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Five Centuries of Artistic Independence

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“Her Story: Women Artists of the ALBERTINA” offers a corrective to an enduring imbalance: women have always participated in art history, yet recognition has rarely reflected their contribution. The exhibition examines five centuries of work within the museum’s collection. Its strongest proposition is not simply to recover overlooked names, but to present women as enterprising and connected makers of artistic culture.

The exhibition’s breadth resists the temptation to treat women artists as a stylistically unified category. Early printmakers Diana Scultori and Magdalena de Passe appear alongside Maria Sibylla Merian, Angelica Kauffmann, Berthe Morisot and pioneering feminist artists of the 1970s. This diversity matters: the history being recovered is not marginal to artistic development, but woven through its changing techniques, ambitions and professional networks.

Merian’s “Stinging Nettle with the Metamorphosis of the Small Tortoiseshell and Two Species of Flies” exemplifies the richness of that approach. Executed between 1679 and 1683 in body colours on a transfer print on vellum, the work joins close observation with pictorial construction. Its subject encourages an appreciation of artistic intelligence operating across boundaries between natural inquiry and visual invention.

Self-representation supplies another compelling thread. Morisot’s “Self-Portrait Drawing, with Julie” and Käthe Kollwitz’s 1908 “Self-Portrait” position women not merely as subjects, but as authors of their own visibility. Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun’s image of a young woman drawing a girl’s portrait extends that enquiry: artistic activity itself becomes worthy of depiction.

The selection also makes space for imaginative independence. Emilie Mediz-Pelikan’s “Female Centaur,” Suzanne Valadon’s “Adam and Eve,” and Anna Zemánková’s embroidered drawing suggest markedly different ways of reworking bodies, inherited narratives and the expressive possibilities of paper. Their conjunction invites comparison without demanding sameness. Especially significant is the institutional dimension. Works by early women engravers and publishers were collected by the ALBERTINA’s founders, Duke Albert and Archduchess Maria Christina.

Their presence complicates any simple story of total absence: collecting and sustained recognition are not necessarily equivalent. Ultimately, “Her Story” promises recognition without reducing artistic individuality

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to a collective label. Its appeal lies in the encounter between historical recovery and aesthetic curiosity: an invitation to reconsider both the artists we remember and the structures through which remembrance is shaped.

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