

Use this guide to learn more about other stories of fierce women on view across our collection.

## ACROSS THE COLLECTION

# FIERCE WOMEN



### ANCIENT

#### **Penthesilea** (Greece, about 570 B.C.E.)

One of the original women worthies, **Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons**, was a courageous and skilled warrior. The Amazons were a mythical race of warrior women in Anatolia, or Asia Minor. These women transcended traditional domestic roles—their ability to build, govern, and protect themselves without the aid of men made them an especially fierce group. Their leader, Penthesilea, bravely assisted the Trojans in war against the Greeks but was killed by Achilles, who reportedly fell in love with her beauty and courage in her final moments.

On view in the Rozzelle Court Balcony through June 4, 2023, as part of the exhibition *Between Myth and Reality: Ancient Greek Vases from Joslyn Art Museum*

*Achilles and Penthesilea*, Greek, 2nd-3rd century C.E. Ivory, 4 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 76-11.



### EUROPEAN

#### **St. Cecilia** (Italy, flourished about 101 B.C.E.–300 B.C.E)

**St. Cecilia** was a strong-willed Christian martyr who took a vow of virginity for her faith. When she married, she appealed to God retain her vow. Her prayer was so passionate it was expressed like a song. Cecilia converted her husband and hundreds of others to Christianity, for which she was arrested and condemned. As punishment, she was confined in a suffocating sauna and didn't even break a sweat. As a second punishment, an executioner attempted to cut off her head multiple times with a sword. Protected by her faith, she continued to preach to large crowds until succumbing to her injuries three days later.

On view in Gallery P15 (see another example of St. Cecilia in the exhibition *Fierce Women*, on view in Gallery P30)

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Bernardo Strozzi (Italian, 1593–1654). *Saint Cecilia*, 1620–1625. Oil on canvas, 68 1/8 x 48 3/8 x 1 7/8 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 44-39.



### PHOTOGRAPHY

#### **Claude Cahun** (French, 1894–1954)

Jewish-born artist and writer **Claude Cahun** lived with a spirit of rebellion and defiance. Her self-portraits evoke a wide range of imaginative, androgynous roles and identities. During World War II, German troops invaded and occupied the Isle of Jersey in northeastern France, where Cahun and her partner lived. As members of a prominent French resistance group, the duo used their creative talents to produce anti-Nazi fliers and pamphlets—sneakily distributing them at German military events while in disguise.

On view in Gallery L10 June 10–October 29, 2023

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Claude Cahun (French, 1894–1954). *Self-portrait*, about 1928. Gelatin silver print, 4 1/8 x 3 1/8 inches. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2018.28.5.



CHINESE

***Central Asian Caravan Woman Rousing her Camel while Nursing***  
(China, 700s C.E.)

This sculpture shows a woman breastfeeding her child while riding atop a Bactrian camel, a breed native to Central Asia. This breed of camel suggests that this woman may have been a merchant traveling along a Silk Road route to exchange various goods, like silk, from China. Many of these routes weaved through treacherous terrains and situations, yet this fierce woman balances her stressful life as a mother and nomadic merchant with ease.

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On view in Gallery 229

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*Central Asian Caravan Woman Rousing her Camel While Nursing*, 8th century C.E. Earthenware with unfired coloring, 16 x 18 x 11 inches. Purchase: the Richard J. Stern Foundation for the Arts--Commerce Bank, Trustee, and Hall Family Foundation Endowment for the Oriental Department, 2002.7.



SOUTH ASIA

**Karaikkal Ammaiyar** (South India, object created around 1000s)

**Karaikkal Ammaiyar**, or “**Mother of Karaikkal**,” was a saint known for her devotional songs and poetry dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. As a young, newly married woman she lived in South India with her husband during the 500s C.E. One day Shiva, who disguised himself as a poor man, came to her home begging for food. She gave him one of her husband’s mangoes. When her husband returned and requested one, she prayed to Shiva for help, and another mango appeared in her hands. Recognizing her miraculous abilities, her husband decided she was a goddess and left her. She left her home to pursue a new life devoted to Shiva, symbolized here by her skeletal, wasted body and rejection of all forms of earthly indulgence.

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On view in Gallery 228

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*Karaikkal Ammaiyar*, a Hindu Saint, Indian, 11th century. Bronze, 19 5/8 x 8 7/8 x 5 1/2 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 33-533.



AMERICAN

**Rita Benton**, (American, 1896–1975)

Rita Benton was a savvy businesswoman who understood the power of negotiation. She married artist Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975) in 1922 and quickly took charge of managing his career, despite the societal roles expected of women. She oversaw the sale of his art and was strategic about deal negotiations to increase the art market demand in her husband’s favor.

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On view in Gallery 219 (American Art rotunda)

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Thomas Hart Benton, American (1889—1975). *Bust of Rita*, modeled 1918; cast 1961. Bronze. 16 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches. Gift of John and Kay Callison, 2019.58.



EUROPEAN

**Margarete Heymann-Löbenstein** (German, 1899–1990)

**Margarete Heymann-Löbenstein** (known professionally as “**Grete Marks**”) was a pioneering German-Jewish painter and ceramic designer. In 1923, Marks and her husband founded a factory that became one of Germany’s leading manufacturers of modernist ceramics. Tragically, he died in a car accident in 1928, leaving her alone to run the business. By 1933, with the rise of Fascist rule in Germany, the business was seized and forced to close by the Nazi party. She did not let these hardships stop her from pursuing art—she fled Germany and resettled in England in 1936 and continued to design and exhibit her ceramics to companies and galleries across London.

On view in Gallery P29

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Margarete Heymann-Löbenstein, German (1899 - 1990). *Teapot with Lid*, about 1930. Alpacca (silvered metal alloy) with synthetic resin, 5 1/2 x 10 x 6 3/4 inches. Purchase: the Charlotte and Perry Faeth Fund, 2005.26.1.A,B.



NATIVE AMERICAN

**Dzunuk’wa** (British Columbia, Canada, object created about 1870)

Depicted as a wild and powerful half-animal, half-woman creature, **Dzunuk’wa (the Wild Woman of the Woods)** was known in the mythology of the Kwakwaka’wakw peoples to capture unsuspecting children in her basket to carry home and eat. Legends say that she possessed great wealth, which she would gladly bestow on those who were able to escape or trick her into releasing a child from her control.

On view in Gallery 206

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*Dzunuk’wa or Gikamhl (Chief’s) Mask*, North American Indian, British Columbia, Canada, about 1870. Wood (alder), pigment, human hair, and bear skin, 11 x 7 5/8 x 5 3/4 inches. From the Estelle and Morton Sosland Collection, 2009.41.1.



CONTEMPORARY

**Vanessa German** (American, born 1976)

A self-taught artist, **Vanessa German** considers artmaking an act of restorative justice. Using a variety of materials and found objects, German creates layered sculptural works and installations to allude to and reckon with historical and ongoing brutalities of structural racism in America. Her creative practice proposes new models for social healing; she uses creativity and tenderness as forces that spark new conversations about Black power, spirituality, mysticism, and feminism.

On view in Gallery L2

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Vanessa German, American (born 1976). *Glory*, 2017. Found object mixed media assemblage, 74 x 47 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust through the George H. and Elizabeth O. Davis Fund, 2018.47.



### NATIVE AMERICAN

**Jamie Okuma** (North American Indian, Luiseño/Shoshone-Bannock, Okinawan, and Hawaiian, California, born 1977)

**Jamie Okuma's** strong skill for fashion design began in early childhood. In order to attend annual pow-wows with her family, she needed suitable attire, so she fabricated her own. Using traditional Native American beading techniques combined with contemporary fashion, Okuma challenges the stereotype that Indigenous arts and traditions are something of the past. Since her first exhibition at age 18, her designs have been exhibited broadly across mainstream art and fashion spaces—spaces that have historically overlooked contemporary Indigenous artists and designers.

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**On View in Gallery 206**

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Jamie Okuma, North American Indian, Luiseño/Shoshone-Bannock, Okinawan, and Hawaiian, California (born 1977). *Adaptation*, 2011. Pair of Christian Louboutin Chaotic 100 ankle boots, glass and 24K gold-plated beads, and polyester tassels. Purchase: A. Keith Brodtkin Fund for the Acquisition of Contemporary American Indian Art, 2011.42.A,B.



### AFRICAN

**Maternity association figure (Bwanga bwa Cibola)** (Lulua peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1800s)

Modeled after the female form, maternity figures like this one were used by ritual healers of the Bwanga bwa Cibola society to protect a woman's pregnancy, birth, and newborn health. The prominent physical features of this figure have strong symbolism in Lulua culture: the muscular legs indicate strength and work ethic, and the prominent head and high forehead reflect notions of intelligence and determination.

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**On view in Gallery L9**

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*Maternity Association Figure*, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lulua peoples, 19th century. Wood and pigment, 18 ¾ x 3 inches. Purchase: Nelson Gallery Foundation, F84-50.