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# The tiny rural gallery that's landed a baroque masterpiece

With the purchase of *Susanna and the Elders*, the Nivaagaard in Denmark is thought to have more Renaissance and baroque women in its collection than the Louvre






Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders* is a coup for Nivaagaard, a stately home with a museum in its grounds

[Julia Buckley](#) |

Sunday September 21 2025, 12.01am BST, The Sunday Times

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**T**he queen of Italian baroque, who painted for kings and cardinals, Artemisia Gentileschi has long been an artist whose works are prized by gallery owners.

But thanks to a rise in galleries looking to increase the number of female artists in their collections, her work is more sought-after than ever.

Now, joining the list of owners of her works, from the Getty and the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Uffizi and London's National Gallery, is a small gallery in rural Denmark.

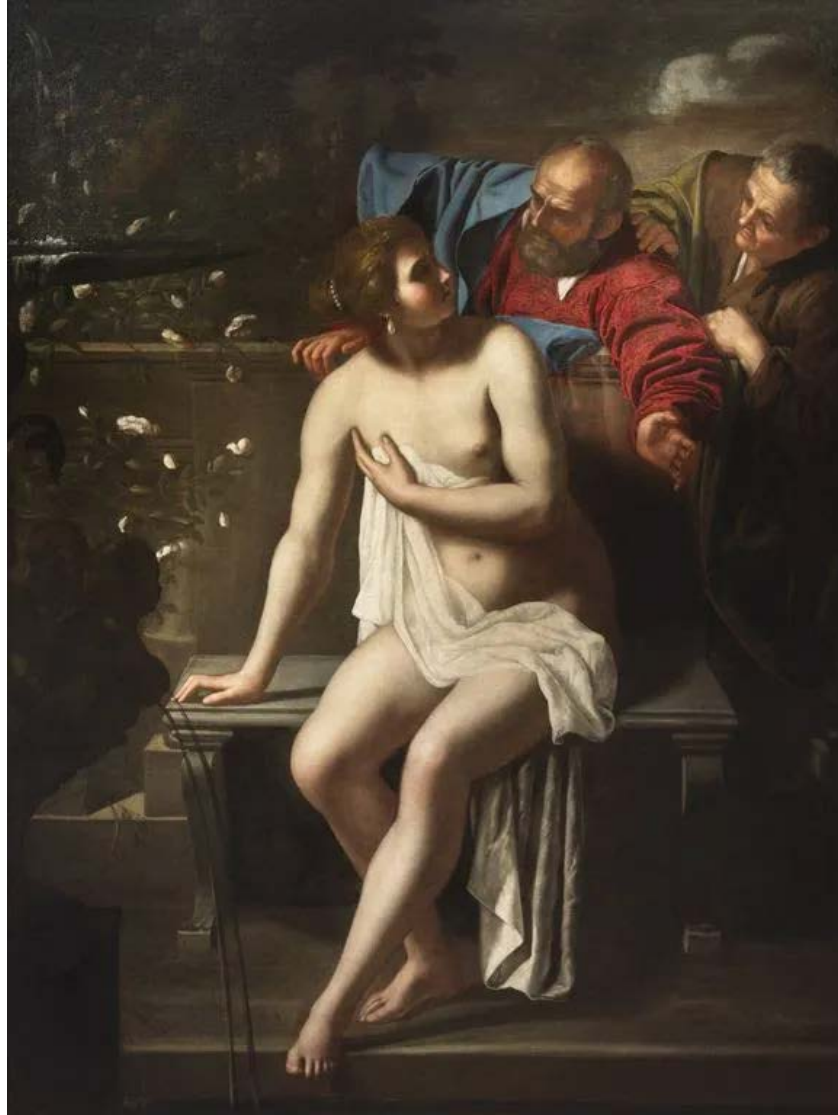
Last weekend the Nivaagaard Collection, located in a seaside village 40 minutes north of Copenhagen, unveiled its latest acquisition, Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders*. Its

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director, Andrea Rygg Karberg, beat dozens of international galleries this summer when she bought the 2m-high painting for an undisclosed sum, and called its unveiling “the happiest moment”.



The painting depicts the biblical story of Susanna, whom two judges threaten to accuse of adultery — punishable by death — if she refuses to submit to them

NIVAAGAARDS MALERISAMLING/THE NIVAAGAARD COLLECTION

In doing so, Rygg Karberg established her tiny museum as one of the foremost galleries for women’s art of the Renaissance and baroque period.

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The painting, which depicts a young woman being harassed by two lecherous men as she bathes, now hangs alongside works by Sofonisba Anguissola, the Renaissance artist who influenced Caravaggio, her sister, Europa Anguissola, and the Flemish still-life maestro Catharina Ykens II.

With works on display by four women who lived before the 18th century, the acquisition puts the Nivaagaard — a museum of just three main rooms and 261 paintings — ahead of the Louvre, whose online catalogue names three female painters who lived before the 1700s in its database of about 500,000 artworks.

- [\*\*The secret life of the Louvre: inside the world's biggest museum\*\*](#)

Nivaagaard has also leapfrogged SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, which has three. It is on a par with the Prado and London's National Gallery, on four each. While the other museums



confirmed their figures, the Louvre refused to follow suit. The museum has 200 female artists in its collection and about 1,200 men.



The Louvre Pyramid, built in 1989

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“I often say that it’s great to be small,” said Rygg Karberg. “We are agile, we can act rapidly and we are eternally lucky in Denmark to have private foundations supporting the arts.”

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Europe’s post-pandemic art world has a renewed interest in works by women. Since 2020,

Gentileschi retrospectives have been held in Naples, Paris and at the National Gallery, while Rygg Karberg staged a Sofonisba Anguissola show at the Nivaagaard in 2022, and the National Gallery of Ireland held a major exhibition on the Bolognese painter Lavinia Fontana in 2023. Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza and the Arp Museum, in Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate state, collaborated on a landmark exhibition of women's art from the medieval period to the 20th century in 2023-24, and the National Gallery Prague's current exhibition on women's art includes works by Anguissola. The Femmes Artistes Musée Mougins, a museum of women's art, opened in the south of France last year.

Yet when it comes to permanent collections, major galleries remain slow on the uptake. The feminist campaigners the Guerrilla Girls have been protesting since 1985 about the low acquisition rates of women's art; a 2019 report found that only 2 per cent of global art auction spending was on works by women. The former director of Florence's [Uffizi](#) Galleries, [Eike Schmidt](#), made a hobby out of hauling women's works out of storage, but new acquisitions eluded him.

Not all attempts to showcase women's art have gone down well, either. A 2023 Gentileschi exhibition in Genoa provoked outrage for its "rape room", which reconstructed the sexual

assault that marked her life.

Rygg Karberg's acquisition is the latest milestone in her goal to display at least one work by a woman in each of the Nivaagaard's three specialist areas: the Italian Renaissance, the Dutch Golden Age and 19th-century Danish painting.

She joined the gallery as director in 2017, when the gallery had just one confirmed painting by a woman. Sofonisba Anguissola's *Family Portrait* was acquired by the collection's founder, Johannes Hage, in 1873, when it was believed to be by an anonymous male painter.

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Family Portrait

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Earlier this year, Rygg Karberg acquired two of the five works known to be by Catharina Ykens II, whose 17th-century still lifes won her a place in the Guild of St Luke, Antwerp's equivalent of the Royal Academy.





The Nivaagaard Collection also features rare 17th-century still-life paintings by the Flemish artist Catharina Ykens II

NIVAAGAARDS MALERISAMLING/THE NIVAAGAARD COLLECTION

Rygg Karberg says her mission is not about making a statement but rebalancing art history.

“Female painters were always there but slipped from history along the way, mostly in the 19th century,” she said. “We lost half of history. Sofonisba and Artemisia were really famous in their own time but they were only rediscovered in the 1970s.”


Nivaagaard was first to register interest in the Gentileschi, which had been part of a private collection. It was sold in New York by the dealer Nicholas Hall, who had visited the museum on

holiday two years earlier. “It made a profound impression,” said Hall of his visit. He described the Nivaagaard as “a small museum but with a room of surprisingly impressive European old master paintings”.

Susanna and the Elders was a subject Gentileschi explored repeatedly, and seven of her paintings of the subject survive. The Old Testament tale of a woman tried for adultery when she refused to be blackmailed into sex by two men had clear parallels with Gentileschi’s own rape trial — which, like the biblical heroine, she won. “It’s really personal to her,” said Rygg Karberg of the topic. “Some of her early versions are more violent. This is more dignified.”

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