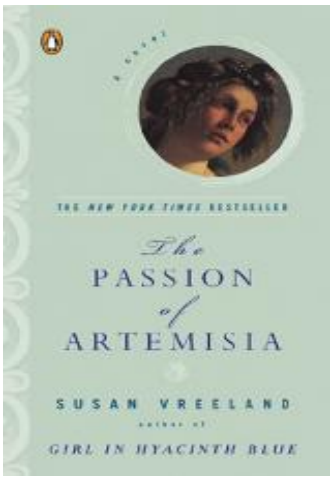
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Passion of Artemisia

by Susan Vreeland



About the Book

Recently rediscovered by art historians, and one of the few female post-Renaissance painters to achieve fame during her own era, Artemisia Gentileschi led a remarkably "modern" life. Susan Vreeland tells Artemisia's captivating story, beginning with her public humiliation in a rape trial at the age of eighteen, and continuing through her father's betrayal, her marriage of convenience, motherhood, and growing fame as an artist. Set against the glorious backdrops of Rome, Florence, Genoa, and Naples, inhabited by historical characters such as Galileo and Cosimo de' Medici II, and filled with rich details about life as a seventeenth-century painter, Vreeland creates an inspiring story about one woman's lifelong struggle to reconcile career and family, passion and genius.

Discussion Guide

1. Sometimes, it's too easy to assume that in centuries past, women were victims of gender prejudice and limitations. What negative events in Artemisia's experience were caused by her own thinking and actions? What better decisions could she have made? What advantages did Artemisia have as a woman?

2. Orazio is seen by Artemisia as the cause of her misfortunes. To what degree is this a fair assessment? How did the attitudes and strictures of the time influence him? Limit his alternatives? Blind him?

3. When Sister Graziela gives Artemisia the pearl earring, she also gives her some advice. How did she follow and not follow this advice? When it's her turn to give advice to Palmira, she reduces it to one line. Why did she make that choice?

4. In what ways did Galileo influence Artemisia? She said to him, "Even stone bears the footprints of many men." How does this apply to women and to her in particular?

5. To what extent was Graziela in control of her own fate? In what ways does the term "passion" apply to Graziela,

Orazio, Galileo, and Artemisia? How is Michelangelo's **Pietà** echoed by the characters?

6. Artemisia told Palmira, "To be a painter, you've got to care for people, for their feelings." Why did she believe this? Is it true for all art in all time periods? In her time period?

7. AHow has Artemisia influenced the minor female characters?Umiliana, Fina, Vanna, Renata, Paola? What has she learned from them? How are they representatives of the time, or exceptions to the social mores?

8. Through what stages must Artemisia grow if she is to reconcile with her father? What experiences move her in that direction, or away from that direction? Did they love each other?

9. Artemisia asked her father, "Haven't you ever felt like shouting, 'Look. Look and let this beauty transform your heart'?" Has this happened to her? What beauties?

10. Of all her paintings, which one(s) was she most passionate about? Which one(s) do you favor? Hypothetically, if Artemisia, the woman with the same history, lived in the nineteenth century, what do you think she'd be painting? What would her style(s) be like? If she could have seen the scope of art history after her as well as before, which artists would she have admired and why? Which ones do you?

Author Bio

Susan Vreeland is the internationally known author of art-related historical fiction. Four of her books are *New York Times* bestsellers.

LISETTE'S LIST presents one woman's yearning for art at a time when her family's collection of paintings had to be hidden in the south of France from Nazi art thieves. CLARA AND MR. TIFFANY reveals the talented woman who conceived of and designed the well-loved Tiffany leaded glass lamps. LUNCHEON OF THE BOATING PARTY depicts Renoir's masterpiece, the personalities involved in its making, and the *joie de vivre* of late 19th-century Paris. LIFE STUDIES is a collection of stories of Impressionist painters told by people who knew them, as well as contemporary individuals encountering art in meaningful ways. GIRL IN HYACINTH BLUE traces an alleged Vermeer painting through the centuries. THE PASSION OF ARTEMISIA illuminates Italian Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. THE FOREST LOVER follows rebel British Columbia painter Emily Carr in her encounters with native peoples and cultures. WHAT LOVE SEES tells the love story of a blind couple who refuse to accept limitations.

Four of these books have been winners of the Theodor Geisel Award, the highest honor given by the San Diego Book Awards. Vreeland's novels have been translated into 26 languages, and have frequently been selected as Book Sense Picks. She was a high school English teacher in San Diego for 30 years.

Critical Praise

"Vreeland's remarkable ability to portray with lyricism and intelligence the life of the artist both at its most practical and

most sublime makes this novel an accomplished work of art."

The Passion of Artemisia

by Susan Vreeland

Publication Date: December 31, 2002
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics)
ISBN-10: 0142001821
ISBN-13: 9780142001820