisia Lomi Gentileschi*. Oil on canvas. Royal Palace of Naples.



(Fig. 16) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1649. *Susanna and the Elders*. Oil on canvas. Moravská galerie, Brno.



(Fig. 17) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1620-21. *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. Oil on canvas. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.



(Fig. 18) Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da, c.1598-99. *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. Oil on Canvas. Palazzo Barberini, Rome, Italy.



(Fig. 19) Gentileschi, Artemisia, 1652. *Susanna and the Elders*. Oil on canvas. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

