



Sofonisba Anguissola: The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance

By Ilya Sandra Perlingieri

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Refuting the Renaissance-era belief that women lacked creativity and intelligence, Italian Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625) became a first-rate painter hailed by Vasari, Michelangelo and Van Dyck. This profusely illustrated biographical-critical study (122 plates, 40 in color) profiles a woman of tenacious spirit who found subtle ways to circumvent the staid formal requirements of Spanish portraiture at the court of King Philip II, where she was painter-in-residence for 20 years. Perlingieri, an art historian at San Diego State University, restores Anguissola to her rightful place in art history, making us see the psychological complexity of her family scenes, genre paintings and religious works. Most striking are the haunting, sensitive self-portraits in which the artist, born to a supportive aristocratic family, proclaims her independence and lays bare her soul.

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From Library Journal

Anguissola was erased from the annals of art history for four centuries, but Perlingieri's exhaustive archival research reestablishes her as a force in the creation of 16th-century art. Her resurrection is cause for rejoicing, but it also forces us to consider the injustice of the loss of a master who painted for over 80 years. Born into nobility, the artist benefited from astute parenting and a comprehensive education that included study under Campi, Gatti, and, briefly, Michelangelo. Both Mannerist and High Renaissance influences penetrate her impressive body of work. Perlingieri unleashes the essential truth of a female painter who flourished despite antagonism from patriarchal society, thoroughly underscoring Anguissola's characteristic technique and style in rendering emotion and anatomy. The deft descriptions of period costumes mirror the accuracy and seriousness with which Anguissola painted. The book's flaws--e.g., imprecise page layout, repeated sentences, misnumbered plates--do not outweigh the importance of the documentation.

Recommended for most collections.

- *Marigrace Maselli, New York*

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