

# Artemisia !

©When I was an undergraduate I was curious as to why there was a sudden plethora of naked Susanna's coming from the brushes of late 16<sup>th</sup> century artists such as those of Artemisia's father, Orazio (1563 – 1639), Paolo Veronese (1517 – 1588); Tintoretto (1518 – 1594), Annibale Caracci (1560 – 1609); Cavaliere d'Arpino (born Guiseppe Cesari) (1568 – 1560); Peter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640) who studied in Rome between 1601 – 1603, and many others. That raised several more questions in my head: were there earlier portrayals of this story, and if so by whom; but more importantly, where did the story come from?

The earliest piece of surviving art that depicts Susanna's story is a 9<sup>th</sup> century intaglio carving known as the [Lothair crystal](#), which is 11 cms in diameter.



*Lothair Crystal, British Museum.  
Image ©The Trustees of the British Museum.*

Carved between 855 – 869 A.D. this exquisite piece of intaglio carving has suffered during its approximately eleven hundred years. The frame is 15<sup>th</sup> century and the jewel is held in the British Museum. Fast forwarding to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Aert van Ort (c1470 – c1540) created this roundel (21cms diameter) showing a fully dressed [Susanna](#) being accosted by the two men – thereby looking decidedly chaste. This is clearly a working sketch for the circular [stained glass window](#), also in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.



Aert van Ort stained glass roundel. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Albrecht Altdorfer (1488 – 1538) also tackled the [subject](#), now in the Alte Pinakotek, Munich.

Another Flemish artist of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to tackle the story is Jan Massys (c1509 – 1575) who embraced the portrayal of the nude in his various paintings created after his return from Italy.<sup>i</sup> Massy's [Susanna](#) of 1564 is a far more sophisticated rendition than an earlier version by him. This version sold at Christie's for \$1,205,000 in 2016 and shows how the artist's sojourn in Italy influenced his work.

### Why paint this subject at all?

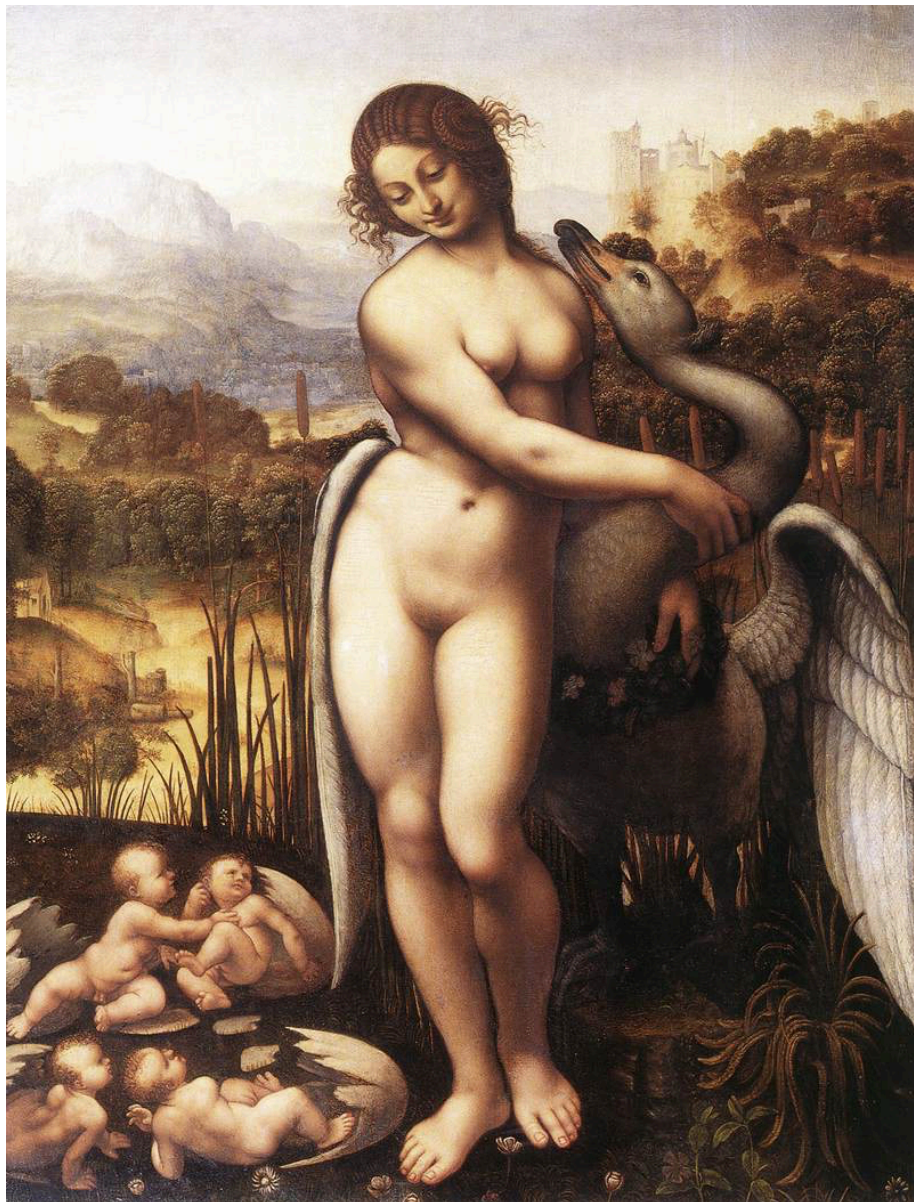
The Catholic church's reaction to the Luther's Protestant reformation of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was eventually to convene an ecumenical council to examine the heresies of the teachings of Protestant reform. We know this today as the Council of Trent that met in the northern Italy town of Trento between 1545 and 1563. It was not until the 25<sup>th</sup> session in 1563 that the Council addressed what could or could not be portrayed in art. This is an extract from the statement defining what the Church said could or could not be included in works of art.

*"..every superstition shall be removed ... all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust... there be nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God. And that these things may be the more faithfully observed, the holy Synod ordains, that no one be allowed to place, or cause to be placed, any unusual image, in any place, or church, howsoever exempted, except that image have been approved of by the bishop ...."*

The key words are 'every superstition shall be removed . . . all lasciviousness be avoided'.

With the rise of humanist learning prior to this edict, artists from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, used the classical writers as inspiration and excuse for portraying the female nude. From any perspective, this marks the beginning of the visual sexual objectification of women, no matter how it has been wrapped up over the centuries in elegant prose, or various philosophical theories.

This 1510 copy of [Leonardo's Leda & The Swan](#) shows a naked Leda caressing a male swan. The swan is the god Zeus in disguise in order for him to get near to the beautiful Leda in order to seduce her.<sup>ii</sup> The outcome of this rape by the chief Roman god, which coincided with the first time Leda slept with her husband, King Tyndareus, were the two pairs of twins, Helen and Polydeuces (the children of the Zeus) and Castor and Pollux, the legitimate offspring from Leda's marriage, who are depicted emerging from two eggs on the ground.



Copy of a lost Leonardo : *Leda & the Swan* c 1505 -1510.  
Cesare de Sesto (1477 - 1523). Wilton House, England.

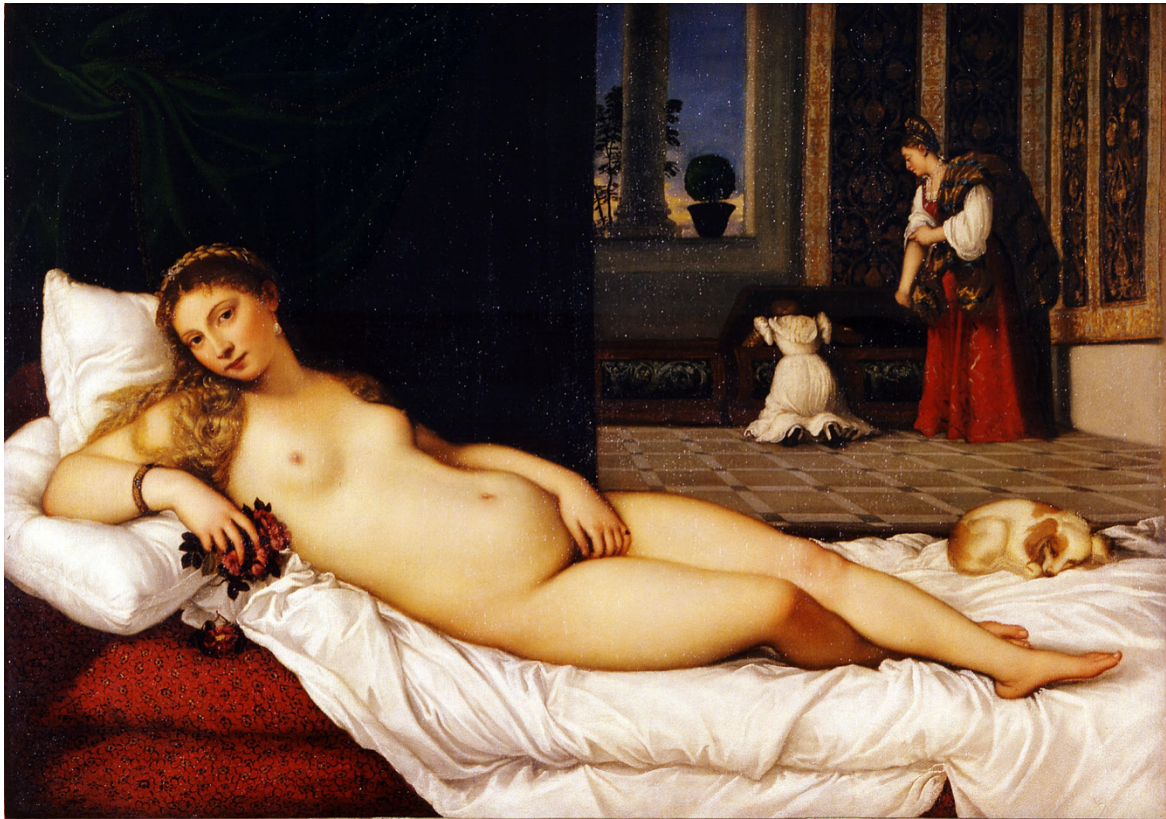
Michelangelo also attempted a [version](#), a copy of which is now in the National Gallery, London.

The first reclining nude suggesting female sexual awareness despite her closed eyes, was [The Sleeping Venus \(1510\)](#) by Giorgione (1477 – 1510). Is she asleep, or perhaps enjoying a private moment? The artist tantalises the viewer (presumably the patron was male) with the possibility that her left hand might not be just resting on her pudendum.



*Sleeping Venus 1508. Giorgione (1478 - 1510). Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden*

[The Venus of Urbino](#), (now in the Uffizzi) was painted by Titian (1490 - 1576) in 1538 for Guildobaldi II della Rovere, the Duke of Urbino (1514 – 1574), as a gift for his young wife, Guilia Varano (1523 – 1547). The painting was intended to be a visual reminder of how the Duke expected his wife to be, the messages are visual and many layered. In short, his expectations were for her to be erotic and sensual, but also faithful (denoted by the presence of the lapdog) and of course, to produce lots of children, preferably male. Again the sexual innuendo is apparent with the placing of Venus's left hand, but this time Venus looks straight at us. Perhaps by referencing the goddess of love (and also finance) the young Guilia was supposed to understand that if she behaved like the goddess and did as she was told, her husband would bestow gifts on her of the best quality money could buy.



*Venus of Urbino. 1538. Titian (1490 - 1576). Uffizzi, Florence.*

Manet (1822 – 1883) does the same thing with his [Olympia](#) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but this time the model's left hand is placed firmly on her right thigh, blocking any access to Olympia's external genitalia. Manet's painting scandalised Parisian society because of the brazenness of the model's overt gaze, as if she is challenging those standing in front of the canvas to say something.



*Olympia. 1863. Edouard Manet (1822 - 1883). Musée d'Orsay.*

That most devout monarch, Philip II of Spain commissioned a series of six paintings from the Venetian maestro, Titian ((1490 – 1576), all featuring female nudes, and all destined to be hung in the Spanish king’s private study. These paintings are based on stories in the 15 books written by the classical poet Ovid (43 BC – 17/18 AD), titled *Metamorphoses* and are known as ‘poesie’.<sup>iii</sup>

The second of this series, [Venus & Adonis](#) (1554) was delivered to Philip while he was in London, not long after his marriage to Mary I of England.



*Venus & Adonis. 1554. Titian (1490 - 1576). Prado, Madrid.*

I have wondered whether the young Adonis, who is rushing away to go hunting while the much older nude blonde Venus is reaching out to keep him at her side, is a metaphor for the young widowed Philip (who was eleven years younger than his English bride) doing his duty and the wishes of his father, but preferring to be elsewhere. The marriage was an arranged one and required dispensation from the Pope because Philip & Mary were first cousins. The marriage also brought about the return of the Catholic church to England that had been Protestant under the previous reign. This marriage also went some way to realising the Hapsburg ambition of a universal Catholic monarchy.

The sleeping Cupid has hung up his bow and arrow in the tree, suggesting that love is not present and history tells us that Philip had other duties away from England. Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the Venetian archives and the private correspondence

between the artist and patron. Now there's a research project for someone provided they speak and can read 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian Italian and Latin and can also get funded.

Clearly the collective thinking of the Council of Trent was to stop artists using pagan references as a vehicle for artists to please the sensual tastes of those with the requisite funds to pay the artist, believing images like these were leading them into a life of sin and sexual gratification (either visual or actual). The Church authorities could not shut down the art market, but they could determine the subject matter in order that artists conformed to their moral and ethical standards.

The story of Susanna & the Elders is not contained in the Masoretic text of the Book of Daniel, being one of twenty four books of the Tanakh, and first appears in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) being the earliest translation from the Hebrew into Greek, made by Theodotion writing some time c150AD. The general agreement is that the tale was included by Theodotion as an embellishment and for moral education. A version is also known in Arabic folklore and that adds another twist to the religious use of this story. For those who do not know the sorry tale, here is a synopsis of Susanna's story.

Susanna, the beautiful wife of a man called Joakim, lived with him in Babylon. Susanna had been brought up 'according to the law of Moses'. Joakim was not only rich, but also a man of honour and often asked to mediate in legal matters.

One day two of Joakim's fellow Jewish elders who met with her husband regularly, saw Susanna making her way to bathe in the garden of the house and they followed her 'inflamed with love for her'. Susanna was accompanied by two maidservants, whom she despatches to the house before taking her bath. The two old men lie in wait and at her most vulnerable, accost her saying that if she does not have sex with them, they will accuse her of meeting a fictional lover.

Adultery was a crime that carried a death sentence by stoning, therefore the elders are placing Susanna between a rock and a hard place. She refuses to have sex with them and shouts for help. On hearing her cries, her servants come running and the two men flee. Later, the two elders carry out their threat and tell Joakim they saw her meeting her lover under a tree. Susanna is condemned to death despite everyone knowing her virtuous reputation, and no one apparently asking the elders the identity of the lover, or for them to produce him. It is at this point that the prophet Daniel (of Daniel and the Lion fame) steps in, takes each man aside and questions him separately. Both men describe how Susanna met her lover under a tree, but one says it was a 'mastic' tree and the other an evergreen oak. Thus is their deceit discovered and instead of Susanna facing the death penalty, they are condemned to death for bearing false witness.

Since we are told that Susanna and her husband, Joakim, are Jewish, perhaps the elders guilty of not only bearing false witness, but also of sacrilege? Therefore was the possible reason she was taking a bath was because she had she been in a state of 'niddah' and therefore about to undertake the ritual of purification in a mikveh seven days after her period had ceased? If that were the case, then Susannah was actually performing the ritual

of purification so that she could return to the conjugal bed.<sup>iv</sup> This could be the reason for Susanna to be taking a bath accompanied by women, and why her hair was also visible. Married Jewish women, or women of marriageable age were required, but Jewish law, to cover their hair because only their husband, or close family members, could see a woman's crowning glory. If this were the case, then the elders were guilty of both sacrilege and false witness.

Theodotion might have been embellishing the Book of Daniel, but he was well aware of the customs that still pertain today for orthodox Jews. While the story is included in Catholic and Orthodox teaching, it is not one that is part of Protestant doctrine, but it has been used by the Protestants as an example of leadership and the consequences of immoral behaviour.

Clearly the story is one that offered a religious narrative that fulfilled the requirement of the subject being a moral story, while also providing the means of portraying a naked female without the artists incurring the wrath of church authorities.

Artemisia's father, Orazio, climbed on to the *Susanna* bandwagon, but his beleaguered lady looks as if she is hardly resisting at all. Her left hand, with its delicately placed forefinger and thumb politely lifting the forefinger of the molesting elder from her shoulder, does not seem to be a convincing removal of the unwanted grope. The poor



*Susanna & the Elders. 17th c. Orazio Gentileschi (1563 - 1639). Museo Nacional de Belas Artes, Brazil.*

woman also appears to be suffering from protruding eyes that are not an especially beautiful attribute. The way the man's right hand is sinking into Susanna's stomach is a grotesque statement of the man's unsaid right to possess her.

Rubens (1577 – 1640) was in Rome at the beginning of the 1600s and many have written of how his sojourn in Italy influenced his work. His various renditions of Susanna are



all of plump blondes that are allegedly frightened, but do not seem to be desperately convincing. I find a great deal of Ruben's work very violent and none more so than his depiction of [The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus](#) (1618) by the sons of Leda and Zeus, Castor and Pollux. This painting depicts the rape of Phoebe and Hilaera, the two daughters of King Leucippus of Argos on the eve of their wedding to Idas and Lynceus, the sons of King Aphareus. In the tale told by Pseudo Appolodorus the wording is that Castor and Pollux were "*charmed by the two girls*". We should also note that the two girls were priestesses of the goddesses, Athene and Artemis (Minerva and Diana in Roman mythology) – who in turn were virgin goddesses. For me, the best part of this painting are the two horses.

In Rubens's portrayal of the capture of the two priestesses, he appears to justify the carrying off of two high born women just because Castor and Pollux are the sons of a god. Take that line of thought one step further: does this mean that a divinely appointed king can do the same? The number of various kingly mistresses litter the pages of history as do the detailed histories of arrangement dynastic marriages. In no case does the woman ever seem to come out the victor.

We know from Ovid's story of *Artemis and Callisto* that Artemis/Diana required her female followers also to be virgins. Actaeon came across the [goddess bathing with her attendants](#) after a particularly arduous hunt and was the subject of another one of Titian's 'poesie' for Philip II.

In contrast to Ruben's two sisters, Titian's various paintings of Artemis's revenge on Actaeon suggests that Titian appreciated the strength of women to take revenge on spying men in a subtle and permanent manner. In Titian's [the death of Actaeon](#) (1559) the goddess changes Actaeon into a stag and he is killed by his own hunting hounds. The virgin goddess appears to possess talents that Titian embodied in this painting as a reminder for all men to beware of the subtleties of the female brain.

Later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rembrandt (1606 – 1669) created many paintings using his wife, and later his mistress as models and while he never travelled south of the Alps, his use of chiaroscuro echoes those fellow artists from the Low Countries that did. His teacher Pieter Lastman (1583 – 1633) was in Italy between 1604 – 1607, absorbing the influences of Caravaggio and another Northerner, Adam Elsheimer (1578 – 1610). Rembrandt's 1647 pretty *Susanna* implores us for help as she steps down the steps of the bath while the man has hold of the cloth that she holds close to her stomach and appears to be pulling it. He looks as if he is peering at the pearls she has wound through her blonde hair, or perhaps he is sniffing to see if she is wearing perfume. The contrast of the two fully dressed men accosting this young woman is creepy, but not as creepy as the version (now lost) by Jan Lievens (1607 – 1674).



*Susanna & the Elders (1647 (Rembrandt (1606 - 1669).*

*Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*

Lievens, like his contemporary Rembrandt, also studied with Lastman, and his version was painted c1631. This *Susanna* is full of violence and at last we see a Susanna who is fighting off her oppressors as one of them pulling away the sheet whilst the other



*Susanna & the Elders; c.1631. Jan Lievens (1607 - 1674).*

*Whereabouts unknown.*

grabs her round the belly, with his left hand nearly in her pubic area. Susanna's sex is clearly visible and does not appear to fulfil the Council of Trent's admonition that ". . . *all lasciviousness be avoided. . .*" One could be generous and suggest that Susanna is defending herself. Certainly the image fulfils the other requirement by the Council ". . . *in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust. . .*"

The overriding factor is that all these interpretations of the story appear to treat the women as if it is the artists' right to view this crime and judge her without considering any other part of the narrative. The way the men are dressed tell us they are of the elite of society and therefore suggests that because they are monied and influential, their behaviour is beyond question – just like the patrons who commissioned and bought these works.

## The rape trial of 1612

Orazio's pursuance of Tassi through the courts was in order to have some recompense for his daughter's loss of honour and for the return of a painting, as if the two were of equal value! The family honour had been besmirched and that carried penalties. Violent rape carried the death penalty for the perpetrator, but if there had been a promise of marriage, or the woman had consented to go to bed then the penalties were either exile or a spell at the oars of the Roman galleys. To prove any of the definitions it would come down to which party could persuade a judge of their story. In each case, the woman would be humiliated, dishonoured and worse still, possibly pregnant and of course, it would be her fault she got pregnant.

I was a part-time student and working full-time when I first came across Artemisia. One of my colleagues was an Italian oil and gas engineer and while I appreciated the elegant translations of the trial transcripts in Mary Garrard's work, I knew enough Italian to know that it was not a verbatim translation. I asked my Italian colleague if he would mind giving me a verbatim translation of part of Artemisia's evidence, some of which was given under torture where her hands were wound round with cords that were tightened in order the resulting pain and possible maiming, would extract the truth from her.

This the literal translation of part of Artemisia's evidence done by my colleague and you can hear the passion of a seventeen year old girl who is determined to prove her story.

*"It was that same day, I had just eaten and it was raining. I was painting a portrait of Tuttia [the family maid/housekeeper] of my liking. It so happens that during this Agostino [Tassi] entered because he was working at home and there was the builders who had left the door open and he finds me painting and he says to me "isn't that enough of painting?" Isn't that enough of painting and he takes off the palette and the handbrushes and throws them. He then says to Tuttia 'go away', and I tell Tuttia not to leave as I had pointed out to him before, that I was going to do this.*

*I then say "I don't want to stay to quarrel here; I want to go with God, and before Tuttia leaves, Agostino puts his head on my chest, and as Tuttia is leaving he grabs my hand and says to me, let's walk a little together and like this we walked together two or three times round the room and I tell him I am not feeling well, and that I thought I had a high temperature and he said, "I have a higher temperature than all of you" and after two or three trips around we approach the bedroom door, and when I get to the door he pushes me inside and locks the door with the key and after locking, he throws me on the edge of the bed with one hand on my chest and he places one knee in between my thighs so I could not move or close them and he lifts up my clothes.*

*He puts a hand with a handkerchief around my throat and mouth so that I would not shout. Prior to this he put both knees in between my legs and he begins to push his member towards me without anything on it and I start to feel it pushing into me hard and he hurt me a lot and for the item round my mouth did not allow me to scream out. Also I tried to scream and call Tuttia. I scratched him and ripped off his hair and I grabbed hold tight of his member that I even pulled off a piece of flesh.*

*He put his member in me like a piece of meat and he continued to do his deeds and once he finishes he gets up from me and I went to the drawer of the table and took out a knife. I went to him and said, 'I want to kill you with this knife as you have raped me'.*

*I open to the judge saying, "Here I am" and I pull him with the knife and wounded him and it was easy to kill him; with everything I had the knife in his chest and blood came out, only a little as tiredness arrived at the point of the knife".<sup>v</sup>*

Despite her hands possibly being injured permanently, Artemisia never changed her story. What a modern lay audience finds difficult to fathom is why she was tortured while Tassi was merely questioned. Ever since Eve tempted Adam the Church considered women to be artful and deceitful. Only when subjected to pain, and possible maiming, was Artemisia able to convince the judge that hers was a true account of what happened.

Artemisia's testimony, under oath as well as thumbscrews, included the statement that she had never been alone with any man not a member of her immediate family until Tassi. She also said that she had never had any sexual relations with any other person except Tassi and believed that he was going to offer her marriage. Unbeknown to Artemisia Tassi was already married.

Tassi's version of events are at the most generous muddled, and he contradicts himself and makes false accusations against the Gentileschi family accusing Orazio of incest with his daughter; that Artemisia wrote erotic letters to men and had slept with at least five. At this point in her life we know that Artemisia was illiterate, but could sign her name. He

also produced six witnesses who stated that Artemisia modelled nude for various artists and that she was a whore. Tassi also accused Artemisia's mother of being a whore, despite the woman having been dead for some seven or so years. He also stated that he had never had carnal relations with Artemisia, and had never even been alone with her. His visits to the Gentileschi house were to keep watch over her and the house!

If Artemisia had held out hopes that Tassi would marry her, it became apparent during the trial that since he was already married, marriage was not going to be an option. That his wife was missing and presumed dead threw even more mud at Tassi as it was suggested, but not proved, that he may have arranged to have her killed.

The transcript of the seven month trial is, unfortunately, not complete, the fact that Tassi was held in prison for eight months after the trial demonstrates he was found guilty. Since he could have been exiled for five years, or imprisoned for the same term, Tassi did not serve a full exile, nor did he serve a full prison sentence and was back in Rome not a great number of months after being found guilty. What had also come to light during this trial was that Tassi was a convicted rapist having raped both his previous wife (who was missing presumed dead), as well as his sister-in-law. During his time in Florence he had also been sentenced to serve time on the Duke of Tuscany's galleys, but for what crime is not recorded. Since the two previous rapes were committed in Florence is it possible that his time on the galleys was the sentence handed down. What has also come to light thanks to the diligence of scholars, is that Tassi did not serve at the oars, and was allowed the freedom of the ship provided he sketched the passing coastlines. It makes sense to use the talents of someone known for their seascapes to record the details of foreign shores in visual format.

As for the missing Gentileschi painting, it is thought that Tassi's friend and accomplice, Cosimo Quorli stole this. Quorli had also tried to rape Artemisia and may well have ensured that Orazio was away from the house on many occasions in order for Tassi to visit the young girl.

Many of us have had to fend off an office 'wolf', or been groped on a bus or commuter train by an unknown male. Because the courts are still slanted against the victim many actual rapes go unreported. Anyone who has been a victim of sexual assault will recognise Artemisia's panic that she will not be believed, which is evident in her testimony, and will empathise with how she fought back, so graphically described by her in court.

In his testimony, Tassi described Artemisia as a wanton. However, his evidence was so contradictory that at one point the judge had to stop him several times and ask him to stop lying! In this instance, no doubt Tassi was hoping that his witnesses would perjure themselves about Artemisia's general behaviour and back up his version of events. We can speculate that his statement was based on his experiences of artist's models, except that is unlikely since he was known for his land and seascapes, not for his portraits or religious narratives.

What struck me was the similarity of Artemisia's questioning with the intense scrutiny that the lawyer, Anita Hill (b1956), was subjected to in 1990 when George H W

Bush nominated Clarence Thomas (b1948) as a judge for America's Supreme Court. Despite Thomas having only been a justice for a year, the President considered him suitable because of his good character. Hill had been interviewed by the FBI and contents of that interview where she revealed that she had been subjected to sexual harassment by Thomas, had been leaked. Despite the Judiciary Committee having finished their scrutiny of Clarence Thomas's suitability, they agreed to take Hill's testimony. Having watched a clip of Hill's cross questioning by the Committee recently what struck me was that it was made up only of white men who sat en masse opposite Anita Hill, sitting alone behind a desk. Just as 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome was gripped by the proceedings of Artemisia's rape trial, in 1990 the world watched the proceedings gripped by this young woman having the temerity to described in detail how a man, whom had been her mentor, had harassed her sexually. Despite Hill's calm and eloquent answers to the Committee's questions, Clarence Thomas was appointed to the Supreme Court and remains in office to this day.

Returning to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps we should put ourselves in the shoes of the women working in the taverns where the artists met, exchanged ideas and more to the point, drank. In the case of Caravaggio, we know that when he got paid for a work he would get uproariously drunk. Faced with the possibility of earning some extra money lying down for some hours on a couch, posing and not having to serve food and booze to a load of drunken men who groped your bottom or breasts at any given opportunity, what would be your choice? So what if the man with the brush wanted to have sex with you – if he were paying you enough then perhaps it would be worth your while. Life was tough in the artists' quarter of any city, so we should not be too condemning of those women who had to earn a living.

The trial was long and the subject of much gossip and rumour. Just how Orazio had come to hear of the rape may well have been because of gossip and rumours circulating among the artistic circles that both he and Tassi frequented i.e. the taverns. Did Orazio confront his daughter? Did he confront Tassi? More to the point, just when did the relationship between Tassi and Artemisia start and for how long did it continue?

That Gentileschi brought the court case demonstrates that his daughter was not, as Tassi described, a whore. Since her talent is now obvious to the world, even Orazio recognised what this was worth to him and why he wanted compensation from his former friend. Artemisia's evidence shows she was dedicated to perfecting her craft which is evident in the early paintings created prior to the trial.

Since it is known that Orazio asked Tassi to teach his daughter the complexities of perspective because Tassi was known for his complex architectural landscapes, and Artemisia's obvious talents with glazes and draughtsmanship, it is possible that Tassi planted the idea that he teach the young woman perspective? Orazio and Tassi had worked together and I know this is pure speculation, had he, Tassi, and possibly the more mysterious but equally odious Quorli, come up with the idea in order to groom her from the time the unsuspecting Orazio had hired him? In other words, perhaps it was either Tassi, or Quorli, who put the idea of teaching Artemisia perspective into Orazio's mind? This idea is

totally unproveable, but the drama of Artemisia's 1610 Susanna, painted prior to the infamous trial, comes from her heart and anyone who has been in a similar position to both the artist and Susanna will recognise that panic.

The Gentileschi household was predominantly male consisting of her father and her two brothers and only the maidservant, Tutta as chaperone for Artemisia. Therefore, any visiting artist might be tempted to take liberties if they were so inclined. If so, is this painting Artemisia's response to the unwanted attentions of male visitors to the Gentileschi atelier who thought she was fair game?

As an unknown artist not confined by painting to commission, Artemisia had the luxury of being able choose subjects and how she wanted to portray them. It is in these first paintings we see how she has portrayed a realistic female form, clearly something that would appeal to any patron, as opposed to the rather grotesque women of her father, Rubens and other male painters. Orzaio's female nudes are another piece of evidence disproving Tassi's accusation that Artemisia posed for her father naked. Artemisia's Susanna has a body of a young woman – perhaps even her own?

## Artemisia's genius

There is no doubt that Artemisia was a child prodigy, mastering the complex techniques of oil painting on canvas and copper while still a teenager, but she was also a mistress of innovation using mirrors to create that stunning self-portrait as the embodiment of the allegory of painting as described in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1560.



*Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting. Royal Collection Trust.*

While the 1610 'Susanna' does not have the chiaroscuro of Artemisia's first 'Judith' to create dramatic effects, she uses the intensity of expression, arms thrown up in her effort to push the men away and twists the torso of the young woman and the means to capture Susanna's horror at the intrusion.

In more recent times Picasso tackled the subject in 1966. <https://restricted.pablo-ruiz-picasso.net/work-710.php>. While I am sure the Picasso fans will make a lot out of this image, I'm not sure what it says, or even if Picasso was sure about what message he wanted to give out.



More recently, the artist Kathleen Giljes (1945 - ) looked at Artemisia's first Susanna of 1610 and recreates it in her piece, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored – X-Ray*. The re-envisaged lead white under-drawing seen as if in X-ray of the original illustrates Artemisia's emotional response and frustration, so graphically recalled in her testimony. Giljes' genius is to recreate the original with the hint of the suggested new pentimenti just visible through the oil glazes. This link will take you to a YouTube video where Giljes takes you step by step through her version. <https://youtu.be/jq2bmbPL7rA>. The painting, now owned by the Addison Museum of American Art, will be part of the exhibition, "*Susanna from Mannerism to Me To*" to be held in Cologne from October 2022 – February 22-23 at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum.



*Screenshot from Kathleen Giljes video showing her recreated version of Artemisia's Susanna.*

Bearing in mind that, at the beginning of the 1610s, Artemisia was totally unknown as an artist therefore having total freedom of choice regarding subject matter, let us look at another of her early paintings (now in a private collection), this time of a young woman. She is fully dressed, but her head is thrown back and her exquisitely defined blouse is slipping off her right shoulder. She grasps her knees and if we look closely, we become aware that she has a bodice of yellow ochre – a colour that was to become a signature pigment of her palette. An apron of deep purple (opposite to yellow on the colour wheel) overlays her skirt, which also rendered in the same yellow ochre pigment. Her hair is loose



and her face is flushed; onscreen there is a flush of pink just above the top of her blouse where her hair falls over her left shoulder. On closer inspection we note her hands are grubby and her neatly trimmed nails are rimed with grime, or is it paint? The way the light falls from the right suggests that she may be enjoying a quiet moment in a patch of sunlight after a day hard at work at an easel. By comparing the various paintings of the female saints where Artemisia is using herself as a model, this image is clearly her.

The experts have had difficulty defining the date for this one offering 1611 and between 1612 and 1620, which is tantamount to saying it is an early work, but without wishing to be too specific.

The minute you add a title this painting becomes a different animal. This painting is known as *The Magdalene in Ecstasy* putting a bias on the subject that has been described as Mary Magdalene expressing divine rapture.<sup>vi</sup> Other critics have put a sexual slant on her apparent expression of bliss.

In most these paintings by any of the artists, including those by Artemisia, the subject matter is pretty obvious even if there was no title. The subtlety of what I suppose we have to call the *Magdalene in Ecstasy*, suggests a fine brain behind this brush, who is well aware that should her work find success, then she will have to find a way of being different from all the male competition. Without a title, this painting is just a young woman leaning back with her eyes closed after working hard at something that has made her hands grubby, as opposed to a female follower of Christ in some form of rapture, be it spiritual or sexual.

It would be her first Susanna that would grab the attention of the wealthy patrons because of the fleshy realism, wrapped up in a tawdry excuse of this being a moral painting depicting Daniel's fine judgement against the elders. If that were the case, then where is Daniel, let alone any tree, 'mastick' or otherwise, that proved the elders were lying! The lack of landscape or any other context except the stone parapet separating Susanna from her would be rapists, makes their intent the focus of her work. No wonder it is thought that the two elders are actual portraits of Tassi and Quorli whispering to each other as to who will have her first. If you compare these two men with those in the 1622 version at first glance they could be older versions of the two men in the first.

Artemisia's first Judith (created c1611 – 1612 and now in Naples) can certainly be considered a revenge painting. Artemisia shows two women with the main character dressed as Artemisia in the style of clothes worn by the artist, and the maid Abra arrayed in not too dissimilar clothes. The two women are of a similar age and Artemisia depicts them as equal collaborators, whereas in other renditions, such as that by Caravaggio, there is a clear visual distinction in status between Judith and her maid. It is Artemisia's second Judith, showing the same scene with the two women hard at work decapitating the Assyrian general, Holofernes, that depicts Judith as a rich woman. This puts Judith on the same social level as the general who has drunk himself into a stupor, to the point where he is vulnerable, but clearly it never entered his mind that a woman might do him any harm. Judith is still assisted by a maid of similar age to herself, but the differences in their social status is very obvious.

Artemisia's paintings of Judith and her maid leaving the Assyrian camp with the head of Holofernes continues this theme of collaboration between two women of similar age, but of unequal status.

Artemisia's other works from 1611 – 12 include two nudes that gave her patrons a realistic image of the female body, so unlike those of her father and the earlier artists. These are women of flesh and blood that appear transfixed on the canvas as if by magic.

Her large canvas of [Cleopatra](#) (1611 -12) now in a private collection in Milan, was probably inspired by seeing an engraving of a Roman copy of a second century BC Greek original sculpture of the [Sleeping Ariadne](#), that is part of the Vatican collection. In her essay on this particular painting, Letitia Treves, the curator of the exhibition, reminds us that the scholar Judith Mann pointed out that the likelihood of Artemisia having similar access to the Vatican collection in order to sketch the various Greek and Roman original statues, was non-existent. As a 17<sup>th</sup> century Roman woman she would have been subject to strict rules of chaperone, despite her mother, Prudenzia di Ottoviano Montoni (d1605) having died when Artemisia was only twelve years old. Her father may have been a successful artist, and mixed with some of the best (and some of the most badly behaved) artists in Rome, but even he would have made certain Artemisia would not have been allowed to mix with the various male apprentices who did have access to these statues in order for them to sketch and understand the male body. There were women who modelled for artists and many used their own wives as models.

Artemisia's smaller oil on copper of [Danaë](#) (St Louis Art Museum) dates from 1612, was clearly painted using the same sketches used for her Cleopatra. Painting on copper was difficult, so perhaps this was also an exercise in mastering yet another technique to add to her skill set. It would explain the small size of the painting, which might also suggest this was painted for 'private consumption'. The presence of the god is in the tumble of gold coins from above have cascaded between the thighs of the sleeping girl, while her maid tries to catch the falling money. The presence of the maid echoes the first of work Titian created in his commission of 'poesie' for Philip II. This version of [Danaë](#) was painted in the early 1550s and now in the Wellesley Collection, Apsley House.<sup>vii</sup>

For those who do not know the story, Danaë, the daughter of King Acrisius of Argos, was imprisoned in a tower by her father because he had been foretold that she would bear a son. You might think this would be a moment of joy as it meant Acrisius had an heir, but the second part of the prophecy was that this grandson would kill him. According to the myth, Zeus was so taken with the beauty of Danaë that he desired to possess her. In order to get past the guards the god disguised himself as a shower of gold and thus impregnated the unsuspecting girl, whose son, Perseus, did end up by killing his grandfather.

Titian's first version of this subject has *Danaë* lying in a virtually identical in pose, but containing a Cupid instead of a maid. It was painted in 1544-45 for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520 – 1589), apparently referencing the cardinal's affair with a courtesan! The artist created several versions and the [1544 version](#) now hangs in Naples. The message is that the naughty son of Venus, whose arrows are tipped with a potent love potion, had clearly pierced the heart of the cardinal. In other versions, the decorously draped sheet is moved from her right thigh to the left and in later versions, this sheet disappears and Cupid is substituted for the more human presence of the maid.

A more problematic painting is Artemisia's depiction of the biblical story of Sisera and Jael.

The story is one of the oldest in the Old Testament, dating from 12<sup>th</sup> century BC and this extract is from Judges Chapter 4 of the Vulgate version of the Bible, being the one Artemisia would have heard read by the priest:

#### *Chapter 4 Deborah*

<sup>1</sup> *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead.*

<sup>2</sup> *So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim.*

<sup>3</sup> *Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.*

<sup>4</sup> *Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading<sup>[a]</sup> Israel at that time.*

<sup>5</sup> *She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.*

- <sup>6</sup> She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor.
- <sup>7</sup> I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"
- <sup>8</sup> Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."
- <sup>9</sup> "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.
- <sup>10</sup> There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.
- <sup>11</sup> Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law,<sup>[b]</sup> and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.
- <sup>12</sup> When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, <sup>13</sup> Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.
- <sup>14</sup> Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him.
- <sup>15</sup> At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.
- <sup>16</sup> Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. <sup>17</sup> Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.
- <sup>18</sup> Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.
- <sup>19</sup> "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.
- <sup>20</sup> "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say 'No.'"

*<sup>21</sup> But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.*



*Jael & Sisera. 1620. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1654/56). Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.*

*<sup>22</sup> Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.*

*<sup>23</sup> On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites.*

*<sup>24</sup> And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.*

In Chapter 5 of Judges, Deborah and Barak celebrate Sisera's death in song, immortalising Jael's deed in verses 24 to 27.

*<sup>24</sup> "Most blessed of women be Jael,  
the wife of Heber the Kenite,  
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.*

*<sup>25</sup> He asked for water, and she gave him milk;  
in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.*

*<sup>26</sup> Her hand reached for the tent peg,  
her right hand for the workman's hammer.  
She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,  
she shattered and pierced his temple.*

*27 At her feet he sank,  
he fell; there he lay.  
At her feet he sank, he fell;  
where he sank, there he fell—dead.*

Artemisia's portrayal captures the moment just as Jael is about to punch down with her full force on to the top of the tent peg with a hammer, pinning the defeated general to the tent floor, has been the centre of much discussion by academics. There is no doubt that this painting is by her as her signature *Aretimita Lomi/Facibat/MDCXX* is carved in the stone pillar immediately behind the sleeping general. Jael's arm will strike that tent peg in the same way a sculptor strikes the chisel to carve Artemisia's name.

As to the story, there appears to be one major anomaly. Why has the Canaanite general gone to Jael's tent and not that of Jael's husband, Heber? The imperious command given for her to stand in the doorway and lie if asked if anyone is in her tent, suggests that Sisera has entered the camp covertly and entered the first tent he comes to. It also shows an assumption on Sisera's part that Jael will do as she is told. Finding herself in a compromising position because, like Susanna, she knows that even though Sisera is a man on the run, his word will be taken over hers.

Sisera asks for water and brings him 'a skin of milk'. Feeling no threat, Sisera falls asleep, because he also knows that nomadic (or otherwise) rules of hospitality are that having been offered and accepted sustenance, in his mind it meant he would be safe. In murdering him, has Jael broken this rule? That he asked for water, rather than had it offered could be an argument in Jael's defence should she be accused of murderer. Other interpretations appear to have failed to consider this aspect regarding the rules of hospitality and focused on how being killed by a woman while hiding in her tent is shaming to all men. Whether Jael murdered him in order to protect herself, or because she knew that the Israelite general, Barak, would pursue the fleeing Canaanites and did not want her, or her husband, to be accused of harbouring an enemy, we are left to judge for ourselves.

Again Artemisia has created a painting that encompasses the above traditional interpretations, but offers a female audience an example of a woman who takes charge of a situation by using her wit to defend both herself, and in this instance, like Judith, her people. Who knew what Barak might have done had Sisera been found alive hiding in Heber's camp.

Immediately after the 1612 trial Artemisia was married off to a fellow artist, the Florentine Pietro Stiattesi and the couple immediately moved to Florence. Pietro was none other than the brother of the lawyer her father Orazio had engaged to present the case against Tassi. Unlike his clever lawyer brother, Pietro's talent was nowhere comparable and certainly not as great as that of his wife. Much is written about Artemisia's marriage, but for Artemisia the important facts are that in the years spent in Florence between 1612 and 1620 when the couple returned to Rome, Artemisia had been accepted into the Academia

del delle Arti del Disegno, the first woman to be so honoured, and she had learnt to read and write.

The National Gallery's catalogue has fabulous essays detailing recent research into her correspondence. Artemisia's letters, some of which were dictated to secretaries or scribes whilst she painted depending whether or not they were destined to patrons, her own writing style not, in her opinion, being suitable to be read by her wealthy patrons. By comparison, her personal letters to Maringhi are full of passion as well as blobs and squidges of ink. Since their discovery in 2011 these letters have given us a better insight into Artemisia's character and life events.

During these seven years, Artemisia gave birth to five children. Three died in infancy, the four and a half year old Christofano died shortly after the family returned to the Eternal City, and Prudentia (named after Artemisia's long dead mother) was the only child to survive to adulthood. Her letters reveal that in 1618/19 Artemisia had embarked on an intense love affair with an influential Florentine nobleman, Francesco Maria Maringhi. Stiattesi seems to have been aware of this affair as his hand has been identified on the reverse of some of the letters from Artemisia asking Maringhi to finalise her affairs in Florence, pay the debts and to send on any effects to Rome.

We know from another letter from Stiattesi to Maringhi that the household was



*Unknown Young Man. Simon Vouet  
(1590 – 1649). Louvre, Paris. Possibly  
Francsco Maranghi*

constantly being visited by cardinals and other influential patrons all keen to have something from Artemisia's palette. The husband, and the influential Florentine lover all fade from Artemisia's life after 1622.

Various signatures identify Artemisia's work done in Florence using the family name of Lomi and later, Gentileschi, but she rarely uses her husband's name.



Florence had been good for Artemisia. Her acceptance into the Accademia meant she was in contact with other academy members, and came under Duke Cosimo's protection. During this period she became friends with other artists and influential Florentines such as the artist Cristofano Allori 1577 – 1621), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1586 – 1648) (Michelangelo of Sistine Chapel fame's great nephew), the French artist Simon Vouet (1590 – 1649) and various musicians and writers. A portrait of an Unknown Man by Vouet hangs in the Louvre and it is thought this may be a portrait of Maringhi

### Artemisia's influence and legacy



*Susanna & the Elders. 1622. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 - 1654/56).  
Burghley House, Lincolnshire.*

The requirement by church authorities for artists to reign in their portrayal of anything considered lascivious such as naked pagan gods and goddesses, and only to produce images that gave a moral and/or religious tale certainly meant that artists had to

put on their thinking caps in order to circumvent these restrictions. The plethora of Susanna's demonstrates the popularity of the female nude as a subject and the ease with which artists came up with a way of satisfying the male gaze.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the academic study of art history was the invented by rich men with a lot of time on their hands. Philosophical ideals such as those proposed by Emmanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), and others, that art should be judged in the abstract, seem to be a very thinly veiled excuse for voyeurism.

The pose of Giorgione's and Titian's sleeping Venuses, of Artemisia's Cleopatra and Danaë, Ruben's nudes and many others nudes painted in subsequent centuries, are all echoed in surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs and the 20<sup>th</sup> century centrefolds and other images in *Playboy* and other 'glamour' magazines – these women were all photographed by men. You might call these photographs camera rape, but that's another subject!

During her lifetime Artemisia's work was much in demand and having sat in front of the Burghley House 1622 version of Susanna waiting for the tear balanced so precariously on the edge of her eyelashes for the better part of half an hour, I can understand why. I first saw this painting in the *Beyond Caravaggio* exhibition at the National in 2016 and the very slight tremor caused by the vibration of the feet made by number of people in the building made it appear as if the tear was trembling and about to tip over and dribble down her cheek. This painting resonates very deeply, far more so than any of the other versions of by Artemisia. Perhaps I was struck by Susanna's expression of hopelessness and her realisation that, whatever the truth, she realises she will not be believed because she is a woman. That is a situation so many women still find themselves in today.

By contrast many of Artemisia's women are far from being victims ergo her Judith series and the image of Jael and Sisera. These matriarchs have taken retribution against the male aggressors into their own hands because they know that the odds of them getting any form of justice are stacked against them.

All the Susanna's are all paintings that on one level fulfil the artistic requirements laid out in the Council of Trent's statement regarding subject matter, but also pander to Artemisia's male patrons' desire to have female nudes on their walls. To the wives and daughters of those patrons, the Judith's are a reminder that they do not have to be victims; they can retaliate and what is more, for the female servants in those households the message is that it does not matter what level of society you come from.

Alberti (1404 – 1474) had argued that women should be educated since they had the keeping of children during infancy and their early years. It was a medieval pope who, a couple of centuries before Alberti's thoughts on the education of women, had declared that 'women should not be educated, but be a sack for men's seed'. It was not until Mary Woolstencraft's publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792 that the concept that women are not naturally inferior to men was set out in print and the women's movement began.<sup>viii</sup> Even though women gained the vote at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that women in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, (I hope also Scotland which has its own legal jurisdiction), obtained a

legitimate voice. The 1973 Matrimonial Causes Act FINALLY removed the status of women from the status of chattel, giving all those married after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1974 the legal rights and responsibilities equal to that of their husbands, but it was not until 2003 that rape within marriage was finally made a criminal offence.

The feminist writers of the 70s, such as Linda Nochlin (1931 – 2017), Professor Laura Mulvey (1939 - ), Professor Griselda Pollock (1949 - ) and a whole host of other feminist writers, playwrights, poets and artists have all highlighted the male gaze as exploitative and pernicious.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary edition Professor Germaine Greer described her frustration that little had happened in the 20 years since the publication of her book, *The Female Eunuch* in 1971:

*“The freedom I pleaded for twenty years ago was freedom to be a person, with dignity, integrity, nobility, passion, pride that constitute personhood. Freedom to run, shout, talk loudly and sit with your knees apart. Freedom to know and love the earth and all that swims, lies, and crawls upon it...most of the women in the world are still afraid, still hungry, still mute and loaded by religion with all kinds of fetters, masked, muzzled, mutilated and beaten.”*

In more recent years we have seen the ‘Me Too’ movement hold men to account through the courts for sexual predation. Hollywood moguls such as Harvey Weinstein are being found guilty and convicted of sexual crimes. Weinstein was found guilty of one count of criminal sexual assault in the first degree and one count of rape in the third degree. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 he was sentenced to 23 years imprisonment. On 18<sup>th</sup> September, Weinstein was stripped of his CBE awarded in 2004 by Elizabeth II for his contributions to the film industry.

There are other, more high profile individuals now holding high office who are alleged to have taken advantage of their previous celebrity status to prey on women. Men of power and money who use their wealth to pay off their victims provided they sign non-disclosure agreements. The message is *“take the money and shut up, or we will come at you through the courts for breaking that non-disclosure agreement.”* Hats off to those women who have fought back against such coercion and exposed these men for what they are.

At a much lower level of society, victims of rape often do not come forward because they know the police will not act. Even if the case were brought to court, they have to consider whether they want to have their personal lives scrutinised intensely. In some instances, that scrutiny has driven some to suicide. The concept of the defendant being innocent until proved guilty appears to demand that the victim has to live the assault again and again, through questioning. In addition, the media crawl over the minutiae of the various social media accounts of the victim, often leaving those of the defendant alone.

Artemisia’s brilliance gave her an entrée to the wealthiest and most powerful men in Europe who all wanted her work long after any notoriety created by the trial had faded. Her message to women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has to be *“The best revenge is your own success.”* That Artemisia’s paintings can be read in more ways than one, suggests she was painting for both a male and female audience. Whether the male audience realised that is another matter and one they would probably have refuted. He who pays the piper calls the tune, and these patrons were the equivalent of our bankers and oligarchs of today. In short – human nature never changes, and it never will.

When it comes to the vast number of artists practising in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, even though they were considered good artists in their own lifetimes, how many of you know, or would recognise the work of Agostino Tassi, Pietro Stiattesi, or even Artemisia's father - Orazio Gentileschi, in order to make a judgement as to whether theirs was of a great standard unless you had seen the work and read the story of

## Artemisia

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I would like to thank Kathleen Giljes for her kind and wonderful response to my email about her wonderful work of art. I hope to get to Cologne to see her piece in 2022, Covid permitting.

In particular, I would also like to express my thanks (albeit it is a tad late) to Professor Raymond Ward Bissell for his patience and kindness in responding to all my questions when I was an under-graduate all those years ago. He shared his vast knowledge on the Gentileschi's use of glazes and put up with my flights of fancy even though I was not his student. R.I.P. Professor, you are much missed.

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<sup>i</sup> Jan Massys was one of two sons of Quinten Massys (1466 – 1530). His younger brother was Cornelis Massys (1510 – 1562), landscape painter, draughtsman and engraver.

<sup>ii</sup> The Leonardo original is now lost, but a copy by Cesare da Sesto (1477 – 1523) now hangs in Wilton House, near Salisbury, Wiltshire, the Uffizzi in Florence and Galleria Borghese, Rome. All versions of Leonardo's Leda may be by da Sesto.

<sup>iii</sup> The National Gallery page states these tales were well understood as biblical stories at the time of Titian. For that sort of statement by such an eminent institution, I'd like to see a cited reference for a biblical sources for the adventures of the Greek and Roman gods. Ovid (43BC – 17/18 AD) straddles the beginning of the Christian era, but his poems, particularly the books making up *Metamorphoses* and his *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) were rediscovered during the early Renaissance and studied by those undergoing a humanist education. Artists realised that they provided a virtually unending source of inspiration for ways of pleasing their wealthy patrons under the guise of classical themes. Considering the number of various roman statues of both male and female nudes being unearthed and finding their way into private collections, it was inevitable that painting, being cheaper than sculpture, would jump on the bandwagon.

<sup>iv</sup> The mikveh is entered after a woman has taken a cleansing bath to remove all impurities of the body. Just as the cleansing bath washes away all physical impurities, the waters of the mikveh cleanse the spirit. The removal of all earthly trappings i.e. bracelets, hair ornaments, rings etc., are often depicted as lying beside the bath, which suggests Susanna may well have been about to immerse herself in the mikveh. The abstinence of sex during menstruation and for seven days after, also makes it more likely that a wife will conceive once she returns to the marital because she is coming to the point of ovulating. The Elders would know this, therefore were they attempting to exact a revenge on Joakim for some imagined slight, by attempting to plant a cuckoo in Joakim's nest? Since the story was interpreted for a Catholic audience, none of these Jewish rituals would have been considered. The idea of a revenge on Joakim is not one that I've seen argued and since there is little possibility of being able to prove this, it will remain the subject of idle speculation.

<sup>v</sup> Many, many thanks to Giovanni Monaco for his translation of nearly 20 years ago. He is now a successful consultant out in Oman.

<sup>vi</sup> This painting is in a private collection.

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vii This is before the painting was cleaned and restored.

viii I read this statement many years ago and I get angry every time I think of it.

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