The Triumvirate: Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto

Of the three painters who dominated Venetian art in the sixteenth century, Titian (Tiziano Vecellio, ca. 1488-1576) was by far the oldest. Universally admired, even by Vasari, despite the latter’s bias against colore in favor of disegno (drawing), he was the first Italian artist to garner a truly international reputation, becoming the chosen painter of a papal family and two emperors. And yet Titian began his career firmly rooted in the thriving local scene. The Metropolitan has two damaged but beautiful early Titians that introduce us directly to the exciting changes occurring in Venetian painting in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Both show Titian’s immediate grasp of the unique qualities in the paintings of Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione, his teacher and collaborator, respectively, as well as the preeminent artists working in Venice when the young Titian arrived in the city from Pieve di Cadore, his provincial hometown in the Dolomites. The first is a *Madonna and Child* (fig. 4) set in a landscape, a popular theme among this group of painters. The boldness of

4: Titian, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1510. Oil on wood, overall 18 x 22 in. (45.7 x 55.9 cm). The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7-15)
the colors, the pyramidal arrangement centered on the Madonna’s broad lap, and the trees rising up from behind (a motif also found in some of his early drawings) are all characteristic of the works with which Titian made his reputation about 1510. The thoughtful but assured manner in which the artist considered his composition is evident in the energetic underdrawing, revealed by infrared reflectography (fig. 5). First Titian brushed in the Madonna and Child sitting in an upright posture, with the baby’s chubby body seen clearly at right. His original idea was thus similar to many such compositions by Bellini, including the Metropolitan’s *Madonna and Child* (fig. 6) from the 1480s. Titian then shifted the Child to the left, into a reclining position, with the Virgin bent over him in a tender gesture. At this stage the two gazed at each other, and the Virgin wore a higher-cut gown. In the composition as finally painted, though, the baby is looking away from his mother, which somewhat lessens the affective connection between them, and the artist has also lowered the bodice of her gown and tucked a diaphanous veil into it.
The second early Titian, *Portrait of a Man* (fig. 7), remains a haunting image even though it has been cut down at the bottom and its surface is abraded (visible in the thin, poorly defined areas of the beard, hair, and gloved hand). The connoisseur Bernard Berenson was a great advocate of the picture when he examined it in 1912, but he attributed it to Giorgione (1477–1510), the short-lived, somewhat enigmatic artist who, according to Vasari, brought Venice into the most modern phase of art with his subtle, tonal approach. Writing to the art dealer Joseph Duveen, Berenson was unequivocal: “I know [the painting is by Giorgione] quite as well, and am quite as ready to prove it as that I am ready to prove that you are Joe Duveen.” He based his opinion on comparisons with a group of known portraits by Giorgione—such as the *Portrait of a Young Man* in Budapest (Szépművészeti Múzeum)—that exude the same poetic melancholy that suffuses the Metropolitan’s canvas. These portraits seem to express something about the state of the sitter’s soul—perhaps his longings for love, friendship, or poetry?—and in so doing diverge from what had been, up to that time, the genre’s more strictly commemorative function and appearance.

Although the consensus among art historians today is that the Metropolitan’s *Portrait of a Man* is by Titian, the artist’s first portraits were undoubtedly inspired by Giorgione’s remarkably innovative approach to the genre (which in turn was most likely indebted to Leonardo and his own groundbreaking works). The painting fits in comfortably among a group of outstanding portraits—really his bread-and-butter commissions—Titian undertook in the second decade of the sixteenth century, in which he carried forward Giorgione’s ideas. Men are typically shown to the elbow or waist (originally our portrait probably included the sitter’s right arm), they often wear or hold gloves, and they are set against neutral backgrounds. With rare exceptions, their clothing is subdued in color but rich in fabric detail, including delicately painted white chemises about the neck. Here the sitter is presented from the side, as in the famous *Man with a Quilted Sleeve* (the so-called *Ariosto*) (fig. 8). In that portrait the young man stares boldly out from this pose at the viewer, but in the Metropolitan’s painting, as in most of Titian’s other early portraits, his gaze is averted, resulting in an
introspective quality remarked upon by many viewers. Although none of the sitters can be identified, their shared youth and elegance, and the fact that they appear to be about Titian’s age at the time they would have sat for him, have led some scholars to speculate that they were all part of the same social set and were perhaps personally known to the artist.

Titian’s reputation spread so quickly that by the 1520s he was being awarded the most prestigious commissions not only in Venice but elsewhere in northern Italy, including the Ferrara mythologies discussed earlier. However, it was the favor he found at the Hapsburg courts of Emperors Charles V (r. 1519–56) and his successor, Philip II (r. 1556–98), that catapulted him into a uniquely privileged position beginning in the 1530s. From that time on his portraits are principally of distinguished citizens, who are thus more readily identified. A fascinating example involves two portraits of the Milanese prelate Filippo Archinto (ca. 1500–1558) (figs. 9, 10). Both canvases remained with the Archinto family in Milan until 1863, when they were sold in Paris and were first described as being by Titian. The two are distinguished by the transparent white veil (or curtain) that obscures much of Archinto’s face and body in the Philadelphia version (fig. 10), an exceedingly odd detail that echoes the unusual circumstances of Archinto’s life and career.

Born into Milanese nobility, Archinto received a doctorate in law and later carried out diplomatic missions from Milan to the Hapsburg court. On the strength of Archinto’s skills and political connections, Pope Paul III (r. 1534–49) made him governor and then vicar-general of Rome and, in 1536, bishop of Borgo San Sepolcro. Archinto became a deeply engaged ecclesiastic; he took part in the Council of Trent as a member

9. (opposite) Titian. Filippo Archinto (born ca. 1500, died 1558), Archbishop of Milan, mid-1550s. Oil on canvas, 46 1/2 x 37 in. (118.1 x 94 cm). Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.650)

of the papal delegation and was a strong advocate of the Jesuit order. His “troubles” began after Paul III’s successor, Pope Julius III (r. 1550–55), dispatched him as papal nuncio to Venice in 1553. Two years later, Julius’s successor, Paul IV (r. 1555–59), became infuriated over what he saw as Archinto’s inappropriate bestowal of a benefice and had him removed. Even without the necessary authority Archinto continued to prosecute heretics around Venice, so his nomination as the archbishop of Milan in 1556 came as no small surprise (it has been speculated that Paul wanted to keep him as far from Rome as possible). The Milanese, delighted at the elevation of their native son, petitioned Philip II (as ruler of Milan and Lombardy) for his approval, which arrived only in 1558, after being bogged down in the Spanish bureaucracy. What followed reduced Archinto’s turn of fortune almost to farce.

Philip’s belated sanction reached Milan when the governor was away from the city, and the man called upon to enforce the nomination in his absence, Marc’ Antonio Pattanella, was the administrator of the church and hence also the acting archbishop. Pattanella and Milan’s vicar-general (whom he had appointed) were both determined to protect their positions from the reform-minded Archinto, and they helped persuade the Milanese governor to exile the prelate. In March 1558 Paul IV sent Archinto the pallium, the cloth that symbolized his episcopal authority, but Archinto died in the neighboring city of Bergamo later that spring without ever having occupied his office.

The veil in the Philadelphia portrait is most likely a reference to these machinations. As the scholar Richard Betts has astutely observed, it probably alludes to a passage from Saint Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the zealous apostle, distracted by the community, becomes all the more determined to preach the truth to them: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel . . .” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). This interpretation could date the Philadelphia portrait to 1558 or later, under the assumption that Archinto’s family or supporters commissioned it following his death, but the exact relationship between the two versions, as well as their authorship and sequence, has been the subject of much debate.

The quality and care with which the Metropolitan’s portrait was painted favor that canvas as Titian’s first depiction of Archinto. If this is the case, it was probably executed while the latter was in Venice, between 1553 and 1556 (we are not sure when he left), and could have presumably sat for the artist. The basic pose derives from Titian’s 1543 portrait of Paul III (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples), while the brilliantly sketchy treatment of the white gown, the textures of Archinto’s mozzetto, or cape, and the subtle modeling of the head and hands can be likened to Titian’s important Venetian altarpiece Saint John the Almsgiver (San Giovanni Elemosinario), now usually dated to about 1550. This sequence of events is important because it might account for the less refined appearance and somewhat rougher, even cruder technique of the veiled version. We can imagine, for example, Titian returning to the subject some years after first having painted Archinto’s likeness. Now, though, he is concerned above all with the visual challenges of depicting half of the prelate’s body as if seen through translucent fabric—and indeed that area is where the most successful aspects of the Philadelphia painting are—and thus he perhaps leaves the less novel portions for studio assistants to finish.

Titian’s crowning achievements were, arguably, the great mythologies of his later career, some of which he referred to as his “poesie.” They were conceived for his grandest patrons, including members of the Farnese family and the Hapsburg court, but versions of them found fascinating afterlife on the open market. These are the masterpieces whose hold on our imagination has continued unbroken and unabated for centuries, exemplified by Velázquez’s quotation from the Rape of Europa. The Metropolitan owns two important poesie, one depicting Venus and her lover, Adonis, and the other showing the same goddess reclining before a lute player.

In the Metropolitan’s Venus and Adonis (fig. 11), we see the goddess implore the mortal Adonis not to go off to the hunt, where, she dreads, he will be killed by wild animals. Titian depicts their final, lingering embrace, as Adonis breaks away from Venus and departs with his dogs for his certain death. The story of the doomed couple is told in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, but the classical text evidently was not Titian’s immediate inspiration since it does not include a precise moment when the two lovers are
II.
Titian. *Venus and Adonis*. Oil on canvas, 42 x 52 1/2 in. (106.7 x 133.4 cm). The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.16)
together and Adonis defies the goddess. Instead, the artist may have turned to a recent retelling of the tale by the Spanish writer Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (1503-1575) called the *Fable of Adonis, Hippomenes and Atalanta*, published in Venice in 1553, which captured in verse the poignancy of the moment of departure and Venus’s desperate pleas for her lover to stay by her side.

In a 1554 letter to Philip II, Titian discussed his representation of the Venus and Adonis myth in a manner that implies the subject held no specific erudite significance for him. Referring to the canvas he had just sent to Madrid (fig. 12)—a *Venus and Adonis* closely related to the Metropolitan’s version—he emphasized its formal qualities, particularly the ways these attributes were meant to delight the viewer. The delivery of that canvas had followed hard upon that of another mythology, *Danaë* (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), which shows the daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, reclining in her bed under a shower of gold. Comparing the two, Titian justified his decision to reverse one of the female nudes, stressing that he intended for Danaë to be seen from the front and Venus from the back: “I wanted in this other ‘poesia’ to vary [the pose] and show it from the other side.” That point raises several issues of artistic skill. The most interesting relates to the much-discussed Renaissance notion of *paragone*, or the comparison of the relative merits of painting and sculpture. Inherent to Titian’s strategy is the debate over whether painting could give as complete an experience “in the round” as sculpture, and the attendant challenge to the artist’s ability to present his protagonist from the back in a visually satisfying manner. In his appraisal of the work, the dramatist and theorist Lodovico Dolce (a friend and admirer of the artist) wrote that Titian’s Venus, whose figure he found to be of unsurpassable beauty, seemed almost alive:
“There is no-one, however acute of sight and judgment, who would not think it alive; no-one so enfeebled by the years, or of such stony character, that all the blood in their veins would not be set alight, melted and moved.” Other contemporaries, struck by the luster of Venus’s back and her passionate embrace of the young Adonis, generally agreed that this was the most erotic of Titian’s poesie. The Spanish ambassador to Venice, Francisco de Vargas, pronounced it beautiful but “too lascivious.”

Titian may have invented the basic composition of Venus and Adonis in a painting for the Farnese family (now lost), but in later renditions (at least eight more emerged from his studio) he employed two slightly different arrangements. The Prado’s Venus and Adonis (the one painted for Philip II) is rather square; Cupid lies asleep at left, there is an overturned bronze jug in the lower left corner, and Adonis restrains three dogs on leashes. The Metropolitan’s more rectangular canvas is akin to the Venus and Adonis in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., with its pair of dogs and lively Cupid holding a dove, but no two versions are exactly alike. Key details such as the drape of Adonis’s tunic and the surrounding landscape have been rethought and quietly reconfigured in each one. These paintings bring us into the world of Titian’s thriving studio in the later decades of his career. Having invented a brilliant and clearly very popular image, he was loath to use it only once. Even if a work was first conceived for a particularly important commission, variations on it could be sold later, even to other noble patrons.

The extant variations on the Venus and Adonis theme also reflect different degrees of participation by the master. We can surmise that the basic composition was transferred from one canvas to another using as a reference a squared drawing or painting that had stayed in the workshop (or, possibly, it was transferred mechanically using a cartoon). Then, to a greater or lesser degree, the master himself worked on the surface, striving for certain effects. In the Prado’s painting, for example, the Venus is notably sculptural in appearance—in fact, her figure is based on a Roman relief Titian would have known—and the work as a whole is rather tightly painted. In the Metropolitan’s canvas Titian achieved just the opposite outcome; his brush moved swiftly across the surface, especially in the grass and the foliage, defining the highlighted edges of the drapery and the fur of the dogs. Most striking is the tender depiction of Adonis’s face and curls as he glances back at his beloved. In some of the other versions the character of this exchange is comparatively mechanical, a distinction that helps to separate works painted with assistance from the studio from those that more fully engaged the master’s attention.

When the Museum’s second poesie, Venus and the Lute Player (fig. 13)—known as the Holkham Venus after the stately home in England where it had hung since the eighteenth century—first came to the Metropolitan in 1936, it entered the collection as one of Titian’s most famous creations. The director of the Museum, H. B. Wehle, lauded it as possibly the most important object ever purchased by the institution. It shows a sensuous blond Venus reclining on a couch or bed, crowned by Cupid and serenaded by a courtier plucking a lute. The recorder held by the goddess in her left hand, the viola da gamba propped against the couch at right, and the sheet music scattered about evoke their music-making and, possibly, the implied presence of another performer. An expansive and luxuriant landscape with a satyr playing the bagpipes and a circle of dancers extends behind her.

Like Venus and Adonis, this composition is known in numerous versions, in this case five. In each of them, Venus reclines in the same position; tracings made of the surfaces of three of the known versions show that the silhouettes of her lower torso and legs are almost identical. The musician is positioned at left in all five paintings; in three he is an organist, and in two he is a lute player (the other Lute Player [fig. 14], now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, has an equally illustrious provenance). They were probably executed over a long period of time and possibly derive from a Venus that Titian sent to Charles V in 1545 (now lost). The Venus with an Organist and a Dog now in the Prado (fig. 15) may have been commissioned on the occasion of a wedding, given that Venus wears a wedding ring and the suitor figure (the musician) seems to be an individualized portrait. Whatever its exact origin, the imagery became associated with Titian’s studio and subsequently enjoyed broad appeal among his clients.

Numerous attempts to interpret the imagery of these voluptuous paintings have reached widely varying conclusions. Where some see unalloyed eroticism, others see a chaste
23. Titian and Workshop. Venus and the Lute Player, ca. 1565-70. Oil on canvas, 65 x 82 1/2 in. (165.1 x 209.6 cm). Munsey Fund, 1936 (36.29)
Neoplatonic allegory. As scholars have rightly pointed out, the addition of a musician to the earlier theme of Venus and Cupid opens up important narrative considerations of love, music, and the power of the suitor’s gaze. No one doubts that the musician is enamored of Venus’s beauty, but what, exactly, is the quality of his love—is it profane or spiritual? Contemporary love poetry as well as the more abstract philosophy of the period stressed that Beauty was best understood through two senses: sight and sound. The Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino distinguished between two kinds of love, one of earthly beauty and the other of heavenly beauty, with the latter best intuited through those two senses. Even as worldly a writer as Baldassare Castiglione, author of the widely read Courtier (1528), could talk of the soul feeding on the sweetest food provided by the eyes and ears. And yet it seems oddly apparent to a modern viewer that Titian’s lover is Petrarchan, not Platonic—he is using music to woo his beloved, and he hopes that his feelings will be requited. Indeed, the seductive power of music is itself a principal theme of the picture, a reading reinforced by the satyr in the background accompanying his merry dancing fellows on the pipes. We should consider, then, what art historian David Rosand has been right to emphasize: that the two aspects of love were not always mutually exclusive, the very point being made by the interlocutor in Castiglione’s Courtier who remarks, “the soul cannot be separated from the body.”

As with the Venus and Adonis group, the degree and intensity of Titian’s personal participation in these paintings varied. It is worthwhile recalling a description of the master’s studio practice related by his younger contemporary Palma il Giovane (ca. 1548–1628) recorded in a 1660 treatise by the Venetian painter and historian Marco Boschini (1613–1678). According to Palma, Titian first blocked in his composition in broad masses (Vasari said he seemed to use brushes as big as brooms at this stage). Then, Boschini adds, “Having constructed these precious foundations he used to turn his pictures to the wall and leave them there without looking at them, sometimes for several months. When he wanted to apply his brush again he would examine them with the utmost rigor, as if they were his mortal enemies, to see if he could find any faults; and if he discovered anything that did not
fully conform to his intentions he would treat his picture like a good surgeon would his patient. . . . Thus he gradually covered those quintessential forms with living flesh, bringing them by many stages to a state in which they lacked only the breath of life. He never painted a figure all at once. . . . And as Palma himself informed me, it is true to say that in the last stages he painted more with his fingers than his brushes.”

This passage provides some critical insights into the appearance of the Metropolitan’s *Venus and the Lute Player*. Again, we can imagine Titian in his studio blocking in the basic composition (or, in this case, more likely a studio assistant using an existing cartoon to delineate the positions of the figures). The canvas is then turned toward the wall. When it is eventually turned back around, Titian begins to make changes and to work up the surface of the painting. X-radiography reveals, for example, that at this stage of the *Venus* now in Cambridge (fig. 14), he changed the positions of both Venus’s and Cupid’s heads. In the Holkham *Venus*, he must have paid particular attention to the subtle modeling of the nude goddess’s flesh, the head of the lute player, and the landscape, all vibrant and luminous passages that clearly show the effects of those final finger strokes praised by Palma.

At the same time, other areas of the painting were clearly never finished, or at least did not benefit from the same scrutiny. These include the viola da gamba, left as an essentially flat shape; the drapery beneath Venus, on which she “floats” rather than weightily reclines; and the noteless sheets of music. Even more out of character, and so discordant with the painterly rest of the picture, is the punctilious description of the heads of both Venus and Cupid. Indeed, X-radiography shows that Venus’s head, down to the string of pearls, was executed with a different preparation and technique. This odd discrepancy has led some scholars to conclude that the painting was worked over for a number of years by the master, was left incomplete at his death, and was finished by another hand—a person who completed only those areas absolutely necessary for its sale. The painting is thus paradigmatic of Titian’s technique in his later years, both as a *pittura di macchia*—a work painted with bold, dashed-off strokes that were meant to be read from a distance—and as proof of the painstaking effort required to bring these seemingly spontaneous pictures to fruition.
During Titian’s enormously long working life, which began about 1508 and continued until his death in 1576, he helped establish possibilities for an artistic vocation that would have once been thought impossible. As his career came to an end, these particular shoes as a painter of international repute—and above all as the esteemed recipient of grand commissions from foreign princes—were filled in part by Paolo Veronese (1528–1588), that unique colorist whose works were by that time filling churches and villas throughout the Veneto. Leaving his native Verona between 1553 and 1555, Veronese had little trouble finding civic and ecclesiastical commissions in Venice. He was so successful that two decades later, when Rudolf II, the Hapsburg emperor in Prague, wished to commission mythological paintings that could rival those by Titian in his uncle Philip’s collection in Madrid, Veronese was the natural choice. Rudolf may have ordered, possibly through an imperial agent active in Venice, a series of four ceiling paintings (the evidence for the commission is inconclusive). The resulting allegories of Love and Marriage (National Gallery, London) illustrate the brilliant illusionism and steep foreshortening that by the mid-1570s were considered Veronese’s greatest strengths. Veronese studied his approach to the difficult site in a fluid pen, ink, and wash sketch (fig. 16), a bravura demonstration of each of these signature effects. The figures move in and out of space along
diagonals that would ultimately organize the space of the paintings. At the upper left of the sheet are repeated studies for the nude reclining man being chastised by Cupid from the painting known as Scorn; his head projects toward the viewer as his foreshortened torso and legs rapidly recede into depth. These are followed, in a clockwise movement, by compositional ideas for Happy Union, Unfaithfulness, and Respect.

Beginning about 1576, the year of Rudolf’s coronation as emperor, and continuing for the next six years or so, Veronese sent mythological paintings to Prague. Several early sources mention a “Venus and Mars,” but the first sure notice of the Metropolitan’s breathtaking Mars and Venus United by Love (fig. 17) is a 1621 inventory of the imperial holdings. Like so many paintings from that great collection, it was removed from Prague by the Swedish army when it sacked the city in 1648, and by 1652 it was the property of Queen Christina of Sweden, who lived in Rome. After passing through several Roman collections the painting eventually made its way to the Orléans collection before coming to England in 1798 and, later, to New York. Two majestic allegories by Veronese that are now in the Frick Collection were also sent to Rudolf, as was a Hermes, Herse and Aglauros (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) that is sometimes considered a pendant to the Metropolitan’s canvas.

At once sumptuous and refined, Mars and Venus United by Love displays Veronese’s expert use of color in its almost dazzling luminosity. The basic subject seems clear enough: Cupid is tying the plump white leg of the goddess of love to that of the god of war, thus “uniting” them in love, a state of affairs also implied by the fact that the pair is either disrobed (Venus’s delicate white chemise is slung over the wall behind her) or disrobing (Mars, although helmetless, is in full dress armor, with a blue garment caught on his wrist). Further interpretations of the scene have been based on some of its interesting details. For example, another Cupid, viewed from above by a herm in the form of a grinning satyr, restrains Mars’s steed with the god’s own sword. Perhaps the oddest detail is the drop of milk Venus conspicuously presses from her breast. Fifty years ago the scholar Edgar Wind proposed that the horse being held back is Passion Restraint and that the drop of milk may be an allusion to Chastity transformed by Love into Charity (often symbolized by the lactans motif).

Whether or not Wind’s readings are precisely correct, it does seem certain that the composition’s principal theme is the transformative power of love, which calms the usually belligerent Mars (so evident in his virile facial features), joins man to woman, and leads to harmony and goodwill. Above all, however, the painting extols the sensual. At the very center is Mars’s lavish satin cloak, shimmering in the light, and behind it the tour-de-force depiction of the satyr supporting a broken entablature. Although nude, Venus sets off her beauty by wearing jewelry—strands of pearls in her hair and around her throat, with pearl earrings, too; exquisite gold bracelets; and a slender cinched belt draped across her chest that resembles the strap of a quiver. The foliage is luxuriant, and billowy clouds race across a blue-green sky. No matter how grand the scale or opulent the detail, though, Veronese’s attention to beauty delights rather than awes.

Veronese was adept at all of the principal genres of painting, and his portraits benefit from this skilled restraint. A particularly effective example is his portrait of Alessandro Vittoria (fig. 18), one of Venice’s greatest sculptors and Veronese’s collaborator in several major commissions. An avid collector, Vittoria (1525-1608) had portraits of himself made at various periods in his life. Five of them—two large portraits and three smaller ones, done at different times and by different hands, but all by the most eminent portraitists of the time—were recorded in the inventory of his house and studio made after his death. Hung in the “room beside the small studio toward the garden,” they can almost be considered “public relations” images, as each one that has come down to us shows the committed artist cradling a piece of his own sculpture. In an early example by Giovanni Battista Moroni (fig. 19), purchased by the collector Bartolomeo Della Nave from Vittoria’s estate, we see a young Vittoria (he seems to be in his twenties) holding a modeled torso; the artist has rolled back his sleeves, obviously ready for work. Veronese’s portrait, in contrast, depicts a decidedly older man in a less workmanlike attitude. Muted and subdued in tone, the painting likely dates to the latter portion of Veronese’s career, perhaps about 1580, when the artist seems to have been influenced by the sober portraits of Jacopo Bassano (ca. 1510-1592) and when the sitter would have been fifty-five. Set before Vittoria on

17. (opposite) Veronese. Mars and Venus United by Love. Oil on canvas, 81 x 63 3/4 in. (205.7 x 161 cm). John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1920 (10.189)
a carpet-covered table is a model of one of his most famous inventions, the serpentine “Saint Sebastian.” This refined figure first appeared as an element of an altarpiece in the Venetian church of San Francesco della Vigna in 1563–64; it was cast as an independent bronze (fig. 20) in 1566 and was cast again about nine years later. The convincing resemblance of the gesso statuette in the portrait to the famous bronze should settle any doubts about the sitter’s identity, which has been questioned by some recent authors. More puzzling is the unidentified but probably antique fragmentary sculpture of a torso at left. Rendered in carefully modulated shades of grays, it is shown on its side, with the truncated neck aimed out toward the viewer. Other notable Venetian portraits of sculptors and collectors, such as Lorenzo Lotto’s Andrea Odoni (Hampton Court, Surrey) or Titian’s...
Veronese. Boy with a Greyhound, possibly 1570s. Oil on canvas, 68⅞ x 40⅜ in. (173.7 x 101.9 cm). H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.105)
Jacopo Strada (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), contain similar fragments, but rarely do they assert such a strong physical or compositional presence.

Veronese reached the height of his illusionistic brilliance and inventiveness in his fresco decorations for the villas of the Veneto. In Boy with a Greyhound (fig. 21), a full-length portrait given to the Museum by the esteemed collectors Louisine and H. O. Havemeyer, we glimpse a similar feat of visual legerdemain. The young man—tentatively identified as a member of the Colleoni family who married into one of the twelve branches of the Martinengos, a sprawling noble clan of Brescia—is shown in front of a wall that opens onto a landscape with a river and a bridge. The illusionism of the image, which invites the viewer to step into the scene and walk by the boy’s side through to the river beyond, can be compared to Veronese’s famous frescoes in Palladio’s Villa Barbaro at Maser, near Treviso, where children seem to peek out from behind doors and women to peer down from balconies. A similar fresco, probably by a follower of Veronese, in the Villa Lambert (formerly Chiericati) in Longa, near Vicenza, depicts a young man with a hunting dog illusionistically stepping through a door to greet the viewer.

The Metropolitan’s portrait of the young nobleman may originally have hung (perhaps across from a pendant) to the side of a door or some other architectural element that would have heightened the feigned three-dimensionality. Restoration undertaken in the 1980s has revealed how Veronese’s adroit handling of paint simulates the fall of light across the striped doublet and the sinewy modeling of the canine musculature (X-radiography also shows how Veronese, who was partial to dogs, rethought the position of this handsome beast). The graying of the once blue sky is the unfortunate effect of using smalt, a fugitive pigment. The faded color actually recalls the poignant story of the painting’s acquisition, related by Louisine Havemeyer in her Memoirs (1961). When she and her husband first visited the decrepit Martinengo villa outside Brescia, she recalled, they were initially disappointed but later came around to buy the picture for a small sum. In the end they were quite satisfied with their purchase. “The gray villa will grow grayer,” wrote Louisine, “its walls will crumble and even the gates may fall from their hinges, but its art will ever survive. Veronese’s ‘Boy and Dog’ is one of my most admired pictures.”

One of the Museum’s most significant recent additions in Italian painting is a late religious work by Veronese, Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Prison, the Holy Ghost Above (fig. 22). When the young Princess Catherine confounded the Roman emperor Maxentius (r. 306-12) and his philosophers with her arguments in favor of Christianity, Maxentius condemned her to twelve starving days in prison. In her isolation she was comforted by the empress and by a white dove, sent by Christ to bring her celestial food. Her later martyrdom by beheading followed an unsuccessful attempt to break her body over knife-studded wheels. Here we see Catherine in the darkness of her prison cell, with fragments of the wheel, her attribute, under her feet. One hand already holds the palm of martyrdom, while the other reaches up to the celestial dove. The painting makes an immediate visual impact with its flash of supernatural light zigzagging over the brocade of Catherine’s gown and the beautifully foreshortened, tender dove about to alight. This nocturnal scene, recently rediscovered, was painted in the 1580s, late in Veronese’s life. It joins a handful of other sacred works by the artist in which darkness is pierced by a sudden electric light, such as the 1584 masterpiece Christ in the Garden Supported by Two Angels (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan). In its dark, dramatic tension, this painting stands apart from Veronese’s playful mythologies and brilliantly rounds off the Metropolitan’s collection of works by this preeminent artist.

22. (overleaf)
Veronese, Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Prison, the Holy Ghost Above, ca. 1580-85. Oil on canvas, 45 ½ x 33 in. (116.2 x 83.8 cm). Anonymous Gift, 1999 (1999.225)
The rather stern and fleshy middle-aged woman portrayed here was once thought to be Paolo Veronese's wife, who was presumed to have sat for her husband. The portrait is the subject of one of Louisine Havemeyer's most evocative anecdotes, in which she describes first seeing it along with her husband, her sister, and the American Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt: "My sister, who thought beauty essential in a portrait, did not like it and made fun of the full chest and tightly drawn bodice, while my husband seemed inclined to share her views; nevertheless Miss Cassatt held firmly to her opinion and studied the picture carefully; she knew a work of art demanded truth as well as beauty." Cassatt argued that they should look past the woman's plainness to the pictorial qualities of the brocade and lace, and to the painter's consummate understanding of light and shadow. She was persuasive, and the Havemeyers made the purchase. Soon, however, critics began to suggest that the work lacked Veronese's usual refinement and that it was actually by Montemezzano, a gifted follower of the master and a fellow native of Verona.
Among the supreme triumvirate of painters active in Venice in the sixteenth century, Jacopo Robusti, known as Tintoretto (1518–1594), stimulated the most controversy and came in for the most criticism from his peers. His strikingly rapid, seemingly spontaneous brushwork and the occasional looseness of his compositions prompted Vasari’s stinging rebukes that his work was “done more by chance and vehemence than with judgment and design” and that he had the habit of “working haphazardly and without design.” The latter accusation was particularly unjust; in fact, Tintoretto studied his compositions carefully by staging them in miniature, first making wax and clay figurines of the protagonists and then placing them in a box and lighting it to observe various effects of chiaroscuro. He was also an ardent student of Michelangelo’s work and collected casts after his sculpture (see fig. 26). We know that Tintoretto wanted to combine Michelangelo’s disegno with Titian’s colore, but in the end it was the quality of prestezza, or quickness, in his work that was most admired by those contemporaries who were receptive to his unique style.

Tintoretto, who never traveled, was tied to Venice and the types of commissions the city could offer him: altarpieces and other sacred subjects for churches and confraternity halls (known in Venice as scuole), civic projects and mythologies, and portraits. The Metropolitan has fine examples of most of these categories, affording the visitor a good perspective on Tintoretto’s broad range and highly individual character. The grandest of them, at more than thirteen feet long, is surely The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes (fig. 23), which depicts the Gospel story of Christ feeding a multitude in the desert. This is how the central episode of the miracle, which follows a moment of skepticism on the part of the apostles, is related in Matthew (14:17–19): “They said to him, ‘We have only five loaves here and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” The large and long horizontal canvas Tintoretto worked on is characteristic of the laterali used to decorate Venetian chapels, especially those maintained by confraternities devoted to the Eucharist, known as Scuole del Sacramento. A view of one such chapel in the church of San Trovaso (fig. 24) shows two similar canvases lining the lateral walls of the narrow,
Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti; Venetian, 1577–1594). *The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes*, ca. 1545-50. Oil on canvas, 61 x 160 ½ in. (154.9 x 407.7 cm). Francis L. Leland Fund, 1913 (13.75)


25. Tintoretto, *Christ Washing His Disciples’ Feet*, ca. 1550. Oil on canvas, 61 x 160 ½ in. (154.9 x 407.7 cm). Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Gift by general subscription, 1959 (58/51)

Deep space. We do not know the original location of Tintoretto’s *Miracle*, but it may have been owned by Sir Joshua Reynolds along with an identically sized *Christ Washing His Disciples’ Feet* (fig. 25) now in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (one of a number of versions of this subject, the finest of which is now in the Prado, Madrid). The two were paired from at least the mid-nineteenth century, suggesting that they once faced each other across a chapel. Both subjects clearly allude to the sacrament of the Eucharist, the *Miracle* with its loaves of bread and the *Washing* as a symbol of purification before taking communion. However, in his *Life of Tintoretto* (1642), the seventeenth-century artist and writer Carlo Ridolfi mentions Tintoretto paintings on these very subjects hanging in the patrician house of Senators Carlo and Domenico Ruzini, and the Ruzini family still owned works on the same subjects (presumably the same paintings) in 1787. Thus there is a possibility that the two hung in a grand palace rather than in a church.

Tintoretto’s composition of the *Miracle* can almost be described as balletic (one critic has written of the *senso chorale* of his works from the 1550s). Christ and his disciple, at the center, sway in opposite directions as they distribute
the loaves. They are ringed by a group of seated or reclining men and women with children (with many more people moving toward them from the rear). The figures sit or stand in exaggerated poses—bending, twisting, and leaning on their arms—that were perhaps inspired by Tintoretto’s study of Michelangelo, as evidenced in his drawings after the master (fig. 26), but Tintoretto has made them more elastic and less muscle-bound. The combination of the ethereal crowds, women with towering pearl headdresses, and loosely articulated figures recalls Tintoretto’s Moses Drawing Water from a Rock (Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt), a similar painting and the likely recipient of Lodovico Dolce’s comments in his Dialogo of 1557 criticizing the artist’s inaccurate portrayal of the desert locale in the service of his desire for an aesthetically pleasing setting. Both paintings were probably quite recent at the time, a period when Tintoretto’s workshop was busily engaged with official and ecclesiastical commissions alike.

Far more intimate in scale, and probably later in date (perhaps about 1570) is The Finding of Moses (fig. 27). The painting is so sketchy—the very embodiment of prestezza—that a debate has raged since the nineteenth century as to whether or not the canvas is actually finished. Writing in 1859, one of its earlier owners, George D. Leslie, R.A., mentions that both Sir Charles Eastlake (first director of the National Gallery, London) and the artist Sir Edwin Landseer admired it enormously: “Whether the picture is unfinished or not must remain a matter of interesting discussion. Many pictures by him are ‘unfinished’ judging by academic standards, but Tintoretto was not an academic artist.” Other critics have pondered whether the unusual style is an indication that the painting is actually by the artist’s son, Domenico (1560–1593). The striking “drawn” quality of the pharaoh’s daughter’s legs, for example, is very close to that of the ambitious modelli the younger artist made for some of his complex narratives (fig. 28). But Domenico, alas, was rarely able to translate the spontaneity of his chalk and gouache works on paper to his larger-scale paintings, which typically appear more finished and finicky.

Questions about the unfinishedness of The Finding of Moses have been followed by doubts about the subject matter. Most renderings of the familiar biblical story (Exodus 2:1–10) show the baby Moses, secreted in an ark of bulrushes, being discovered by pharaoh’s daughter and her maid. Here we must be witnessing a moment further on
in the text, when a nurse is found for the child (actually his own mother) and Moses is given to her. The background hunting scenes, painted with such brio, have no doubt contributed to the confusion surrounding the central subject, but they can perhaps be explained by a Venetian tradition that allowed for—or seemed to demand—the inclusion of secondary figures to enliven the composition. Veronese’s several canvases on the same theme also include hunters, hunting dogs, jesters, and other possible members of the royal entourage, while Tiepolo, in his grand development of the story (ca. 1736–38, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh), continues the tradition by including


halberdiers, dogs, and other marginal characters. One mythological alternative to the biblical reading of the Metropolitan’s painting is that it depicts the rescue of the newborn Jupiter from infanticide by nymphs devoted to his mother, Rhea (these nymphs, usually called the Corybantes, could thus be the figures at left carrying spears). Another similarly composed painting by Tintoretto (known only through photographs) has been identified as a depiction of that myth, but the theory falters in both cases because the goat Amalthea, almost always shown nursing the god, is absent. On balance, the unusual aspects of the imagery from Exodus are probably the outcome of Tintoretto’s characteristically undogmatic approach.

Arguably the most engaging work by Tintoretto in the Museum’s collection is Doge Alvise Mocenigo (1507–77) Presented to the Redeemer (fig. 29), a large modello for a votive painting in the Sala del Collegio in the Doge’s Palace (one of the artist’s major civic commissions). According to the sixteenth-century writer Francesco Sansovino, who penned several successful guides to Venice, a variety of meetings was held in this crucial sala, covering anything to do with “the sea, peace and war; correspondence with foreign sovereigns and relations with their ambassadors.” Destroyed by fire in 1574, the chamber was refurbished with an orchestrated program of political imagery alluding to various aspects of Venetian power and prestige.

Alvise Mocenigo (r. 1570–77) was doge of Venice at a crucial juncture in the city’s history,

during the Battle of Lepanto in October 1571—an important naval victory celebrated in a painting by Veronese hung above the doge’s throne—through the virulent plague of 1576 that killed scores of the Venetian citizenry, including Titian. It was Mocenigo who vowed that when the pestilence had finally abated he would build a church on the Giudecca dedicated to the Redeemer, which we know today as Palladio’s majestic Redentore. Tintoretto’s votive painting is almost certainly an allusion to both of these prominent events in Mocenigo’s tenure. It shows the doge kneeling on steps in front of several intercessory saints. In the distance behind them we glimpse the *piazzetta*, with the ducal palace and Jacopo Sansovino’s magnificent Library, along with a number of ships, a reference to the crucial naval battle.

Tintoretto rarely made sketch models in oil such as the Metropolitan’s *modello*, but in this case—as brought to light by years of technical examination—the format served him well as a means to finesse compositional possibilities.
When the painting entered the Museum’s collection in 1910, the area to the left of the kneeling doge was thought to be inexplicably bare (fig. 30), and by the 1940s X-radiography had revealed several abandoned figures of other saints underneath the paint layer in this area, including Mark, the patron saint of Venice (fig. 31); one of them, viewed entirely from the rear, is moving up the steps toward the doge. These would have been presenting the doge to Christ, seen soaring in from the left.

Thirty years ago Metropolitan conservator Hubert von Sonnenberg undertook another technical examination of the painting and eventually carried out a restoration that yielded rather dramatic results. It uncovered the two partially painted figures seen in the X-radiograph floating above the doge (one still in the schematic form of a wax or clay model, which would seem to corroborate Ridolfi’s account of the artist’s working process). Clearly Tintoretto had struggled to position these figures so that they would not overwhelm the central protagonist, an issue he resolved in the final work (fig. 32) by raising the figure of Christ so that there is a natural progression of movement upward from the doge, through the saint, to the Redeemer. As von Sonnenberg discerningly observed, the confidence and élan of certain areas of the sketch—especially the underpainting of the figures seen in the X-radiograph, the painted figure of Christ and the music-making angel, and other details such as the crosier held aloft at right—proclaim Tintoretto’s direct involvement, but other passages, such as the rather dull architecture or even the charmless heads of the figures at right, may have been finished by a studio assistant.

The vibrancy of the preparation in those figures that were worked up by the master is what connects this odd but fascinating canvas to the more intimate Finding of Moses. Both paintings belonged to English collectors in the mid-nineteenth century, and both appealed to a similar sensibility. The modello, in fact, was once the property of the great writer and art historian John Ruskin, who, despite an occasional criticism of Tintoretto (like Michelangelo, he wrote, Tintoretto painted figures that were always “flying, falling, sinking, or biting”), admired the artist enormously and owned five paintings by him. He bought this one in Venice in 1853 and treasured it as an elderly man at his home in Brentwood, England.
Tintoretto’s finest portraits are gripping presentations of Venetian patricians and statesmen. This older gentleman, his face somewhat lined and his hair gray, looks out with his blue eyes in a penetrating stare. Although critics such as Bernard Berenson, followed by Federico Zeri, believed this work was painted rather early in Tintoretto’s career, it may be one of a number of extraordinary likenesses he executed about 1560, including the Portrait of Alvise Cornaro (Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence), which also shows an elderly man, and the Portrait of Giovanni Paolo Cornaro (Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent), dated 1561. In terms of the subtle torsions of pose and the carefully worked fall of light across the hands, faces, and dark garb of these sitters, they all reflect an awareness of Titian’s later portraiture.