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Italian Women Artists Celebrated in Groundbreaking Exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum

Hartford, Conn. (July 30, 2021)— The first exhibition solely dedicated to Italian women artists at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, By Her Hand: Artemisia Gentileschi and Women Artists in Italy, 1500–1800 explores how women succeeded in the male-dominated art world of the time. From the group of eighteen artists presented, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1654 or later), takes center stage with outstanding portraits and images of heroines. This exhibition recognizes and celebrates the vital contributions of women to the history of art in Italy through rarely seen works, recent scholarship, and introductions to virtually unknown artists. By Her Hand will be on view September 30, 2021–January 9, 2022 at the Wadsworth.

“Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, and Rosalba Carriera, among others, created pathbreaking works of art, simultaneously subverting expectations and challenging norms,” said Oliver Tostmann, Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art at the Wadsworth. “Their works and careers are often distinguished by alternative choices and idiosyncratic methods employed within the context of the male dominated art world of the time. By Her Hand brings together a wide spectrum of works by these artists—many on view for the first time—inviting visitors to explore, reassess, and celebrate the achievements of Italian women artists.”

The exhibition features a wide array of paintings, miniatures, and works on paper from institutional and private collections in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The artists
take on a range of subjects from portraiture and still life, to historical and religious stories. Many works are being shown publicly for the first time or are making their U.S. debut such as Artemisia Gentileschi’s ravishing Mary Magdalene. By Her Hand reweaves history by examining women artists’ work and careers from the 1550s to the 1750s. Despite the fundamental differences and challenges women artists faced, some achieved notable success in their lifetime. The accomplishments of this diverse and dynamic group are introduced, discussed, and reassessed. Until recently, many of these Italian women artists were overlooked by critics, scholars, collectors, and institutions alike.

Artemisia Gentileschi is arguably the best-known artist included in the exhibition. Gentileschi’s talents were widely recognized by her contemporaries, many elite patrons of her day knew of and desired her work. Important works by Gentileschi highlight her innovative ideas, use of sensuous colors, and command of the brush. The Wadsworth’s Self-Portrait as a Lute Player is compared with the recently discovered Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria from the National Gallery, London, as well as Portrait of Saint Catherine from the Uffizi Galleries, Florence. This will be the first opportunity to see these three celebrated paintings side by side in the United States. Additional examples of Gentileschi’s pioneering depictions of strong women, such as Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes from the Detroit Institute of Arts, will also be on view.

The compelling works of art on view in By Her Hand coupled with stories of their pioneering makers reveals a nuanced picture of the role Italian women artists played from the Renaissance to the Rococo. By Her Hand celebrates their long-overlooked contributions, and aims to inspire continued reexaminations of the role women artists have played throughout the history of art.

"Never before in its long history has the Wadsworth devoted an exhibition to the work of professional women artists in sixteenth through eighteenth-century Italy, despite the fame of our Italian Baroque painting collection” said Jeffrey N. Brown, Interim Director & CEO of the Wadsworth Atheneum. “By Her Hand is the first exhibition in any encyclopedic museum in the United States to focus on this subject. This ground-breaking exhibition provides our audiences with a chance to encounter the outstanding art produced by these women artists in early modern Italy and to appreciate the far-reaching consequences of Artemisia Gentileschi’s illustrious career."

By Her Hand is a collaboration between the Wadsworth and the Detroit Institute of Arts. Curated by Eve Straussman-Pflanzer former curator at the Detroit Institute of Arts now Curator and Head of Italian and Spanish paintings at The National Gallery of Art, Washington and Oliver Tostmann, Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art at the Wadsworth. After its debut at the Wadsworth, it will travel to Detroit where it will be on view February 6–May 29, 2022.
Artists in the exhibition
Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1535–1625)
Diana Scultori (c. 1547–1612)
Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614)
Fede Galizia (c. 1574–c. 1630)
Isabella Catanea Parasole (active 1585–1625)
Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1654 or later)
Orsola Maddalena Caccia (1596–1676)
Giovanna Garzoni (1600–1670)
Virginia da Vezzo (1600–1638)*
Anna Maria Vaiani (1604–1655)
Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665)
Ginevra Cantofoli (1618–1672)
Caterina de Julianis (c. 1670–c. 1742)
Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757)
Marianna Carlevaris (1703–after 1750)
Maria Felice Tibaldi (1707–1770)*
Veronica Stern Telli (1717–1801)
Anna Bacherini Piattoli (1720–1788)

* Virginia da Vezzo and Maria Felice Tibaldi are represented in portraits painted by their husbands Simon Vouet (1590–1649) and Pierre Subleyras (1699–1749).

Publication
The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated 208-page catalogue published by Yale University Press with essays by Eve Straussman-Pflanzer, Oliver Tostmann, and Sheila Barker; and individual object entries are written by the exhibition curators as well as Babette Bohn, C. D. Dickerson, Jamie Gabbarelli, Hilliard T. Goldfarb, Joaneath Spicer, and Lara Roney. The book can be ordered through the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum Shop at [www.wadsworthshop.org](http://www.wadsworthshop.org) or (860) 838-4052 for $40.

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About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Founded in 1842 with a vision for infusing art into the American experience, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is home to a collection of nearly 50,000 works of
art spanning 5,000 years and encompassing European art from antiquity through contemporary as well as American art from the 1600s to today. The Wadsworth Atheneum’s five connected buildings—representing architectural styles including Gothic Revival, modern International Style, and 1960s Brutalism—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn.

Hours are noon–8pm Fridays, and noon–5pm Saturdays, and Sundays. Visitors are required to wear a face mask/covering while inside the museum. The library, food service, and Austin House are currently closed to the public. Admission: $5–15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4–5pm. From July 1 to September 6, Connecticut children age 18 and under plus one accompanying adult can visit free of charge through the Connecticut Summer at the Museum program. Advance ticket registration via thewadsworth.org is encouraged, not required. Phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.


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