



Merchant of Venice

Venetian-born Rosalba Carriera popularized pastel as a medium for serious portraiture rather than for mere preparatory sketches. She spent most of her long life fulfilling commissions for distinguished patrons from courts across Europe.



America, ca. 1730

Take a closer look

Pastel—pure, powdered pigment bound into sticks—lends itself to soft-edged forms with remarkably clear detail.

Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757) skillfully used the medium to achieve the figure's naturalistic flesh tones and glinting jeweled headband.

Something to talk about

Eighteenth-century artists often personified the continents by using female figures in characteristic clothing and accessories. Based on details like the feather hair ornament, how do you think Carriera and her European contemporaries stereotyped America and its inhabitants?

Who knew?

Carriera enjoyed such extensive fame that for subsequent women artists to be called a “modern Rosalba” was high praise. Renowned French portraitist Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun (1755–1842), also in the museum's collection, earned the moniker long after Carriera's death.

Rosalba Carriera, *America*, ca. 1730; Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 16½ x 13 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Purchased with funds donated by Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

