In Conversation with Jane Adams

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Jane Adams, co-founder and CEO of Artemisia Gold Inc., brings extensive experience in PR and communications within the art and cultural heritage sectors. As Director of Partnership Relations for Jane Fortune and Advancing Women Artists Inc., she helped restore more than 70 works of art over a decade, blending conservation, historical research, and public engagement. In 2020, she founded Artemisia Gold (AG), a UK charity dedicated to rediscovering the works of female artists and, through restoration, research, and education, bringing these works - and the stories of these forgotten artists - back to life. To launch Artemisia Gold, she co-sponsored and coordinated the restoration of Artemisia Gentileschi's Sinite Parvulos, Let the Children Come to Me from Rome's Church of San Carlo al Corso. In 2022, Artemisia Gold sponsored a diagnostic campaign on Gentileschi's Mother and Child, undertaken by Emmebi Diagnostica Artistica in partnership with Rome's Galleria Spada, culminating in the publication Investigating Artemisia at the Spada Gallery (De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2022). Artemisia Gentileschi, Sinite Parvulos, Let the Children Come to Me. The back of the painting, revealing the artist's signature and date discovered during restoration. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. That same year, she co-founded Caravaggio & Contemporary Ltd., overseeing restoration work at Florence's Church of Ognissanti. In 2024, Artemisia Gold co-sponsored the restoration of two paintings by Suor Plautilla Nelli - Madonna of the Rosary and Mother and Child with Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine, and Sant'Agnese - to celebrate the artist's 500th anniversary. The project was marked by public lectures at the Museum of Santa Maria Novella, San Marco, Palazzo Corsini, and Trinity College Dublin. In 2026, Artemisia Gold launched a new restoration of The Birth of the Virgin by Plautilla Bricci in the Church of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio, Rome. This year, Adams co-founded Artemisia Gold Inc., a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) charity extending this work to engage international audiences in celebrating historically overlooked female artists. You have worked with overlooked women artists for many years. Do you remember a particular artwork or encounter that first made you realise how much of this history was still waiting to be recovered? Yes - very clearly. I met Jane Fortune in 2014 at the launch of When the World Answered, her book on the 1966 flood of Florence, the "Mud Angels," and the wave of solidarity it inspired worldwide. What struck me wasn't only the flood itself, but one detail: the art historian Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti's appeal for contemporary artists to donate a work to Florence as a gesture for what had been lost. Dozens of artists, including many women, answered that call - and their paintings were then quietly filed away in storage at the Museo Novecento in Florence, largely unstudied, while the story of the flood's aftermath was written mostly around the men who had donated alongside them. Luckily, a large number of these works were restored by Jane Fortune and her foundation, Advancing Women Artists. That evening, I realised this wasn't a story about a flood. It was a story about how easily generosity gets absorbed and forgotten, and how selectively history decides whose gesture counts. These weren't obscure artists - they had stepped forward publicly, in a moment of real urgency. It reframed my question from "Which female artists have been overlooked, and where are their works?" It was a fortuitous evening, and I ended up working for Jane Fortune and the Foundation until Fortune's sad passing in 2018 and the closure of AWA. This led me to found Artemisia Gold in 2019 to continue the mission. You recently spoke in Florence about critically rethinking the biographies of early modern women artists. What do you think is the biggest mistake we still make when telling their stories today? Restoring works by female artists - and bringing their stories back to life - is really the

core of what we do. But when it comes to the stories, I'd hesitate to call it a "mistake"; it's more that we don't have much to work with. Most of these women left behind no letters, no notes, nothing in their own words. What survives are accounts written by men like Vasari, Baldinucci, or Gabburri, and they wrote their own opinions about what a female artist should be. So even when a life feels "documented," we're really only hearing a snippet through someone else's point of view. Vasari, for example, often cared more about telling a good story than getting the facts right. Therefore, we have to read the old sources with a careful eye and try to understand what has been left out. Restoration and technical investigation allow us to see decisions that never entered the written record, such as changes in composition, underdrawing, pigments, and working methods. What can the physical object tell us about an artist that biography and archival research cannot? This is exactly why having the actual painting in front of us matters so much to me. Biography tells us what people said about an artist - the painting shows us what she actually did. Things like underdrawing or pentimenti show her technique and changes of mind in the composition; pigment analysis can establish a date and also hint at workshop practice. None of that shows up in a letter or a contract, only in the painting itself. Restoration is really its own kind of detective work. A scientific campaign can date materials, uncover overpainting, or reveal a signature buried under centuries of old varnish. Add in provenance research, and the painting basically starts telling its own story. The painting isn't just proof of the artist's talent - it's an untouched archive and a voice reclaimed. Artemisia Gentileschi, Madonna and Child, Galleria Spada, Rome. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. Artemisia Gentileschi, Madonna and Child, Galleria Spada, Rome. X-radiography from the diagnostic campaign sponsored by Artemisia Gold, which led to the publication Investigating Artemisia at the Spada Gallery (De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2022). Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. Many women artists used self-portraiture to shape their own public identity, not simply as women, but as educated and professional artists. How important are these images in helping us understand how they wanted to be seen, rather than the identities later constructed for them by art history? I think these self-portraits are huge - probably the clearest source we have of how these women actually saw themselves. In a period with no internet or social media, and no way to "put yourself out there," a self-portrait was basically your business card: brushes, an easel, sometimes a book to show that she was educated as well as talented. It was a woman saying, "Look at my skill. Take me seriously as a professional." That's such a different story from the one often written about them later, when art history boxed them into "wife of" or "daughter of," as if the fact that a woman could paint was the interesting part. But in how they painted themselves, you see someone actively shaping her own image - confident, in control of the narrative, and essentially doing her own marketing. In recent years, museums and exhibitions have given much more attention to historical women artists, yet the same few names often dominate this renewed interest. At the same time, uncertain or unattributed works are increasingly being reconsidered in relation to them. How do we expand the canon without simply creating a new hierarchy of familiar names, or allowing the enthusiasm for rediscovery to influence attribution before the evidence is fully convincing? It's easy to fall in love with rediscovery - there's real excitement in it - but that excitement can't be allowed to get ahead of the evidence. A new attribution has to earn its place through technical analysis, archival research, and comparison with securely attributed works. Suor Plautilla Nelli is a good example of how this can be done correctly. Over the past years, a real body of her work has come back to light - paintings that were unattributed or in storage. That accumulation let us do something we couldn't do with one painting alone: study her working methods across her whole output and understand her convent

workshop as a real artistic environment. It led to her first exhibition at the Uffizi in 2017, and recently more paintings have been found, two of which were newly attributed, restored, and exhibited in 2024. This autumn sees her overseas debut with her Saint Catherine of Siena, from the Museum of San Marco, which will be shown in the “Women Painters” exhibition in Oslo, while other panel paintings will be seen in a monographic exhibition at Robert Simon Fine Art in New York, Suor Plautilla Nelli: La Prima. So for me, expanding the canon properly means two things at once: bringing in names beyond the handful we already know well, and being disciplined enough that when we do attribute a new work, it’s because the evidence holds up - not because we wanted it to. Suor Plautilla Nelli, Madonna and Child with Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Agnes, private collection, Florence, after restoration, 2024. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. Suor Plautilla Nelli, Madonna and Child with Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Agnes. Infrared reflectography conducted during the diagnostic investigation. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. Suor Plautilla Nelli, Madonna of the Rosary, Church of San Giuseppe and Santa Lucia, Montaione, Florence, after restoration, 2024. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold. Your newest major project focuses on Plautilla Bricci (1616-1705), a Roman painter and architect and one of the few women to establish a professional artistic career in seventeenth-century Rome. Artemisia Gold is now working on her monumental Birth of the Virgin in Santa Maria in Campo Marzio. What drew you specifically to Bricci and to this painting, and what do you hope the restoration and technical investigations might reveal about her working process? Plautilla Bricci has fascinated me since reading Melania Mazzucco’s novel L’Architettrice and after seeing the exhibition curated by Yuri Primarosa at the Galleria Corsini in Rome in 2022. She wasn’t just a painter; she was also an architect, which was almost unheard of for a woman in seventeenth-century Rome. That combination of ambition and skill is what first drew me to her. The opportunity to restore The Birth of the Virgin came to us through historian Marco Coppolaro, who had been studying the Church of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio for a publication. Through technical analysis of Bricci’s technique and archival research, the attribution to her became increasingly convincing - and the archives also point to the commission coming from the Abbess Anna Maria Mazzarino. Our aim isn’t only to restore the physical integrity and visual brilliance of the work - it’s also to deepen our understanding of Bricci’s artistic practice, help secure her place in the canon of Baroque art, and bring her story to a global audience through research, conservation, and education. And if we’re lucky, we might even find a signature, which would be an extraordinary discovery. Plautilla Bricci, The Birth of the Virgin, c. 1660, Church of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio, Rome. Image courtesy of Consuelo Lollobrigida. The Birth of the Virgin also brings us to another, less visible history: that of female patronage. The painting was commissioned by Abbess Anna Maria Mazzarino. While much attention has rightly been given to recovering women who made art, have we paid enough attention to the women who had the financial means, influence, and cultural agency to commission it? And how important is that relationship between female artist and female patron for understanding Bricci’s work? Honestly, no - and this painting is a good example of why. A woman commissioning a major painting in the seventeenth century was genuinely rare. It meant having the financial means, but also the standing and authority to make that kind of decision within the Church. Abbess Mazzarino was exercising real cultural agency, choosing what would be made and by whom. It’s likely she knew of Bricci through her brother, Cardinal Mazzarino, who had been introduced to Bricci by her protector Elpidio Benedetti - for whom Bricci had designed the famous, but now destroyed, Villa Vascello. That connection changes how we should read the painting itself: a woman patron commissioning a female artist isn’t a coincidence to note in passing; it’s a relationship

worth understanding on its own terms. So for me, recovering female artists can't stop at the artist alone - we also have to recover the women who made that work possible, because their agency is part of the same history we're trying to bring back. If a painting is restored but remains detached from the community, convent, church, or patronage network for which it was created, have we really recovered its history? How important is it for Artemisia Gold to restore context as well as objects? For me, restoring the painting without restoring its context only tells half the story. Our goal is to return paintings to public view along with the history and provenance that made them what they are. A painting that's beautifully restored but disconnected from the story that produced it hasn't been fully recovered. Restoring context isn't always easy, as paintings often end up far from where they were commissioned. The Napoleonic suppressions, for example, took countless works from churches and convents, which were then redistributed, often incorrectly and with no record of origin. That doesn't make recovering their story less important - it makes it more fascinating, piecing together the history. We were lucky with Bricci's The Birth of the Virgin - it's still in the church it was commissioned for, Santa Maria in Campo Marzio. That's rare, and it matters enormously: the painting can go back into genuine dialogue with the space, the community, and the patronage that shaped it. If we spoke again ten years from now, what would make you feel that Artemisia Gold had truly succeeded? Would success mean more restored paintings, rewritten scholarship, greater institutional recognition, or reaching a point where these artists no longer need to be described as "rediscovered" at all? I believe it would be some combination of all of those - but if I had to choose one, it's the last: reaching a point where artists like Bricci or Nelli no longer need the word "rediscovered" attached to their names. That word does important work now, but it also admits these women are still treated as exceptions, as surprises, rather than as artists who were simply always there. That said, we have a long way to go. In ten years, I'd hope to see many more paintings restored and returned to public view, scholarship that reflects this research properly, and greater institutional recognition. University courses, art history programs, and textbooks need to be part of that too - featuring these artists not as extraordinary exceptions, but as artists who were always part of the story. Artemisia Gold's role is to keep restoring paintings and bringing these women's stories back to life through publication, education, and exhibition. Earlier this year, Dorotheum sold a fragmentary Mary Magdalen by Artemisia Gentileschi for €837,500. The head and part of the shoulders had been physically cut from the canvas and are now lost, leaving a striking void at the centre of the composition. That absence gives the painting an almost contemporary visual force, very different from the way we usually encounter a seventeenth-century work. Do you think the loss has, paradoxically, created a new way of seeing the painting? And what do you think the strong market response tells us? Are collectors responding to fragmentation, absence, and survival as qualities in themselves, or is the value ultimately driven above all by the fact that the work is by Artemisia Gentileschi? It's difficult for me to give a firm opinion on this one. I stand by my conviction that every painting carries its own history and passage of time, and that restoration is about consolidation - never taking anything away from or adding to the painter's hand. There's something painful about seeing a work with that kind of loss at its centre, whatever the cause. We're fortunate that a full version survives at the Palatine Gallery in Palazzo Pitti, so the missing head and shoulders can be reconstructed rather than guessed at - and what remains is still genuine testimony to Artemisia's hand, her technique, and her pigments. The painting, through its void, does have a strange visual power - it gives the work an unexpectedly contemporary quality. But I don't think that's what people were really buying. Her hand is legible even in a fragment, and

that’s remarkable in itself. Whatever the story behind it, it’s her name that carries the value. Lead image: Jane Adams with Artemisia Gentileschi’s Sinite Parvulos, Let the Children Come to Me, Church of San Carlo al Corso, Rome, 2021, after restoration. Courtesy of Artemisia Gold.