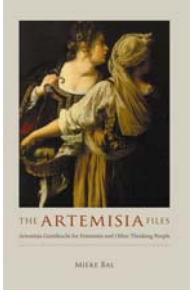


The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People / Edited by Mieke Bal.—
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\$27.50.



The personal is political, goes the feminist rallying cry of the 1970s. However, the personal can overshadow other aspects of a woman's achievement.

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was a successful Baroque painter, exceptional for being a pre-twentieth-century woman painter whose name is part of the art history canon. However, three things distract scholars from serious consideration of Gentileschi's paintings: first, her label as a "woman" painter; second, the trial of her rapist, who was her tutor; and third, the comparison of her paintings to those of her father, Orazio, and the misattribution of some of her work to her father.

The scholars who contributed essays to *The Artemisia Files* look past the personal notoriety and gender ghettoization and help us see Gentileschi's work unencumbered by "scandal and sensationalist prefigurations" (p. ix). In "Artemisia's Hand," Mary Garrard observes that the hands of Gentileschi's female subjects appear strong and engaged while her father painted limp, powerless hands, and re-attributes some of Orazio's work to Artemisia. Nanette Salomon discusses Gentileschi's depictions of two biblical themes, Susanna and the elders and Judith beheading Holofernes, and comments on art critics' and art historians' judgments as regards the artist. Elena Ciletti offers a formal examination of the "Judith" paintings, choosing not to look for interpretive clues in the artist's biography. In "Death, Dispassion, and the Female Hero: Artemesia Gentileschi's *Jael and Sisera*," Babette Bohn discusses one of Genteschi's lesser know works. Like Ciletti, Bohn shifts our focus from the personal to a more resonant historical and technical appreciation of the artist's work. Griselda Pollock's "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem" is the most far-ranging of the essays in this compilation and it may challenge those who are unfamiliar with feminist art criticism. Pollock analyzes the 1997 film *Artemisia* and posits that the film portrays Artemisia as defined by her relationships with men, and that her independent agency or "feminine desire...[is] confined within a phallically defined circuit of exchange" (p. 205). Editor Bal's contribution is her examination of three exhibitions that included work by the artist or were relevant to her work.

This book is for advanced undergraduates in the disciplines of art history or women's studies. It is sturdily constructed and has an excellent index and bibliography. Its one shortcoming is its black-and-white illustrations (however limited in number). Readers are advised to seek color reproductions of the works discussed in the book, since the deep, dark colors of Gentileschi's chiaroscuro technique often appear black in these pages.

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