

## Titian

**Titian** (c.488/1490 – 1576) is considered the most important member of the 16th-century Venetian school.

He was one of the most versatile of Italian painters, equally adept with portraits, landscape backgrounds, and mythological and religious subjects. His painting methods, particularly in the application and use of colour, would exercise a profound influence not only on painters of the Italian Renaissance, but on future generations of Western art.

During the course of his long life, Titian's artistic manner changed drastically but he retained a lifelong interest in colour. Although his mature works may not contain the vivid, luminous tints of his early pieces, their loose brushwork and subtlety of tone are without precedent in the history of Western painting.



### **01 *Self-Portrait* c1567**

Dating to about 1560, when Titian was at least 70 years old, this is the latter of two surviving self-portraits by the artist. The work is a realistic and unflattering depiction of the physical effects of old age, and as such shows none of the self-confidence of his earlier self-portrait. He looks remote and gaunt, staring into the middle distance, seemingly lost in thought. Still, this portrait projects dignity, authority and the mark of a master painter to a greater extent than the earlier surviving self-portrait.

The artist is dressed in simple but expensive clothes. In the lower left corner of the canvas he holds a paintbrush. Although the presence of the paintbrush is understated, it is the element that gives legitimacy to his implied status. This is one of the earliest self-portraits in western art in which the artist reveals himself as a painter. Titian's influence was such that the work led to numerous self-portraits by later generations of artists.



### **02 A Man With a Quilted Sleeve c.1509**

A Man with a Quilted Sleeve is an early portrait, painted around 1509. Rembrandt borrowed the composition for his self-portraits.

Quote: "Why not admit that we still don't know very much about Venetian painting in the first decade of the 16th century, instead of pretending to a knowledge that we do not possess?"



**03 Portrait of a Man in a Red Cap c1510**



**04 Salome With the Head of John the Baptist c1515**

The painting of Salome is set in a dark room, with, on the right, an arch opening to a blue sky surmounted by a sculpted angel. It depicts Salome holding the head of St. John the Baptist, helped by a young assistant.

The woman, an example of idealized beauty, was portrayed by Titian in numerous other works of the period.



**05 Sacred and Profane Love c1514**

Measures over nine feet long and seems to take up an entire wall in one of the largest rooms. Like many other famous paintings of the Venetian Renaissance the subject matter of the "Sacred and Profane Love" remains a mystery.

The painting is presumed to have been commissioned by Niccolò Aurelio, a secretary to the Venetian Council of Ten (so identified because his coat of arms appears on the sarcophagus or fountain in the centre of the image) to celebrate his marriage to a young widow, Laura Bagarotto. It perhaps depicts the bride dressed in white, sitting beside Cupid and being assisted by Venus in person.

Art critics have made several analyses and interpretations, among them are: Ingenious Love and Satisfied Love; Prudery and Love; the wise and foolish virgins; the dressed Aphrodite Pandemos (left) opposite the nude Aphrodite Urania. or that it contains a coded message about Bagarotto's father's innocence. Nadia Gaus notes that while the title might at first lead one to view the left hand woman as the sacred one, further thought leads to the opposite interpretation: the well dressed woman is Profane Love while the nude woman is

Sacred Love. The title itself of the painting is uncertain: in 1693 it was listed as *Amor Divino e Amor Profano* (Divine love and Profane love).

The conventional title is only a nickname, but it is probably accurate that the picture almost certainly comprises an allegory of two antithetical but complementary aspects of sexual love...the figures consist of a woman wearing a magnificent robe of lilac silk, with rich accoutrements, and a female nude whose sensuous beauty is enhanced by the equally magnificent cloak of red silk that billows beside her.

Panofsky found the source of the painting in Neo-Platonic humanism, and pointed out that the nude represented a higher order of being.

*In fact the title of Titian's composition should read: Geminae Veneres. It represents the 'Twin Venuses' ...The nude figure is the 'Venere Celeste' symbolizing the principle of universal and eternal but purely intelligible beauty. The other is the 'Venere Volgare,' symbolizing the 'generative force' that creates the perishable but visible and tangible images of Beauty on earth; ...Both are therefore, ... 'honourable and praiseworthy in their own way.'*

Titian's famous Magdalens were all completed after the "Sacred and Profane Love." In this early rendition he separated the Magdalen into her two guises. The clothed woman is the courtesan contemplating the error of her ways. The semi-nude woman is the newly converted Magdalen who, according to the apocryphal legends, would spend the last 30 years of her life fasting and mortifying herself in a desert outside of Marseilles.

Finally, in her left hand she holds aloft the jar of oil that is the single most recognizable symbol of Mary Magdalen. Anna Jameson noted that practically every depiction of her includes this element.

The fountain/sarcophagus - the *Fountain Cyane* - is mythologically located between Olympus and Tartarus. Hades - otherwise known as the realm of the dead - is actually this terrestrial globe which is positioned halfway between the celestial realm of Olympus and the 'geographic' opposite of Tartarus. This is to say that esoterically, this terrestrial globe - this planet Earth - is actually the 'underworld' to that incorruptible spiritual (causal) world of Enna (Eden).

The sulfurs: White is the fixed sulfur and Red is the volatile sulfur and primarily these colours are apportioned to Proserpine and Ceres respectively. Proserpine's gown is white and so represents White (sulfur) with a splash of Red (sulfur) at the sleeve and at the flash of red slip at the hem of the dress. Ceres is predominantly surrounded by red fabric and this represents Red (sulfur) with a splash of White (sulfur) across her lap. Mercury's arm playfully swirls the (mercurial)water within the fountain and this shows that the White and Red sulfurs are being mixed in the Athanor. All of this is indicated by the mixed primary colours of the women's clothing. Again, this painting represents the

mystical form of Hermetics understood as alchemy.



**06 *Noli me Tangere*** c1514



**07 *Mary Magdalen*** 1533



**08 *Assunta*** 1516-18



**09 *Bacchus and Ariadne*** c1520-23

The painting, considered one of Titian's greatest works, now hangs in the National Gallery in London.

It is one of a cycle of paintings on mythological subjects produced for Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara,

Ariadne has been left on the island of Naxos, deserted by her lover Theseus, whose ship sails away to the far left. She is discovered on the shore by the god Bacchus, leading a procession of revellers in a chariot drawn by two cheetahs (These were probably modelled on those in the Duke's menagerie and were tigers in Ovid's original text). Bacchus is depicted in mid-air as he leaps out of the chariot to protect Ariadne from these beasts. In the sky above the figure of Ariadne is the star constellation Corona Borealis (Northern crown). There are two possible variations of the story both going back to Ovid. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid has Bacchus throw the crown of Ariadne into the sky where it becomes the constellation Northern Crown. In *Ars Amatoria*, Bacchus promises the entire sky to Ariadne where she then would become the constellation Northern Crown.

The composition is divided diagonally into two triangles, one of blue sky (using the expensive ultramarine pigment) and still but for the two lovers caught in movement, the other a riot of movement and predominantly green/brown in colour.



### **10 Equestrian Portrait of Charles V 1548**

A tribute to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, following his victory in the April 1547 Battle of Mühlberg against the Protestant armies.

The portrait in part gains its impact by its directness and sense of contained power: the horse's strength seems just in check, and Charles' brilliantly shining armour and the painting's deep reds are reminders of battle and heroism. Titian recorded all of the foreground elements—the horse, its caparison, and the rider's armour—from those used in the actual battle. Both the armour and harness survive, and are kept at the Royal Armoury in Madrid.

Charles specifying how he wished to be presented. The emperor was very aware of the importance of portraiture in determining how he was seen by others, and appreciated not only Titian's mastery as a painter, but also the artist's manner of presenting him as a ruler.

Titian came to know Charles V personally, and had painted a number of portraits of him by this time. A highly intelligent man, Titian was quick witted, humorous and easy company. He had developed such a strong friendship with Charles by the time of this portrait that the emperor's courtiers were uneasy at the extent that a lowly painter was allowed into his confidence.

Titian creates a tension between the emperor's age and physical frailty, and his reputation as a forceful and determined, dynamic leader. This is most apparent in the fact that Titian portrays Charles heroically, but places him in a calm dawn setting in which there are no signs of battle. Charles' frailty is underlined by the dark overhead clouds, his weary facial expression and weak jaw (his lower jaw protrudes beyond the line of the upper part), though this is subverted so that it instead conveys his resolve. Charles further suffered from gout, and in reality was carried to the battle in a litter.

The skyscape is considered Titian's best, and has been described as "flaming and shadowed, with gold light fighting with blue, deathly clouds set against a landscape [which] suggests the immensities of space that Charles dominates and the brooding, inner landscape of the soul."



**11 *Venus and Organist and Little Dog* c 1550**

Titian painted five images of Venus and music, but those five variations on a single theme were not made for the same client, nor intended to be exhibited together. Set in a villa, they show Venus reclining before a large window. At her feet, an organist (in the versions at the Museo del Prado and the Staatliche Museen in Berlin) or a lutenist (at the Metropolitan Museum of New York and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge) play their instrument as they contemplate the goddess's nudity. Meanwhile, she looks away, distracted by the presence of a dog, or of Cupid.

The paintings of Venus and music have been the object of diverse interpretations. Some historians consider them manifestly erotic works with no deeper meaning. Others assign them considerable symbolic content, interpreting them as allegories of the senses from a neo-Platonic perspective that considers sight and hearing the means of knowing beauty and harmony.



**12 *Danaë* 1553-56**

***Danaë and the Shower of Gold*** series comprises at least five oil-on-canvas paintings by the Venetian master Titian, completed between 1540 and 1570. The works are based on the mythological princess Danaë. According to Ovid she was isolated in a bronze dungeon following a prophecy that her firstborn would eventually kill her father. Although aware of the consequences, Danaë was seduced and became pregnant by Zeus (in Roman mythology Jupiter), who, inflamed by lust, descended from Mount Olympus to entice her as a shower of gold.

The works have been highly influential and affected the work of many artists including Rembrandt, Anthony van Dyck and Gustav Klimt, who all painted versions of the scene.



**13 *Diana and Actaeon* 1556-59**

Portrays the moment in which the goddess Diana meets Actaeon. Diana is the woman on the right side of the painting. She is wearing a crown with a crescent moon on it and is being covered by the dark skinned woman who may be her servant or slave.

Diana and Actaeon is part of a series of seven famous canvases, the "poesies", depicting mythological scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* painted for Philip II of Spain.



**14 *Diana and Calisto* 1556-59**

This painting portrays the moment in which the goddess Diana discovers that her maid Calisto has become pregnant by Jupiter.



**15 *The Death of Actaeon* 1559-75**

*The Death of Actaeon* is a sequel of Titian's work *Diana and Actaeon* showing the story's tragic conclusion, which approximately follows the Roman poet Ovid's account

in the *Metamorphoses*: after Actaeon surprised the goddess Diana bathing naked in the woods, she transformed him into a stag and he was attacked and killed by his own hounds. Both paintings belong to a group of large-scale mythological paintings inspired by the *Metamorphoses*.



**16 *Rape of Europa*** 1560-62

In Greek mythology Europa was the mother of King Minos of Crete, a woman with Phoenician origin of high lineage, and for whom the continent Europe was named. The story of her abduction by Zeus in the form of a white bull was a Cretan story; as Kerényi points out "most of the love-stories concerning Zeus originated from more ancient tales describing his marriages with goddesses. This can especially be said of the story of Europa".



**17 *The Flaying of Marsyas*** c1570-76    **18 *The Flaying of Marsyas***, detail

*The Flaying of Marsyas*, Titian's last completed work, portrays the flaying of Marsyas, a silenus (companion to Dionysius) who dared to defy the God Apollo. The choice of such a crude scene was perhaps inspired by the death of Marcantonio Bragadin, a Venetian commander who was flayed by the Ottomans in that period.

Midas, the thoughtful character on the right, is possibly the artist's self-portrait.





**19 Pieta** c1576

Distinguishing features: The master of light here plunges into darkness, makes death's night visible. Glimmers of silvery torch- and moonlight on the mosaic canopy above Christ, on the statues of Moses and the Sybil, most of all the pale glowing flesh of the body of Christ accentuate the terrible gloom; it is overwhelming, and extremely personal.

Titian's terror makes the Christian images of redemption (that flicker of heavenly gold on the half-dome, the prophetic figures, the vegetation on the stone pediment) anything but reassuring. While the painting pleads for salvation, the emotional texture is of fear and horror: the closeness of death. The stone oppresses the mind; the statues are bodies frozen into stone, like a corpse with rigor mortis; the atmosphere of the painting is thickened, as if the air were poisoned.