



## Artemisia

*Alexandra Lapierre , Liz Heron (Translator)*

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An international best-seller, Artemisia is based on the passionate story of one of the Western world's first significant female artists. Born to the artist Orazio Gentileschi at the beginning of the 1600s, when artists were the celebrities of the day, Artemisia was apprenticed to her father at an early age, showing such remarkable talent that he viewed her as the most precious thing in his life. But at the age of seventeen Artemisia was raped by her father's best friend and partner. The Gentileschi name was dragged through scandal, for Artemisia refused, even when tortured, to deny it happened. Indeed, she went further: she dared to plead her case in court. All of Rome was riveted by the trial. Artemisia won the case, but lost the love of her father and of all of Rome. Artemisia sought revenge through her art, portraying women liberating their fellow citizens from tyrants. Her stunning works took Rome by storm, overturning the prejudices of her time and winning the admiration of patrons, courtesans, and monarchs. Lapierre brings the historical Artemisia Gentileschi to vivid life, capturing the sights, sounds, and smells of Baroque Italy as well as the life of this remarkable woman.

## Artemisia Details

Date : Published September 21st 2001 by Grove Press (first published 1998)

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Author : Alexandra Lapierre , Liz Heron (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Artemisia for online ebook

### Laura says

To be send to Chrissie in Belgium. And then to Virginie in France.

Some of her paintings can be find at:

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art...>

And also at:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemisi...>

Great book, even if the rape episode took so long.

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### 'Aussie Rick' says

This book by Alexandra Lapierre on the life of the female artist, Artemisia Gentileschi, is a fascinating study of the world of art and Europe during the seventeenth Century. Having read a few books on Caravaggio I had come across the name of Artemisia but knew very little of her other than that she had been raped by another artist and later went on to become quite famous herself. This book told the story of not only Artemisia and her art but also her father, Orazio Gentileschi, and showed how artistic rivalry, love, family, honour and a passion for art interlocked their lives and careers.

The book is not a novel as the title suggests but is indeed a historical biography of Artemisia Gentileschi and her times. The author has used her skills as a novelist to fill gaps in the story of Artemisia but only with the greatest sense of historical correctness. The author has carried out extensive research on her subject and has used the results of this research to help fill the gaps in the story of this famous artist. She lets the reader know that at times she has fictionalised some of the narrative but never the facts.

Alexandra Lapierre provides the reader with comprehensive notes and references to show the reader why she has decided to use certain narrative or placed a particular slant on her perspective of some events. I found that this manner of story telling in this particular account did not detract from the book in any fashion. It may not please those historians or experts in the field of art but to me, a novice, I found it a great approach to help the reader understand this great artist and the times she lived in.

A number of colour plates are provided of not only Artemisia's paintings but also her fathers and other artists involved in her story. A number of maps have also been placed in the book to assist the reader with following the story, events and travels of Artemisia.

The story itself was well told and in particular I found the account of the rape case very interesting. This is an intriguing and very enjoyable book and I hope that the idea of some of the narrative being fiction will not put other readers off. In fact the 80 pages of notes used by the author to support her account makes fascinating reading in themselves. The book is over 500 pages and I found it a very easy to read account and it has provoked in me a desire to learn more about this great female artist. This book is well worth the effort to sit down and read and I hope that many other readers out there enjoy this book as much as I did.

Just for the interest other readers, in Australia the book is titled *Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness*. Following are some reviews taken from the back cover:

*"A book bristling with adventure, noise, passion and colour which recreates Baroque Italy in all its diversity, from the ballrooms to the torture chambers, from trials to marriages, from drinking parties to underground conspiracies"* - Les Echos.

*"Alexandra Lapierre has succeeded in enabling a non-specialist of the seventeenth century (99.9% of the population) to experience an artist's struggle through great literature."* - Elle.

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### **Lisasue says**

I enjoyed this book very much, but found at times that it awkwardly shifted between the more scholarly tone of a biography with the narrative of pure fiction. The story of her life is just fascinating, and I suppose that is what carries it along, but sometimes that weird fusion just was strange to read. I definitely appreciated the inclusion of prints of the artist's works in the book, since that added to the experience of the story of Artemisia's life and work.

Overall, I would recommend this for those that are interested in art history, Italian history and the renaissance.

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### **Amanda says**

It was unreadable mainly because the names in the book are so freakin' long! Reading a paragraph is exhausting.

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### **Malcolm says**

Artemisia Gentileschi is one of the most intriguing women of the European Renaissance, possibly one of the most intriguing women ever, but this biographical novel is problematic. On the one hand, I want to praise it for laying out her life and for its presentation of the difficult existence of a serious woman artist in 17th century Italy. It is a novel that comes with 130 pages of notes and references and 16 pages of full colour plates featuring much of her most well known work along with several of her father's. But it is a novel, not a biography, and while I understand the need to depict in fictional form to get to the rich complexity of her life, it just did not convince.

I am not sure if the problem lies in Lapierre's writing style or in Liz Heron's translation, but it is depressing that the fictionalisation is argued to be necessary to draw out the Gentileschi's existence but finishes up in so many places being so unconvincing and in some so obviously a plot device. This isn't to say it is a bad book – just that Anna Banti's biographical novel and Mary Garrard's two serious art history studies are much better. Read it as historical fiction, not as a biography – if you want a biography, consult the 50 page bibliography.

## Megan says

At first I thought this book was too trashy for me to enjoy properly, but then I realized how deeply the author had researched her subject. Lapiere definitely presents things in a dramatic light, but to her credit, her protagonist was clearly living in a sensational time.

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## Bonnie Wilson says

I trudged through about 100 pages of this with absolutely no enjoyment whatsoever. I did spend some minutes wondering exactly how to describe the writing - maybe a doctoral dissertation chopped up and interspersed with some very occasional dialogue and an omniscient author explaining the characters feelings? Not that I would know how a doctoral dissertation reads, but this sure does not read like a novel.

I will credit the author for definitely not making this a "perky modern girl in period costume" read - from the beginning - when Orazio Gentileschi takes his six-year-old daughter Artemisia to the very foot of a scaffold and holds her up to get a good view of a young girl being beheaded - we are absolutely not anywhere near the 20th Century.

The volume does have some high-quality photos of some of Artemisia's paintings. Looking at Artemisia's paintings in the book and in some images online they are very rich, lush, and I think her women's faces are quite remarkable.

The Baroque is not my favorite period in painting, nor do these gruesome topics appeal to me - but can one wonder at them, given the artist having been taken to public executions as a young child? Still, I am sorry that when I was in the Uffizi I missed seeing some of hers that are on display there. (I was too staggered wandering from Lippi to DaVinci to Michaelangelo to Botticelli - nothing, nothing can prepare the mind for seeing these paintings in person, they seem impossible, like miracles - and I had a hard time tearing myself away from them.)

Too bad the author's prose does not have any of the life of that painting. In my opinion of course - the review quotes - words like "masterpiece" are used - make it obvious I'm in the minority. Maybe it turns wonderful after the first hundred pages .... my loss, then. I'm not willing to give it any more time.

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## Sara says

History of Artemisia Gentileschi, a famous painter of 17th century Rome, her father, and the rape that shaped her life. Fascinating view of Italian society of this era and the world of painters.

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## Arielle says

It says on the cover that this is a novel, but I don't know if that's what this book is. The author tried to create this odd hybrid of historical fiction while simultaneously inserting chunks of what reads a lot like non-

fiction. Which was incredibly frustrating for this reader: I say, pick a side. Additionally, the writing was not good. It's very possible that the cause of this was a poor translation because the language felt clunky and sort of haphazard. I had to force myself to get through this book-- never a good thing. The life of Artemisia is so complex, vibrant and violent and I felt the language and mode of writing did not express that.

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### **Ardesia says**

Imponente e dettagliato affresco della vita e dell'arte di Artemisia Gentileschi che si pone a metà strada tra il saggio e il romanzo. Alcuni temi vengono ripresi e ripetuti in modo quasi ossessivo nell'arco di tutta la narrazione e alla lunga questo soffermarsi nell'analisi degli stessi argomenti appesantisce un po' la lettura, ma dinnanzi a una tale opera d'immedesimazione, ricerca e ricostruzione storica qualche eco di ridondanza è facile da perdonare. Di grande pregio l'appendice finale di oltre cento pagine in cui, tra l'altro, per ogni capitolo, vengono indicate in modo estremamente dettagliato le fonti relative ai fatti narrati ed è operata una chiara distinzione tra le parti inventate da quelle storicamente accertate. Utilissimo anche l'insero centrale che riporta le riproduzioni dei quadri citati nel romanzo.

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### **Sandie says**

Art historians have always had an almost romantic attachment to Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the few female post-Renaissance painters to achieve fame during her own lifetime. Trained as an artist by her famous father, Orazio Gentileschi, she was a woman with 21st century ideas and ideals forced to deal with being born in the 17th century. Raped at age seventeen by an associate of her father she filed a complaint and took the matter to trial (a scandalous and unheard of event in 1612 when women had little voice).

The fascinating story of Artemisia is brought to life by Alexandra LaPierre as she paints a word picture of the many events that shaped the life of this remarkable Baroque artist. In an era when female painters were not easily accepted by the artistic community or patrons, she was the first female painter to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno in Florence and to have her works commissioned by Popes and the nobility.

LaPierre encourages readers to examine her well researched details of the love/hate/jealousy/betrayal relationship between father and daughter, as well as the artist's marriage of convenience, and her attempt to balance her growing fame as an artist with motherhood. The back of this book contains almost 65 pages of scrupulous notes that add to the "history" of this enlightening tale. This is a must read for art history majors or anyone who enjoys well researched historical fiction. For those who like their history on the lighter side, a novel by Susan Vreeland called *The Passion of Artemisia* is your alternate choice.

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### **Orsolya says**

If you are unaware of Artemisia Gentileschi, then I can only say: shame on you! Arguably the most talented female painter of Baroque Italy, the victim of a rape and first public rape trial, and a true feminist; Artemisia is nothing short of amazing. Sadly, her work and life is less known to those outside of the art world. Alexandra LaPierre brings Artemisia Gentileschi to life in, "Artemisia".

“Artemisia” is a very unique novel, being difficult to describe in terms of format. Being neither a straightforward HF novel but not a biographical fiction either; “Artemisia” is in a world of its own. LaPierre is heavy on the history revealing the life of Artemisia and also that of Baroque Italy, art, the artist lifestyle, etc. If looking for a dialogue-heavy work, “Artemisia” isn’t for you. Heavily researched, “Artemisia” satisfies art and history lovers alike and results in a “meaty” novel.

Admittedly, the style of LaPierre’s “Artemisia” isn’t for everyone. The characters are lush but don’t follow traditional character developments or arcs. Have no fear though; the reader definitely gets to know each personality on an intimate level. Furthermore, the settings are also well-described but not overdone and do not overwhelm. Everything has a set place and natural flow.

Speaking of flow, “Artemisia” has a strong momentum with a heavy heartbeat. The novel feels very much alive and is a true page-turner during which the reader begs to know what happens (even those familiar with the events). “Artemisia” is a novel which can not easily be put down.

LaPierre’s text is beautiful and intelligent but not too flowery. She avoids the over-sodden metaphors common to most HF but still makes use of art both in content/plot and with her writing style. There are small annoyances, however; such as a few awkward transitions from pure historic sections to HF and the habit of asking the reader questions. My biggest quip against “Artemisia” is the focus on the scandal and drama with the art taking place on the back burner. Those new to Artemisia don’t truly learn of her passion and talent of painting. In fact, the psychological spotlight almost makes her to be a villain in some aspects versus a victim; which I don’t think was LaPierre’s aim.

On the other hand, “Artemisia” has a well-balanced ratio of strong emotional events which truly move the reader along with an emphasis on historical events, resulting in a memorable history lesson.

The last quarter of the book feels comparatively weaker to the previous sections and is sort of like a different novel, entirely. The content is very interesting and could deem its own novel but the Artemisia centralization feels lost (the reasoning for this is explained in the “Notes”, however). Despite this, the conclusion to “Artemisia” is emotionally unforgettable and rounds up the novel well.

Worth mentioning is LaPierre’s thorough historic approach by including color plates, an after word, and approximately 140 pages of primary sourced notes making “Artemisia” more credible and accurate than many pure history works. A minor detail, but one requiring mentioning, is that “Artemisia” does contain some punctuation, grammar, and content errors (such as addressing characters by incorrect names).

LaPierre’s “Artemisia” is extremely rich both in topic and presentation, strident with many layers, deep research, and satisfactory writing; displaying her passion for art and doing both the field and artist Artemisia, justice. The novel is **much** recommended for a plethora of readers including: HF fans, history lovers, art enthusiasts, devotees of Baroque Italy and the Medicis, artists, and of course: lovers of Artemisia, herself. The novel is also suggested for those who seek a deeper look at Artemisia after reading Susan Vreeland’s, “The Passion of Artemisia”. “Artemisia” isn’t perfect, but it is a wonderful novel on a woman who deserves much more attention than she received.

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## Sequana says

I read this book as an audio book and it captured my interest from the first few moments. The reader was fabulous, using expressiveness and well pronounced Italian to bring the story to life.

I have enjoyed several books that fictionalize the life of artists, especially women. This is one of my favorites, though it has been several years and my memory of the details is not as sharp as I would like.

Artemisia is a strong and compelling character and the writing is lovely. I recommend this book if you enjoyed *Girl With A Pearl Earring*.

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### **Rebecca Huston says**

Out of the three novels that I've read about Artemisia, this one is my favourite, and the one that is the best written. This is the one to go to for a good read, and some understanding of the sensationalistic rape trial that marred Artemisia's youth, but may have been what turned her into such an expressive artist.

For the longer review, please go here:

[http://www.epinions.com/content\\_31116...](http://www.epinions.com/content_31116...)

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### **Alessia Simoni says**

Leggendo *La passione di Artemisia*, romanzo sulla vita della pittrice Artemisia Gentileschi, vagavo ogni tanto sul web alla ricerca di immagini delle sue opere, soprattutto di quelle descritte nel libro che stavo leggendo. Capitai così nella pagina dedicata alla Gentileschi in Wikipedia, e lessi una breve citazione da questo romanzo della Lapierre: e decisi di leggerlo, anche viste le recensioni più che positive.

Un'ottima scelta, direi.

*Artemisia* di Alexandra Lapierre non è un romanzo, ma non è nemmeno una biografia e nemmeno un saggio: è tutto insieme. Un testo imponente che nasce dalla passione della sua autrice per i Gentileschi padre e figlia, Orazio e Artemisia, che nel libro si rincorrono, si evitano, si guardano, si scrutano, si influenzano. La vita di Artemisia Gentileschi è descritta in maniera precisa e puntuale, anche grazie a una mole non indifferente di materiale raccolto e di studi e ricerche svolti dalla Lapierre per fornire un affresco il più possibile veritiero della vita di questa pittrice del Seicento, donna forte e insieme fragile. Basta pensare che ci sono, alla fine del testo, almeno una cinquantina di pagine di bibliografia, e basta considerare che l'autrice, sempre alla fine del testo, fornisce capitolo per capitolo i testi a cui si è ispirata, le ricerche che ha svolto per ricostruire quel tratto di vita di Artemisia, ciò che ha inventato e ciò che ha invece trovato riscontro negli archivi di varie città italiane. Un gesto di onestà intellettuale che non è possibile ignorare e non è possibile non ammirare. In questo senso, si tratta di un testo estremamente diverso da *La passione di Artemisia*, perché non censura nulla della vita di Artemisia. Mentre nel romanzo della Vreeland leggiamo una vita e vediamo un'immagine della Gentileschi che l'autrice ha plasmato in base alle proprie esigenze di trama, come lei stessa ammette, qui abbiamo Artemisia con la sua forza, la sua bellezza, la sua ricerca costante di fama e successo nel mondo della pittura, i suoi problemi finanziari e il suo "piegarsi" alla necessità di elargire favori per riceverne altri. Scopriamo della sua storia con Agostino Tassi, di ciò che è successo dopo il primo stupro, di come la giovane si sia abbandonata a quello che credeva un amante. Di come abbia raccontato, in tribunale, del suo stupro, con termini estremamente crudi e precisi. Leggiamo la sua deposizione, che emana forza e orgoglio, mentre viene sottoposta al supplizio della corda e dice ad Agostino Tassi, fissandolo: "queste sono le fedeli nuziali che mi hai promesso". Leggiamo di una donna così completamente unica che la pittrice di *La passione di Artemisia* a confronto sembra una macchietta. Leggiamo di una donna che si innamora. Che civetta. Che flirta. Che si dipinge nuda e bellissima come *Allegoria dell'Inclinazione* nella casa di Michelangelo (mentre la Vreeland aveva immaginato che avesse utilizzato una modella, togliendo tantissimo impatto alla vicenda). Leggiamo di una donna tradita, delusa, amareggiata. Di una donna con un rapporto difficile col marito impostole dalle convenzioni, di una donna che perde i figli e di fratelli che pregano con

lei, di un padre che fissa le sue tele e vi vede i suoi insegnamenti. Leggiamo le lettere che scriveva, chiedendo denaro, chiedendo commissioni.

Leggiamo davvero di una donna "che tiene nel petto l'animo di un Cesare".

Artemisia non può mancare nella biblioteca di un estimatore dei Gentileschi, perché l'analisi di questo rapporto quasi ossessivo con il padre, l'immagine di questa donna che sfida il mondo con la sua arte e il suo talento, l'immagine di questa donna forte, che ha sofferto, è probabilmente la più veritiera che si possa avere. E', insomma, un libro che vale davvero la pena di essere letto. O anche solo consultato per l'imponente opera di ricerca e la ricca bibliografia che contiene.

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