



DETAILS

Artist	José Brel y Giralt (1832-1894)
Place of Production	Valencia
Place of Origin	--
Title/ Name of Piece	<i>Genio, Gloria y Amor</i> (Genius, Glory and Love: The poetic genius paying homage to love)
Date	1866
Measurements	
Materials/Technique	Oil on canvas
Inventory No.	--
Location in the Museum	First Floor/ Salón Rojo (Red Room) / Ceiling

DESCRIPTION

Between 1854 and 1867, the Palace of Dos Aguas underwent a large-scale interior redecoration, commissioned by the 7th Marquess of Dos Aguas, Vicente Dasí Lluesma. Almost all of the ceiling murals from the first floor are a product of this important renovation. José Brel y Giralt was one of the artists who participated in this project. He designed the dome of the chapel and created the ceiling murals in the antechamber and the Red Room. In the centre of the aforementioned Red Room, he painted a grand tondo (a circular painting). The tondo features the most famous Renaissance poets and artists along with their loved ones in the temple of glory, with the Allegory of Fame watching over them.

In the foreground (left to right) appear Dante and Beatrice; Tasso with sisters Leonora and Lucrecia d'Este; and Luis de Camões, pictured armed, facing away and conversing with Catarina d'Ataide. In the background, all of the following can be observed: Lucrecia Borja, Pietro Bembo; the painter Raphael and La Fornarina (also known as The Portrait of a Young Woman); Pierre Abélard and Héloïse; Petrarch and Laura de Noves; Boccaccio and Maria of Naples.

FURTHER READING

Related Themes

Gender roles
Gender stereotypes: Genius/ Muse
Gender stereotypes: Subject/ Object

Further Reading

The painting *El Genio, la Gloria, y el Amor* conveys a clear message: the artistic and poetic (male) genius achieves success and leaves his mark on history inspired by love, represented here by the women. In his right hand, the Allegory of Fame carries a scroll which reads: 'genius, glory and love' and in his left he holds a laurel wreath, a symbol of triumph.

The assignment of clearly defined gender roles is evident in this scene: the woman as a muse and the man as a genius. This gender stereotype based on binary opposition is a recurring theme in art history. Not only does this stereotype reduce the role of women in the artistic process to inspiration or muse, but presumes that women are unable to assume the creative role. Therefore, there have been no female artists because men in essence possess the artistic genius.

Since the 70's, feminist art critics have attempted to dispel these myths. In 1971, in an article published by *Art News*, art historian Linda Nochlin questioned 'Why have there been no great women artists?'. This went on to become a fundamental text in feminist art criticism (Mayayo, 2003: 21). Nochlin reflected upon this question, attributing the difficulty for women to develop careers in art to adverse social and institutional conditions, and not to the natural inability of women. She focused on the difficulty women face in accessing nude studies, a fundamental exercise in the development of an artistic career, thus restricting them to 'inferior' art genres, such as portrait, landscape and still life. Furthermore, it tackles the myth of genius being an 'innate nugget which will always win through' (Pollock, 2013: 83). Following Nochlin's article, a series of studies were published which aimed to 'rediscover' female artists silenced by art history and museums. In 1976, Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris organised the exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950*, with its corresponding book of the same name. Feminist art critics in the 70's and 80's highlighted the lack of gender equality between artists represented in larger museums. Ultimately, they focused on the stereotype of men as the artistic creators and subjects, and women as the object and muse. One such group of critics was 'Guerrilla Girls', who created the famous poster 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?'

However, female artists not only had to face their omission from history, their work being judged by critics in mainstream discussion and art history, but even with how they have been represented in art themselves as women (Chadwick, 1992: 19, referring to Marietta Robusti, Tintoretto's daughter). The notion of 'femininity' emerged in the 19th century as a bourgeois concept. It portrays the woman as modest and demure, confining her to the private sphere as the 'angel in the house'. Therefore, the gender specific role for women contradicted the typical ideal of what it means to be an artist: a 'professional gentleman' and 'bohemian outsider' (Mayayo, 2003: 41). Describing a piece as 'feminine' automatically implied two things. Firstly, that it was inferior and amateur compared to art by men, which is both professional and suitable for public display. Secondly, that 'feminine' characteristics such as delicateness, imperfection and sensitivity were innate. Throughout art history, the art produced by females has been seen as secondary because it does not correspond with the norm or masculine criteria.

As Chadwick indicates, 'writing about art has confused the issue of women artists by inscribing social constructions of femininity on them' (Chadwick, 1992: 31). Even when it began to be accepted that women have equal creative abilities and can possess the same 'genius' as men, it was still considered that art produced by women was naturally different because it was 'feminine' (Chadwick, 1992: 36). This explains the numerous publications specifically about female artists in the 19th century. These were deemed worthy of publication but separately from the historical and artistic contexts to which they evidently belonged. This separation was supported by the bourgeois concept of distinguishing between domestic and private spheres. Even in the 20th century, the aforementioned study *Women Artists 1550-1950* by Nochlin and Sutherland Harris was influenced by this bourgeois concept. The interpretation of the artwork focuses on the gender of the artist as a transhistorical category rather than the social and political function of the art (Pollock, 2013: 90). According to Pollock, the problem with the analyses of Nochlin, Sutherland and Germaine Greer in *The Obstacle Race* (1979), is that they consider women as one single transhistorical category (2013: 92).

In order to deconstruct the genius vs. muse stereotype, not only is it essential to revive the memory of female artists but also to question the myth of the male creative genius. By emphasising the importance of a social and institutional context for the development of a career, Nochlin at the same time dispels the 'romantic myth of the artist being a self-sufficient lucky genius who gives free reign to his individuality' (Mayayo, 2003: 22). Surrounding this idea of genius or 'Great Artist', Nochlin suggests that a myth has emerged of a young gifted artist being discovered by an older maestro. From a young age, their inner talent developed quickly and independently without any form of help or training. As genius is naturally self-revealing, this supposes that prominent female artists have not existed simply because women do not possess artistic genius. Throughout art history, it has been considered that social and institutional structures are a mere question of context or background for the 'Great Artist' (Nochlin, 1973: 8).

The Renaissance, as referred to in Brel's painting, or more specifically 15th century Italy, is when the image of the artistic figure was formed. Artists claim that painting, sculpture and architecture should no longer be considered skilled trades and should obtain the status of liberal and intellectual arts such as poetry and music. The 'Vite de Vasari' publication helps define the concept of genius and creativity associated with the artistic figure. It explains that even when a piece of artwork was obviously the result of a collective effort in a family-run workshop, historiography only credited the maestro. For example, as a consequence of this rewriting of art history, the contribution of Marietta Robusti has been undervalued (Chadwick, 1992: 18).

In the late 17th to early 18th century, the creation of Academies for official training and public exhibition purposes consolidated the social and intellectual position of the artist. However, it was during the romantic era that artistic creation and masculinity were truly equated. This forged the image of an artist, naturally male, who was melancholic, different, marginalised and original. An analogy was in fact established linking artistic creativity and masculine sexual vigour. The strong link between creation and masculinity results in the exclusion of female creators. They can only succeed if they renounce their sexuality, in other words, converting themselves into a 'male' (Mayayo 2003: 67). According to Christine Battersby, the romantic ideal attributes certain 'feminine' characteristics to the artist, while at the same time excluding women from assuming the creative role. Romanticism values characteristics previously considered as feminine: subjectivity, individuality, difference and originality, exaggerated emotions and passion. However, they are not considered derogatory when applied to the idea of male genius (Battersby, 2012: 559). In other words, as long as the criteria for creative genius and a masterpiece is defined by men themselves, women will forever remain excluded.

BATTERSBY, C. (2012): *Gender and genius (The clouded mirror)*, in Tanke, J., McQuillan, C. (eds.), *The Boomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics*, New York, Bloomsbury, 559-570.
 CHADWICK, W. [1990] (1992): *Mujer, arte y sociedad*, Barcelona, Destino.
 MAYAYO, P. (2003): *Historias de mujeres, historias del arte*, Madrid, Cátedra.
 NOCHLIN, L. (1973): *Why have there been no great women artists?*, in Hess, T. B., Baker, E. C. (eds.), *Art and sexual politics. Women's liberation, women artists and art history*, New York, MacMillan.
 POLLOCK, G. [1988] (2013): *Visión y diferencia: feminismo, feminidad e historia del arte*, Buenos Aires, Fiordo.