

European Heritage Days – Women's contribution

European Heritage Days have helped raise awareness of Europe's rich and diverse heritage. Yet, have they promoted women's contribution to our common heritage sufficiently or highlighted enough the female dimension of the aim to promote diversity?

European Heritage Days – A shared experience?

Initiated in 1985 by the Council of Europe, European Heritage Days have been organised jointly with the European Commission since 1999. Every year thousands of events around a September weekend raise awareness of Europe's cultural richness and diversity. For 35 years, the celebration has also aimed *inter alia* to counter racism and xenophobia, and encourage greater tolerance. However rich its thematic coverage, it has left some questions unanswered, such as: Does cultural diversity include women's contribution to arts and crafts and their paths to artistic achievement? Does tolerance include openness to women's perception of the world and its artistic rendition? Are works by female artists preserved, shown to the public and included in educational curricula in order to set an example and inspire future generations of artists?

Cultural heritage: A mix of contributions by men and women

In French, the word for heritage is *patrimoine*, reinforcing the idea that heritage has male roots. In response to this age-old notion, a movement – 'Les journées du [matrimoine](#)' – was launched in France in 2015, to draw attention to the cultural heritage produced by female artists through the ages, to promote the image of women as subjects not objects of artistic endeavour, and to encourage girls to follow in the footsteps of these talented women. In the context of the movement, a huge amount of effort has been put into revealing a host of works by female artists – [painters](#), [composers](#), pioneer [photographers](#), [filmmakers](#) – showing women as creators, rather than just muses or performers of men's works, and allowing the public to enjoy the full diversity of Europe's cultural heritage from both male and female angles.

European efforts to promote cultural heritage by female artists

During the European Heritage Days in 2018, the UK honoured the [100th anniversary](#) of women's voting rights through various exhibitions and events devoted to the suffragettes who fought for equal political rights for women, paving their way to equality in other domains.

From January to March 2019, Europeana, a website displaying cultural heritage items from around 4 000 institutions across Europe, hosted a [Women's Season](#) event. It put the spotlight on women's artistic and scientific achievements throughout history. The EU-funded project includes a section on 'Art by [female artists](#)', from the 16th century to modern times. Finding a monument by a woman is more difficult than finding a monument of a woman. An August 2020 Europeana blogpost, 'Sculpture trail: statues by [female sculptors](#) in Dublin', features the works of three women in a domain often considered a man's world.

The European Parliament's September 2015 own-initiative report on [Empowering girls](#) through education in the EU highlighted the need for measures to encourage the promotion of women's cultural production and the dissemination of their artistic and intellectual works. Combating structural discrimination experienced by women in this domain, fostering balanced representation of women and men in public artistic and cultural life, providing financial support and taking positive action could contribute to eliminating such inequalities. In its proposal for a [regulation](#) on the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 the Commission highlighted that the regulation aspires to ensure equality between men and women. In its [resolution](#) on the Commission proposal, the European Parliament stressed the need to 'promote female talents and to circulate their works in order to support women's artistic careers'. Highlighting female artists' contribution to European heritage could support these ambitions.

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