

whitlum-cooper.

## Citation metadata

Authors: Susanna Avery-Quash, Letizia Treves and Francesca Whitlum-Cooper  
Date: June 3, 2019  
From: 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century (Vol. 2019, Issue 28)  
Publisher: Ubiquity Press Ltd.  
Document Type: Interview  
Length: 12,112 words

## Main content

Article Preview :

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The National Gallery's recent acquisition of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (Fig. 1) takes the number of works by female artists in the permanent collection to twenty-one.[1] Artists represented at the National Gallery include Henriette Browne, Berthe Morisot, Rachel Ruysch, Rosa Bonheur, Catharina van Hemessen, Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Judith Leyster, Rosalba Carriera, Marie Blencourt, Vivien Blackett, Madeleine Strindberg, Maggi Hambling, and Paula Rego.

Fig. 1: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1615-17, oil on canvas, 71.4 x 69 cm. [c] National Gallery, London. [see PDF for image]

In this interview at the National Gallery, Susanna Avery-Quash (Senior Research Curator in the History of Collecting) asks Letizia Treves (The James and Sarah Sassoon Curator of Later Italian, Spanish, and French 17th-Century Paintings) and Francesca Whitlum-Cooper (The Myojin-Nadar Associate Curator of Paintings 1600-1800) about the experiences of women artists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and how their work was received during their lifetimes and later.

SAQ:

What was it like to be a woman artist in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and how exceptional was it?

LT:

Germaine Greer famously described Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) as 'the magnificent exception'. Although it was certainly unusual for women in seventeenth-century Italy to become professional artists (as opposed to amateurs), Artemisia wasn't alone in doing so - nor was she the first. Famous precedents include Sofonisba Anguissola (1530-1625), who specialized in portraiture (and self-portraits); Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614), who gained notable success painting portraits and small paintings on copper; and Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665), whose period of activity overlaps with Artemisia's (though her life was cut short in her twenties), who set up the first school of painting for women. What sets Artemisia apart is that she didn't limit herself to portraiture and still life, but tackled the same biblical and historical subjects as her male contemporaries. It's fair to say that women who became professional painters rarely attained the same fame and reputation as men during their own lifetimes, but Artemisia is an exception in this regard.

FWC:

Across Europe, the eighteenth century saw more women working as professional artists, but the fact that the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in Paris felt the need to limit the number of women who could hold membership at any one time to just four tells you quite a lot about the anxieties these women artists provoked! Even when they were awarded membership to the Académie royale, they received none of the privileges their male counterparts enjoyed, such as studio space within the Louvre or access to life drawing classes. Nevertheless, that didn't stop artists such as Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842) or Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803) becoming extremely successful. They both worked as portraitists - the gallery owns Vigée-Lebrun's *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat* (NG1653) (Fig. 2) - but there were still life painters too, such as Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818) in France or Mary Moser (1744-1819) in England. But stereotypes about women artists being less...

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Avery-Quash, Susanna, et al. "[In]Visible: Paintings by Women Artists in the National Gallery, London: An Interview with Letizia Treves and Francesca Whitlum-Cooper." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* vol. 2019, no. 28, 2019, p. NA. Accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A637562689



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Ah, The National Gallery – epitome of grandeur, treasure trove of western European painting – situated proudly in London's Trafalgar Square. Last year, over five million people flocked to the gallery to visit some of the world's most famous and recognisable masterpieces. There's plenty of landscapes, still lifes, portraits of men and women – yet not so much art that is actually by women. Oil paintings made by a female artist account for only around ten paintings in The National Gallery's permanent collection of 2,300, which equates to not even half a per cent. This doesn't "Women Painters in History" is a brand new page I started when a friend of mine asked me about my favorite female painters and I couldn't name any. I'm still figuring out things, so you are very welcome to comment or suggest works by female painters I should share on this page. By liking and sharing this page, you are not only supporting the work of these artists, but you are also contributing to its promotion so it reaches a bigger audience. Fiona Alderton takes a tour of some of the paintings painted by women in the National Gallery collection, including:  Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, who pai Fiona Alderton takes a tour of some of the paintings painted by women in the National Gallery collection, including:  Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, who pai The Catalogue of paintings in the National Gallery, London lists the named painters of the collection of the National Gallery, London, as they were catalogued in 2010 by the Public Catalogue Foundation. The collection contains roughly 2,300 paintings by 750 artists, and only attributed artists are listed here. Painters with more than twenty works in the collection are Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Carlo Crivelli, Anthony van Dyck, Francesco Guardi, Rembrandt van Rijn, Peter Paul Rubens, Jacob van