

READING BODIES: COVERAGE AND ERASURE

IN BETTY TOMPKINS' *APOLOGIA (ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI #1)*

by

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(Under the Direction of Isabelle Wallace)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* (2018) by Betty Tompkins (b: 1945), a work from her *Apologia* series that overlays art historical imagery with text excerpted from media responses to #MeToo allegations. Through the formal techniques of overpainting and historical layering, Tompkins interrogates the instability of language and its paradoxical power to reveal and obscure. The paper argues that *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* functions as a critical lens on the entanglement of cultural and scholarly discourse, weaving together threads from Biblical studies, Baroque history, twentieth-century developments in feminist thought, and contemporary discussions about sexual violence. Tompkins merges word and image, bridging popular and academic dialogues on misogyny to reveal the effect of gender in a lingual episteme.

INDEX WORDS: *Apologia*, Betty Tompkins, Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith and Holofernes, Chuck Close.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Nanabear—my first call, my biggest fan, and my best friend
and to Madeline Perkins—my favorite thinker and faithful editor.

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I am indebted to the professors who share their minds, the writers who share their words, and the women who, despite everything, choose to keep seeing, noticing, and creating.

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CHAPTER 1

READING BODIES: COVERAGE AND ERASURE

IN BETTY TOMPKINS' *APOLOGIA (ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI #1)*

*Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search of it,
and the way I do not find it.*

-Clarice Lispector¹

The opposite of rape is understanding.

-Jericho Brown²

This paper discusses Betty Tompkins' *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* (2018) (Figure 1), one of several works in a series that consists of images taken from art history textbooks and overpainted with pink text. This overpainting creates structural layers that facilitate a reflection on the way that images and ideas interact to build or blanket one another. In *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, the base images of textbook renditions of Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* and *Judith Beheading Holofernes* are partially obscured by a quote taken from a *New York Times* interview with the artist Chuck Close after models who had worked with him came forward accusing him of sexual violence. This painting, as does the rest of the series, examines the limitations of language by problematizing the illusion of its transparency and, in doing so, interrogating the conditions of its "mimetic privileges."³ In this paper, the physical and philosophical layers of Tompkins' *Apologia* will be investigated as to how they variously confirm or

¹ Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* (New Directions, 1964/8), 8.

² Jericho Brown, "Duplex," in *The Tradition*, (Copper Canyon Press, 2019), 27.

³ Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Indiana University Press, 1993), 55-6.

complicate the stability of the relationship between words and the things they cover (as in recount) and cover (as in conceal). As such, the formal strategies of appropriation, overpainting, and historical layering will facilitate a reflection on the tension and entanglement that occurs as discursive formations regulate and reinforce social practices.

Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1) is exemplary of the *Apologia* series, bringing together various threads that are woven and repeated across the individual paintings. This particular work concisely and cohesively demonstrates the complexity demonstrated through the series as a whole; therefore, elucidation of the details of this painting provides the necessary depth to illuminate a more complete understanding of the rest of Tompkins' *Apologia* paintings, which she began making in 2018 from pages taken from numerous art history survey books, pencil, and bazooka pink paint, and continues to produce today. The *Apologia* series was created in the wake of the #metoo movement. Although Tompkins' work had long been interested in the interplay of bodies and text, the often-dismissive statements released by many of the accused amid the #metoo reckoning provided a new rhetorical reservoir for Tompkins' art. The #metoo movement was a nexus between tabloid and academic discussions of misogyny, sexism, and violence against women.⁴ Many of the women responsible for the inception of the #metoo movement were pop cultural celebrities, not paragons of formal scholarship. The layering Tompkins employs in the *Apologia* series literalizes the interplay between cultural conversations and philosophical theory, creating a space where people who have interest in pop culture are invited to explore art, and people who have an interest in art

⁴ The distinction between these three ideas is parsed in Samantha Pinson Wisley's "Feminist theory and the problem of misogyny," *Feminist Theory* 24, no. 2 (2021): 188-207.

scholarship are invited to bring critical attention to conversations taking place in tabloid spaces. The images in the *Apologia* series make understanding the epistemological menace of language accessible from a variety of entrance points; this paper explores the theories scaffolding the syllogistic effect of Tompkins' bodies hidden under words.

Close Reading

Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1) is a diptych of two pages torn from the left side of an art history textbook placed side by side in a single frame. Each page has a singular image clearly identified by a neat row of type underneath it: "8. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1620. Florence, Uffizi." and "4. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612-13. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte." Beneath the typed labels, which are original to the primary source, a scrawled line of pencil is split between the two pages: "Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)" and "Betty Tompkins © 2018." Even if the images were not so overtly labeled, Tompkins' adaptations do little to convolute most of the source material. Judith, heroine of the eponymous deuterocanonical text, leans into the right foreground of each image, her forearms stiffened by the force of her aggression. Above and behind her, her maid helps pin their tragic victim in his place. Only one thing in each image is hidden: on both pages, Tompkins' revision inhibits any view of the victim's body beyond the blood spilling from the blade of the sword Judith holds.

Although in the original Gentileschi paintings (Figure 2; Figure 3), the disrobed body and distressed expression of Holofernes are front and center, Tompkins has submerged the fraught Assyrian general under a spate of light pink text, the sloppy acrylic letters spilling to fill the perimeter created by the dying man's now-hidden body.

The text of the letters, which is split between the two images, is a single paragraph taken from a *New York Times* article from December 2017 in which Chuck Close responds to “several women’s” accusations of sexual misconduct:

I’ve never had a complaint in 50 years, not one. Last time I looked, discomfort was not a major offense, I never reduced anyone to tears, no one ever ran out of the place. If I embarrassed anyone or made them feel uncomfortable, I am truly sorry, I didn’t mean to. I acknowledge having a dirty mouth, but we’re all adults.⁵

Close’s contrition, dubious despite the *Times* labeling the statement an “apology,” was further undermined one month later when the *New York Times* released a follow-up piece in which Close said, “It’s lies. I haven’t slept in weeks. I’ve been such a supporter of women and women artists. I’ve done nothing wrong, and I’m being crucified.”⁶

Tompkins’ rendition of Close’s remarks mirrors the ambivalence of the compunctious content. It is difficult to make out the entire statement. Some line breaks split words in the middle; other text is crammed into edges or small corners. Legibility is not the focus of the letters here. Their primary, and perhaps only, goal is coverage. The fated men in Gentileschi’s paintings are buried behind defensive statements that other inculpated men made. Tompkins’ pink text has transformed the male body into an amorphous lump tacked to the Baroque painting by Judith’s sword.

The duplication of Gentileschi’s Judith paintings in *Apologia (Artemesia Gentileschi #1)* suggests the meaning of the work is a function of a narrative that has been told again and again. The import of this repetition is augmented by the stereoscopic

⁵ Robin Pogrebin, “Chuck Close Apologizes After Accusations of Sexual Harassment.,” *The New York Times*, last modified December 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/20/arts/design/chuck-close-sexual-harassment.html>.

⁶ Tompkins uses this statement as a textual cover later in her series. See Figure 4: *Apologia (Artemesia Gentileschi #3)*; Colin Moynihan and Robin Pogrebin, “The National Gallery of Art cancels a Chuck Close show after misconduct accusations,” *The New York Times*, last modified January 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/arts/design/national-gallery-of-art-cancels-chuck-close-thomas-roma-sexual-misconduct.html>

style. Stereoscopes are nineteenth-century tools that use a side-by-side near-copy of a two-dimensional image to create the illusion of three dimensions. Stereograms look real when they are, in fact, only representations of the real. By referencing the visual language of the stereoscope through the presentation of the diptych, Tompkins recalls a dense technological legacy of artistic attempts of making representations that reflect the dimensions of reality by animating through difference. Once this history is evoked, it is almost immediately subverted, as Tompkins flattens the stereoscopic promise by her overpainted words. Even though the underpaintings may roughly duplicate one another, the overpainted words bridge the two images and require the viewer to view them only in adjacency with each other. This prevents Tompkins' diptych from fully participating in the volumetric mythology suggested by the stereoscope, instead revealing the artifice of narrative iteration. Tompkins' use of the stereoscopic imagery also draws attention to the way that the words form a blind spot; the overpainting obscures even as it calls attention to the fact that something is being hidden. The viewer is made aware that something is escaping their vision and therefore their conceptualization. The absence of the complete Gentileschi paintings is present as the pink text forms an obnoxious visual impediment to the viewer. As a result, Tompkins' painting is neither an entirely triumphant image of Judith conquering Holofernes, nor an illustration of Holofernes' unscathed by escape: the words he is hiding under protect him from being seen, but he is trapped beneath them, his shape frozen as a sort of scar. Although diptychs are limited in Tompkins' oeuvre, the overpainting style of coverage is an extension of Tompkins' lifelong experiment into how bodies are constituted and understood. In *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, Tompkins' creative strategy can be understood as a gesture intended to stimulate an exploration of

the politics that scaffold the sutures between what is seen, what is noticed, and what is extrapolated.

Betty Tompkins

Betty Tompkins (b. 1945) first gained notoriety for her series *Fuck Paintings* (1969-1974; 2003-present), black-and-white monumental paintings of genitalia appropriated from vintage pornography.⁷ After exhibiting the images in two group shows in North America, Tompkins shipped two paintings to Paris, where French customs officials seized them, declaring them too profane for public display. For more than a year, Tompkins fought to have her paintings returned to her. After countless letters and phone calls, officials relinquished the art, but nearly three decades passed before Tompkins showed them in public again.⁸

This experience of censorship shaped the themes of Tompkins' subsequent paintings. Her show *Censored Grids* was her first foray into what would become her mainstay—text overlaid on painted images, often in attempt to obfuscate the particular “offensive part” beneath.⁹ In 2003, when Tompkins re-released her *Fuck Paintings*, she amended many of the previously plain black and white images with centered Bazooka pink text of statements people had directed towards her as she grew up: *You should be in the kitchen* or *Betty would be a better student if she didn't talk so much in class* or *I think your intelligence has gotten in the way of your ability to be intimate* (Figure 5). In Tompkins' paintings, the text of these jarring remarks conceals the explicit imagery

⁷ Anya Harrison, Alison Gingeras, and Betty Tompkins, *Betty Tompkins: Raw Material* (JBE Books, 2021), 9.

⁸ “Betty Tompkins,” *The Sackler Center for Feminist Art*, January 19, 2025, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/feminist_art_base/betty-tompkins

⁹ Harrison et al., “Betty Tompkins,” 10.

beneath—one “offense” traded for another. The operational distinction between the visual and verbal transgressive is one of quality rather than degree; Tompkins’ negotiation of propriety and perversion uses the kinesthetic act of reading to demand and direct the viewer’s eye, entangling them in the vulgarity of the written statement and simultaneously demanding their complicity in the perception of the obscene imagery beneath.

Tompkins makes no apology to those who find her art licentious and crass. Claiming to function void of didactic intent, Tompkins stated, “I am free of theory, which I consider a blessing, to tell you the truth.”¹⁰ Unlike Joan Semmel and the collation of sex-positive anti-pornography feminists of the late 1970s, Tompkins used her husband’s collection of pornography as her source material, despite the fact that, at the time, procuring or owning such explicit imagery was illegal. In pulling from these contentious images, Tompkins refused to divorce herself from the claims of objectification and misogyny cleaving commercial sexual material from explicit erotic imagery produced apart from the “sexual economy.”¹¹ She has said, however, that she is open to admission as to the ways her developmental experiences shaped her interest in the relationship between speech and the permissibility of access. Her father’s work as the leader of the Philadelphia Progressive Party earned her family a spot on the FBI’s cold war watch list; Tompkins remembers agents following her and her sister to school when she was a child.

¹⁰ Wendy Vogel, “Beyond the F word: An interview with Betty Tompkins,” *Art in America*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/beyond-the-f-word-an-interview-with-betty-tompkins-56446/>.

¹¹ Joan Semmel, as quoted in Harrison et al., “Betty Tompkins,” 18.

In an interview with Alison Gingeras, Tompkins recalled, “My first complete sentence was, ‘Do you have a search warrant?’”¹²

If Tompkins cared little about the moral morphology of the source material for her early art, by the turn of the millennia she had begun to more deliberately play with the discursive valence of underpainting. In 2002, Tompkins began working on *Woman Words*, a corpus of paintings of words used to describe women which would grow to include almost one thousand images created over a span of nearly two decades. Tompkins made the series from responses she received when she put out a call for the public to send in words used to describe women: her request yielded over 3,500 replies.¹³ The style of underpainting in the series varies—1,000 paintings have text with no delineative background; others reprise the pink-text-on-grisaille-graphics style of her *Fuck Paintings*. As the *Woman Words* series progressed, the concept continued to evolve. No longer content to use words in the absence of forms or to use genitalia as synecdoche for gender relations, Tompkins began to acquire her base material from art history.

Tompkins started off sourcing images from the work of four male photographers;¹⁴ she later purchased more than sixty art history textbooks to disassemble for her project. Instead of the sparse and centered text of *Fuck Paintings* or the solitary text of the early *Women Words* paintings, later images in the *Woman Words* series depict entire female figures taken from art history hidden under cramped pink handwriting, their bodies the boundary for the “classic abuse lines” which covered them (Figure 6).¹⁵

¹² Harrison et al., “Betty Tompkins,” 19.

¹³ Sarah Cascone, “Artist Betty Tompkins explains why the vile words used to describe women are worth painting,” *Artnet News*, December 14, 2018, news.artworld.com/art-world/-betty-tompkins.

¹⁴ Brassai, Weegee, Helmut Newton, and Richard Avedon.

¹⁵ Bean Gilsdorf, “An atmosphere of threat: Betty Tompkins interviewed—Art that confronts abuse towards women,” *Bomb Magazine*, September 24, 2021, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2021/09/24/an-atmosphere-of-threat-betty-tompkins-interviewed/>.

Tompkins described this burial as an act of “obliteration,” explaining, “I cover the women because language defines us. The women are defined by what is written on top of them.”¹⁶ Here, the body is revealed as the nexus of the tension between representation and reality, a negotiation mediated by the way in which visual and verbal languages enforce arbitrary social hierarchies.

Apologia

This overview of Tompkins’ oeuvre demonstrates the continuity within her work, as well as the differences that mark the development in form and thought from each series to the next—a pattern that continues through to her series *Apologia*, which opens with the painting that this paper concerns. *Women Words* is a visual and thematic precursor to Tompkins’ *Apologia* series, which was released in response to the 2017 #metoo movement more than sixteen years after she began overlaying iconography with text. In *Woman Words*, Tompkins chose images that men painted of women and covered them with words that men spoke about women.¹⁷ The *Apologia* series repeats and revises that format, now overpainting images made by both male and female artists. Although both *Women Words* and *Apologia* use paintings found in art history textbooks where figures have been covered in pink paint, in the latter series, the bodies of the men are covered with text, and the bodies of women remain untouched. The other distinction between the two series is the etiology of the text Tomkins uses as coverage for the bodies. The statements painted in pink for *Woman Words* were taken from the thousands

¹⁶ Gilsdorf, 2021.

¹⁷ Forming the text in the shape of a figure is a phenomenon of Islamic calligraphy. Other contemporary artists, such as Shirin Neshat and Lalla Essaydi often overlay female bodies with text in their work. Although these ideas offer fascinating dimensions to the analysis of Tompkins’ overpainting, such exploration is beyond the scope of this paper.

of entries Tompkins received from the general public; the statements for *Apologia* were taken from the public remarks made by famous people who were accused of sexual impropriety during the #metoo movement. There is, of course, wordplay with *Apologia*'s doublet *apology*, which is most often used to describe an expression of regret or deficiency. Still, the title of the *Apologia* series suggests the function of the public statements is not, in fact, to communicate remorse.

Apologia is a lexical blend of two Greek words: *ἀπό* (“away, off”) + *-λογία* (“speaking”). The Greek term was first used ca. 400 BCE in forensic rhetoric to describe the oratory praxis of response to an accusation; its Latin cognate appeared nearly six hundred years later to connote a formal defense of a doctrine. In titling her series *Apologia*, Tompkins draws on both ideas. The statements the men put forth are public responses to allegations of violence. They are also, in the Latinate sense, a statement of belief. In their repudiative excuses, the men demonstrate the tenants of misogyny and objectification that form what Tompkins calls an “atmosphere of threat.”¹⁸ The words of men “away-speak” the perspective of women. By covering the women’s bodies/self/image with the statements that men proclaimed over and against the women’s claims of harm, the politics of visual and verbal signification are reified.

In this way, the declarations in the *Apologia* paintings are not apologies—the closest that any of the quotes chosen for Tompkins series come to an expression of remorse is Mario Batali’s short, four sentence statement, which begins with, “I have made many mistakes and am so very sorry,” and ends with “in case you’re searching for a holiday-inspired breakfast, these Pizza Dough Cinnamon Rolls are a fan favorite”

¹⁸ Gilsdorf, 2021.

(Figure 7).¹⁹ The declarations are, instead, constitutive acts iterating the normalizing discourse that capacitates the operative potency of gender dynamics.

Textbooks and Palimpsests

The historical artworks that Tompkins overpaints have been replicated into an array of commercial merchandise: a cursory Google search of Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes merchandise*, for instance, yields droves of t-shirts, tote bags, jewelry, magnets, mugs, miniatures, posters, stickers, notebooks, prints, and phone cases, all bearing a printed rendition of the violent Baroque painting. Considering this superfluity of merchandise, Tompkins' decision to pull her base images from art history textbooks suggests some calculated intentionality. For this reason, it is worthwhile to explore the significance of the textbook's election as Tompkins' image source.

The structure of the written text, and more specifically, the format of the book, is one which suggests a sort of architectural three-dimensionality, providing a visual language indicative not only of time, but also of space. The book was predated by the continuous scroll, a tool that shifted text by the simultaneous turning of two dowels.²⁰ Although this allowed visualization of the passage of narrative time, the fixity of the dowels limited the reader's experience of the text as a movement through space. If the scroll were to be fully unraveled such that the movement through space could be traced, the entire text would be visual at once, thus erasing the visual movement through time. The tactile depth of books, on the other hand, provides a spatial experience in which the

¹⁹ Jamie Ducharme, "Mario Batali's sexual misconduct apology came with a cinnamon roll recipe," *Time Magazine*, December 16, 2017, <https://time.com/5067633/mario-batali-cinnamon-rolls-apology/>.

²⁰ Henry Bainton, "Chapter 4. Literate Performances and Literate Government," in *History and the Written Word: Documents, Literacy, and Language in the Age of the Angevins*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 76.

turning of each page is a physical movement from one position to the next, progressing relatively through the continuum of content. Even though the closed book simultaneously contains the entire content of text, each section of text can only be revealed by physically shifting away from one page and toward the next.

The codex, fabled to have been invented when Julius Caesar folded a scroll to ease the distribution of messages during the campaign against Gaul, facilitated the use of both sides of a piece of papyrus and allowed the reader to simultaneously consult material distributed throughout the length of the text.²¹ The codex was popularized by the rise and spread of Christianity in the first century and overtook the scroll as the dominant methodology of storing written text.²² There is a history of flexibility the codex enabled within the Christian tradition: although medieval manuscripts were often ordered sequentially within a codex, they could be accessed according to the structure ordered by the liturgical calendar.²³ Unlike the scroll, whose continuity was intrinsic to its structure, the codex allowed the reader to quickly shift between the various parts of the text. In this way, the book/codex format functioned with two simultaneous structures—that of the physical object, which was immutable to the binding, and that of the object’s engagement with the reader, which was continually negotiated by aims entirely extrinsic to the anatomical ordering of the text-object.

Codices were not only more operationally flexible than their predecessor, but they were also significantly more durable.²⁴ Compared to the unrolling and rolling required to

²¹ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divus Julius*, ed. Alexander Thomson (Perseus Tufts), 56.6. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0132%3A1ife%3Djul.%3Achapter%3D56>.

²² Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*, (The British Academy, 1987), 61.

²³ Matthew D.C. Larsen and Mark Letteney, “Christians and the codex: Generic materiality and early gospel traditions,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27, no. 3 (2019): 389.

²⁴ Stuart Murray, *The Library: An Illustrated History*, (Skyhorse, 2012), 320.

read a scroll, turning pages was a gentle act, prolonging the lifespan of the ink on the parchment and of the parchment itself. The augmented fortitude increased the number of palimpsests—parchment which was erased to create space for a new text.²⁵ In *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, Tompkins references the visual language of the codex by placing two pages side-by-side, then turns the codex of art history into a palimpsest of her own making by her overpainted obliteration of the image below.

Tompkins' palimpsest is created by the overpainting-erasure of an art history textbook, an object whose material history is indicative of the way in which power is produced and perpetuated through decisions about how narrative is remembered, recorded, and retold. Art History textbooks, which date back to H.W. Janson's 1962 seminal tome, seek to streamline the disparate threads of art through time and space into the semblance of linearity.²⁶ In doing this, they decide what is significant and what is forgotten. In the context of an art history textbook, the structural fusion between space and time is especially pronounced. The content often develops chronologically, a plodding though time punctuated by historical moments that show incremental development in form, thought, and theory.

In *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, the layout of two pages side-by-side preserves the book format, an apparition of sensibility which dissipates upon recognition of the chronological upheaval. Tompkins exaggerates her expropriation of the textbook's narrative primacy by arranging the two images in Tompkins' *Apologia (Artemisia*

²⁵ Discussion of the palimpsests in art history are often found in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory, a connection this author acknowledges although further analysis is beyond the scope of this project; Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History*, (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013), 22.

²⁶ Jeffery Weidman, "Many are Culled but Few are Chosen: Janson's *History of Art*, Its Reception, Emulators, Legacy, and Current Demise," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 38, no. 2 (2007): 86.

Gentileschi #1) diptych such that the picture with the earlier date (1612-13) is to the right of the later image (1620). This effect is further augmented by the fact that both pages are taken from the left side of the text such that the tear is on the right side of both pages. This overt departure from the manufactured coherence of linear temporality subverts the expected conjunction between space and time, demonstrating it as a thing which can be reconsidered, renegotiated, and rearranged.

Art History textbooks define and reify the hegemonic canon, a process wherein inclusions create and evict collateral. The textbook's authors variously include and exclude content, implementing subjective values that are based on the standards determining their prioritization of contingencies. The adoption and implementation of subjective values that must necessarily come at the cost of other values. As Jacques Derrida observes, "There is no archive without outside," a framework that Timothy Morton echoes, stating that "being nice to bunny rabbits means being not nice to bunny rabbit parasites."²⁷ The episteme of objectivity and rationality is dependent on the durability of the juxtapositions that serve as the operative scaffold for the construction of meaning. Rationality is juxtaposed with irrationality and set forward as the facilitator of the process of discovering truth. In this frame, truth is a stable thing, not shaped or swayed by emotion, passion, feeling, perspective, sensation, attachment, desire, intuition, dreams, or obliquity. Traditionally, the work of the historian is to observe the objective—positioning themselves as external to the surveillance they conduct. The narrative

²⁷ Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz. (University of Chicago Press, 1995/1996), 11; Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, (Columbia University Press, 2013) as cited in Nelson, "Riding the blinds," in *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*, (Greywolf Press, 2021), 190.

produced through the performance of objectivity pretends sterility, masking the reality that the construction of a smoothed-out, synthesized, singularized narrative is a violent implementation of one value system at the expense of another. Art History textbooks physicalize the result of the negotiations which determine the in-group and the Other.

Tompkins interrogates the implicit value of hegemonic standards by taking pages from a textbook, a vessel for canonic authority, then scrambling the order of the pages. The page as a found object brings with it a complex history which is then thrust into conversation with the adaptations Tompkins imposes. Tompkins' use of textbooks as the source material for her series emphasizes and complicates the viewer's relationship to their own understanding. Whereas an art history textbook functions by arranging ideas into a fixed conversation with one another, Tompkins decontextualizes the pages she extracts for her project. Previously frozen in space-time through the artifice of the textbook's structure, the newly released images invite scrutiny by infracting the Humean idea that subjecthood exists as pre-subjective parts form a stable network of relationships. In his explanation of the fold, a philosophical concept used to envision "the inside as an operation of the outside, (97)" Gilles Deleuze explains that "the outside is not a fixed limit (96)."²⁸ Intrinsic meaning, a concept that Deleuze calls interiority, is only extant as a function of the relational milieu in which meaning is constructed; Tompkins' alteration of the "exterior" frame demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the relationships asserted through the structure and sequence of history. By displacing the images from the fixity of the book-object to arrange and display them on her own terms, Tompkins exerts an

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Sean Hand, (University of Minnesota, 1988/1986), 96-7.

agency that demonstrates the illogicity of the pretext that there is an axiomatic ordering of ideas by which universal objectives are compulsively derived.

Women artists did not appear in *History of Art* until the 1986 third edition; Artemisia Gentileschi did not appear in Janson's survey until the 1987 revised third edition. The troubling omission of women artists in Janson's art history text has remained largely unrectified—as recently as 2010, when the *History of Art* eighth edition was released, a mere 7% of the included artists were women.²⁹ Although the format of the textbook is conjured by virtue of the side-by-side pages in the *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* diptych, the normative function of the book falls apart upon recognition of the disordered timeline and the two left-side pages. In this context, the use of repetition in the images is particularly striking. Tompkins places two similar images side by side—an arrangement which causes a sort of stutter step in the viewing and is quite unlike the economic calculations used to decide the inclusion of plates in a standard survey. The viewer is stuck by this repetition, an experience which further distances Tompkins' *Apologia* from the linear temporospatiality of the art history textbooks that provide the source images for the diptych. Two notably similar images of Judith, each a product of Gentileschi's high-compulsive engagement with the subject matter, are placed beside one another; as such, the performance of incremental development in theory and form which is suggested by the progression of the typical survey textbook conspicuously fails. Still, it is not only the object of the textbook and its significance to cultural consensus that is stressed through the excision, rearrangement, and repetition of the pages that form the

²⁹ Paul Bolin, "Discussions and Depictions of Women in H.W. Janson's *History of Art*, Fourth Edition." *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* 15, (1996): 148.

Apologia diptych—the images depicted on the selected pages is of similar, if not greater, import to the effect of the art and its message.

Judith in Context

Each of the two pages in the *Apologia* diptych depict the deuterocanonical account of Judith beheading Holofernes, a story which is itself a demonstration of how context shapes meaning. The book's female protagonist engages in several activities generally disdained by the moral standards of the Hebrew Bible, yet in this account they are narrativized as noble.³⁰ This shift occurs not because the actions in themselves changed, but because of the context which scaffolded them: Judith's reason for engaging in them and the result of her work. The story begins with her scolding men, rebuffing their collaboration, and refusing to share her plan with them. She then prayed for "deceitful words,"³¹ adorned herself to "entice the eyes of all the men who might see her,"³² "prostrated herself" before the Assyrian leader,³³ and, after she seduced and beheaded him, declared, "as the LORD lives, who has protected me on my journey, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction."³⁴ Because Holofernes was drunk, he fell asleep and was beheaded before he acted on his sexual desire for Judith, thus she escaped to her town of Bethulia, both victorious *and* undefiled.³⁵ Her purity is iterated by the return to Bethulia, as the name of the town is etymologically and sonically similar to the word Bethula (בתולה; lit: sexually pure woman) from Bethulim (בְּתוּלִים; lit,

³⁰ Deception, seduction, secrecy, insubordination, etc.

³¹ 9:10 & 9:13

³² 10:4

³³ 10:23

³⁴ 13:16

³⁵ Elena Ciletti, "Gran Macchina é Bellezza: Looking at the Gentileschi *Judiths*," in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, edited by Mieke Bal, (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 77.

hymen). As such, she is most often catalogued as an integrous figure. The name Judith (יהודית) comes from the Hebrew word for *praise* (יָדָה); in Koine Greek the name (Ιουδίθ) is translated as *woman of Judea*. The idea that her name renders her an archetype for God-fearing people augments the potency of her valorization. In the medieval period, she was celebrated as a “moral, political, and religious” hero by “Christians and Jews alike,” a fact that was strengthened in the Renaissance as the Christian world, threatened by the Ottoman Turks, found reassurance in the story of an Assyrian defeat.³⁶ The character of Judith is not won by her lying, seduction, and refusal to submit to men. Instead, her character is established as the context of her actions is scaffolded within the broader narrative.

The diegetic importance of context to Judith’s story is mirrored and amplified through the contestation the book of Judith faced, for although Judith was a consistently venerated figure, her story’s canonization was fraught. The book of Judith was included in the Septuagint and was frequently referenced in patristic and synodal writing, but in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther excluded it from the 1534 Protestant canon—a decision that remains in effect to this day.³⁷ There is debate as to the directives that precluded the anagnoskomena from admission to the Protestant Bible. As for the book of Judith, some scholars suggest that Luther wanted to reestablish an older, and therefore “truer” version of the Old Testament: the early rabbinate had disputed the story’s glorification of the Hasmonean dynasty and, as a result, they had kept it out of the

³⁶ Sarah Blake McHam, “Donatello’s Judith as the emblem of God’s chosen people,” in *The Sword of Judith* ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann. (Openbook, web, <https://books.openedition.org/obp/1015?lang=en>), 313.

³⁷ Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. Mackenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, (Baker Publishing Group, 1995), 171-2.

Hebrew canon.³⁸ Other scholars think the reason Luther left it out had more to do with Judith's controversial behavior. Other Old Testament women who accomplished their tasks through seduction and deceit step back under the submission of men upon the completion of their project.³⁹ Judith shows no such compliance.⁴⁰ After she beheaded Holofernes, Judith chose to remain childless, refused to marry, and became the only woman in the whole Old Testament to oversee her own estate. In 1546, the Council of Trent formally included Judith in the Vulgate, noting that although she and David are both heroic figures, their responses after their victories demonstrate their compliance with gendered expectation: David becomes king; Judith returns home and, in doing so "redomesticates herself."⁴¹

The *Apologia* diptych draws upon the complex legacy of the Judith story by depicting two images which show the moment in the story that Judith's violation of gendered expectations is the most pronounced. Judith is depicted as a large woman—her forearms are creased by the substance of her flesh, her head is pulled in such that her chin folds upon itself. With one hand she grips the hilt of the blade, with the other, she grasps the hair on her victim's face to pin his head upside down and expose his neck to her assault. This contrasts with the singular hand of Holofernes, which is shown clenching nothing but the empty air. He is helpless, trapped, and passive. She is in control, and she is cutting off his head. When Tompkins overpaints Holofernes' body with the pink text,

³⁸ It is not in Masoretic text, early rabbinic literature, or in Dead Sea Scrolls; Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (Continuum, 2009), 73.

³⁹ Pharoah's daughter, Shiprah, Puah, Tamar, Yael, Rahab, Rebekah

⁴⁰ Crawford, "Esther and Judith," 74-5.

⁴¹ Roger J. Crum, "Judith between the private and public realms in Renaissance Florence," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across disciplines*, ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, 1st ed, (Open Book Publishers, 2010), 293-302, 338.

Judith's arms penetrate the mass of his flesh, accentuating the violence of the Gentileschi images. The eyes of the women in each image are hidden as they look down upon their victim. Although in the original Gentileschi images, the hollowed, harrowed eyes of Holofernes stare pleadingly at the viewer, Tompkins' overpainting covers his face entirely. Many feminist theories about old master works describe paintings as gendered spaces that exist to be penetrated by the eye of the beholder in a way that is often analogized to heterosexual dynamics. In this sense, the viewer is invited to join Gentileschi and the maid in their violation of Holofernes' body—in fact, the text covering him forces the onlooker to stare closely, traversing every inch of the body of the Assyrian general with the severity of their gaze.

At the same time, Tompkins' pink text prevents the viewer from clearly seeing the body of Holofernes. No matter how closely or carefully the viewer tries to look, they are unable to discern any identifiable features of the figure beneath. Although one's antecedent knowledge may allow them to compensate for what cannot be seen, the requirement of this extraneous information accentuates how visual understanding is an invariably hermeneutical process facilitated by the subsistence of external data. It is only through knowledge of the original painting that the viewer is able to derive the nature of the violence Judith conducts: although the blood of her onslaught streams down the furniture at the bottom of both pages, the source of the blood remains occluded by the script. This paradox is the crux of the tension the overpainting creates—one is compelled to look, yet unable to see.

Furthermore, although Tompkins could have overpainted Holofernes into a solid, indeterminant pink lump, she instead twists words into a structural medium. This

visualizes the interplay of the relationship between experience and recounting, complicating the illusion that “language is in some sense transparent... [that] there is some correspondence between a word and thing (as between a correct truth and the real)... [that] objects are not linguistically (or socially) constituted, they are merely made present to consciousness by naming and the right use of language.”⁴² Tompkins interrogates the transparency of language by literally making language the source of the work’s opacity and obfuscation. The figure is covered by the text—in both senses of the contranym. The death of Holofernes is covered as a news anchor wraps a *happening* into the solidity of a story. The death of Holofernes is also covered as a blanket hides a body from the observation, exposure, or the effects of the world beyond itself. Language is both at once: the naming and the burial. As Richard Rorty attests, “we only know ourselves and the world under a description.”⁴³

Artemisia Gentileschi

As the tension surrounding canonization played out in the ecclesiastical world, Judith’s representation in visual art and literature proliferated. She was painted by Caravaggio, Botticelli, Michaelangelo, Mantegna, and Giorgione, among many others, and she appeared beside Yael in the *Speculum Virginum*, in the Nowell Codex alongside the story of Beowulf, in the writing of Dante, Chaucer, and Frauenlob, and in frescos, bible miniatures, and cathedral windows. In 1495, the newly reestablished Florentine republic stole Donatello’s statue of Judith from the Medici palace and changed the inscription on the base to read “Exemplum Sal. Pub. Cives Pos. MCCCCXCV” (trans: an

⁴² Jane Flax, “Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (Routledge, 1990), 42.

⁴³ Richard Rorty, “Foucault and Epistemology,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. (Basil Blackwell, 1986), 48.

example of the public prosperity installed by the citizens of 1495)—an amended version of Cicero’s famous assertion “*salus publica superma lex esto*” (trans: “the prosperity of the public is the highest law”). Artemisia Gentileschi came of age in the Florence whose political status was celebrated via the veneration of the Judith figure, a tradition Gentileschi participated in by making at least five paintings of Judith’s story.

Gentileschi’s engagement with the Judith story has often been subjected to scrutiny considering the artist’s experience of sexual assault and the subsequent legal process of torture and testimony which she endured to bring about her rapist’s conviction.⁴⁴ The biographical lens, albeit reductive and essentializing, is hard to fully dismiss given the visual correlation between Gentileschi’s self-portraits and her depictions of Judith (Figure 8; Figure 1). The *Judith Slaying Holofernes* paintings, both made within a decade of Gentileschi’s own experience of rape, is an irruption of the binary between representation and reality. The body of the woman in the painting is a coalescent space. Hélène Cixous wrote, “If there is a propriety of women, it is paradoxically her capacity to depropriate⁴⁵ unselfishly.”⁴⁶ This Sartrean act of depropriation serves as a rebuttal to Descartes’ declaration of rational ipseity (and the corresponding alterity of everything else). The pretense of objectivity on the part of the artist “suggests the certitudes of a well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries around a singular, unified, and atomic core, the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Mary Garrard, “Artemisia Gentileschi” in *Painting women: cosmetics, canvases, and early modern culture*, edited by Patricia Philipp, JHU press, 2006, 75.

⁴⁵ Sarita Gopakumar defines depropriation as “indifference to possession, a form of renunciation, a willingness to relate to the world without imposing conditions of ownership,” Sarita Gopakumar, “Hélène Cixous, Notes,” *Government College for Women*, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, October 30, 2021, 9.

⁴⁶ Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 889, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239>.

⁴⁷ Smith, “Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body,” 5.

Although Griselda Pollock lamented that Gentileschi's rape had become "the axis of interpretation of (her) work," it is impossible to pretend that this nexus was not a significant force in galvanizing Gentileschi's ascent as a paragon of contemporary feminism.⁴⁸

While the complexities of the relationship between Gentileschi's art and her personal experiences are beyond the scope of this paper, the profuse discourse surrounding this conjunction is salient to Tompkins' employment of the Gentileschi paintings. In 1970, Linda Nochlin published her famous treatise "Why have there been no great women artists?" a piece that reinvigorated academic and cultural focus on Gentileschi's character and oeuvre.⁴⁹ Since the publication of that article, Gentileschi's work and life have become an arena for fierce debate.

Tompkins invites the viewer to consider what effects are produced and what realities are made (im)possible by language and its declarations. This recentering practice is grounded in and produced through the body—the site of what Bakhtin refers to as a "collision of heteroglossia."⁵⁰ If, as Evelyn Fox Keller attests, "masculinity connotes autonomy, separation, distance, and particularly objectivity," then femininity connotes something fluid, entangled, and unbounded where the rational mind is not allowed disconnection from the messiness of the body.⁵¹ In her essay "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought" Susan Bordo explains how entanglement and embodiment

⁴⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (Routledge, 1999), 16.

⁴⁹ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* 1, (1971): 145.

⁵⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (The University of Texas Press, 1981), 428.

⁵¹ Evelyn Fox Keller, "Gender and Science," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (D. Reidel Publishers, 1983), 187.

are reified as feminine through the “drama of parturition.”⁵² The umbilical relationship between self and other enacted through the exercise of pregnancy and birth informs and enforces the gendered scripts that assign rational words to the masculine and material corporality to the feminine. The female body is a contested space: as groundedness gives way to objectification, it is revealed to be “a linguistic construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogenous, discontinuous, and unconscious nature.”⁵³

Rape is, among other things, a perversion of the female disposition of entanglement and connectedness. According to various epistemes across history, penetration—whether consensual or not—has been understood as a literal and figurative act of infiltration/colonization. Understanding the discourse about sexual violence during Gentileschi’s lifetime is somewhat irrelevant to the influence the image has in Tompkins’ image. The emerging feminist art history discourse in the 1970s invigorated scholarship about the life and work of Artemisia Gentileschi, whose rape and public trial became inextricable to the conversation about her art and its legacy. Although it is unreasonable to suggest Artemisia Gentileschi and her contemporaries would have the same understanding of sexual violence that has shaped the conversations of the twenty-first century, the role that Gentileschi’s life and art have played in contemporary feminist art history is inextricable from the visual and cultural legacies that Tompkins’ painting draws on. Throughout history, many artists have depicted Judith, but in choosing Gentileschi’s painting of Judith as her base image, Tompkins engages the unique salience of

⁵² Susan Bordo, “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11, no. 3 (1986): 444.

⁵³ Rosi Braidotti, “Towards a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism,” in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Bondas and Dorthea Olkowski (Routledge, 1994), 196.

Gentileschi's positionality as an artist, as a woman, and as a victim. While Tompkins appropriation foregrounds Gentileschi's art, her overpainted words shroud Gentileschi's painting. The relationship between the artists mirrors the diegetic dialogue: in a conspicuous parallel to the way that the Judith character is depicted as powerful even as the textual blind spot masks the rationality of her intent, the resurgence of interest in Gentileschi's life and art in the late twentieth century uncovered her genius even as it buried her in words.

Chuck Close

Each image in the *Apologia* series uses a different quote from public figures accused during the #metoo movement. *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* uses the first statement released by artist Chuck Close after two former models accused him of sexual harassment. One month after Close released this statement, four more female models came forward with accusations of abuse. Chuck Close gained prominence through his photorealist and abstract grid-based monumental portraits of both himself and others. Although many of these images were focused on people's faces, Close also created numerous paintings of the nude body, many of which were presented as diptychs, triptychs, or polyptychs. Tompkins' use of the diptych in *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* alludes to this legacy, acknowledging the overlap in their styles, while simultaneously suggesting that her career was curtailed by censorship, while his progressed mostly unimpaired. In 1967, Close's first solo show was shut down because of its graphic content—a similar experience of censorship to what Tompkins would face for her hyperrealist paintings six years later.⁵⁴ When Close was censored, however, he partnered

⁵⁴ Chuck Close: Nudes 1967-2014. Feb 28-March 29, 2014. Pace Gallery, New York.

with the American Civil Liberties Union and saw the decision overturned, then almost immediately returned to creating and displaying large-scale nude images with no discernable awareness of a continued threat.⁵⁵ Tompkins shaped her career around her sense that censorship was not an experience contained to a discrete injunction, but rather that it was indivisible from the work of painting and language-making itself.

By choosing the Chuck Close quote to overpaint the Gentileschi painting, Tompkins poses a question as to who is allowed to tell certain stories, and how those stories are understood and interpreted. The text of Close's quote covers the body of *Holofernes*—and in this sense, he is protected by the excuse that Close tried to use to cover himself. At the same time, the text of the quote erases the viewer's ability to see *Holofernes* clearly. Although it seems this coverage might afford protection, it is worth considering the cost that protection demands. As the men are hidden under the text, they are simultaneously disallowed the nuance of individuality. The excuses that men make are used to cover the bodies of other men.

In this way, the *Apologia* series highlights a pattern where the excuses that justify violence enacted by individual men create a culture of indiscriminate indulgence. Tompkins suggests this indulgence functions as a cage that prevents those within it from navigating complexity within discourse and practice. Through materiality of discourse—an idea made tangible in Tompkins' overpainting—language “becomes the site of contestation and politics.”⁵⁶ In his essay “Plato's Pharmacy,” Derrida explores the

⁵⁵ Sarah Cascone, “The American artist Chuck Close, who created larger-than-life photorealist portraits, has died at 81,” *Artnet*, August 19, 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/chuck-close-obituary-2000774>.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “Arts of Existence: The Construction of Subjectivity in Older White Southern Women” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1995), 37, http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1217010855

mechanism through which language simultaneously erases and constructs.⁵⁷ In the *Apologia* series, Tompkins demonstrates the cost of this pharmakon—although men are permitted to hide behind the cover of objectivity/rationality, in doing so, they are stripped of the self-representative agency. That stripping stiffens the flexibility that comes as the subject is constructed by the dynamic effects of discursive praxis. What is not covered in words in the Tompkins image can be continually repositioned into novel formations. In this outside, “all categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences.”⁵⁸ In *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, the man is covered with words, and, as such, he is trapped under a singular narrative. Judith and what surrounds her can be viewed without the impediment of language, opening her up to a multiplicity of narratives. Spivak states that “language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. . . language regularly falls apart, is inadequate, and subverts itself, indicating that there is the always possible menace of a space outside of language.”⁵⁹ And, as Elizabeth St. Pierre suggests, “perhaps it is in that space that agency plays.”⁶⁰ The uncovered women maintain their agency. Holofernes, blanketed under text, is protected from being seen, but his presence is not entirely erased. As the *sous rature* quotations in *Apologia* re-script what is visible, the presence of that rescripting remains apparent in the image. The excuse does not erase the harm of male

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, ed. Jacques Derrida (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 63-116.

⁵⁸ Deborah Britzman, “Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop being |acting| straight!” Paper presented at the Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theorizing. Dayton, OH. As cited in St. Pierre, “Arts of Existence,” 15.

⁵⁹ Gaytri Chakravorty, *Outside the Teaching Machine*, (Routledge, 1993), 181.

⁶⁰ St. Pierre, “Arts of Existence,” 48.

violence, it only obscures the reality of the harm and artificially locks the hegemonic narrative into place: it casts it into inviolable iron.

Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein)

In Tompkins' *Apologia* series, the bodies of the women are untouched by the overpainted words, with one exception. *Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein)* (2018) (Figure 9) depicts a hunched figure standing near a mirror.

Although the reflection in the mirror shows the face of a woman, Tompkins' overpainting obfuscates the corresponding figure. The text which covers her body is, in part, taken from the statement Avital Ronell made to the media when she was accused of sexual assault.⁶¹ Ronell, a professor of ethics, continental philosophy, and literary studies who worked alongside Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, and Judith Butler, was accused of sexually harassing a male graduate student. Upon her subsequent suspension, Judith Butler, Lisa Duggan, Slavoj Žižek, Joan Scott, and Gayatri Spivak, and other prominent feminist theorists signed a letter in her defense, which is, in part, quoted at the end of the text covering the figure in Tompkins' painting.⁶² In choosing the quotes from Ronell and her defenders for the only image in which the figure of the woman is occluded, Tompkins highlights how perpetration is not limited to men and suggests that the very people responsible for building much of the contemporary understanding of sexual violence are not excluded from participation in the exact harm they work to define and deconstruct.

⁶¹ "Our communications — which Reitman now claims constituted sexual harassment — were between two adults, a gay man and a queer woman. . . as a penchant for florid and campy communications arising from our common academic backgrounds and sensibilities. These communications were repeatedly invited, responded to and encouraged by him over a period of three years." Zoe Greenberg, "What happens to #metoo when a feminist is the accused?" *New York Times*, August 13, 2018.

⁶² "There is arguably no more important figure in literary studies at New York University than Avital Ronell." Olivia Goldhill, "Feminist scholars argue a Title IX case is unfair—when a woman is under investigation." *Quartz*, June 12, 2018; Nell Gluckman, "How a letter defending Avital Tonell sparked confusion and condemnation," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 12, 2018.

The body of the woman is covered by Ronell's excuse; what remains of her depiction is only the mirage of her reflection—an apparition whose departure from the real suggests a disconnect between form and fact. Indeed, essentializing the commission of violence to discrete categories of actors inhibits awareness as to the multiplicity of structures supporting and enabling the continuation of harm. Even those who understand Tompkins' message are not exempt from the threat that they could become complicit in its causation: the threat of the transience of comprehension is iterated in the name of the base painting: “Un Regard Fugitif” (Figure 10).

Conclusion

Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1) functions as a key to unlock the complexity of the *Apologia* series. By understanding the complex relationships of this image, it is possible to navigate similar (and different) threads present in the other organizational and artistic choices that Tompkins made in the remainder of the series. By suturing the #metoo movement to Gentileschi and her painting of Judith, Tompkins' explores how the work of women is painted over—both literally and metaphorically, paying tribute to the legacy of women who have attempted to speak about violence while emphasizing the ways in which discourse can obscure and erase their voices. *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)* prompts viewers to consider how perception, attention, and interpretation are shaped by broader cultural and political forces. In choosing to appropriate the image of the story of Judith that Gentileschi chose to paint, Tompkins presents a chorus of three women who join one another across time to plunge the blade into the power of men. But unlike the feminist victory of Holofernes' agony in the original Gentileschi paintings,

Tompkins makes it clear that as long as apologies away-speak accountability, it does not matter how women wield the sword. Men still get away.

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Images



Fig. 1: Betty Tompkins, *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #1)*, 2018. Acrylic on book page. 25.4 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York.



Fig. 2: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. 1612-13. Oil on canvas. 158.8 x 125.5 cm. Museo Capodimonte, Naples.



Fig. 3: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. 1620. Oil on canvas. 146.5 x 108cm. The Uffizi, Florence.



Fig. 4: Betty Tompkins, *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #3)*, 2018. Acrylic on book page. 27.9 x 21 cm. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York.



Fig. 5: Betty Tompkins, *Betty Would Be...* 2018. Acrylic on Canvas. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York, via *Elephant*.



Fig. 6: Betty Tompkins, *Woman Words (Brassai #1)*, 2017. Acrylic on book page, 26.7 x 20.3 cm. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York, via *Elephant*.



Fig. 7: Betty Tompkins, *Apologia (Artemisia Gentileschi #2)*, 2018. Acrylic on book page. 25.4 x 20.3 cm. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York.



Fig. 8: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Autoritratto in veste di Pittura*, 1638-9. Oil on Canvas. 98.6 cm × 75.2 cm. The Royal Collection: RCIN 405551.



Fig. 9: Betty Tompkins, *Apologia (Mary Shepard Greene Blumenschein)*, 2018 acrylic on book page. 27.9 x 23.5 cm. Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P.P.O.W, New York.



Fig. 10: Mary Shepard Green Blumenschein, *Un Regard Fugitif*, 1900. Oil on Canvas. 131.4 x 92.1 cm. Brooklyn Museum.