

Press Release

Artemisia Gentileschi's post-Caravaggio depiction of *Judith and Holofernes* is one of the most iconic early images associated with Feminism. The painting illustrates the Old Testament parable from the Book of Judith, in which Judith seduces Holofernes, a tyrannical invader. After seducing and drugging the soldier, Judith proceeds violently decapitate him and save her land. It's a classic tale of heroism at its core, but what makes this work particularly unique is the autobiographical elements. Gentileschi's depiction of the biblical, Judith represents her own struggle with her rapist, Agostino Tassi, as well as the lack of subsequent charges brought against him. Tassi was sentenced to one year in prison, time which he never served, and the events of her abuse culminated in lifelong inspiration for Gentileschi. Contemporarily seen as one of the most respected female painters of the Baroque, the majority of Gentileschi's paintings feature women as the principle figures and protagonists, which she borrowed primarily from biblical allegories such as, The Book of Judith.

This exhibition, inspired by the work of Gentileschi, is a diverse representation of the reinterpretation of strong feminist icons through the use of historical and religious iconography to convey female empowerment in contemporary society. The distinctive use of 'promiscuous imagery' and violence symbolize a positive rebellion against the suppression of women as sexually and politically empowered beings.

Each work in the show is dually inspired by a female heroine and the artist herself as a strong female figure within the context of her own society. Be it a goddess, biblical character, or historically significant being- each subject disregards the misogynistic constraints prescribed for women.

Anjali Bhargava's work (Suffocation Series 2010) explores the different portrayals and physical attributes associated with Devi. The use of sensuality and seduction to convey divine beauty is representative of the somewhat confused societal expectations of mortal women. Furthermore, the presentation of artist as goddess further provokes the limits of sensuality for the common woman versus the divine.

Chitra Ganesh's work pays homage to Rani of Jhansi- the warrior queen of India, and the counterpart to western heroines such as Judith and Joan

d'Arc.

Divya Mehra's works present two different aspects of the exhibition. Her work PANTS demonstrates the dominance and suppression of women in historically patriarchal societies. While the work is funny it is indicative of an alarming trend of dominance and curtailing of female strength. The alternate work honors women who are strong in the face of diversity.

Samira Abbassy and Sangeeta Sandrasekhar's works explore the power of femininity and strength in goddess such as Kali and Durga within the Hindu context, while applying autobiographical elements to their illustrations.