

# In Today's Art Market, the 'Male Gaze' Is Not a Good Look



“Self Portrait as St. Catherine of Alexandria,” by Artemisia Gentileschi, is the 21st work by a female artist to enter the collection of the National Gallery in London. Credit National Gallery

By Scott Reyburn

- July 14, 2018

LONDON — Taste is changing. When private collectors and public museums acquire works of art, these acquisitions are being made in a very [different cultural climate](#) from that which prevailed in the late 20th century, let alone the late 19th.

The market for contemporary art is, for example, being transformed by some curators' desire to rehabilitate underrepresented names, particularly [female](#) and [African-American artists](#). Similar imperatives are driving museum purchases of pre-20th-century works.

This month, the National Gallery in London announced that it had bought Artemisia Gentileschi's "[Self Portrait as St. Catherine of Alexandria](#)" for 3.6 million pounds, or about \$4.8 million.

Artemisia, though, is hardly an unknown talent. Hailed in her own lifetime as a “prodigy of painting, easier to envy than to imitate,” the most

renowned female artist of the Italian Baroque was the subject of solo exhibitions [in Milan in 2011](#) and [Rome in 2016](#). Her extraordinary life story has become a set text of feminist art history.

In 1611, Artemisia, aged 17, was raped by Agostino Tassi, an artist collaborating with her painter father, Orazio Gentileschi. Tassi was subsequently charged and found guilty, but only after his victim had been forced to endure testimony under thumbscrew torture and accusations of immorality. The condemned rapist never served his sentence of exile.

The self-portrait, painted in Florence around 1615-1618, shows the artist leaning against a wheel studded with iron spikes. “It’s tempting to read the painting biographically,” Letizia Treves, the curator of Italian, Spanish, and French 17th-century paintings at the National Gallery, said in an email.

“Artemisia had long been identified as an artist whose works are missing from our collection,” Ms. Treves added. “She’s an artist we wanted to represent primarily for her artistic achievement, in addition to the fact that she is a celebrated female artist.” The acquisition brought the number of works by women among the 2,300 owned by the National Gallery to 21.

The transaction was a coup for the London-based dealers Marco Voena and Fabrizio Moretti, who had bought the newly discovered painting in partnership in December at a [Paris auction](#) for 2.4 million euros with fees, or about \$2.8 million, an auction high for the artist.

“You have to think differently today,” said Mr. Voena. “The taste of the connoisseur is over.”

“You have to ask what the image you are buying means to people,” he added. He said Artemisia’s self-portrait was “a picture of a heroine, the sort of image you see on Instagram.”

The popularity of exhibitions devoted to female artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Frida Kahlo (whose “[Making Her Self Up](#)” show is currently drawing crowds at the Victoria & Albert museum in London) are signs of our cultural times, according to Mr. Voena. “Museums want to sell tickets,” he said.

Visitors should, however, be able to view the Artemisia self-portrait without charge when it goes on display next year, after conservation. But with visitor numbers [down 17 percent](#) last year, the National Gallery is aware of the need to show old art that appeals to new sensibilities.

If those sensibilities are making the market for old masters more selective than ever, where does that leave the academic painting and sculpture of the

19th century, the art produced when industrial Europe was exploiting its colonies and its visual culture was dominated by what college art history departments call the “male gaze”?

Read the full article here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/arts/design/male-gaze-art-market.html>