

NATIONAL TREASURES: ARTEMISIA IN BIRMINGHAM

JESSE JONES: *MIRROR MARTYR MIRROR MOON*

10 MAY – 8 SEPTEMBER 2024

IKON GALLERY



Left: Artemisia Gentileschi, 1593 – 1654 or later, *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, about 1615-17

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. © The National Gallery, London

Right: Jesse Jones, *Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon* (2024). 16mm film, 16 minutes duration. Production still by Mark Duggan.

In Summer 2024, Ikon is 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). Wrapped around the Gentileschi work, and made as a direct response, is a solo exhibition by contemporary Irish artist Jesse Jones, whose artistic practice crosses film, sound, performance, sculpture and installation. *Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon* considers art history, cinema, feminism, ritual and healing, presenting multiple interconnected archetypes of feminist resistance.

National Treasures sees twelve partners, one in each region of the UK, receive a masterpiece from the National Gallery's collection and curate around it, with all displays opening simultaneously on Friday 10 May, the 200th anniversary of the National Gallery's opening in London. For the duration of the exhibitions, 35 million people – more than half the UK population – will be within an hour's journey of a National Gallery masterpiece.

For this self-portrait, Artemisia Gentileschi, the most celebrated female artist of the seventeenth century, appears in the guise of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a Christian saint martyred in the early fourth century. She leans on a broken wheel studded with iron spikes, to which she was bound, and which became her standard attribute in art. Her right hand, delicately holding a martyr's palm between thumb and forefinger, is brought to her chest. The saint is portrayed as resilient, having endured torture – as indeed the artist herself did during the trial following her rape at the age of 17 by the painter Agostino Tassi. Gentileschi seems to have used her own image frequently in works she produced in Florence – new to the city and keen to demonstrate her talent, she may have painted such pictures in a conscious act of self-promotion.

Fascinated by Gentileschi's decision to title her work *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, Jesse Jones explores the performative relationship between the artist and the medium of self-portraiture. Through extensive research, Jones, like many other contemporary scholars, views Gentileschi's work 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.

Jones transforms Ikon's gallery space to present audiences with an opportunity to "encounter" Gentileschi's self-portrait through sound and architectural interventions. At the exhibition entrance is a stone trough with a self-portrait of Jones and a sacred water offering from an Irish holy well, dedicated to healing particular illnesses. These sacred waters, collected by anthropologist Sara O'Rourke, represent a folk collecting practice that runs in parallel with the formalised history of art seen in national collections. Interrupting the exhibition space is *The well of Eels* (2024), a scrim curtain with a printed image showing an entanglement of bodies referencing an ouroboros – a serpent eating its own tail. Created in collaboration with Junk Ensemble the work is itself a self-portrait of twin choreographers Jessica and Megan Kennedy. 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.

Within Ikon's space, Gentileschi's masterpiece takes centre stage and is accompanied by *Head of Prudence* (c. early 1400s), a two-faced marble sculpture from The Barber Institute of Fine Arts' collection. Echoing *The well of Eels*, this sculpture depicts one of the Cardinal Virtues, Prudence, whose ability to use reason and judgment allowed her to look backwards towards precedents whilst looking forwards to the consequences of her actions.

In the final space, Jesse Jones presents a new 16mm film *Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon* (2024), a cartographic operatic work based on the landscape of Mount Sinai, where the body of St Catherine was mystically elevated after her martyrdom. The score features the music of Francesca Caccini, a friend and contemporary of Gentileschi. The film includes a score composed by Irene Buckley and stars Colombian American singer Stephanie Lamprea vocalising texts from the lives of Hypatia, St Catherine and Gentileschi, whilst wearing a costume of parchment and latex created with collaborators Rosin Gartland and Alison Conneely. Made using a two-way mirror stage to create the impression of multiple performers, the film also explores the unseen labour and physicality of self-portraiture and the use of the mirror as a tool in the painting process. Visitors can imagine Gentileschi using the mirror to simultaneously look inward and outward, enabling her

to reflect on her life and artistic career aspirations through a prism of multiple selves. This film holds a powerful space for healing and contemplation with Gentileschi's *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* invoked, in the words of Jones, as a "triple headed goddess".

Alongside the exhibition, Ikon hosts free guided water rituals which include an interactive eye-cure ceremony, using water gathered from a holy well in Ireland, and a private encounter with Gentileschi's masterpiece.

Jesse Jones' exhibition is supported by The Ampersand Foundation, Culture Ireland and Arts Council of Ireland. Film production supporters: The Dean Art Studios and TU Dublin. This exhibition is presented as part of Ikon's 60th anniversary year.

For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Social Media: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @NationalGallery @ampersandfoundation @artscouncil_ie @ace_national @acegrams @ace_midlands @bhamcitycouncil

Notes to Editors:

1. **Jesse Jones** is a Dublin-based artist. Her practice crosses film, performance and installation. Often working through collaborative structures, she explores how historical instances of communal culture may hold resonance in our current social and political experiences. Jones' practice is multi-platform, working in film installation, performance and sculpture. Recent solo exhibitions include Talbot Rice gallery Edinburgh, Project Arts Centre, ICA Singapore and an upcoming solo presentation at Guggenheim Bilbao. Future projects include a five-year commission for kunsthalle Gent and The Magdalen project at Rua Red. Jones' teaching practice runs parallel to her work as an artist and is based on Sherkin Island, Cork as a lecturer for TU Dublin School of Creative Arts. jessejonesartist.com
2. **National Treasures** is part of the National Gallery's programme of events to celebrate their Bicentenary. Twelve of the nation's most iconic and well-loved paintings from the collection are being lent to twelve partners across the UK. nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/across-the-uk/national-treasures
3. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed public art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for everyone, and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org

4. **Ikon** is open Wednesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council.
5. **The National Gallery** is one of the greatest art galleries in the world. Founded by Parliament in 1824, the Gallery houses the nation's collection of paintings in the Western European tradition from the late 13th to the early 20th century. The collection includes works by Artemisia Gentileschi, Bellini, Cezanne, Degas, Leonardo, Monet, Raphael, Rembrandt, Renoir, Rubens, Titian, Turner, Van Dyck, Van Gogh and Velázquez. The Gallery's key objectives are to care for and enhance the collection and provide the best possible access to visitors. Admission free. On 10 May 2024 the National Gallery will be 200 years old, and will start their Bicentenary celebration, a year-long festival of art, creativity and imagination, marking two centuries of bringing people and paintings together. nationalgallery.org.uk
6. **The Ampersand Foundation** was founded in 2011 by businessman, collector and philanthropist Jack Kirkland to support the visual arts. The Foundation supports high-quality exhibitions and projects, provided they are free to the public at least one day per week. It also supports public collection expansion, art education projects and artists residencies. The Foundation is focused mainly on supporting institutions and projects within the UK. theampersandfoundation.com
7. **Culture Ireland** promotes Irish arts worldwide. They create and support opportunities for Irish artists and companies to present and promote their work at strategic international festivals and venues. Culture Ireland develop platforms to present outstanding Irish work to international audiences, through showcases at key global arts events, including the Edinburgh Festivals and the Venice Biennales.
8. **The Arts Council of Ireland** is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. We work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life. artscouncil.ie
9. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. artscouncil.org.uk
10. **Birmingham City Council** is the local government body responsible for the governance of the City of Birmingham, UK. It is the most populated local council area in the United Kingdom (excluding counties) with 101 elected councillors representing over one million people, in 69 wards. The council headquarters are at the Council House, Victoria Square in the heart of the city centre. The council is responsible for running nearly all local services, with the exception of those run by joint boards. For more information visit www.birmingham.gov.uk

