



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Penitent Magdalene*, c. 1625/30

## Ahead of her Time: Pioneering Women from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century

5 December 2023 – 10 February 2024  
On view during Old Masters Week 2024  
980 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10075

[www.robilantvoena.com](http://www.robilantvoena.com)

Robilant+Voena is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by Old Master, nineteenth- and twentieth-century women artists, alongside portraits of and works belonging to notable women in artistic, cultural or intellectual spheres. Bringing together over **30 works by women artists from Europe and America, and spanning a period of five centuries**, the exhibition highlights the challenges faced – and overcome – by these groundbreaking individuals in their lives and work. This is a rare opportunity to see such a breadth of works by, and relating to, female artists and intellectuals, some well-known, some less so but deserving of wider recognition. Each protagonist represented in the exhibition set herself apart within the context of her time, surmounting obstacles imposed by societies across history.

The artists, writers, adventurers, and other women who feature in the exhibition realised achievements that rivalled, and in many ways surpassed, those of their male counterparts.

Curated by Dr Virginia Brilliant, the exhibition is especially impressive in the areas that reflect R+V's strengths as an Old Master gallery, presenting several masterpieces from the **Italian Renaissance and Baroque**, and paintings in a range of media from **late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century France**. The exhibition concludes with a selection of **American works from the twentieth century** by women artists that is indicative of the gallery's increasing activity in the United States following the opening of a new gallery space in New York in 2020.

**Commenting on the significance of the exhibition, Dr Brilliant says:** 'We are excited to highlight the extraordinary artistic contributions of women to art across the centuries, to contribute to the growing body of scholarship around these female protagonists, and to offer an opportunity for our audiences to learn more about the considerable challenges faced by even the most talented and intrepid women in a male-dominated world as they sought to claim their place in the canon of art history. I hope that the exhibition will offer inspiration to women today who likewise aspire to creative self-expression and exploration.'



Orsola Maddalena Caccia, *Still Life with Flowers*, c. 1630s

Bringing to bear new scholarship which has resulted in **several discoveries including new attributions**, the exhibition also uncovers works previously hidden in private collections, **on public display for the first time in generations**. The show is accompanied by a **catalogue with full information on the artworks, detailing the rich stories of the female artists and subjects on view**. Additionally, a tactile reproduction of a still life painting by **Orsola Maddalena Caccia** (1596–1676), a nun who was not only a talented artist but also a shrewd businesswoman, features in the exhibition, facilitating engagement for blind and partially-sighted visitors, and bringing an additional dimension of appreciation to all.

*Ahead of her Time* begins with a celebration of the women painters of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, uniting rare examples of pictures by stand-out artists of their day **Lavinia Fontana** (1552–1614), **Fede Galizia** (1578–1630), **Orsola Maddalena Caccia**, and a previously unknown **Artemisia Gentileschi** (1593–1654). Each of these artists had the good fortune to receive their initial artistic training from their fathers, evolved a unique personal style and forged careers for themselves in societies where women working independently as artists was almost unheard of. Examples of



Anna Maria Bassi, *Saints Martha and Mary Magdalene, after Bernardino Luini, 1839*

contemporaneous female artists in England, such as **Mary Beale** (1632–1697), attest to the varied, yet invariably challenging environments in which these talented and determined women made their mark.

Following these early pioneers are some of the most notable artists from the eighteenth century, including **Angelica Kauffman** (1741–1807), **Rosalba Carreira** (1673–1757) and **Adelaide Labille-Guiard** (1749–1803). Although this was an era of increasing opportunities for women in artistic education and training, despite their advocacy for equal rights many artists found their efforts stymied, with Labille-Guiard limiting herself to the genre of portraiture, and Kauffmann leaving England for the Continent where history paintings by women found greater acceptance.

Exceptional during this era were the **women painters of Sèvres**, who produced some of the finest works in porcelain to emerge from the Royal Manufactory, sophisticated examples of which are on show. Moreover, artists such as **Anne Vallayer-Coster** (1744–1818) and **Hortense Haudebourg-Lescot** (1784–1845) capitalised on the new freedom occasioned by post-Revolutionary France to pursue their artistic careers, surprising male contemporaries with their deft artistry and skill.

More prolific were women artists across nineteenth-century Europe such as **Erminia de Sanctis** (1840–1919) and **Victoria Dubourg** (1840–1926), who explored genres and styles distinct from their male colleagues. Several artists in the exhibition demonstrate their receptiveness to the changing trends and fashions in society, creating works depicting popular literary or historical subjects, or incorporating the latest craze of *japonsime*, as evident in a striking painting by **Grace Adelaide Fletcher** (1857–1942).



Victoria Dubourg, *Potted Pansies, c. 1870s*

Certain objects also reflect the wider impact of women in society during this century, such as a portrait of the **Brontë sisters**, famed for their novels, by their brother Patrick Branwell Brontë (1817–1848) and carved ivory tusk that stands as a testament to the nineteenth-century British adventurer **Anne Brassey, Baroness Brassey**. Moving into the twentieth century, one of the most intriguing works in the exhibition is a double-sided canvas from 1919 depicting

British writers and lovers **Vita Sackville-West** and **Violet Trefusis**, newly attributed to **Augustus John** (1878–1961), a discovery made through research for the exhibition.



Grace Gassette, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1907

American women painters of the twentieth century embraced the developments forged by their European forbearers, and in many cases infused their works with subtle expressions of their burgeoning struggles for political equality. An intimate drawing by **Laura Coombs Hill** (1859–1952) of her cousin shines a light on the impossible co-existence of personal independence and familial responsibility, while an enigmatic full-length portrait by **Grace Gassette** (1871–1955) bears witness to an extraordinary individual who used her artistic training to heroic effect in the infirmaries of France during the First World War, designing orthopaedic devices for injured servicemen.

The scope and sheer number of women highlighted in this exhibition stand as a tribute to the resilience, ingenuity and determination of the female spirit across the centuries. Whether poised before an easel or a porcelain plaque, performing on Europe's most exalted stages, putting pen to paper in authoring literary masterpieces, or setting off on dangerous voyages to discover new worlds, the women highlighted in this volume still offer inspiration today through the beauty of their creations, through the risks they took, and through the agency they claimed, in order to achieve their intellectual ambitions and aesthetic dreams.

**Featured artists include:** Andrea Appiani, Anna Maria Bassi, Mary Beale, Anna Rimbault-Borrel, Patrick Branwell Brontë, Orsola Maddalena Caccia, Rosalba Carriera, Giulia Crespi, Erminia de Sanctis, Victoria Dubourg, Grace Adelaide Fletcher, Lavinia Fontana, Fede Galizia, Grace Gassette, Artemisia Gentileschi, Laura Coombs Hill, Antoinette-Cécile-Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot, Augustus John, Jonathan Eastman Johnson, Angelica Kauffmann, Etienne-Charles Le Guay, Catherine Lusurier, Elisabetta Marchioni, Athénaïs Paulinier, Giulio Cesare Procaccini, Sophie Frémiet Rude and Anne Vallayer-Coster.

**Virginia Brilliant** is Director of Old Masters at Robilant+Voena, New York. Virginia obtained her MA and PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and for the subsequent fifteen years held curatorial positions at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Virginia has published extensively on various topics in medieval art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting, Peter Paul Rubens, and the

history of collecting in America, as well as organising numerous exhibitions devoted to these topics. Virginia joined Robilant+Voena in 2019 and works closely with museums and collectors of Old Master paintings both in the United States and abroad.

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### Notes to editors

Robilant+Voena is a partnership of art dealers Edmondo di Robilant and Marco Voena. They launched R+V in London in 2004. Further gallery spaces were opened in Milan in 2009, and Paris and New York in 2020. R+V has distinguished itself as one of the leading international art dealers in Old Master paintings, as well as 20th-century Italian art.

The gallery has sold paintings and works of art to many important private and royal collectors and museums including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Frick Collection, the Gallerie dell'Accademia Venice, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery London, the National Gallery of Stockholm, the Museum of Western Art Tokyo, and the Pinacoteca di Brera Milan. R+V is represented at the most prestigious fine art fairs in the world, and is committed to its active exhibitions program and the publication of books and scholarly catalogues.