



Artemisia GENTILESCHI (Rome 1593 - Naples c. 1656)

Bathsheba at her Bath

Oil on canvas

204.5 by 155.5 cm.; 80 1/2 by 61 1/4 in

This impressive full-scale depiction of Bathsheba at her bath was painted by Artemisia Gentileschi, probably in the 1640s at the height of her maturity.

Sometimes presented by latter-day scholars as a proto-feminist, Artemisia specialized in depictions of female heroines such as Judith and Sisera, as well as more traditional subjects such as Cleopatra, Danae, and female personifications of allegories. In the present work the heroine is at her toilet, attended to by two maid-servants. It successfully combines two of Artemisia's career-long interests: the magnificence of the female form and the voluminous depiction of sumptuous fabrics, particularly in evidence in Bathsheba's yellow drapery.

Artemisia must have enjoyed the subject considerably – probably because it offered her a ready-made vehicle to explore the female nude and thus delight her patrons – and revisited it on numerous occasions, producing several very distinct treatments of the subject and a number of versions of each treatment, one of which is recorded in the inventories of Charles I of England, though is sadly untraced. That the different 'types' were carefully modified in each of the various versions lends further credence to the theory that the artist made use of preparatory cartoons.

The composition finds echoes in all the other treatments of the subject. While David is notably absent from the present work, which Ward Bissell dates to 1637/38, the closest variant is the painting in a UK private collection exhibited in Milan in 2011, which shows the three figures in identical poses but is considerably altered in the background. Another type, possibly earlier in date, is represented by the Bathsheba in the Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio, which can also be linked to the present work since it repeats the disposition of the three figures. In the pose of Bathsheba's legs, the composition also makes use of features from another, later, scheme, whose best variant is probably the work in Potsdam,

which has a much suffered version in the Uffizi (and a lost variant formerly at Gosford House, Scotland).

This type can be extended to include the signed painting in the Haas Collection in Vienna, which is horizontal, and that sold at Sotheby's Milan in 2011, which introduces a handsome red curtain running vertically along the right edge of the design. The kneeling figure of the present work has been removed in both the last two types, with the basin taking a prominent central position as the fully nude Bathsheba is shown seated on a tasseled pillow.

Provenance:

Acquired in Italy circa 1865 by Baron Deichmann as by Alessandro Allori;

Thence by inheritance to Freifrau Ady von Ruxleben, Thuringia;

By whom lent in 1961 to the Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, until bequeathed in the mid-1990s to the former owner

Literature:

H. Birringer, 'Bathsheba im Bade, in Museum der bildenden Künste zu Leipzig', in *Erbe und Gegenwart: Festschrift Johannes Jahn zum 70. Geburtstag*, Leipzig 1963, pp. 393–97 (as Neapolitan, towards Artemisia);

A. Sutherland Harris in A. Sutherland Harris and L. Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, exhibition catalogue, New York 1976, p. 123, under cat. no. 15, and note 29 (here and henceforth as Artemisia);

M. D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi. The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art*, Princeton 1989, pp. 128–29, 517, note 230, reproduced p. 129, fig. 120;

R. Contini in R. Contini and G. Papi (eds), *Artemisia*, exhibition catalogue, Rome 1991, pp. 79, 80, 87, note 88, 179, reproduced p. 80, fig. 66;

D. R. Marshall, *Viviano and Nicolò Codazzi and the Baroque Architectural Fantasy*, Milan 1993, pp. 154–55 (with the architectural setting possibly by Ascanio Luciani);

R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, Pennsylvania 1999, pp. 269–71, cat. no. 40 (slight reservations are given over attributing the work in full due to only knowing it from photographs; a possible collaboration with Artemisia's daughter is proposed);

R. Lattuada in K. Christiansen and J. W. Mann (eds), *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, exhibition catalogue, New York 2001, p. 416, under cat. no. 80, under 'Related Pictures';

R. Contini and F. Solinas, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, exhibition catalogue, Milan 2011, p. 114 and p. 228 under cat. no. 41