



A Light of Her Own

Carrie Callaghan

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In Holland 1633, a woman's ambition has no place.

Judith is a painter, dodging the law and whispers of murder to become the first woman admitted to the prestigious Haarlem artist's guild. Maria is a Catholic in a country where the faith is banned, hoping to absolve her sins by recovering a lost saint's relic.

Both women's destinies will be shaped by their ambitions, running counter to the city's most powerful men, whose own plans spell disaster. A vivid portrait of a remarkable artist, *A Light of Her Own* is a richly-woven story of grit against the backdrop of Rembrandts and repressive religious rule.

A Light of Her Own Details

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Author : Carrie Callaghan

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From Reader Review *A Light of Her Own* for online ebook

Helgaleena Healingline says

This is a very evocative telling of life in 17th century Netherlands, for the female members of families in the Artists Guilds. Talent is not enough to merit training for Maria, though she shares a room with her father's female apprentice Judith Leyster. Both are already grown women in their twenties, but around them young painters have become masters at a younger age.

At last both of them take decisive steps into the world on their own, Judith taking illicit commissions to afford her master's fee, Maria traveling to Leiden in search of a missing Guild artifact. But the road forward is fraught with daily perils not encountered by the male artists. And despite managing to set up her own workshop and apprenticeships, Judith walks a fine line, one group demanding three times the talent, and the other chastising her for putting her art before ties of friends and family.

Even when she helps to save her dear friend Maria's life, Maria interprets it in a spirit of betrayal.

In the end, the first and only female master of the Haarlem School would give up painting for marriage to a fellow painter, using her energies to keep his books and only seldom turn out a canvas. Yet this was the age of expansion and the marriage was a happy one. Making history demanded stepping away from invisibility in order to pursue her ideal.

It was a good idea to contrast her achievement with the life of her good friend, since talent does not happen only to brothers and not to sisters. How a person handles being gifted when society is not encouraging is interesting too.

Julie Christine says

All the artists, writers, musicians, philosophers, sages, inventors we will never know, because they were female... when we pause to consider what how history has been overwritten and rewritten by those who hold the swords, it's like the pain of a phantom limb. Into this void writes debut novelist Carrie Callaghan, inspired by an historical footnote of two women, one held aloft by ambition, the other by faith.

Rendering 17th century Holland with gorgeous, vivid detail, Callaghan offers the story of Judith Leyster, the first woman painter to be offered a place in the prestigious Haarlem Artist's Guild, and Maria, whose religious fervor sends her on a harrowing journey. From the thinnest threads of anecdotes, she weaves a rich tapestry of ambition and passion, art and commerce in a time and place where Rembrandt and his painter contemporaries changed the way we viewed the world. Knowing that some of these contemporaries were women is the grace and integrity of historical fiction, reminding us that the stories we hold as facts are often missing volumes of truth. A lovely, elegant read.

Doris Vandruff says

This is a historical fiction about the first woman to attain master status in painting. She also owned her own shop. This woman was Judith Leyster. I found this book very interesting and informative. I had no idea a

woman was up there with all the great painters. Amazing! By no means was it easy for her. The book points out a time when a painting was discovered as hers, a females, the price went down. Whereas if it had been a male painter, the price would have been higher. Talk about discrimination. Of course this was in the 1600's. It's a great book. Loved the storyline. It portrays her as being selfish. Only about her painting, but I choose to consider her as strong, driven and especially brave!

Amalia Gavea says

Holland, during the 17th century. Judith and Maria are two women who are struggling to find their footing in a society that closes all doors to the ones who don't fit in the religious images cultivated by an endless battle between different denominations. It closes all doors to women who are talented and brave enough to seek a better future, to make their talents one. Judith Leyster wants to be a painter, following the great tradition of her country. In order to do so, she needs to convince the men in the profession that she deserves to be taken seriously. She struggles to make them pay attention to her creations, not her petticoats. And Maria? Maria has to live in fear because of her faith. Her only solution is the search of a holy relic that will make her atone for whatever sins she has committed...

And this is one of the worst Historical Fiction novels I've ever read.

Excuse me, dear friends, but no. NO! How could one of the most important women in the History of Art be transformed into a walking snoozefest that behaves like a petulant schoolgirl is a dark mystery to me. I won't even waste my time and yours to talk about Maria because I skipped most of her chapters to avoid gauging my eyes out with a knife. Bayern was on TV and I wanted to watch the game, needing my sight to do so. Therefore, no Maria for me after the 40% mark, thank you. In my opinion, both women are one-dimensional characters, unoriginal, boring, bad copies of female main protagonists we have seen before in much better books.

It is so sad that a beautiful setting and an exciting era went to waste due to a lack of events, repetition and implausible twists that had no function whatsoever. I mean, dear writer, show! Don't tell. I don't need a thousand paragraphs describing Judith and Maria's thoughts and differences. Write an adequate dialogue and create events that have a meaning and an outcome. Don't give me a pseudo-psychological treaty. Now that I mentioned the haunted word "dialogue", I have to tell you that every interaction in this book sounded (to me, obviously) like an uninspired period piece seen on a second-rate TV channel. Examples follow. Proceed with caution, dearest friends:

"I'll be right back." (In Holland, in the year of Our Lord 1633. Yeah, dude, whatever...Seriously, I expected to come across the previous exclamation somewhere in the course of the "story".)

And more examples, all from the same chapter:

"Forgive me for interrupting you. You were painting?"

"Of course, that's wonderful. I mean, obviously you're painting, but it's wonderful work."

"That's perfect. Wonderful. Thank you. I'll be back soon."

Welcome to the Dutch version of a Nickelodeon Art School programme taking place in the 17th century. I must be punished for some serious sins I committed in a past life...

I've had such high hopes for this one and they were crushed from the very first chapters. I am aware that

many readers have loved this novel but personally, it made me fall asleep. In truth, what did I expect from a book that contained the phrases *“She clenched her jaw shut...”* and *“She sucked in a half breath...”* ?

P.S. How do you suck in a half breath? I genuinely want to know.

Many thanks to Amberjack Publishing and NetGalley for the ARC in exchange for an honest review.

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.wordpress.com>

Cheri says

!! NOW AVAILABLE !!

*“It was a wicked and wild wind
Blew down the doors to let me in
Shattered windows and the sound of drums
People couldn't believe what I'd become”*

-- Viva la Vida, Coldplay, Songwriters: Christopher A. J. Martin / Guy Rupert Berryman / Jonathan Mark Buckland / William Champion

“As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight.” James McNeil Whistler

“Judith leaned against the small window ledge and looked inside. The frigid twilight air seeped past her cloak into her many layers of tunics and her well-worn bodice, and the painted ledge below her numb fingertips had dulled to the gray of a low sky. Behind the glass, the inn’s golden light beckoned, and though it was not yet suppertime, already drinkers dressed in shades of brown sat at small tables. Her teeth chattered with cold and nerves.”

It is February of 1633 as this story begins, and Judith Leyster has trusted a painting of hers to a man who is inside, to offer to sell this painting to those gathered. She was not, at that time, a member of the Guild, but in time she would become one of the first two women to attain master status in the Haarlem artist’s guild. On that evening, as she waited to receive the coins from her painting that would not come, it would have seemed like an impossible dream.

At the age of thirteen, she was apprenticed to Frans de Grebber. Ten years have passed since she began her apprenticeship, and she is not allowed to sell her art without achieving master status. It is not an easy road for a female, few have tried, none had yet been chosen. That does not mean that de Grebber does not believe in her, he does, but she will have to convince more people than just de Grebber.

Judith shares this story with Maria, the daughter of de Grebber, around her own age, and an artist-in-training, as well. But Maria is more devoted to her religion, to the Catholic Church and its teachings, which have been banned there. There are other characters, but primarily this is a story of the art world, the lives of female artists, or women who were trying to become formally recognized as artists, in the Haarlem artist guild.

The writing is often lovely, the story is set in a time when any woman trying to create a path of her own was not only difficult, but often put them in a dangerous position. Callaghan’s attention to detail really has a transporting effect, and I felt and saw it all as I was reading this. The atmosphere of the streets reminded me,

a bit, of the descriptive writing in Jessie Burton's *The Miniaturist*, which I enjoyed, but I would have to say that I enjoyed this a bit more.

Three hundred and eighty-five years have passed since Judith's dreams of becoming an acknowledged artist came true, and yet, even with that recognition bestowed upon her, she would never, in her lifetime, achieve the status of her male peers.

Pub Date: 13 NOV 2018

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Amberjack Publishing

Kate Lemery says

Fans of Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* will be delighted with Carrie Callaghan's debut novel, *A Light of Her Own*. The story focuses on the friendship between real-life 17th century Dutch artists, Judith Leyster and Marie de Grebber. Lyrical prose and engaging descriptions of Dutch life and the artmaking process made this book easy to escape into.

Jeanette Lewis says

In 1633 Judith Leyster was admitted to the Haarlem Guild. The first and only female to attain this status. Judith Leyster is known to be the greatest female painter in history.

Even with small accounts of Judith Leyster's life in existence the author has created a beautiful story around this outstanding female artist. The book reveals the struggles and obstacles faced by Judith as a woman of this time trying to pursue a career, to have her own apprentices and to be able to sell her paintings. The Guild to which she attained recognition was the controlling body for artists. Being admitted to the Guild would give an artist status, although there was still a pecking order depending on fame and those fameless would still struggle to make a living. Judith has a strong and fearless personality and seems to have boundless energy. She has a close friend Maria that as a teenage apprentice she shares a room with. Maria is the daughter of her employer and the complete opposite to that of Judith. The times are of the strong Protestant Church with those of the Roman Catholic Church having to hide their worship practices. Maria is a strong Catholic, Judith seems to be a non believer and while she doesn't understand Maria's religious obsessions she shows empathy to her friend who is a close to her as a sister. Judith's family has left town owing money leaving two of their children behind, (Judith) and a son, Abraham who appears to live his life similar to his parents. The author has written parallel stories, the main one of Judith but the other one of Maria who has her own complex issues and through fate has her own misadventure. The descriptions of the environment and the towns with window boxes of flowers give the story added colour whilst the descriptions of everyday life and struggles, the polluted waters of the waterways and canals remind the reader that this was also a time of high infant deaths and when death through even minor sickness due to lack of hygiene and primitive medical practices was just around the corner.

Anya Leonard says

A wonderfully painted tale of the imagined life of Judith Leyster. An artist in the Dutch golden age, Leyster was one of the only women awarded master status in the Guild. This novel seeks to highlight what set her apart from other female painters of the age. Woven together with intrigue and daring, this story is different from other depictions of artists a la *Girl With The Pearl Earring* or similar prose. Carrie Callaghan deftly sketches a many-sided and adroit portrait of Leyster as well as her more well-known contemporaries. Written from a female point of view, it was refreshing and new to see and also easier to relate to for me than some of the other writings in the same genre. Pick it up! Highly recommend.

This ebook was provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jenni Walsh says

While I enjoy biographical fiction with well-known figures, I'm also drawn to portraits of lesser-known women, especially when written as artfully as Carrie Callaghan has done with Judith Leyster, a Dutch painter who hasn't always been given her full due, her work often credited to others. Vividly rendered, Judith's story is one of loyalty, independence, and finding her place in a world dominated by male artists like Rembrandt and Molenaer. Throughout, Judith has an unrelenting focus and often grapples with ambition, influencing both her undoing and her redemption. I feel fortunate to have met Judith Leyster through Carrie Callaghan's well-crafted words.

ABCme says

Thank you Netgalley and Amberjack Publishing for the ARC.

A Light of Her Own follows the lives of two young Dutch woman in a time of religious conflict. Haarlem 1633, city of Frans Hals and other Old Masters. Painter Frans de Grebber is Maria's father and Judith Leyster his apprentice. The girls have been friends for years, even though one is protestant and one catholic.

Maria needs to atone for an incident in her past and leaves home to recover an old relic for her father. We get to see a bit of Leiden and The Hague as well.

Meanwhile Judith longs to be a member of the painters guild running her own workshop. She achieves both, although being a woman doesn't make life easier.

The story tells of friendship, love and loss. All quite calm even though it's filled with tons of everyday events.

I enjoyed walking the city with the characters. The churches, the market, the laden carts, the canals, the smells, the dirt, the port and its merchants, but also the art world and the workings of the guild. Life is tough, poverty all around. It's hard to imagine those paintings now fetching at least six figures.

As the story unfolds the girls are drifting apart, until a devastating event brings them back together.

Beautiful descriptions of scenery throughout the book.

I appreciate the author's afterword on Judith Leyster's life as an artist. Definitely a Leading Star for many woman in centuries to come.

Beata says

* I would like to thank the Author, the Publisher and Netgalley for providing me generously with ARC in exchange for my honest review.*

A Light of Her Own is a most beautiful novel about a Dutch artist, Judith Leyster, who lived in the 17th century and was probably the first female painter to have been admitted to the Guild. The novel is absolutely amazing for several reasons. To begin with, while reading I could visualize paintings in the style of the Dutch school, sometimes two or three sentences, sometimes a paragraph prompted descriptions of beautiful scenes of everyday life in street market or indoors, with most important aspect: the light and the colours. Another reason for my liking this novel massively was the detailed description of a life of a painter in the town of Haarlem, problems, techniques, customs and traditions and religious dilemmas. Carrie Callaghan did a thorough research into Dutch Masters and the novel takes us as close to them and times as possible. And one other thing, the background: the houses, clothes, hairstyles, food - they are perfectly presented by the Author. Reading A Light of Her Own was like looking at the paintings which could have been created by Dutch artists of the 17th century.

The novel was an amazing surprise for me as I have been interested in the Dutch Masters for some years now and it complemented my interests perfectly.

A highly recommendable read!

Deborah Stevens says

A female painter in Holland in the age of the old masters? Fantasy?

Actually, historical fiction based on the (admittedly thin) evidence of one such woman, Judith. She was apprenticed to a well-known painter and roommates with his daughter, also an apprentice. She was also just as ambitious (maybe more so?) as the male apprentices around her. Would this fly in Haarlem in 1633? You will have to read it to find out!

I loved this book. It had plenty of detail about the domestic and city scenes and the material aspects of oil painting. The characters felt real to me, and there was just enough plot to hold my interest. I read it on Kindle and looked forward to my next opportunity to read more.

Highly recommended for those interested in art, historical fiction, women's lives in other times and places.

With thanks to Amberjack Publishing and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for my honest review.

Corey Planer says

Callaghan's thoughtful prose creates a richly detailed novel that feels relevant despite taking place nearly 400 years ago. The struggles experienced by Judith feel eerily similar to the battles that women fight today in largely male dominated arenas. I appreciate Callaghan's desire to give attention to a lesser known historical figure. A great book to curl up with on a fall evening with a cup of tea!

Linda says

"The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls." (Pablo Picasso)

Haarlem, Holland in February of 1633 is wrapped in the frigidity of brisk winds and icy streets. Judith Leyster peers on tiptoe through the smudged window of the rowdy tavern. She can hardly bend her frozen fingers, but she knows that she will readily feel the weight of a few coins in her outstretched hand. Judith waits anxiously for Lachine, a shady Frenchman, who has promised to sell one of her paintings to a patron. No Lachine. No coins.

Judith heads back to the workshop of Frans de Grebber. Frans is an art master who has apprenticed the twenty-three year old since she was thirteen. Judith and her younger brother, Abraham, have been on their own since their parents left the city banished with heavy debt. Judith shares a tiny room with Frans' daughter, Maria, a fellow artist. Both young women experience the solid walls of rejection for females who pursue the arts during this time period. Opportunities are few.

Judith's giftedness is stoked with the flames of persistence. It is this internal fire that eventually lights the way for Judith to become a member of the St. Luke Artists' Guild and later she reaches the level of master status. But none of this comes easily.

Carrie Callaghan presents a story rich in detail of the lives of two female artists living in a profession dominated by men. Haarlem provides an environment of ruthlessness and cunning as we will experience throughout these pages. Callaghan has quite the talent for imbuing her storyline with the sounds, the cadence, and the muddled surroundings of the city's crowded streets. Her characters shift back and forth from the lowliness of street dwellers to the loftiness of master artists. We feel the renowned presence of Rembrandt van Rijn and Johannes Vermeer.

A Light of Her Own has the flavor of Girl With A Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier. But Carrie Callaghan creates a grittier atmosphere for Judith and Maria. I was delighted to find that a self-portrait of Judith Leyster can be found in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.. Although a debut novel for Callaghan, the richness of the prose will certainly link her to even greater experiences in the future.

I received a copy of this book through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to Amberjack Publishing and to Carrie Callaghan for the opportunity.

Sydney Young says

4.5 stars! This refreshing book gave me a good deal to think about while keeping me turning pages. The stars of the book are Judith and Maria, though there are a number of other well known painters making cameo appearances (and that's always fun).

Imagine this: Judith Leyster, woman painter in Haarlem, was actually admitted to the city's art guild in 1635. What hardships did she have in pursuing her work, and do they compare to the hardships that professional women face today? In what ways does she pay for her desire to be treated equally? Callaghan's debut novel

made me think through my own professional career over the last twenty plus years. Judith fought each inch of the way to live by her brush; this still rings true today.

Also, her relationships with family and friends, such as that with Maria, don't actually make her efforts easier. For example, though Judith and Maria basically grew up together, they've grown apart and don't know how to find their way back to their friendship. Basically that desire, though there for both, takes a lower place to the other desires of their hearts, as our friendships so often do. I enjoyed watching the ebb and flow of this friendship to its conclusion in the book. Maria was the harder of the two characters to relate to (for me), due to her crushing guilt over everything-everything, but she felt also very true, historically speaking, and I enjoyed rooting for her to stand tall and shed the guilt cloak.

Now what was different for me about this book (that I really enjoyed) is that—though there was a love interest or two—that is certainly not the point of the novel. The focal point is truly about two women trying to live (or find) their dreams in a man's world. Also the world and art came alive with the descriptions. Great job, Carrie! Highly recommend.

OH—one more weird life thing. My maiden name is Snelling. This is the first book I've ever read that ever had that name in it. Family lore says it's a "black Dutch" name. Also, that Grandad's branch were descendants of William of Orange (female who didn't inherit, in America before the Civil War). Grandad's middle name is Orange so ????? maybe? Anyway, it was fun to read a book with both those names in it, placed in the right part of the word. ?
