

INGENIOUS WOMEN. WOMEN ARTISTS AND THEIR COMPANIONS
14 OCTOBER 2023 TO 28 JANUARY 2024

In the exhibition *Ingenious Women. Women Artists and Their Companions*, the Bucerius Kunst Forum traces the careers of outstanding women artists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. For the first time, the family context in which the women artists pursued their careers is addressed and made visible through works by their fathers, brothers, husbands and fellow painters. Female artists were able to achieve extraordinary success in a wide variety of family constellations: They became court painters, teachers, entrepreneurs and even publishers, and were awarded the highest honours. The exhibition presents 30 women artists and some 150 works, by artists including Sofonisba Anguissola, Judith Leyster, Marietta Robusti (La Tintoretta) and Angelica Kauffmann. Masterful portraits, still lifes and historical scenes in painting, drawing and prints from all over Europe, ranging from the Renaissance and Baroque periods to early Neoclassicism, will be brought together in Hamburg.

In the early modern period it was not altogether impossible for women to pursue a career as an artist, but it was definitely outside the norm and therefore always subject to special challenges. Anyone wishing to practise a freelance profession had to join a guild, but some regions denied membership to women, and in others it entailed considerable hurdles and costs. This explains why a conspicuous number of women artists of this period came from or married into artistic families. They worked for their fathers, brothers and husbands, often in secret. At the royal courts by contrast, women were able to work openly as artists because different rules prevailed there based on a more open-minded attitude to artistic achievement, regardless of origin or gender. Women artists who managed to flout social norms captured the attention and earned the esteem of their contemporaries. Due to the male gaze that dominated art scholarship until the twentieth century, however, their accomplishments were forgotten for a long time.

The exhibition gets off to a dazzling start with a self-portrait by Catharina van Hemessen, the earliest self-portrait that depicts a painter working at the easel. Catharina van Hemessen received her training in the workshop of her father, Jan Sanders van Hemessen. He, too, painted portraits, but his daughter surpassed him in this field. Katherina van Hemessen's life and work is part of the first chapter of the exhibition, *Daughters, Brothers and Fathers*, which also features works by Tintoretta, daughter of the Venetian artist Tintoretto. Further chapters explore the themes: *Deliberately Single, Up Until Marriage, Painting with Family, Women Graphic Artists, Women Artists at Court* and *Women Artists in Art Institutions*.

For further press information and images, please contact:
Ineke Rickert, Press and Public Relations, Bucerius Kunst Forum
+49 (0)40 36 09 96 78, presse@buceriuskunstforum.de, buceriuskunstforum.de

For many women painters, marriage meant putting aside productive artistic work, as Judith Leyster's biography demonstrates. They had to attend to family duties, or worked in their husband's workshop, but anonymously. Other women managed to juggle artistic work and motherhood. Lavinia Fontana was a renowned painter of the late Renaissance and one of the first women to establish herself in the profession. She was so successful that her husband, Giovanni Paolo Zappi, likewise a painter, gave up his own career to take care of the family.

In contrast, it is apparent that some women deliberately refrained from marrying or separated from their husbands in order to pursue a profession as artist. Prominent examples are Maria van Oosterwijck, one of the most important still life painters in the northern Netherlands, and the flower painter and naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian.

There were also several women who made a name for themselves in printmaking. A notable example in the eighteenth century was Maria Katharina Prestel, who, together with her husband Johann Gottlieb Prestel, specialised in the reproduction of drawings and paintings.

Many women ascended to the status of court painter, including Sofonisba Anguissola, who portrayed the Spanish King Philip II and his family in numerous paintings. An exception during the same period was Rachel Ruysch, because both she and her husband achieved success painting for the Düsseldorf Elector Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz-Neuburg.

The exhibition closes with the chapter *Women Artists in Art Institutions*, which presents works by well-known artists such as Elisabetta Sirani, Angelica Kauffmann and Dorothea Therbusch. Elisabetta Sirani took over the management of her father's workshop, where she had previously trained as an artist. Thanks to her excellent reputation, she was accepted into the *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome. She also founded a painting school in Bologna exclusively devoted to women's artistic training.

This is the first exhibition to systematically juxtapose works by women artists with those of their male colleagues. In this way, both formal and stylistic similarities and differences come to the fore. Scholarly research and exchanges with international experts have furthermore brought some intriguing new insights to light.

The exhibition will subsequently be shown at the Kunstmuseum Basel, from 2 March to 30 June 2024.

An exhibition catalogue will be published with Hirmer Verlag.

The exhibition is sponsored by

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