

4145

Artemisia Gentileschi

Maura Reilly: Artemisia Gentileschi was an early Italian Baroque painter. She was born in Rome in 1593 and was the daughter of celebrated painter Orazio Gentileschi, for whom she served as an apprentice from a young age. Her innovative compositions and focus on biblical heroines separated her from her male counterparts and have led to the celebration of Gentileschi as a painter with a uniquely female perspective. Gentileschi enjoyed a freedom and independence known to few of her female contemporaries. The patronage of her art—which included the Medici family and King Charles I of England—supported her family. Although Gentileschi was a recognized painter in her lifetime, after her death a great deal of her work fell into obscurity and was often attributed to other followers of Caravaggio or her father. Only now, in light of recent feminist scholarship, has Gentileschi been recognized and reclaimed as an esteemed artist during her lifetime. Gentileschi is well known for depicting the heroine Judith, who is honored on the first wing of the table. Indeed, their place settings share a similar color palette, as well as the sword image that pierces the illuminated first letter of each woman's name. These suggest a shared unification in their physical and emotional strength. To indicate her identity as an artist, the capital letter *A* on Gentileschi's runner also includes a paintbrush and palette. This plate is surrounded by rich gold velvet fabric, which is modeled on the costumes of Gentileschi's female subjects and references the distinctive color in her paintings that became known as "Artemisia gold." The twisting and turning form of the plate is meant to suggest the extraordinary efforts required of any woman in Gentileschi's era who desired to become an artist. Grouped beneath Gentileschi's place setting on the Heritage Floor are the names of other European women artists of various disciplines from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century such as Italian painter Lavinia Fontana, Portuguese soprano Luiza Todi, and the Italian painter Elisabetta Sirani.

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