



Disobedient

Elizabeth Fremantle

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In Elizabeth Fremantle's historical novel *Disobedient*, an artist fights for freedom and restitution.

Rome is buzzing. The talent of young painter Artemisia Gentileschi defies all expectations. The quality of her work has already surpassed that of her father, renowned painter Orazio Gentileschi. But young women in seventeenth-century Italy are expected to become wives and mothers, not artists.

Headstrong and dedicated to her art, Artemisia perseveres. She rebels against her jealous, drunken father, who takes credit for her work. She turns down marriage proposals she is meant to accept.

In the hopes of securing himself a son-in-law, Orazio introduces Artemisia to fellow painter Agostino Tassi. When the two are left alone, Tassi rapes Artemisia to win a wager with a friend. To restore the Gentileschi family honor, Orazio presses charges against Tassi. But the outcome of the trial is far from certain. In a society where women are accused of causing the violence perpetrated against them and are forced to marry their rapists in the name of honor, the personal and artistic freedom Artemisia fought for all her life is at stake.

Based on real-life events, *Disobedient* is narrated from Artemisia's perspective. One of the few women of her time to be given an opportunity to work as a painter, Artemisia is still considered one of the most important artists of the Baroque era. Because of her work and her victory in the trial against Tassi, she is also seen as one of the forebears of modern feminism. Still, some of the book's attitudes toward religion and LGBTQ+ people, and Artemisia's view of herself as a woman in society, seem anachronistic.

Though it is brisk, at times just skimming the surface of Artemisia's inner life and art, the historical novel *Disobedient* honors the artist's perseverance and fight for artistic freedom.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (July / August 2023)

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