

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 Saturday, 30 November

Rediscovered Artemisia Gentileschi painting goes on display in Scotland for the first time

A **rare surviving painting** by Artemisia Gentileschi, the greatest female artist of her generation, will go on display for visitors to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh from Thursday, 28 November.

The painting was recently rediscovered in the Royal Collection following a misattribution at least two centuries ago, and, following extensive conservation work, first went on display for visitors to Windsor Castle in 2023.

The **rediscovered painting, *Susanna and the Elders***, forms a significant addition to Artemisia's extant body of work and **sheds fresh light on her creative process** and her time in Great Britain in the late 1630s as she worked alongside her father Orazio Gentileschi at the court of Charles I and Henrietta Maria.



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, c.1638-40

Also on show will be *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* ('*La Pittura*'), considered one of Artemisia's greatest works. The two paintings form a new temporary display in the Palace of Holyroodhouse, taking their place in the ornate baroque interiors of the Palace.

Emma Stead, Curator at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, said: 'Artemisia Gentileschi is one of the finest artists of the Italian Baroque period, achieving great success during her own lifetime when few women artists were formally recognised. She is celebrated today for her skilful technique along with an ability to empathise with and empower the female protagonists of her paintings, in a way that many of her male contemporaries' works typically did not.

'It's quite extraordinary that we can follow the history of a painting by Artemisia through the centuries, from its initial creation and display at Whitehall Palace in the 1630s, right through to its recent rediscovery by the Royal Collection Trust paintings team, and *Susanna and the Elders* adds much to our knowledge of her artistic practice. We are delighted to have it on display for the first time in Scotland for visitors to see.'

The rediscovery resulted from work by Royal Collection Trust curators, notably former staff member and art historian Dr Niko Munz, to trace the paintings sold off and scattered across Europe after Charles I's execution. Seven paintings by Artemisia were recorded in Charles I's inventories but only the *Self-Portrait* was thought to survive today, with the others believed lost. However, research allowed curators to match the description of *Susanna and the Elders* to a painting that had been in store at Hampton Court Palace for over 100 years, attributed to 'French School' and in very poor condition. A 'CR' ('Carolus Rex') brand was subsequently found on the back of the canvas during conservation treatment, confirming that the painting was once in Charles I's collection.

Artemisia Gentileschi gained fame across Europe in the 17th century, after training with her father in Rome and before working in Florence, Naples, Venice and London for aristocratic and royal patrons. Her work fell out of favour in the 18th and 19th centuries, but in the last 50 years she has become known for her powerful and empathetic depictions of women from history.

The rediscovered painting depicts the Biblical story of Susanna, who is surprised by two men while bathing in her garden. When she refuses their advances, she is faced with a false accusation of infidelity, punishable by death, before she is proven innocent. While male artists of the period often presented an idealised or sexualised view of the scene, Artemisia gives great emphasis to Susanna's vulnerability and discomfort as she twists her body away from the lecherous men. It is a story that Artemisia returned to many times over her 40-year career; at least six compositions of the subject by the artist are known today. The story may have held particular resonance given her own experience of sexual assault, having been raped at age 17 by an artist in her father's workshop and subjected to gruelling questioning and torture at his trial.

The painting's history can be traced in a remarkably unbroken line, with records found in every century since its creation. It was most likely commissioned by Henrietta Maria, probably around 1638–9 while her apartments were being redecorated for a royal birth. An inventory from 1639 shows that the painting originally hung above a fireplace in the Queen's Withdrawing Chamber at Whitehall Palace – a relatively private room used by Henrietta Maria for receiving small numbers of officials, eating and relaxing.

The painting was returned after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and is thought to have hung above a fireplace at Somerset House, home to queens and consorts including Catherine of Braganza and Queen Anne. In the 18th century, as Artemisia's reputation waned, the painting appears to have lost its attribution. It was moved to Kensington Palace, where it is depicted in a watercolour of the Queen's Bedchamber published in 1819 leaning against a wall, suggesting it was considered the work of a minor or unknown artist and not worthy of hanging. It was later transferred to Hampton Court Palace, where at some point it lost its frame, and in 1862 it was described as 'in a bad state' and sent for conservation, at which point additional layers of varnish and overpaint were likely applied.

Following its rediscovery, the painting underwent significant treatment by Royal Collection Trust conservators. Work included the painstaking removal of centuries of surface dirt, discoloured varnish and non-original paint layers to reveal the original composition; removing canvas strips that were added to enlarge the painting sometime after its creation; relining the canvas; retouching old damages; and commissioning a new frame.

Analysis of the painting during conservation confirmed the reattribution and gave an insight into Artemisia's working practices. She is thought to have travelled with a stock of tracings or drawings that she used to create new compositions, and conservators found that at least four parts of the painting were also used in previous works, including the Elders' heads and Susanna's face. Artemisia must have considered this Susanna particularly accomplished, as she reused elements of the figure in at least three versions of her later painting *Bathsheba*. X-radiography (used to analyse aspects of a work not visible to the naked eye) and infrared reflectography (used to make underdrawing visible) have also revealed changes that Artemisia made to the composition, uncovering a large fountain that she subsequently painted out with trees.

Ends

The special display of works by Artemisia Gentileschi is included in a visit to the Palace of Holyroodhouse from Thursday, 28 November 2024 until Thursday, 4 September 2025.

The Palace of Holyroodhouse is open to visitors Thursday to Monday, remaining closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, except between 23 May and 7 September when it is open seven days a week. Tickets and visitor information: www.rct.uk, T. +44 (0)303 123 7306.

A selection of images is available from [Dropbox](#) (please find captions and credit lines on the attached contact sheet).

B-roll footage of the painting undergoing conservation, including an interview with Paintings Conservator Adelaide Izat, is available to download [here](#) (password: 37fhdk30!j\$). A shot list is available in the Dropbox folder linked above.

Notes to Editors

Royal Collection Trust is a charity caring for the Royal Collection and welcoming visitors to the royal palaces. We bring our shared history to life through world-class experiences that involve and inspire people, wherever they are. Income from tickets and retail sales helps us to conserve the Collection so that it can be enjoyed by everyone for generations to come.

The Royal Collection is one of the world's great art collections, held in trust by The King for his successors and the nation. With over a million objects, from paintings, drawings and books to sculpture, furniture and jewellery, it is a unique record of the tastes of British kings and queens over the past 500 years, with many items still used today for their original purpose. The Collection can be seen in palaces, museums and galleries across the UK and around the world, and can be explored online at www.rct.uk.

Admission to the Palace of Holyroodhouse is managed by The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity in England and Wales (1016972) and in Scotland (SCO39772).