

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Family matters

Artistic dynasties and their daughters

Wednesday 28 October and Thursday 29 October, 11.00am - 1.00pm

Tutor: Siân Walters

The history of art is full of important family relationships, from the Bellini clan in Venice to the Brueghel and Teniers dynasties in Flanders. Many female painters were daughters, sisters or wives of notable and established artists, including Marietta Robusti, Levina Teerlinc and Artemisia Gentileschi. How easy was it for others such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Judith Leyster to achieve professional success without similar associations? Our study day addresses the extent to which family relationships mattered, with particular (although not exclusive) focus on women artists represented in the National Gallery collection.

Day one: Wednesday 28 October

Part one

Introduction: Renaissance women and their relations

Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael are household names today but fewer have heard of Lavinia Fontana, Levina Teerlinc or Sofonisba Anguissola – the latter highly admired by arguably the greatest artist of the Renaissance, Michelangelo. How were women such as these able to make a living in an essentially male-dominated industry, and why have many of them fallen into obscurity today? Our course explores the role of family relationships during the 15th and 16th centuries and particularly the importance of family workshops for female artists.

Break

Part two

Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi

With reference to the National Gallery's current exhibition, we explore the relationship between Artemisia Gentileschi and her famous father, Orazio. Artemisia was trained in Orazio's workshop in Rome alongside her three brothers but proved to be the most talented of all of his children, forging a flourishing independent career in Florence and Naples. Towards the end of Orazio's career however, she returned to work alongside him in London. Despite a series of tragic events and the constant challenge of working within a male-dominated environment, Artemisia continued to overcome personal difficulties, producing some of the most sublime and moving images of the early 17th century.

Focus paintings include:

- Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-portrait as St Catherine of Alexandria*, c1615-16, National Gallery. Currently on display in *Artemisia* exhibition (Sainsbury Wing)
- Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susannah and the Elders*, 1610, Kunstsammlungen Graf von Schönborn, Pommersfelden. Currently on display in *Artemisia*
- Sofonisba Anguissola. *Boy Bitten by a Crayfish*. 1559. Museo di Capodimonte, Naples
- Lavinia Fontana, *Self-portrait at the Spinnet*, 1577. Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome
- Catharina van Hemessen, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1551. National Gallery, Room 14

Day two: Thursday 29 October

Part one

The Bellini family: Collaboration and artistic interchange

In this session we examine the relationship between Andrea Mantegna & Giovanni Bellini, two of the most important artists working in Renaissance Italy (and also brothers-in-law), whose exchange of ideas would have a transformative impact on the development of Northern Italian painting. Giovanni Bellini was brought up in one of the leading family workshops in the city and his early work was much influenced by his father Jacopo. However, he soon developed a new and radical approach to style and technique, introducing a softer, tonal use of light and colour that revolutionized Venetian painting. Much influenced by the works of classical antiquity, Mantegna developed a more sculptural style, yet it is clear that both artists were much inspired by one another and their creative dialogue continued into old age.

Break

Part two

Keeping it in the family: artistic dynasties, 1580-1800

We explore the importance of family workshops in later generations, from Pieter Brueghel the Younger who made numerous versions of his father's much-loved compositions, to Bernardo Bellotto who trained under his uncle Canaletto in Venice. We also assess the importance of family relationships during their careers of female artists such as Judith Leyster and Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun.

Focus paintings include:

- Giovanni Bellini, *The Agony in the Garden*, c1465. National Gallery, Room 55
- Andrea Mantegna, *The Introduction of the Cult of Cybele at Rome*, 1505-6. National Gallery, Room 5
- Judith Leyster, *A Boy and a Girl with a Cat and an Eel*, c.1635. National Gallery. Not on display
- Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Self Portrait in a Straw Hat*, 1782. National Gallery, Room 33

Your tutor

Siân Walters is an art historian and director of *Art History in Focus*. In addition to her work for the learning departments at the National Gallery and Wallace Collection, she lectures for The Arts Society and leads specialist art tours abroad. Siân was a lecturer at Surrey University for many years and has worked in France and Venice. Her specialist areas of research are 15th and 16th-century Italian painting, Spanish art and architecture, Flemish and Dutch painting and the relationship between dance and art.

Suggested reading

Letizia Treves, *Artemisia*, National Gallery Company, 2020

The current National Gallery exhibition catalogue, highly recommended.

Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, 2012

An excellent and affordable survey, which covers the history of women artists up to the 20th century.

Leticia Ruiz, *A Tale of Two Women Painters: Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana*, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2020

This catalogue accompanied a really superb exhibition last year at the Prado Museum, only the second in its entire history dedicated to female painters.

Caroline Campbell and others, *Mantegna and Bellini*, National Gallery Company, 2018

This National Gallery exhibition explored the creative dialogue between brothers-in-law Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini.

Amy Orrock, *Bruegel: Defining a Dynasty*, Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017

This small, well-illustrated book accompanied a delightful exhibition at the Holburne Museum in Bath a few years ago, whereby four generations of artists belonging to the famous Flemish family were put under the spotlight.

Siân Evans (ed.) *The Memoirs of Elisabeth Louise Vigée le Brun*, Camden Press, 1989

A highly readable first-hand account of the artist's life, works, encounters and experiences as she travels through Europe.

Exhibition

The first major exhibition of Artemisia's work in the UK runs until 24 January

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/artemisia>

Online resources

A series of videos dedicated to the recent restoration of the National Gallery's recently acquired painting by Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/film-series-restoring-artemisia-gentileschis-self-portrait>

The Quest for Artemisia

A BBC documentary presented by Michael Palin

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06t3w73>

A trailblazing association created by the late Jane Fortune, dedicated to committed to restoring and exhibiting works of art by (often forgotten) women in Florence. Their newsletter is very good

<http://advancingwomenartists.org/>

The National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington) is the only major museum in the world dedicated to female artists.

<https://nmwa.org/>

Upcoming events

Desmond Shawe-Taylor on Orazio and Artemisia in London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/events/orazio-and-artemisia-in-london-26-11-2020>

Mary D. Garrard on Artemisia

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/events/early-modern-feminism-and-the-dangerous-artemisia-gentileschi-12-11-2020>

Staging artemisia: The artist's life in performance

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/events/staging-artemisia-the-artists-life-in-performance-06-11-2020>