



Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné

Ward Bissell

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One of the most memorable creative personalities of the Baroque age and arguably the most forcefully expressive and influential woman painter in history, the Roman-born Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652/3) has become the central figure in the recovery of the history of art produced by women. Applying a rigorous methodology, this profusely illustrated study with interpretative text and catalogue raisonn  embeds Gentileschi’s pictorially and emotionally compelling pictures within the actual sociocultural contexts in and for which they were created.

The interpretive text analyzes key pictures and primary literary evidence to reveal the sweep of Artemisia’s oeuvre, chart her travels, define her standing with artists and patrons of the period, investigate the links between her financial situations and the artistic decisions that she made, and assess the validity of proposals regarding her activity as a still-life painter, her access to professional organizations, her level of literacy, and the nature of her subject matter. Exploring the question of the interrelationships among Gentileschi’s gender and experiences as a woman, the state of her psyche, and her art, the text also confronts—and often challenges—the widely embraced feminist interpretation of her pictures.

Many of the conclusions in the text are supported by an extensive register of archival documents and by the very core of the study: the first and only catalogue raisonn  of Artemisia’s autograph works, each of the fifty-seven pictures exhaustively investigated as to basic factual information, condition and color, iconography, history, documentation and dating, existing copies, and bibliography. Catalogues of misattributed and lost paintings complete this comprehensive volume.

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