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Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

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Titian and Workshop
Titian
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576
Italian 16th Century

Venus and Adonis

c. 1540s/c. 1560-1565

oil on canvas
overall: 106.8 x 136 cm (42 1/16 x 53 9/16 in.)
framed: 134.9 x 163.8 x 7 cm (53 1/8 x 64 1/2 x 2 3/4 in.)
Widener Collection 1942.9.84

ENTRY

Even more than in the case of the *Venus with a Mirror*, the *Venus and Adonis* was one of the most successful inventions of Titian's later career. At least 30 versions are known to have been executed by the painter and his workshop, as well as independently by assistants and copyists within the painter's lifetime and immediately afterward. The evolution of the composition was apparently highly complex, and scholars remain divided in their interpretation of the visual, technical, and documentary evidence. While there is general agreement that the Gallery's version is a late work, dating from the 1560s, there is much less consensus regarding its quality and its relation to the most important of the other versions.

The subject is based on the account in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (10.532–539, 705–709), of the love of the goddess Venus for the beautiful young huntsman Adonis, and of how he was tragically killed by a wild boar. [1] But Ovid did not describe the last parting of the lovers, and Titian introduced a powerful element of dramatic tension into the story by imagining a moment in which Venus, as if filled

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with foreboding about Adonis's fate, desperately clings to her lover, while he, impatient for the hunt and with his hounds straining at the leash, pulls himself free of her embrace. The goddess's gesture is echoed by that of Cupid, who, clutching a dove—a creature sacred to Venus—anxiously watches the lovers' leave-taking. It is usually assumed that this new conception of the story was the painter's own idea, and in 1584 he was explicitly criticized by the Florentine Raffaello Borghini for his lack of fidelity to the ancient literary text. [2] Some scholars have suggested that in this respect Titian was following modern literary retellings, for example the *Fábula de Adonis* by the imperial ambassador to Venice in the early 1540s, Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, or by the Venetian Lodovico Dolce in the later 1540s. [3] But Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides have argued that, on the contrary, such texts could well have been inspired by their authors' knowledge of the invention by Titian, which itself is more likely to have been inspired by visual sources. They identify one such source as Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, after Raphael's fresco in the Vatican Loggia, in which a young man similarly escapes the amorous advances of an older woman. [4] As first recognized by Erwin Panofsky, another important visual source for Titian's composition—although in this case not for the novel interpretation of the myth—was the so-called *Bed of Polyclitus*, an antique relief known in a number of versions and copies. Panofsky focused in particular on the representation of a twisting female figure from the back, but subsequent scholars have also noted the resemblance of Adonis's left arm to the dangling arm of sleeping Cupid in the relief. [5]

The many versions of the composition fall into two main groups, which were respectively dubbed Groups A and B by Panofsky, [6] and the "Prado" and "Farnese" types by Harold Wethey. [7] The former type takes its name from the picture in the Prado, Madrid [fig. 1], which Titian painted in 1553–1554 for Prince Philip of Spain (from 1556 King Philip II). Other important versions of this type include those in the National Gallery, London; in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; formerly in the collection of Patrick de Charmant, Lausanne; and in a recently discovered example now in a private collection, Moscow. [8] The format of these pictures, although they are all wider than they are tall, is close to square; Adonis has three dogs; Cupid is shown asleep under a tree in the right background; and Venus is again represented in her swan-drawn chariot in the sky. While the Prado painting is universally accepted as the finest example of the type, both the ex-Charmant and the Moscow versions have also sometimes been claimed to precede it. [9] By contrast, the Gallery's picture, like the version in the

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Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York [fig. 2], is broader and lower in its proportions than Panofsky's Type A; Adonis has only two dogs; Cupid is awake and close to Venus; and the sky is filled with a rainbow and a burst of light. Wethey called this the "Farnese" type, because he argued that both of these pictures—as well as all the examples of the "Prado" type—were preceded by a painting formerly in the Farnese collection in Rome, Parma, and Naples, now lost, but recorded in an engraving of 1769 by Robert Strange, in which the composition was reproduced in reverse. This lost version was recorded by Carlo Ridolfi in 1648 at Palazzo Farnese in Rome [10] and in a succession of Farnese inventories, beginning in 1644, [11] and the writer implied that Titian painted this version for the pope's grandson Ottavio Farnese on his visit to the papal capital in 1545–1546, together with the first version of the *Danaë* (Capodimonte, Naples). Although Ridolfi was certainly incorrect in saying that the *Danaë* was also commissioned by Ottavio, rather than by his elder brother Cardinal Alessandro, it does not necessarily follow that he was also wrong about the Farnese *Venus and Adonis*. There remains, in any case, a certain amount of circumstantial evidence in favor of Wethey's hypothesis that this picture was painted for the Farnese family in the mid- or late 1540s, and critics who accept it include Fern Rusk Shapley, Rona Goffen, David Rosand, and (with reservations) Falomir and Joannides. [12] As documented by a famous letter of 1554, Titian conceived the *Venus and Adonis* for Philip of Spain as a pendant to a second version of the *Danaë*, painted for him a year or two earlier; and since the latter is clearly based on the Farnese *Danaë*, there is some logic in supposing that it, too, had an original pendant in the lost *Venus and Adonis*. And in the following century, at least, the Farnese *Venus and Adonis* came to be regarded as one of a pair with the original *Danaë*, as is evident from the Farnese inventory of 1680, which records the two hanging together. [13]

Yet against Wethey's hypothesis is the simple fact that there is no mention of any *Venus and Adonis* in any of Titian's extensive correspondence with Cardinal Farnese and his agents in the later 1540s. Nor does Giorgio Vasari, who was in Rome at the time of Titian's visit, and who discusses the *Danaë* at length, refer to any pendant, and the Farnese version is not mentioned in any document before the inventory of the Palazzo Farnese of 1644. [14] Further, as argued by Nicholas Penny, not only is the *Venus and Adonis* not a particularly happy complement to the *Danaë* in terms of its composition, but even more conclusive is Penny's argument from the visual evidence that the lost Farnese picture, as recorded in Strange's engraving, actually postdated both the Washington and the New York examples of the type, both of which are always dated for stylistic reasons to the

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1560s. It is likely, therefore, either that one of the Farnese brothers ordered it from Titian at some time after circa 1565; or that it was acquired by some later member of the family, at some date before 1644.

The likelihood that Wethey's name for this type is a misnomer does not, however, prove that Titian invented it only in the 1560s or that it must postdate his invention of the "Prado" type. Joannides and Penny have separately observed that the composition of the "Farnese," or "two-dog," type is more satisfactory than that of the "Prado," or "three-dog," type, and that for visual reasons it is more logical to interpret the latter as an expansion of the former, than the former as a simplification of the latter. [15] Penny pointed out that the concentration of the figures more tightly into the picture field, without being diluted by landscape, is dramatically more effective. [16] Joannides, in a series of articles, has argued that the "two-dog" type began with a now-lost composition reflected in a picture once in the Arundel collection, and destroyed in Vienna in World War II, of which there exists a miniature copy of 1631 by Peter Oliver (Burghley, Stamford) [fig. 3]. [17] This composition was appreciably more static and less dramatic than in later versions of the type, including the Gallery's picture, and the foremost of the dogs was shown standing still and looking back toward its master. Not quite ready for the hunt, Adonis was shown with his right arm around Venus's shoulder, instead of holding a spear. To judge from a prewar photograph of the ex-Arundel picture, it was not of high artistic quality, and it was apparently itself a workshop version of a lost autograph prototype. Joannides argued that both this lost original and the ex-Arundel picture were painted as early as the later 1520s and that the former was perhaps painted for Titian's most important patron of the period, Alfonso d'Este. His principal reasons were that the poses of the pair of dogs were strikingly similar to those of the two cheetahs in the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (National Gallery, London) and that the color scheme, as transmitted by Peter Oliver's copy, resembled that of the other mythologies painted for Alfonso between 1518 and 1523. Against this it may be argued that the thickset anatomy of Adonis in the ex-Arundel picture, the apparent breadth of its handling, and Venus's hairstyle (which resembles that of the *Portrait of a Young Woman* of circa 1545–1546 at Capodimonte, Naples) all make it difficult to date it to the 1520s. Nevertheless, the ex-Arundel picture and its lost prototype—in other words, the earliest not only of the "two-dog" versions but of the whole series—cannot for visual reasons plausibly be dated after the mid-1540s. Indeed, if it is conceded that Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's *Fábula de Adonis*, written in Venice between 1539 and 1545 (mentioned previously), was inspired by it, then the prototype cannot have been

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painted much after circa 1543.

Given the likelihood of this early date, the evidence revealed by a technical examination of the Gallery's picture undertaken in 2004 is both interesting and surprising. Most significantly, the x-radiograph [fig. 4] and the infrared reflectogram [fig. 5] of the latter show that the foremost dog was originally represented in a standing pose, with its head looking backward, exactly as in the ex-Arundel picture; other pentimenti corresponding to this composition include the originally vertical position of one of the leashes and the drapery that originally appeared above Adonis's proper right shoulder. [18] In other words, the Gallery's picture must have been begun as another version of the ex-Arundel picture—very likely in the 1540s, or anyway, before the development of the "three-dog" composition—but was then, to judge from its surface handling, set aside and not completed until the 1560s.

This technical evidence naturally also has a bearing on another problem regarding the Gallery's picture that has been much discussed: its relationship to the New York version. While in general agreement that both of these versions of the "two-dog" composition are late works, and that both show a certain degree of workshop assistance, scholars have expressed divergent opinions about their respective chronological relationship and quality. Hans Tietze regarded the Washington version as superior to that in New York, an opinion later reiterated by W. R. Rearick. [19] Rodolfo Pallucchini, by contrast, followed by Francesco Valcanover, Augusto Gentili, David Alan Brown, and Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, judged the New York version to be a substantially autograph work of the early 1560s, and the Gallery's picture to be essentially a product of Titian's workshop. [20] At the end of the *Titian* exhibition in 1990, however, the opportunity was taken by a group of scholars, including Brown and Penny, to make a direct comparison between the two pictures; and a consensus appears to have emerged that despite its abraded surface and the severely compromised state of the blues and greens, the present work is the earlier and the finer, and shows more evidence of intervention by the master. In support of this opinion, Penny has convincingly pointed to the greater tension of Venus's arm and the greater expressiveness of her face in the Gallery's picture; to the addition of decorative accessories in the New York picture, such as the draperies over Adonis's shoulders and the pearls in Venus's plaits, not present in the Washington version or in the earlier "Arundel" composition or the picture for Philip II; and to several of the pentimenti visible in the x-radiograph of the New York picture, which show changes to initial correspondences with the Washington

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version. [21] Since neither picture shows the extremely broken brushwork of Titian's very late works of the 1570s, both may be dated to the 1560s, with the Gallery's picture perhaps dating from the first half of the decade.

The various differences of detail between the Washington and New York pictures support the observation by Pallucchini that an engraving of the composition by Raphael Sadeler II, dated 1610 [fig. 6], was made from the present work, probably when it was still in Venice. [22]

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, 1553–1554, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado

fig. 2 Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, 1560s, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949

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fig. 3 Peter Oliver, after Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, 1631, tempera on vellum with gold, Burghley House, Stamford. © Burghley House Preservation Trust Limited

fig. 4 X-radiograph, Titian and Workshop, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1540s/c. 1560–1565, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

fig. 5 Infrared reflectogram, Titian and Workshop, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1540s/c. 1560–1565, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

fig. 6 Raphael Sadeler II, after Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, 1610, engraving, Heidelberg University Library. http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/fwhb/klebeband13/0149 © Universitätsbilbiothek Heidelberg

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NOTES

[1] For the relation of Titian's subject to Ovid's text, see Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (London, 1969), 151–154; David Rosand, "*Ut Pictor Poeta*: Meaning in Titian's *Poesie*," *New Literary History* 3 (1972): 536–538; Philipp Fehl, "Beauty and the Historian of Art: Titian's *Venus and Adonis* (1982)," in *Decorum and Wit: The Poetry of Venetian Painting* (Vienna, 1992), 108–110; Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings,* vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 278–280. For an interpretation of the subject in allegorical terms, see Augusto Gentili, *Da Tiziano a Tiziano: Mito e allegoria nella cultura veneziana del Cinquecento* (1980), rev. ed. (Rome, 1988), 167–172; Jane Nash, *Veiled Images: Titian's Mythological Paintings for Philip II* (Philadelphia, 1985), 28–32.

[2] Raffaello Borghini, *Il riposo* (Florence, 1584), 64–65.

[3] For Mendoza's *Fábula de Adonis, Hipómenes y Atalanta*, published in Venice in 1553 (but written at some date between 1539 and 1545), as a possible source for Titian, see Pedro Beroqui, *Tiziano en el Museo del Prado* (Madrid, 1946), 77–81; Miguel Falomir, in *Tiziano* (Madrid, 2003), 238, 389–390. For Dolce's *Favola di Adone* and *Didone*, published in Venice in 1545 and 1547 respectively, see Kiyo Hosono, "Venere e Adone di Tiziano: La scelta del soggetto e le sue fonti," *Venezia Cinquecento* 13, no. 26 (2003): 128–147, with further observations on Mendoza. See also Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 31–33, 66.

[4] Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 32, 66.

[5] Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (London, 1969), 151; David Rosand, "*Ut Pictor Poeta*: Meaning in Titian's *Poesie*," *New Literary History* 3 (1972): 535–540; David Rosand, "Inventing Mythologies: The Painter's Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Titian*, ed. Patricia Meilman (Cambridge, 2004), 43–55; Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 280. See also Aneta Georgievska-Shine, "Titian and the Paradoxes of Love and Art in *Venus and Adonis,*" *Artibus et Historiae* 33, no. 65 (2012): 104, with reference to Roman sarcophagi.

[6] Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (London, 1969), 150–151 n. 34.

[7] See the listings by Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:188–194, 222–223, 241–242, cats. 40–44, X-39-40, L-19; and Nicholas

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Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 280–284.

[8] For the last, see Vittoria Markova, "Una nuova versione della Venere e Adone di Tiziano: Notizie storico artistiche," in *Una nuova versione della Venere e Adone di Tiziano* (Venice, 2007), 12–24; and Alfeo Michieletto, "Il restauro," in *Una nuova versione della Venere e Adone di Tiziano* (Venice, 2007), 26–44.

[9] See respectively W. R. Rearick, "Titian's Later Mythologies," *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no. 33 (1996): 23–67; and Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 35–36, 67. With respect to the latter, Alfeo Michieletto, "Il restauro," in *Una nuova versione della Venere e Adone di Tiziano* (Venice, 2007), 34, already commented on the quantity of pentimenti revealed by the x-radiograph of the Moscow picture, in contrast to the almost complete absence of such alterations in the Prado version.

[10] Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte, overo Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin, 1914), 1:179.

[11] The picture is described in the Farnese inventory of 1680 as follows: "Una Venere, che siede sopra di un panno cremisi, abbraccia Adone, che con la sinistra tiene duoi levrieri e un Amorino con una colomba in mano, di Tiziano" (Amadeo Ronchini, "Delle relazioni di Tiziano coi Farnesi," *Atti e memorie delle RR Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 2 [1864]: 144; Giuseppe Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti* [Modena, 1870], 211). For the inventory of 1644, see Bertrand Jestaz, ed., *L'inventaire du Palais et des propriétés Farnèse à Rome en 1644*, *Vol. 3, Pt. 3: Le Palais Farnèse* (Rome, 1994), 77, no. 4394; for those of 1653 and 1708, see Giuseppe Bertini, *La galleria del duca di Parma: Storia di una collezione* (Bologna, 1987), 139. The picture was later transferred from Parma to the Palazzo di Capodimonte in Naples with the rest of the Farnese collection and was last heard of in 1804.

[12] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:492–495; Philipp Fehl, "Beauty and the Historian of Art: Titian's *Venus and Adonis*," in *Atti del XXIV Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte, Vol. 10: Problemi di metodo, condizioni di esistenza di una storia dell'arte (1979)*, ed. Lajos Vayer (Bologna, 1982), 188; Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 248–249; David Rosand, "Inventing Mythologies: The Painter's Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Titian*, ed. Patricia Meilman (Cambridge, 2004), 44; Paul Joannides, "Titian and the Extract," *Studi Tizianeschi* 4 (2006): 139–140; Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed.

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Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 36–37, 67–68.

[13] See Amadeo Ronchini, "Delle relazioni di Tiziano coi Farnesi," *Atti e memorie delle RR Deputazioni di Storia Patria per le Provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 2 (1864): 144; Giuseppe Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti* (Modena, 1870), 211; M. Utili in *I Farnese: Arte e collezionismo*, ed. Lucia Fornari Schianchi and Nicola Spinosa (Milan, 1995), 208.

[14] As emphasized by Clare Robertson, *Il Gran Cardinale: Alessandro Farnese, Patron of the Arts* (New Haven and London, 1992), 72–74. The writer notes that, by contrast, the *Danaë* is mentioned in a report of 1581 of the paintings in the cardinal's room.

[15] Paul Joannides, "Titian and the Extract," *Studi Tizianeschi* 4 (2006): 141; Paul Joannides and Jill Dunkerton, "*A Boy with a Bird* in the National Gallery: Two Responses to a Titian Question," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 28 (2007): 38; Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 283.

[16] Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 283.

[17] Paul Joannides, "Titian and the Extract," *Studi Tizianeschi* 4 (2006): 140–141; Paul Joannides, "Titian's Repetitions," in *Titian: Materiality, Likeness, Istoria*, ed. Joanna Woods-Marsden (Turnhout, 2007), 46; Paul Joannides and Jill Dunkerton, "*A Boy with a Bird* in the National Gallery: Two Responses to a Titian Question," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 28 (2007): 39–40; Paul Joannides, "Titian's Vienna *Mars and Venus*: Its Lost Pendant and a Variant," *Paragone* 61, no. 721 (2010): 3–27; Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 32–34, 66–67. Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:194, no. 3, had considered the ex-Arundel picture to be a free variant of the Gallery's picture.

[18] These pentimenti are usefully highlighted in red in the reproduction of the x-radiograph in Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), fig. 33. It may be noted, however, that some of the other red highlights indicated in this reproduction are not fully warranted by the technical evidence.

[19] Hans Tietze, *Titian: The Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1950), 402; W. R. Rearick, "Titian's Later Mythologies," *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no. 33 (1996): 24, 34, 53.

[20] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:142, 315; Francesco Valcanover, *Tutta la pittura di Tiziano* (Milan, 1960), 2:44 (and Francesco

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Valcanover, *L'opera completa di Tiziano* [Milan, 1969], 128–129; Francesco Valcanover, in *Le siècle de Titien: L'Âge d'Or de la peinture à Venise* [Paris, 1993], 616–617), Augusto Gentili, *Da Tiziano a Tiziano: Mito e allegoria nella cultura veneziana del Cinquecento* (Milan, 1980), 115–116; David Alan Brown, in *Titian, Prince of Painters* (Venice, 1990), 328–330; Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, in Filippo Pedrocco, *Titian: The Complete Paintings* (New York, 2001), 260.

[21] Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice 1540–1600* (London, 2008), 283. This reassertion of the quality of the Gallery's picture renders superfluous previous attempts by scholars to attribute it to particular members of Titian's workshop, for instance by Hans Tietze, "An Early Version of Titian's *Danaë:* An Analysis of Titian's Replicas," *Arte veneta* 8 (1954): 201–202, to Orazio Vecellio, or by Fritz Heinemann, "La bottega di Tiziano," in *Tiziano e Venezia: Convegno internazionale di studi (1976)* (Vicenza, 1980), 435, to Girolamo Dente.

[22] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:315. See also Maria Agnese Chiari, *Incisioni da Tiziano: Catalogo del fondo grafico a stampa del Museo Correr* (Venice, 1982), 142; Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, "Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Origen y evolución," in *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: Las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2014), 37, 51 n. 79, 68, 73 n. 80.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The picture is painted on a relatively coarse, open, plain-weave fabric, estimated to be linen, which has been lined. The tacking edges have been removed, but cusping along all four edges and the composition imply that the painting's dimensions have not been altered.

Infrared reflectography at 1.1 to 1.4 microns [fig. 1] [1] and x-radiographs [fig. 2] reveal extensive pentimenti, the most significant of which may be summarized as follows: the head of the dog on the right originally looked backward toward the figures; a leash held by Adonis originally hung vertically downward; the contours of his proper left arm and the proper left side of his torso have been adjusted; part of his cloak fluttered above his proper right shoulder; the position of the fabric by Venus's proper left ankle has been altered; and her left leg was originally slightly higher.

Close inspection by the naked eye suggests that the ground was applied thinly in reddish brown. The paint is freely applied with loose, confident brushwork; lighter

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colors are used in a full-bodied, textured manner with scumbles, while the darks are generally painted much more thinly. The red drapery was created by covering a white underpainting with a transparent red glaze. To judge from its present gray/brown color, the sky on the right was painted with smalt pigment, but it has retained its correct hue in the area to the left of Adonis, where the smalt was clearly mixed with white lead. The copper resinate greens used for the foliage have typically discolored to a dark brown.

The picture has suffered from overzealous cleanings, and the fabric is visible in many places where the paint has been abraded. During treatment undertaken in 1992–1995 extensive old retouchings and the badly discolored varnish were removed. The painting had been treated previously in 1924 and again in 1930, this time by Herbert N. Carmer.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Catherine Metzger and Joanna Dunn and the treatment report by David Bull

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Infrared reflectogram, Titian and Workshop, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1540s/c. 1560–1565, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

fig. 2 X-radiograph, Titian and Workshop, *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1540s/c. 1560–1565, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

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TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with a J astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

Robert Spencer, 2nd earl of Sunderland [1641-1702], London and Althorp, Northamptonshire, by 1679;[1] by inheritance to his youngest son, the Hon. John Spencer [d. 1746], Althorp;[2] by inheritance to John Spencer, 1st earl Spencer [1734-1783], Althorp;[3] by inheritance to George John Spencer, 2nd earl Spencer [1758-1834], Althorp;[4] by inheritance to John Charles Spencer, 3rd earl Spencer [1782-1845], Althorp; by inheritance to Frederick Spencer, 4th earl Spencer [1798-1857], Althorp; by inheritance to John Poyntz Spencer, 5th earl Spencer [1835-1910], Althorp; by inheritance to Charles Robert Spencer, 6th earl Spencer [1857-1922], Althorp; by inheritance to Albert Edward John Spencer, 7th earl Spencer [1892-1975], Althorp; sold 1924 to (Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd., London); sold 1925 to (Arthur J. Sulley and Co., London); inheritance from Estate of Peter A.B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, after purchased 1925 by funds of the Estate; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] The picture is first certainly recorded in the Chelsea house of Anne Russell Digby, Countess of Bristol [d. 1696/1697], mother-in-law of Lord Sunderland, by John Evelyn on 15 January 1679 (John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn (1620–1706)*, ed. Esmond S. de Beer, 6 vols., Oxford, 1955: 4:162). Yet although Sunderland inherited a few family portraits from his mother-in-law, he acquired most of his extensive collection during his diplomatic career, including in Italy (Kenneth Garlick, “A Catalogue of Pictures at Althorp,” *Walpole Society* 45 [1974-1976]: xiii-xiv); and according to Thomas F. Dibdin, *Aedes Althorpianae: An Account of the Mansion, Books and Pictures at Althorp*, London, 1822: 13, the *Venus and Adonis* was one of Sunderland's favorite purchases. In 1685, still in the lifetime of Lady Bristol, Evelyn saw the picture again at Sunderland’s house in Whitehall (Evelyn 1955, 4:403). Harold Wethey repeats a theory that the picture is identical with a *Venus and Adonis* mentioned by Marco Boschini, in the Palazzo Barbarigo

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della Terrazza in Venice, and which is sometimes supposed to have been acquired by Cristoforo Barbarigo soon after Titian's death from his son Pomponio; see Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, 3 vols., London, 1969-1975: 3(1975):193–194; and Marco Boschini, *La Carta del Navegar Pitoresco* (1660), ed. Anna Pallucchini, Venice, 1966: 30, 664. But apart from the fact that Cristoforo's will of 1600, which does mention the Gallery's *Venus with a Mirror* (NGA 1937.1.34), makes no mention of any *Venus and Adonis*, Siebenhüner demonstrated that the Barbarigo version was of an upright format, was still in Venice in 1793/1795, was sold to the Czar of Russia in 1850, and is now lost. See Herbert Siebenhüner, *Der Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza in Venedig und seine Tizian-Sammlung*, Munich, 1981: 30; and also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols., Washington, 1979: 1:495.

[2] George Knapton's catalogue of 1746, with an attribution to "Schidone" (Andrea Schiavone), after Titian (Kenneth Garlick, "A Catalogue of Pictures at Althorp," *Walpole Society* 45 [1974-1976)]: 99 no. 175).

[3] Althorp catalogue of 1750, as by Schiavone after Titian (Kenneth Garlick, "A Catalogue of Pictures at Althorp," *Walpole Society* 45 [1974-1976]: 108).

[4] Althorp catalogue of 1802, as by Schiavone after Titian (Kenneth Garlick, "A Catalogue of Pictures at Althorp," *Walpole Society* 45 [1974-1976]: 124); Thomas F. Dibdin, *Aedes Althorpianae: An Account of the Mansion, Books and Pictures at Althorp*, London, 1822: 13-14, as by Titian; George John Spencer, 2nd Earl, *Catalogue of the Pictures at Althorp House, in the County of North Hampton*, 1831: 7.

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