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J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM ACQUIRES 17th-CENTURY MASTERPIECE BY ORAZIO GENTILESCHI: *DANAË*, c. 1621

The classical mythological subject was commissioned as part of a set of three large paintings that included Lot and His Daughters, already one of the Getty Museum's most important Baroque paintings



LOS ANGELES —The J. Paul Getty Museum announced today the acquisition at auction of *Danaë* (1621) by the famed Italian painter Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). The monumental oil painting depicting the classical theme of Danaë and the shower of gold was one of three paintings commissioned together in 1621. At the Getty, it joins another of the three, *Lot and His Daughters*, which has been a standout of the Getty Museum's collection since 1998.

"Orazio Gentileschi's majestic *Danaë* is a masterpiece of 17th-century Italian painting," says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "With its ambitious scale and wonderfully sensual subject, the picture has been heralded as one of the most important Baroque pictures to come to market in recent memory. Reuniting it with *Lot and His Daughters*, with which it was intended to hang as part of a spectacular triad of paintings commissioned by a Genoese nobleman, not only makes art-historical sense but multiplies greatly the visual impact of both works. Baroque paintings were often conceived as ensembles

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that play off each other in both subject matter and composition, as these two works so clearly do. It is one of those rare acquisitions that also elevates the stature of the paintings collection as a whole. "

In 1621, nobleman Giovanni Antonio Sauli traveled from Genoa to Rome to honor the newly elected pope, Gregory XV, and there encountered Orazio Gentileschi. Sauli commissioned three pictures from Orazio for his Palazzo in Genoa: *Mary Magdelene* (now in a private collection), *Lot and His Daughters*, and *Danaë*. While all three pictures draw their subjects from different source material, they each touch on different types of love and man's relationship to God.

In Greek mythology, Danaë was the beautiful daughter of King Acrisius of Argos. Warned by an oracle that his daughter's son would one day kill him, Acrisius banished her to a tower, away from the reach of men. While the imprisonment effectively kept mortal men away, it was no impediment to Zeus. Transforming himself into a shower of gold, Zeus visited Danaë and impregnated her, conceiving the hero Perseus. The theme was popular in classical art, and again in the late Middle Ages, when Danaë was depicted, secluded in a tower, as the image of modesty. During the High Renaissance however, images of Danaë's story became more erotically charged; it was from the celebrated precedents by Correggio and Titian that Orazio took his cue.

In Orazio's monumental depiction, Cupid pulls back a luxuriant dark green curtain, allowing Zeus to enter as a shower of gold coins and ribbons. Danaë lies partly covered on a sumptuous red bed with white and gold sheets, the dynamism of the falling coins and ribbons combining with the subject's sculptural physique and piercing gaze. The picture is also a meticulous study of light, color and surface texture, from the shiny gold coins to the sheen of the fabrics, displaying a range of tones from cool white linen to the deep crimson bed, and the gilt bed frame and artichoke-shaped bed knobs.

"The sensuality and splendor of *Danaë*, which is part of a trio of masterpieces that Gentileschi completed at the apogee of his career, draw together the Caravaggesque naturalism prevalent in Italian art in the early 17th century with the refinement of color which marks the mature style of Orazio, one of the most elegant and individual figures of the Italian Baroque," said Davide Gasparotto, senior curator of paintings at the Getty Museum. "During his lifetime Gentileschi was probably the most internationally successful of all the artists associated with Caravaggio."

Once it arrives at the Getty, *Danaë* will be displayed in the Museum's East Pavilion, along with *Lot and His Daughters*. The timing will be announced.

About Orazio Gentileschi

Orazio Gentileschi was born in Pisa in 1563, the son of Giovanni Battista di Bartolomeo Lomi, a Florentine goldsmith. He worked as a goldsmith before becoming a painter and apparently came to painting only in his early twenties. By the late 1570s or early 1580s he was painting figures in fresco in several Roman churches. As late as 1593, when the artist would have been 30, he is recorded as receiving payment for the design of medals for the feast of Saint Peter. By his late 30's, however, Orazio seems to have been committed to painting and he is documented as working in Rome. Once he became an established artist, his success came quickly and he became associated with Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (Italian, 1571-

1610). He traveled extensively and his career took him to Florence, the Marches, Rome, Genoa, Paris and finally London.

Simplicity of composition, clear, precise contours, and a rich blend of bright, cool, and warm colors characterized Orazio's art. His Tuscan training influenced a strong lyricism and sense of color. He was one of the few artists of his generation who succeeded in blending Caravaggesque naturalism with formal sophistication, and in using light as an instrument to celebrate beauty rather than as a theatrical device. In this way Orazio proved to be one of the most refined, personal, and innovative artists of the period.

By 1620 Orazio had established himself in Rome as an artist of great repute, working for the most prominent Roman families, included the Borghese, the family of the sitting pope. In 1622, at the behest of his prestigious patron Giovanni Antonio Sauli, he had settled in Genoa, where he created paintings for Sauli's burgeoning picture gallery. At the time Genoa was enjoying unprecedented wealth and urban transformations, and its artistic scene was one of the liveliest in Europe. There, during this high point of his career, Orazio completed three masterpieces for Sauli's Palazzo: *Penitent Magdalene*, *Lot and His Daughters*, and *Danaë*.

After four years in Genoa, Orazio was working in Paris for Marie de' Medici and was so much in demand that wealthy patrons commissioned him to create "autograph" variants of his more famous works. After a short stay in Paris, he relocated to England to become court painter to King Charles I. His daughter Artemesia Gentileschi (1593-1653), whom Orazio had trained and who became one of the few successful female painters of her time, joined her homesick father there shortly before his death in 1639.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

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