



Domenico Tintoretto
Venetian, 1560 - 1635

Susanna

c. 1580s

oil on canvas

overall: 150.2 x 102.6 cm (59 1/8 x 40 3/8 in.)

framed: 185.7 x 137.8 x 10.8 cm (73 1/8 x 54 1/4 x 4 1/4 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.231

ENTRY

The story of the beautiful and chaste Susanna is recounted in Daniel 13. Two elders of Babylon lusted for Susanna, the wife of the priest Joachim. They spied upon her as she bathed, then threatened to falsely accuse her of adultery with another man unless she submitted to their advances. Although the subject can be interpreted as a parable of justice—Susanna is ultimately vindicated—artists of the period clearly favored the image of the nude Susanna at the bath for its sensual appeal. [1]

Jacopo Tintoretto's *Susanna and the Elders* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), painted when the artist was still in his 30s, is justifiably considered one of his greatest works, for its incandescent nude, evocative background, complicated play of pictorial space, and witty juxtaposition of different ways of looking. [2] The Gallery's *Susanna* is a much simpler conception, focusing on the nude figure, with only the barest allusion to narrative elements in the two sketchy figures of the elders in the background, and none of the sophisticated intellectual content of the earlier painting. [3]

Tintoretto's 17th-century biographer Carlo Ridolfi reported that "Senator Lorenzo Delfino [Dolfin] has . . . six scenes from the Old Testament placed above doors; namely . . . Susanna in the garden, and the two old men, emerging in the distance from a pergola." [4] The Gallery's *Susanna* fits this description. The somewhat perfunctory nature of the picture's composition and execution is consistent with an origin as part of a decorative ensemble rather than as a painting intended to be appreciated on its own. [5]

The Gallery's *Susanna* has been accepted as an autograph work by Tintoretto by a number of scholars, among them Bernard Berenson, Rodolfo Pallucchini, and Paola Rossi, and, in early manuscript opinions, Roberto Longhi, Raimond van Marle, F. Mason Perkins, Giuseppe Fiocco, Wilhelm Suida, and Adolfo Venturi. [6] Dissenters, however, include Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat, Fern Rusk Shapley, and Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, and the painting can best be deemed a studio work. [7] The nude figure is comparable to those in other paintings that can be identified as Tintoretto studio products of the 1570s and 1580s, such as the *Concert* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden), *Leda and the Swan* (two versions, both Uffizi, Florence), and *Hercules Ejecting the Faun from the Bed of Omphale* (Szépmvészeti Múzeum, Budapest; probably by Jacopo Tintoretto's son Domenico). [8] These nude figures can be distinguished from those by Jacopo Tintoretto himself, such as those in *Tarquin and Lucretia* (Art Institute of Chicago); in the allegories painted for the Atrio Quadrato in the Palazzo Ducale, Venice; and in the *Origin of the Milky Way* (National Gallery, London). [9] All of these show a more convincing sense of the figures' underlying anatomy and dynamics, as well as more varied and dynamic compositions. [10] Similarly, as noted by Shapley, the shorthand rendering of the two elders under the arbor in the background, while resembling similarly sketchy figures in works by Tintoretto dating back to the *Miracle of the Slave* of 1548, lacks the virtuoso mastery of Tintoretto's own hand. [11] The maid seems almost an afterthought, throwing the composition off-balance. Her facial type is one that appears regularly in paintings that can be associated with Domenico, such as the Budapest *Hercules and Omphale*. [12] The picture can thus provisionally be assigned to Domenico, working in his father's studio. However, the identification of different hands in the Tintoretto shop remains a challenge. Moreover, this painting was probably produced during Jacopo Tintoretto's lifetime and, as a product of his studio, would have been accepted as a work "by Tintoretto."

Robert Echols

March 21, 2019

NOTES

- [1] The story is omitted entirely from many editions of the Bible, including the King James version and later revisions.

- [2] Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. no. 200; 2: figs. 262–264; Tom Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity* (London, 1999), 91–93; Miguel Falomir, ed., *Tintoretto* (Madrid, 2007), cat. no. 31; Frederick Ilchman et al., *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice* (Boston, 2009), cat. no. 31; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,” in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), no. 64. A much later version from Tintoretto’s studio, executed with substantial participation by assistants (now Louvre, Paris) employs a similar format and is clearly intended to evoke the earlier painting, although it falls short of the magic of that work; Pallucchini and Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane*, 1: cat. no. 144, 2: fig. 191; Echols and Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue,” no. 144.
- [3] Neither the Vienna, Paris, nor Washington paintings adhere strictly to the biblical text, in which Susanna is accosted by the lecherous elders as soon as she has sent her two maids away to fetch soap and oils; thus, she never receives the bathing accoutrements or has time to bathe.
- [4] “Il Signor Lorenzo Delfino Senator ha . . . sei historie del vecchio testamento collocate sopra poste; cioè . . . Susana nel giardino, & i due vecchi, che spuntano di lontano da un pergolato.” (“Poste” is presumed to be an error for *porte*, or doors.) Carlo Ridolfi, *Vita di Giacompo Robusti detto il Tintoretto* (Venice, 1642), 72; Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, overo Le vite de gl’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato* (Venice, 1648), 2:45; Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, overo Le vite de gl’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin, 1924), 2:53–54. The passage was first linked to the Gallery’s painting by Wilhelm Suida (manuscript opinion in NGA curatorial files). The other subjects mentioned by Ridolfi as part of the ensemble were Adam and Eve, Hagar and the Angel, Lot and His Daughters, Abraham Sacrificing Isaac, and Ruth and Boaz. All seem to be lost.
- [5] The Gallery’s *Summer*, 1961.9.90, is an example of an autograph painting from a decorative cycle by Jacopo Tintoretto.
- [6] Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School* (London, 1957), 1:183; Rodolfo Pallucchini (letter of January 16, 1971, copy in NGA curatorial files); Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1:210, no. 377; 2: fig. 487 (dated to 1577–1578); see also Pierluigi De Vecchi, *L’opera completa del Tintoretto* (Milan, 1970), 115, no. 216 (“prevalentemente attribuita,” dated to c. 1575); Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 201. The manuscript opinions, copies of which are in NGA curatorial

files, from Roberto Longhi, Raimond van Marle, F. Mason Perkins, Giuseppe Fiocco, Wilhelm Suida, and Adolfo Venturi, all praise it highly.

- [7] In 1973 Fern Rusk Shapley assigned it to Tintoretto's studio, but in 1979 saw some involvement of Tintoretto himself. Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, 1973), 58; and Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:472–473. Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat (manuscript opinion, NGA curatorial files) called the execution clumsy, the composition lifeless, and the narrative undramatic, and ascribed it to an imitator of Tintoretto. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman attributed it to Tintoretto's studio, probably by Domenico, 1580s. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), 143, no. S36.
- [8] Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. nos. 204, 158, 384, and 447; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), nos. 215, 221, 222, and 214.
- [9] Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. nos. 450, 373–376, and 390; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), nos. 219, 201–204, and 213.
- [10] On these elements as central to Tintoretto connoisseurship, see Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), 99.
- [11] In comparison, the similarly conceived little figures in the background of Tintoretto's San Trovaso *Last Supper* are equally sketchy, but convincingly volumetric and dynamic, like Tintoretto's drawings; see Miguel Falomir, ed., *Tintoretto* (Madrid, 2007), cat. no. 32, fig. 160 (detail).
- [12] See Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,"

in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007 (Madrid, 2009), no. 214. A similar figure appears in the *Entombment* (Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice), primarily executed by Domenico; see Miguel Falomir, ed., *Tintoretto* (Madrid, 2007), cat. no. 49; Echols and Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue,” no. 313.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a fabric support made up of two pieces of medium-weight, herringbone fabric sewn together. The vertical seam is located approximately one-quarter from the left edge. The painting has been lined, and the original support has been extended at the top and bottom by a total of approximately 14 centimeters. A strip of canvas of 6 to 7.5 centimeters has been sewn along the top. A strip of 8.5 to 9 centimeters has been added at the bottom; this strip is not sewn to the original canvas and was probably added at the time the painting was first lined. Light cusping evident along both sides indicates that the canvas has not been extended nor cut down horizontally.

Analysis of cracks with a stereo microscope indicates that the painting was built up with multiple layers, probably on a white ground followed by dark underlayers of different colors, with the additional paint layers built up from dark to light. Infrared reflectography at 1.2 to 5 microns [1] reveals rough preparatory sketches for the principal figure executed with a brush and dark paint, showing several changes in pose. The most significant of these is the change in the position of Susanna’s legs. An x-radiograph composite shows a full-face view of Susanna, as well as the change in the position of her legs visible in the infrared reflectogram, numerous small changes in her drapery, and major changes in the area to the left of the figure, which are difficult to interpret. Underlayers of unexpected colors can be detected under the final paint layers, such as a bright orange layer under the blue of the sky and a blackish layer under the orange drapery. These may be additional evidence that the composition was extensively reworked during its creation.

The paint surface is heavily abraded throughout, but especially in the orange drapery, and there are many small areas of paint loss, including some losses in Susanna’s face. There is an old tear in the background to the left of Susanna’s head. The painting was “relined, cleaned and restored” in 1936–1937 by Stephen Pichetto. By 1958 the varnish applied by Stephen Pichetto had darkened. Mario

Modestini removed it and inpainted the losses and abrasion.

Joanna Dunn and Robert Echols based on the examination report by Susanna Griswold

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Kodak 310-21X Focal plane array PtSi camera.

PROVENANCE

Probably Senator Lorenzo Delfin [or Delfino, 1591-1663], Venice, by 1642.[1] George Oakley Fisher [1859-1933], Egremont House, Sudbury, England.[2] (David M. Koetser Gallery, London). (Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, Florence); sold June 1936 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[3] gift 1939 to NGA.

[1] In a passage first linked to the NGA painting by Wilhelm Suida (manuscript opinion in NGA curatorial files), Tintoretto's biographer Carlo Ridolfi wrote "Il Signor Lorenzo Delfino Senator ha ... sei historie del vecchio testmento collocate sopra poste [presumed to be an error for "porte," doors]; cioè ...Susana nel giardino, & i due vecchi, che spuntano di lontano da un pergolato...." ("Senator Lorenzo Delfino has. . .six scenes from the Old Testament placed above doors; namely. . .Susanna in the garden, and the two old men, emerging in the distance from a pergola. . ."); *Vita di Giacomo Robusti detto il Tintoretto*, Venice, 1642: 72. The other subjects mentioned by Ridolfi as part of the ensemble were Adam and Eve, Hagar and the Angel, Lot and his Daughters, Abraham Sacrificing Isaac, and Ruth and Boaz. All seem to be lost. See also: Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte, overo Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello Stato*, 2 vols., Venice, 1648: 2:45; Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte, overo Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello Stato* (Venice, 1648), edited by Detlev von Hadeln, 2 vols., Berlin, 1914-1924: 2(1924):54.

If the painting described by Ridolfi is, as scholars believe, the NGA painting, it

appears as item 45 of page 286 in a partition document dated 26 November 1655: "Tintoretto vecchio, Susana insediata da vicchi." See: The Getty Provenance Index Databases, Archival Inventories, no. I-3348 (Dolfin); and Linda Borean, "Appunti per una storia del collezionismo a Venezia nel Seicento: la pinacoteca di Lorenzo Dolfin," *Studi Veneziani* 38 (1999): 259-291.

[2] Fisher was a book collector and antiquarian; the NGA painting does not appear in the several sales of his collection held by his executors in London in 1934 (see NGA curatorial files).

[3] The bill of sale for a group of paintings, including the Tintoretto, is dated 1 June 1936 (copy in NGA curatorial files). See also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/2025>.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1996 Obras Maestras de la National Gallery of Art de Washington, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, 1996-1997, unnumbered catalogue, 48-49, color repro.

1999 Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1999, no. 79, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1642 Ridolfi, Carlo. *Vita di Giacompo Robusti detto il Tintoretto*. Venice, 1642: 72.
- 1648 Ridolfi, Carlo. *Le maraviglie dell'arte, ovvero Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello Stato*. 2 vols. Venice, 1648: 2:45.
- 1914 Ridolfi, Carlo. *Le maraviglie dell'arte, ovvero Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello Stato* (Venice, 1648). Edited by Detlev von Hadeln. 2 vols. Berlin, 1914-1924: 2(1924):54.
- 1941 *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1941: 195, no. 342.
- 1942 *Book of Illustrations*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1942: 246, repro. 196.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

- 1957 Berenson, Bernard. *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance. Venetian School*. 2 vols. London, 1957: 1:183.
- 1959 *Paintings and Sculpture from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1959: 205, repro.
- 1965 *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1965: 128.
- 1968 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings and Sculpture, Illustrations*. Washington, 1968: 115, repro.
- 1970 De Vecchi, Pierluigi. *L'opera completa del Tintoretto*. Milan, 1970: 115, no. 216.
- 1972 Fredericksen, Burton B., and Federico Zeri. *Census of Pre-Nineteenth Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*. Cambridge, Mass., 1972: 201.
- 1973 Shapley, Fern Rusk. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI-XVIII Century*. London, 1973: 58, fig. 110.
- 1975 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1975: 340, repro.
- 1979 Shapley, Fern Rusk. *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*. 2 vols. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1979: 1:472-473; 2:pl. 337.
- 1982 Pallucchini, Rodolfo, and Paola Rossi. *Tintoretto: le opere sacre e profane*. 2 vols. Venice, 1982: 1:160, 210, and 264, no. 377; 2:fig. 487.
- 1984 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. Rev. ed. New York, 1984: 227, no. 286, color repro.
- 1985 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985: 391, repro.
- 1991 Kopper, Philip. *America's National Gallery of Art: A Gift to the Nation*. New York, 1991: 184, color repro.
- 1998 Apostolos-Cappadona, Diana. "Toilet Scenes." In *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*. Edited by Helene E. Roberts. 2 vols. Chicago, 1998: 2:874.
- 1999 Borean, Linda. "Appunti per una storia del collezionismo a Venezia nel Seicento: la pinacoteca di Lorenzo Dolfín." *Studi Veneziani* 38 (1999): 274, 286, 298 fig. 6.
- 2009 Echols, Robert, and Frederick Ilchman. "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology." In *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26-27, 2007*. Madrid, 2009: 143, no. S36.
-

To cite: Robert Echols, “Domenico Tintoretto/*Susanna*/c. 1580s,” *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/372> (accessed September 19, 2024).