

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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NATIONAL TREASURES: ARTEMISIA IN BIRMINGHAM

JESSE JONES: MIRROR MARTYR MIRROR MOON

10 MAY – 8 SEPTEMBER 2024

As a partner in *National Treasures*, a key strand of the programme celebrating the National Gallery's Bicentenary, NG200, Ikon presents a masterpiece by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1654 or later), *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (about 1615-17).

In direct response to Gentileschi's work, Ikon shows *Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon*, a solo exhibition of new work by Dublin-based contemporary artist Jesse Jones, whose practice crosses film, performance, sculpture and installation.

Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon considers art history, cinema, feminism, ritual and healing, presenting multiple interconnected archetypes of feminist resistance. Through extensive research, Jones views *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* as a composite of three women: Gentileschi herself, Saint Catherine (287-305 AD) and the pagan philosopher, mathematician and astronomer Hypatia (around 370-415 AD). All three women are linked by their experiences of violence.

Please note this exhibition contains some nudity and is a darkened space with variable lighting.

IKON/60

THE NATIONAL GALLERY | **NG200**
200 YEARS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Wednesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm
Free entry, donations welcome

EXHIBITION ARTWORKS. NATIONAL TREASURES: ARTEMISIA IN BIRMINGHAM

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1654 or later)

***Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (about 1615–17)**

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London. Bought with the support of the American Friends of the National Gallery, the National Gallery Trust, Art Fund (through the legacy of Sir Denis Mahon), Lord and Lady Sassoon, Lady Getty, Hannah Rothschild CBE and other donors including those who wish to remain anonymous, 2018.

In this life-size painting, Artemisia Gentileschi depicts herself as the early Christian martyr Saint Catherine of Alexandria, who was tortured for her beliefs by being bound to a spiked wheel which miraculously broke and left her unharmed. The artist uses a bold, closely-cropped composition and strongly directed light to focus our attention on the Saint herself, who was renowned as an intellectual. Catherine's steady, resolute gaze, her hand upon the wheel and the martyr's palm she holds close to her chest, make clear her sanctity and intelligence, as well as the sincerity of her convictions.

Gentileschi was the most famous female artist in Europe in the first half of the 17th century and, when in her twenties, made a series of self portraits in which she appeared in various guises. These may have served, in part, to promote herself and her work – as her success as a woman was unusual at the time. She seems to have begun this painting, which was only discovered in 2017, without Saint Catherine's attributes. The menacing wheel, palm, halo and crown ornamented with pearls were added as the painting neared completion.

Gentileschi was born and worked in Rome, but travelled widely, establishing her presence in Florence, Venice, Naples

and London. Like Saint Catherine, she had herself endured torture. At the age of 17, she was raped by an associate of her father. During her attacker's trial, she underwent judicial torture, used to discern whether she was telling the truth, by having ropes tightened around her fingers. While Gentileschi's work, which includes numerous representations of strong female protagonists, has often been interpreted in relation to this aspect of her biography, we know nothing about the circumstances of this painting's making. In a later letter to a collector however, she declared: "you will find the spirit of Caesar in this soul of a woman".

EXHIBITION ARTWORKS. JESSE JONES: MIRROR
MARTYR MIRROR MOON

1. Unknown Italian Artist

Head of Prudence (c. early 15th century)

Marble

Loaned from The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts

This sculpture is a fragment of a female allegorical figure Prudence, one of the Seven Virtues. The sculpture has two heads, signifying Prudence's ability to use reason and judgment, allowing her to look backwards towards precedence and forwards towards consequence. The figure probably came from a tomb in the church of Saint Francis at Gaeta. Figures representing the Virtues were often included at the base of tombs. The complete figure may have held a serpent or a mirror to signify her wisdom; associations that can be seen throughout the exhibition in work by Jones and her collaborators.

2. *The well of Eels* (2024)

A scrim curtain with a printed image shows two female figures connected by their hands and feet referencing an ouroboros – a serpent eating its own tail. At the centre of the image is an entanglement of eels that signify endurance and continuity. Created in collaboration with Junk Ensemble, a Dublin-based dance-theatre company, the work is itself a self-portrait of twin choreographers Jessica and Megan Kennedy. *The well of Eels* is a multi-layered work that references sacred holy wells in Ireland, mystical eels as omens of good fortune and the curative powers of water. Here, Jones and Junk Ensemble make connections between the wells and the ancient alchemical symbol of the ouroboros, as an allegory for resistance and rebirth.

At intervals throughout the day, an invigilator manually moves the curtain around the galleries, letting it rest at designated points to reveal and conceal aspects of the exhibition.

3. *Moon* (2024)

A glass vessel containing sacred water, from an Irish holy well dedicated to healing eyes, sits atop a mirror that is inset into a stone trough. This sacred water has been sourced by anthropologist Sara O'Rourke from a 7th century Irish holy well in County Kerry, which is situated on a cliff edge at Srón Bhroin (Brandon Point). Positioned in the same gallery as Gentileschi's self portrait, the installation makes a connection between the healing power of the holy water, folk collecting practices and the importance of cleansing the gaze from the masculine narrative of art history. A plaster cast head of Jones builds on the rich history of women self-fashioning as artists through the medium of portraiture.

Every Thursday, 5.30-6.30pm and Saturday, 10-11am, Ikon hosts free guided water rituals which include an interactive eye-cure ceremony, using water gathered from the holy well in Ireland, and a private encounter with Gentileschi's masterpiece. To book a free place, please visit ikon-gallery.org.

4. *Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon* (2024)

This 16mm film shows Colombian American singer Stephanie Lamprea vocalising texts from the lives of Hypatia, Saint Catherine and Gentileschi. Made using a two-way mirror stage, the film creates the impression of multiple performers. Echoing Prudence's ability to look forwards and backwards simultaneously, Lamprea's interaction with her self-image connects with Gentileschi's painting process.

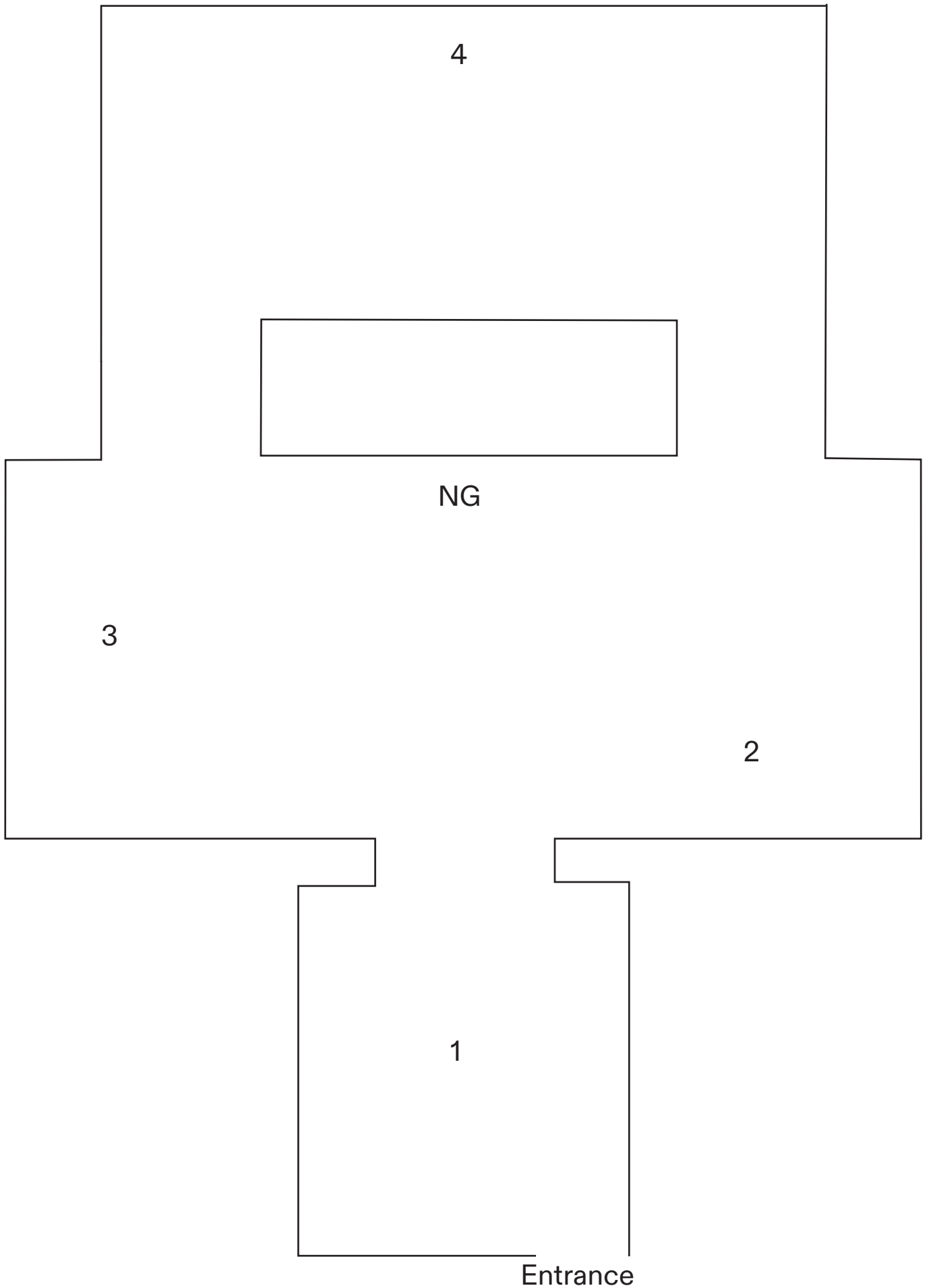
Inspired by Christine de Pizan's (1364-1430) 14th century text, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) – a story of three Virtues: Reason, Rectitude and Justice, who instruct the author to mentally build a walled city to protect from slander against womankind. The film stages this fictional city of ladies as a cartographic operatic soundscape based on the landscape of Mount Sinai, where the body of Saint Catherine was mystically elevated after her martyrdom.

The score is composed by Irene Buckley, featuring the music of Francesca Caccini (1587-1640), a friend and contemporary of Gentileschi. Echoing the red gown worn by Gentileschi in her self portrait, Lamprea wears a costume of latex and parchment that has been dyed red, made by Jones' collaborators Róisín Gartland and Alison Conneely. The parchment references the materiality of writing and painting in the 17th century, during which Gentileschi's self portrait was made.

Jesse Jones' exhibition is supported by The Ampersand Foundation, Culture Ireland, Arts Council of Ireland and The Finnis Scott Foundation.

It is presented as part of Ikon's 60th anniversary year.

FIRST FLOOR



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Entrance

LIST OF WORKS

NG. Artemisia Gentileschi

Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria (about 1615-17)

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London. Bought with the support of the American Friends of the National Gallery, the National Gallery Trust, Art Fund (through the legacy of Sir Denis Mahon), Lord and Lady Sassoon, Lady Getty, Hannah Rothschild CBE and other donors including those who wish to remain anonymous, 2018.

1. Unknown Italian Artist

Head of Prudence (early 15th century)

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2. Jesse Jones

The well of Eels (2024)

Printed curtain scrim

3. Jesse Jones

Moon (2024)

Antique shallow stone sink, mirror, plaster cast, self-portrait, glass

4. Jesse Jones

Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon (2024)

16mm film, colour, sound

16 minutes

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Free entry, donations welcome

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