

Life Without Instruction



by Sally Clark

A Playgoer's Companion



Sally Clark, a playwright, filmmaker and painter, is the author of several plays: *Moo*, *The Trial of Judith K.*, *Jehanne of the Witches* and *Life Without Instruction*, among others. Her plays have received a Chalmers Award, two Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations and a Governor General's Award nomination. She attended the

University of British Columbia, York University, and Toronto's New School of Art, earning her a B.A. in Fine Arts. She uses her background in art (specifically painting) in *Life Without Instruction*, using her knowledge of art history and her own experience as a painter to weave these two art forms together.

The play premiered on August 2, 1991, at Theatre Plus Toronto under the direction of Glynis Leyshon (Grace, 133). Another production in 1999 was at the Frederic Wood Theatre of the University of British Columbia.

"The character of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-c1653) is, in large part, a rediscovery of the latter third of the twentieth century. Although Gentileschi was a popular and highly successful painter of the Italian baroque, with several major canvasses to her credit, she was all but written out of art history until feminist scholars began revisiting her story in the 1970s. . . . Revival of interest in [Artemesia] Gentileschi, no matter what form it takes, turns on the rape trial and on these paintings, and in each fictional creation of the artist's life differing emphases and interpretations are given to these dramatic events and hence to her great works. To date, the works inspired by her story include four novels and four plays . . . in English, one feature film, and two television pieces. " – Sherrill Grace, "Life Without Instruction: Artemisia and the Lessons of Perspective" (*Theatre Research in Canada*)

Artemisia Gentileschi was an Italian Early Baroque painter, the daughter of Orazio Gentileschi. She painted her famous painting "Susannah and the Elders" at age 17. She was mentored and heavily influenced by Caravaggio.

She was one of the first female artists to paint historical and religious paintings, at a time when such heroic themes were considered beyond a woman's reach. She was the first female painter to become a member of the *Accademia di Arte del Disegno* in Florence.



In 1611 she was sent to study under the landscape painter, Agostino Tassi. Assisted by Cosimo Quorlis, another painter, Tassi raped the young Artemisia. Artemisia took him to trial in 1612. The trial lasted seven months in which Tassi was sentenced to prison and a five year exile from Rome. The sentence was later commuted to one year in prison. Artemisia is believed to have died sometime around 1656, during the plague, as the last records of her were from 1654-6.



Agostino Tassi was an Italian painter who worked mostly out of Rome where he was a specialist in quadratura (quadratura is a tradition in Baroque art in which tools such as foreshortening, and other effects are used to create the illusion of three-dimensions on an otherwise two-dimensional or mostly flat ceiling surface above the viewer).

Orazio Lomi Gentileschi was born at Pisa in 1563. He was, one of more important painters influenced by Caravaggio (the so called Caravaggisti). He was distinguished greatly by his works in Florence, Genoa, and Rome, as well as in France and Savoy. His reputation was so great that he was invited by Charles I to London.

Caravaggio was a Italian artist active in Rome, Naples, Malta and Sicily. His intensely emotional realism and dramatic use of lighting had a formative influence on the Baroque school of painting.



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