



### ***Ranuccio Farnese***

1542, oil on canvas

by Titian (Tiziano Vecellio)  
(Venetian, 1488/1490 – 1576)  
(89.7 x 73.6 cm (35 5/16 x 29 in.)

Ranuccio Farnese was 12 years old when Titian painted his portrait. The boy had been sent to Venice by his grandfather, Pope Paul III, to become prior of an important property belonging to the Knights of Malta. As a member of the powerful and aristocratic Farnese family, Ranuccio went on to an illustrious ecclesiastical career. He was made Archbishop of Naples at the age of 14, and he later served as Bishop of Bologna, Archbishop of Milan and Ravenna, and Cardinal Sant'Angelo, dying when he was only 35 years old.

Adult responsibility came to Ranuccio when still a child, as Titian so brilliantly conveyed through the cloak of office, too large and heavy, sliding off the youth's small shoulders. The boy in the role of the man is what gives this characterization such poignancy.

Portraits by Titian were in great demand, distinguished as they were for their remarkable insight into character and their brilliant technique. Nowhere is the painter's genius more in evidence than in this image. Limiting his palette to black, white, and rose, Titian enlivened the surface with light: the dull gleam rippling over the sleeves of the velvet cloak; the fitful pattern flickering across the slashed doublet; and the changing reflections on the satin Maltese Cross.

## Biography

In a career that spanned more than seventy years, Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian in English, was the greatest force in Venetian Renaissance painting. Probably born around 1490 in the town of Cadore in the Italian Alps, Titian moved at an early age—perhaps as young as eight or nine years old—to Venice to study art there. After training briefly with a mosaicist, he entered the workshop of Giovanni Bellini, the leading painter of his generation. Titian was influenced not only by Bellini's rich color but by the lyrically elusive pastoral and mythological scenes of fellow Bellini pupil Giorgione.

By 1510 Titian had established himself as an independent master, and after Bellini's death he was appointed official painter to the Venetian Republic. Following a succession of commissions for the courts of Ferrara, Mantua, and Urbino, Titian's fame spread internationally. His patrons included the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Philip II of Spain, Francis I of France, and Pope Paul III.

Titian was a master in all genres: he produced dignified and insightful portraits, Madonnas of modesty and charm, playfully joyous mythological pictures, sensuous nudes, and meditative religious works. He took from Bellini a typically Venetian approach to color, his early works often juxtaposing brilliant contrasting hues. After about 1530, the year of his wife's death, Titian more often worked within a more narrow tonal range, using subtle glazes to create complex nuances of color. During the last twenty years of his life, Titian's handling of paint grew looser, opening up a wider gamut of expressive possibilities. Thin glazes appear along with heavy impasto, each a mark of the artist's own presence on the canvas.

Titian died in 1576, as an outbreak of the plague roiled through Venice, but it is not known if he died of the disease. He was buried in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, where his dramatic altarpiece, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, had been installed nearly sixty years before.