Lesson 14: Judith and the Heroines of Baroque Art

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“Judith and the Heroines of Baroque Art” is part of the

ART APPRECIATION
Open Educational Resource

by Marie Porterfield Barry
East Tennessee State University, 2020

Introduction

This course explores the world’s visual arts, focusing on the development of visual awareness, assessment, and appreciation by examining a variety of styles from various periods and cultures while emphasizing the development of a common visual language. The materials are meant to foster a broader understanding of the role of visual art in human culture and experience from the prehistoric through the contemporary.

This is an Open Educational Resource (OER), an openly licensed educational material designed to replace a traditional textbook.

Course Materials

Presentations
The course materials consist of 24 presentations examining art across the globe from prehistory though the contemporary art world. These introduce key vocabulary, explore the way that culture and art are linked, describe the varying methods and techniques of the featured artists, and encourage classroom discourse.

Reading Lists
Each of the 24 presentations has an accompanying reading list which provides links to articles, videos, and other resources. The reading list is meant to reinforce and clarify information covered in each of the presentations.

Sample Assignments
A list of sample assignments is also included. Ranging from brief essays to simple art projects, these are designed to be completed in a sketchbook to more deeply explore course concepts. Intended to encourage learners to think like artists, art critics, and art historians, assignments emphasize practices of creative thinking and artistic method, while reinforcing concepts addressed in classroom lectures and required readings.
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Adopting, Adapting, or Expanding the Resource
The goal for this OER is to build an educational resource that is flexible enough to address concepts relevant to the contemporary discourse and scholarship in the visual arts. For those interested in utilizing these course materials, I am providing below some additional information that may be useful in expanding, adapting, or reinterpreting the materials. Editable versions are available in Microsoft PowerPoint and Word at https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/

The font used to create the presentations and written documents for this OER is Calibri.

Finding Additional Readings, Lessons, and Articles

Smarthistory: https://smarthistory.org/
Smarthistory is an extensive open educational resource which publishes outstanding essays and video lectures about art. The Creating + Conserving section of Smarthistory includes wonderful informational articles and videos about materials and processes: https://smarthistory.org/tag/conservation/

MoMA Learning: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/
MoMA Learning provides a wonderful selection of essays on works of modern art and also has assignment suggestions at the bottom of each section.

KhanAcademy: https://www.khanacademy.org/.
Khan Academy is an outstanding platform of open educational resources covering a variety of academic and scholarly topics.
Trivium Art History: https://arthistoryproject.com/
Trivium Art History is a free, online art history book with clean design and approachable descriptions of works of art, periods of art history, and fun artist biographies. The Themes of Art section is a nice tool to helping students explore works that match their interests. The World of Art section is a useful tool for an exploratory World Art sketchbook prompt. The Timeline section is useful, as it separates works of art into galleries based on period.

Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning: https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/arts-textbooks/3/
For a more traditional, textbook approach, there is an Introduction to Art open educational resource textbook available.

Locating Images
If you are utilizing the course materials and would like to add new images that are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons, there are several useful tips provided below for finding images.

The Met Museum: https://www.metmuseum.org/
The Met has an option to search for Open Access images within the collection here. Make sure that the “Open Access” box is checked. The image license is CC0 1.0, and will be marked OA Public Domain at the lower left of the image.

Google Images: https://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi&ogbl
Google Images has an option under “Settings” > “Advanced Search” to search by “Usage Rights”. Choosing “Free to use share or modify” will allow a search for images suitable for expanding our OER.

Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/
Wikimedia Commons is an outstanding resource for finding open source images, with a strong collection of works of art.

Flickr: https://www.flickr.com
Flickr allows users to specify image licenses on uploaded photographs. Click “Some rights reserved” at the lower right of the image to check the licensing. Some images will say “Public Domain” or will be licensed under a Creative Commons (CC) license, allowing for the use in an OER.

Smarthistory Flickr: https://www.flickr.com/groups/smarthistory/pool/
The Smarthistory Flickr is expansive with images licensed for educational purposes.

Acknowledgements
This Art Appreciation OER was adapted from existing resources by Marie Porterfield Barry as part of East Tennessee State University’s Open Educational Resources (OERs) Initiatives, which are a collaboration of the Charles C. Sherrod Library and the Center for Teaching Excellence. Deepest gratitude for the support from Ashley Sergiadis of Sherrod Library and Phil Smith of the Center for Teaching Excellence during the building of this resource. Thanks as well to my students at East Tennessee State University whose feedback and participation during our Art Appreciation classes was immensely valuable in compiling and evaluating this OER.
Judith & The Heroines Of Baroque Art
Baroque art is characterized by energy and dynamism, emotional intensity, movement and diagonal forms, high contrast between light and dark, called *chiaroscuro*, rich ornamentation, and theatricality.
Michelangelo da Caravaggio
What is the subject of this painting?

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Color Corrected  
License: Public Domain
What is the subject of this painting?

The men in this painting are wearing contemporary (Italian Baroque) fashion and are counting coins in what looks like the back room of a tavern. The figures appear to be a combination of low-life and everyday people.

Source: Wikimedia Commons
*Color Corrected*
License: Public Domain
What is the subject of this painting?

But the painting actually depicts the Bible story in which Christ calls the tax collector (Matthew/Levi) to become a disciple.

“Follow me” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him...

(Matthew 9:9)

*The Calling Of St. Matthew*
Contarelli Chapel, Rome.
Oil on canvas, 1599-1600.
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
The diagonal shaft of light adds drama and energy to the scene.

*The Calling Of St. Matthew*  
Contarelli Chapel, Rome.  
Oil on canvas, 1599-1600.  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)  
License: Public Domain
Caravaggio’s asymmetrical composition no longer places Christ at the center of the image.

Christ is seen at the edge of the painting with a small halo of light, obscured behind St. Peter.

Caravaggio
The Calling Of St. Matthew
Contarelli Chapel, Rome.
Oil on canvas, 1599-1600.
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Christ and Peter point toward Matthew.
Christ’s gesture mimics that of Michelangelo’s Adam; this references Christ as the second Adam, meant to redeem humankind of their sins.
Which figure is meant to represent Matthew?
In *The Calling of St. Matthew* natural light represents spiritual light. Light falls from over the shoulder of Christ and illuminates face of Matthew.
Caravaggio was an influential painter, whose style was emulated and adapted by other artists...

Including Artemisia Gentileschi.
In *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, Artemisia Gentileschi depicts a scene from the Book of Judith (which is included in the Catholic and Orthodox Old Testament, but considered Apocrypha for Protestants, and excluded from the Hebrew canon).

Judith saves her city from the Assyrians by sneaking into the camp of the invading general Holofernes, charming him, then beheading him while he is drunk.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Artemisia Gentileschi was follower of Caravaggio.
How are their paintings of Judith similar and different?

Caravaggio
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1599
Author: Barberini
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain
Both are dramatic & bloody, with sharp contrast between light and dark.

Caravaggio
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1599
Author: Barberini
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain
Caravaggio’s Judith is dainty and repulsed by the gruesome act that she is committing; she seems hesitant as she lightly wields her sword.

Artemisia’s Judith is strong and determined; there is a sense of weight to her body as she forces the sword to sever the neck of her enemy.
Caravaggio’s painting seems more sympathetic to the emotion of Holofernes, who looks up at Judith in anguish.

Artemisia’s Holofernes is painted with less sympathy and seems already defeated and resigned to his fate.
Notice, as well, the way that the blood from the wound in Artemisia’s version is much more convincing.
Artemisia was acquainted with Galileo Galilei, father of modern physics. Some scholars have even linked this relationship with her ability to paint such lifelike blood. The motion of the squirting blood fits harmoniously with Galileo’s research on parabolic trajectory, or the path followed by projectiles.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Artemisia’s painting of *Judith Beheading Holofernes* is an ideal example of the Baroque interest in theatricality, drama, and the vivid use of light and dark (*chiaroscuro*) in art.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Artemisia revisited the subject of Judith multiple times, depicting different moments of the narrative.
Artemisia Gentileschi is one of the most important female artists in history.

Rather than simply painting landscapes, still life paintings, and portraits (all acceptable pastimes for ladies of her time), she painted the same types of images that contemporary male artists were painting.
Although her work was valued during her lifetime with patrons including King Charles I of England and the powerful Medici family, and although she was respected by scholars including her acquaintance with Galileo, following her death many of her works were erroneously attributed to her father or her male contemporaries.
Or her work was oversimplified and explained by the narrative around a crime committed against her in her late teens.

Agostino Tassi, Artemisia’s painting and perspective instructor since age 15, raped the young woman at age 17.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Susanna and the Elders*
Oil on Canvas, c. 1610
Author: Web Gallery of Art
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Following a harrowing rape trial in which the victim Artemisia was subjected to torture via thumbscrews to secure a true statement, Tassi was convicted of rape and spent a startlingly brief period in prison as punishment.
Some interpretations of the works of Artemisia Gentileschi suggest she was drawn to Judith due to her desire to seek revenge on Tassi.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Judith Beheading Holofernes*
Oil on canvas, c. 1619-20
Author: Uffizi
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
However, we must question the role that the narrative of the artist’s life has in altering our view of the work.

Many of her contemporaries, including her father and Caravaggio, painted images of Judith and Holofernes. So, how much of Artemisia’s attraction to the powerful heroine relates to her own personal experience and how much is simply fashion?
Especially with a female artist such as Artemisia Gentileschi who had a brilliant artistic career during her long life, we must consider if it is fair to allow the narrative of a violent incident from her youth to color our perceptions of all her works that followed.

Artemisia Gentileschi
*Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)*
Oil on canvas, 1638-1639
Author: Google Art Project
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
In fact, Caravaggio’s reputation is well-documented in police records. He was arrested for a range of crimes, from carrying weapons and brawling to slander ing rival artists. Eventually, in 1606, he murdered another man, for reasons unclear to historians, and was forced to flee.

Unlike Artemisia Gentileschi, Caravaggio’s works have not been overshadowed by his biography, in spite of his tumultuous and violent life.
Gianlorenzo Bernini
Bernini
*Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*
Cornaro Chapel, Rome
1647–1652
Author: Alvesgaspar
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 4.0

Bernini, *David*, 1623
Author: Steven Zucker
Source: Flickr
License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
We have previously discussed Bernini’s wonderfully emotive and dynamic sculpture of David in the midst of battle with Goliath.
Another of Bernini’s important works depicts a vision of Spanish mystic and nun St. Teresa of Ávila.
Bernini, both a sculptor and an architect who was interested in theater and set design, designed the entire space surrounding the figures.

The installation includes the central marble statue along with gilding, stained glass, fresco painting, colored marble, accompanying marble sculptures, and natural light.

Bernini
Ecstasy of Saint Teresa
Cornaro Chapel, Rome, 1647–1652
Author: Steven Zucker
Source: Flickr
License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
To enhance the sense of Baroque theatricality, Bernini even included marble theatre boxes in the sides of the niche, in which the marble effigy of the patron and his family sit watching the vision.
The marble effigy of the patron and his family sit watching the vision from a theatre box.
A hidden window above the sculpture allows sunlight to shine on the gilded bronze rays.

Natural light symbolizes spiritual light, which illuminates the sculpture.

*Above Left: Author: Steven Zucker, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*
*Left: Author: Steven Zucker, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*
Flooded in light, the angel pierces the body of St. Teresa repeatedly resulting in ecstatic oneness with God.

Bernini, Ecstasy of Saint Teresa
Cornaro Chapel, Rome, 1647–1652
Author: Alvesgaspar, Cropped from original,
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 4.0
Beside me on the left appeared an angel in bodily form. He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful. And his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest ranks of angels, who seemed to be all on fire. In his hands I saw a great, golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused me by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease. Nor is one’s soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it, even a considerable share.

-St. Teresa of Ávila

Bernini, Ecstasy of Saint Teresa
Cornaro Chapel, Rome, 1647–1652
Author: Alvesgaspar, Cropped from original,
Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: CC BY-SA 4.0
**Reading List: 14_Judith and the Heroines of Baroque Art**

Video lecture on how to recognize Baroque Art:  
[https://smarthistory.org/how-to-recognize-baroque-art/](https://smarthistory.org/how-to-recognize-baroque-art/)

Video lecture on Caravaggio’s *The Calling of St. Matthew*:  
[https://smarthistory.org/caravaggio-calling-of-st-matthew/](https://smarthistory.org/caravaggio-calling-of-st-matthew/)

Video lecture and article on Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (including comparison with Caravaggio’s meeker Judith):  
[https://smarthistory.org/gentileschi-judith-slaying-holofernes/](https://smarthistory.org/gentileschi-judith-slaying-holofernes/)

Article with short biography of Artemisia Gentileschi, including information about her patrons and friendship with Galileo:  
[https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/artemisia_gentileschi](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/artemisia_gentileschi)

Biographic information about Artemisia Gentileschi:  

A description of several of Artemisia’s paintings:  

Caravaggio as artist and criminal:  
Sketchbook Assignment: 14_Judith and the Heroines of Baroque Art

Consider the way that the personal trauma from the life of Artemisia Gentileschi has affected the scholarship around her works and the way we view her paintings. An important question in contemporary scholarship is, how significant is the biography of the artist when discussing works of art? Should the biography be considered in explaining the artist’s choice of subject, for example? Or should the works be viewed completely on their own merit, separate from any biographical information about the artist’s life deeds? Write two paragraphs in response.