

Press release

September 17, 2009–  
January 4, 2010

Napoleon Hall



Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian (1488/90–1576), *Venus with a Mirror*, Oil on canvas, 1.25 m x 1.05 m, Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.34, National Gallery of Art, Washington © Courtesy Board of Trustees of The National Gallery of Art, Washington

**This exhibition is organized by the Musée du Louvre and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**

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## Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice

A major event at the Louvre: powerful canvases by the greatest Venetian painters of the sixteenth century are presented side by side in Napoleon Hall in an exhibition allowing visitors to observe the play of inspiration and admiration between these geniuses as well as the competitive nature of their artistic dialogue. Including eighty-five canvases, most of which have been loaned for the occasion by prestigious museums worldwide, the exhibition brings this noble rivalry into focus through juxtapositions of paintings treating the same or equivalent themes, thus demonstrating just how much these artists were influenced by one another or instead used their paintings as critiques or to put forward their own personal interpretations. Although Titian, named official painter to the Republic in 1516, dominated the Venetian art scene, the arrival of later generations—Bassano, Tintoretto, Veronese, Palma the Younger—and the influence of artistic developments in central Italy, resulted in novel treatments of subjects favored by Venetian artists in the second half of the sixteenth century.

*“Because he had a formidable rival in Veronese, Tintoretto was especially creative and daring in his paintings, since in the face of such competition, any artist is inclined to make it a point of honor not to be outdone.”*

These views expressed by Carlo Ridolfi in 1642 are certainly not limited to Tintoretto and Veronese. All major Venetian painters of this period modeled their approach to their art on those of their contemporaries, the preeminent figure among whom was, without any doubt, the uncontested and unequalled master Titian. Rivalry thus played a major role in shaping the development of Venetian painting.

The unique political regime of the Republic of Venice and its social structure largely favored artistic diversity. The presence of numerous wealthy families, whether of noble descent or not, the importance of the Church during this vibrant period of Counter-Reformation, and the network of powerful charitable fraternities or guilds, called *scuole*, meant that the scene was rife with work opportunities for artists, at a time when the awarding of commissions was decided with great freedom. The desire to attract the attentions of these various patrons gave rise, perhaps more than in any other place or time, to a climate of constant one-upmanship among painters. This rivalry would be officially recognized and further fomented through the competitions organized for the most prestigious commissions, as is done today for major architecture projects. This was the case, in particular, for the decoration of the Biblioteca Marciana, the Scuola di San Rocco, and most important of all, the Sala del Maggior Consiglio (Grand Council Chamber) in the Palazzo Ducale (Doges' Palace).

In addition, Venetian artists of the latter half of the sixteenth century were confronted with the innovations and challenges brought by Mannerism. This little-known aspect of Venetian painting is also addressed within the exhibition, which explores the ways in which artists working in La Serenissima crafted a unique style, adapting the Mannerism of central Italy to their naturalistic world vision.

**Exhibition curators:** Jean Habert, Curator in Charge, and Vincent Delieuvin, curator, assisted by Arturo Galansino, scientific consultant, Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre.

*Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice* seeks to trace the development of Venetian painting after 1540, using both a chronological and topical approach. Grouped according to a selection of subjects favored by the Venetians of the “golden century”, the exhibition juxtaposes works painted by leading Venetian artists throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. The visitor is thus prompted to consider the different forms of expression of an art dominated by the joy of painting (fascination with materials and palettes), its naturalistic propensity, and the joining of the sacred and the profane.

The period covered by the exhibition is particularly interesting as it corresponds to that singular moment when three great masters worked at the same time on the fashionable subjects of the time: the inventive genius Titian, whose mature style displays a constant quest for renewal; the dynamic genius Tintoretto, who applied near superhuman energy and intensity to the development of his art; and finally the decorative genius Veronese, whose Apollonian palette and serenity were a source of fascination for artists until the twentieth century.

Establishing the context of painting in Venice between 1540 and 1550, shortly before the arrival of Veronese (1553), the exhibition’s introductory section notes the supremacy of Titian and the ascendancy of Tintoretto. It juxtaposes works by these two artists with others by the young painter from Verona, leaving no doubt as to the talent that attracted the patrons who had brought him to Venice. This section affords the visitor an opportunity to arrive at an initial stylistic assessment of the Venetian school as it brings together seminal works by these three great painters. The exhibition thus welcomes visitors with masterpieces by Titian, at that time in the full maturity of his genius, including the *Danaë* and the *Portrait of Pope Paul III without a Cap* (both from the Museo e Galleria Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples), accompanied by paintings by the younger artists Tintoretto and Veronese.

## **I - Portraits of Powerful People**

Dukes, admirals and aristocrats of the Republic of Venice are the denizens of this first section. Of all the rooms in the exhibition, this one probably could be described as offering the most uniform group of paintings: when these portraits are viewed side by side, the persistence of the model imposed by Titian (*Portrait of Doge Francesco Venier*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) is clearly demonstrated. Widely acknowledged as having completely transformed Venetian painting, offering reinterpretations of many traditional subjects, Titian created very strong images that quickly acquired the status of archetypes for later generations of painters. Titian’s preeminence in the field of portrait painting is such that questions of attribution linger even today with respect to certain works: the compositions are often identical, with close stylistic similarities as well (for example, the previously mentioned portrait of Doge Venier by Titian and Tintoretto’s *Sebastiano Venier*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), underscoring the weight of tradition and the role of portraiture in Venice.

## **II - Reflections**

Intellectual elites and artists of the period were much taken with the concept of the *paragone*, or comparison, which involved theoretical discussions of whether one or another of the arts was superior to all the others. Painters were therefore very concerned with the connections between painting and the other arts. Venetian painters offered a unique riposte to this polemic through their work on reflection, thus endeavoring to demonstrate the superiority of their art. Whether by way of a mirror, on the metal of armor, or on water, these artists sought to give a three-dimensional aspect to a body that the act of painting reduces to two dimensions. Giorgione was the first to take this approach. Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Jacopo Bassano later developed, each in his own way, the use of reflections, thus creating masterpieces of subtlety: *Venus with a Mirror* by Titian (National Gallery of Art, Washington), *Susanna and the Elders* by Tintoretto (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), *Saint Menna* by Veronese (Galleria Estense, Modena).

Titian eroticizes the theme of the female nude with a mirror placing special emphasis on the play of gazes, treated with extreme finesse, between the subject of the painting and the contemplating viewer. Tintoretto makes use of this same effect to allude to elderly men driven by their lustful nature. The more sensual and less erotic Veronese chooses instead to place his interpretation in the world of noble courtesans (*Venus at Her Toilette*, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha). With the Bassanos (for example Francesco Bassano’s *Forge of Vulcan*, Musée du Louvre, Paris), the treatment of reflections becomes an important element of genre scenes.

### III - Between Sacred and Profane

The Venetian passion for pantheism led them to combine the sacred and the profane in their canvases. Subject matters of different types (portraits, sacred scenes, genre scenes, still lifes, etc.) tended to be treated together in a single painting. Sacred scenes never more acquired the qualities and attributes of portraiture and genre scenes than in Venice. Among religious subjects, the holy repast is particularly representative in this regard. Titian's painting *The Supper at Emmaüs* (Musée du Louvre, Paris) was long referred to in France as *La Nappe* due to the artist's exceptional still-life treatment of the embroidered tablecloth. Venetian artists also frequently inverted the subject matter at hand, with anecdotal elements taking precedence over the central theme (Jacopo Bassano, *The Supper at Emmaüs*, private collection, United Kingdom). Veronese's treatment of this same subject (Musée du Louvre, Paris) constitutes the definitive realization of this approach.

This section also offers the opportunity to consider a very special aspect of Venetian painting: these artists were the first to paint animals in their own right. Frequently included in their compositions, with dogs and cats far outnumbering other species, animals served to reinforce or underscore the interpretation of the scenes depicted. With his unquestionable masterpiece *Two Hunting Dogs Tied to a Tree Stump* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), Jacopo Bassano produced the first known painting (1548) exclusively depicting animals. Keenly observed dogs also feature in paintings by Titian and Veronese. Exhibiting a less naturalistic bent than Titian (*Boy with Dogs in a Landscape*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam) or Bassano, Veronese, who did not paint from nature, nevertheless painted dogs with loving attention, clearly conveying his own feelings toward animals and perhaps overemphasizing their beauty, his works thus contrasting with the vibrant and detailed observations of canines painted by his rivals (*Cupid with Two Dogs*, Alte Pinakothek, Munich).

### IV - Sacred Nights

Closely linked to the status of the Church after the Council of Trent, the themes addressed in this section of the exhibition are marked by the spirit of the Counter-Reformation: The Baptism of Christ, The Entombment, The Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Saint Jerome in the Wilderness.

Venetian painters favored the theatricalization of biblical scenes through the dramatic use and intense depiction of light (called "luminism" by art historians), with the aim of fostering a new, stronger and more effusive approach to religion. Their passion for light and the influence of Northern painters having visited Venice beginning in the fifteenth century led them to develop what might be considered today as "special effects" and this is especially true of Tintoretto (*The Baptism of Christ*, Chiesa di San Silvestro, Venice). Gradually, darkness began to gain favor as a symbol of both interior solitude and the permanent threat of the forces of evil. Jacopo Bassano's *Baptism of Christ* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), depicted as occurring late at night and probably the last painting he completed, expresses a sorrow and a suffering that seem to prefigure the Passion.

The influence of Titian, whose *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* (Musée du Louvre, Paris) was the first painting to depict a scene at night, is clearly felt in the works of his contemporaries, from Veronese, whose life came to an end as his palette became more somber, at times even gloomy (*The Dead Christ Supported by the Virgin and an Angel*, State Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg), although this painter's canvases suggest an early evening rather than nocturnal atmosphere, to Jacopo Bassano.



Paolo Caliari, called Veronese (1528–1588), *The Supper at Emmaüs*, Oil on canvas, 2.42 m x 4.16 m, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. 146 © RMN / Gérard Blot

## **V - Portraits of Artists and Collectors**

Apart from portraits of aristocrats, Venetian painters produced many portraits of artists and collectors. Art collectors were dramatically represented in their element, as in Titian's portrait of Jacopo Strada (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). The freedom enjoyed by Venetian patrons in awarding commissions is illustrated by the fact that the other half of this pair of portraits depicting Ottavio Strada, the collector's son, was entrusted to Tintoretto (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

The Venetian fashion for recording celebrated figures of the time through portraits prompted artists either to depict themselves—the stunning self-portraits by Titian (Museo Nacional del Prado) and Tintoretto (Musée du Louvre, Paris)—or to have themselves painted by their peers, such as the portrait of the great Venetian sculptor Alessandro Vittoria by Veronese (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

## **VI - Decorative Miniatures**

Contrasting with the large-format works presented in previous sections, here are assembled small decorative paintings, most often intended as ornamentation for furniture and frequently illustrating mythological scenes. None of the great Venetian masters scorned this rather precious genre, which it would be a mistake to consider as of secondary importance, owing to the fervor it inspired among patrons. Tintoretto (although little accustomed to the painting of minute details), Schiavone and Sustri (a Flemish painter having established himself in Venice with considerable success) worked together on a certain number of commissions. Three Veronese paintings in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston round out the presentation of this little-known genre.

## **VII - Representations of Desire**

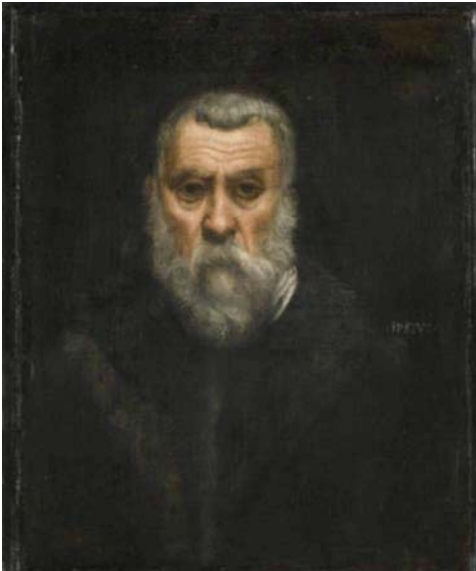
Two themes are addressed in this final section, mainly through mythological or biblical scenes: women in peril and women as objects of desire. The first is conveyed through stories such as those of Tarquin and Lucretia, Perseus and Andromeda, Susanna and the Elders; the second by those of Danaë and of Venus and Mars.

“Women in Peril” explores scenes often of a violent nature, such as Tintoretto's *Tarquin and Lucretia* (Art Institute of Chicago) or the same subject interpreted by Palma the Younger (Gemäldegalerie, Kassel), Veronese's *Perseus and Andromeda* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes), and Jacopo Bassano's *Susanna and the Elders* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nimes).

In contrast, “Women as Objects of Desire” pays tribute to the masterful sensuality of sixteenth-century Venetian painting. The only reclining female nude in Veronese's entire oeuvre is found in the *Allegory of Love III: Respect* (National Gallery, London). Titian's poetic nature is expressed in his approach to myths, in this section that of Danaë: he reinterprets the story by introducing the character of the elderly nursemaid, thus imposing an iconography adopted by later artists, for example Tintoretto (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon). His *Danaë* (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), painted only four years after the version from Naples presented in the introductory section, is the last painting that the visitor sees before leaving the exhibition.



Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian (1488/90–1576), *Danaë*, Oil on canvas, 1.3 m x 1.8 m, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Inv. P00425 © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto (1519–1594), *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 0.63 m x 0.52 m, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. 572 © RMN/Jean-Gilles Berizzi

## Related events and publications

### *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*

#### Publications

- Exhibition catalogue, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Hazan, 480 pages, about €42.

- Exhibition album, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Hazan, 48 pages, €8.

**The publication of these two works is made possible thanks to the support of ArjoWiggins.**

#### Events in the Auditorium du Louvre

##### - Opening event

**Friday, September 25 at 12:30 p.m.**

##### **Presentation of the exhibition,**

by Jean Habert and Vincent Delieuvin, Musée du Louvre

##### - Conference series at 6:30 p.m.

##### **“Painting in Venice in the Sixteenth Century”**

Organized by Monica Preti-Hamard, assisted by Charlotte Chastel-Rousseau

**Monday, September 28, 2009**

##### **Styles and Techniques: Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese**

by Michel Hochmann, EHESS, Paris

**Monday, October 5, 2009**

##### **Seeing Miracles: Politics of Healing in Tintoretto and Veronese**

by Augusto Gentili, Università Ca' Foscari, Venice

**Monday, October 12, 2009**

##### **Color Variations in Venice from Titian to Veronese**

by Paul Hills, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

**Monday, October 19, 2009**

##### **A Brush with Nobility: Titian, Castiglione and Court Painting in Renaissance Venice**

by Philip Cottrell, University College, Dublin

**Monday, October 26, 2009**

##### **Titian's Heirs: Disciples, Partisans and Rivals**

by Miguel Falomir, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

##### - Related film

**Friday, October 2, 2009 at 12:30 p.m.**

*Venise 1575*, directed by Jean-Loïc Portron, France, 2006, color, 52 min.

#### Guided tours of the exhibition

For information, call +33 (0)1 40 20 52 63 or visit [www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)  
Guided tours for individuals led by specialists in the field are offered beginning on September 28 and for the duration of the exhibition, on Wednesdays at 7 p.m., Thursdays at 11:30 a.m., and Fridays and Saturdays at 2:30 p.m.

#### **Visitor information:**

##### **Place**

Napoleon Hall, Musée du Louvre

##### **Press opening**

Tuesday, September 15, 2009, from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

##### **Hours**

Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., until 8 p.m. on Saturdays, and until 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

##### **Admission fees**

*Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice* only: €11

Permanent collections + *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*: €14 before 6 p.m., €12 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays

Free admission for youths under 18, the unemployed, and holders of the “Louvre Jeunes”, “Louvre Professionnels”, “Louvre Enseignants”, “Louvre Etudiants Partenaires” or “Amis du Louvre” cards.

**Further information:** [www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)

## ***The Virgin with the Rabbit: Entering Into a Work by Titian (Interactive Experiences)***



Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian (1488/90–1576), *Madonna and Child with Saint Catherine*, called *The Virgin with the Rabbit* (full view at bottom right, detailed views above and below), c. 1525–30, Oil on canvas, 0.71 m x 0.87 m, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. 743 © 2007 Musée du Louvre / Angèle Dequier



A multimedia installation involving Titian's *Virgin with the Rabbit* will be presented in the museum's permanent collections, in the room generally used for the "Painting of the Month" within the Department of Paintings (Richelieu Wing, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor).

Produced as part of the Louvre/DNP Museum Lab project, the aim of this multimedia installation is to provide clues to the reading of the painting by means of an analysis treating both painterly and iconographic aspects, commented by Jean Habert, Curator in Charge, Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre. Through this multimedia presentation, visitors may explore the work in detail and immerse themselves in its composition, thus appreciating the genius behind the *Virgin and the Rabbit*, around which the installation is constructed.

The result of a collaboration between the Louvre and Dai Nippon Printing (DNP), the Louvre/DNP Museum Lab project based in Tokyo, Japan seeks to explore new ways of approaching works of art, particularly through the use of multimedia tools. This project illustrates the Louvre's commitment to ensure its relevance in the modern world and in the living present. The Louvre develops curatorial content, scenarios for mediation, and multimedia designs in collaboration with Dai Nippon Printing (DNP). The multimedia installation itself is produced by DNP's teams, who work closely with those of the Louvre, and makes use of proprietary technical expertise and tools designed and developed by DNP. Louvre/DNP Museum Lab is an innovative and pioneering project that allows the Louvre to put twenty-first century technologies to work in keeping with its ongoing commitment to furthering the knowledge of art.

