



Workshop of Titian  
Italian 15th/16th Century

Titian  
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576

## *Allegory of Love*

c. 1520/1540

oil on canvas

overall: 91.4 x 81.9 cm (36 x 32 1/4 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.259

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### ENTRY

Ever since 1815, when it was discovered by Count Leopoldo Cicognara in the attic of a palace in Ferrara, the picture has attracted controversy with regard both to its attribution and to its subject. [1] Cicognara, a renowned antiquarian and connoisseur, had been commissioned by the Duchess of Sagan to find works by Titian for her, and he was convinced that his discovery was autograph. His friend Stefano Ticozzi agreed, and went on to identify the figures as Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, and his mistress (later wife), Laura Dianti, partly on the basis of the Ferrarese provenance, partly on a supposed resemblance of the male figure to known portraits of Alfonso, and partly on the report by Giorgio Vasari that Titian had painted a portrait of Laura. [2] With these credentials, Cicognara sold the picture (together with Titian's *Self-Portrait* now in Berlin) to Lord Stewart, British ambassador to the imperial court in Vienna and lover of the Duchess of Sagan. But Stewart was advised by the Milanese dealer Gerli that both pictures were copies, and he accordingly had them sent to Rome to be appraised by the Accademia di San Luca. The academicians pronounced the *Self-Portrait* to be authentic, but because of the presence of retouching ("alcuni ritocchi") on the other picture, they were unable to decide between Giorgione and Paris Bordone. Since he was only interested in authentic works by Titian, Stewart insisted on returning the picture to Cicognara, who subsequently sold it to Count Pourtalès-Gorgier in Paris. [3]

In Paris the picture could be compared with the compositionally similar *Woman with a Mirror* in the Louvre [fig. 1], previously known as *La maîtresse de Titien*, but which on the basis of Ticozzi's identification was now also accepted as a double portrait of Alfonso and Laura. By the mid-19th century it was further widely believed

that the Washington picture was the earlier, since the nudity of the female figure implied that she was still merely the duke's mistress, while the Louvre picture, in which the female figure is clothed, was seen as dating from after her marriage. [4]

But a certain skepticism toward both the traditional attribution and the title was already expressed by Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle in 1877, and then more emphatically by Carl Justi and Seymour de Ricci; [5] and by the time that the picture came to America around 1922, Ticozzi's romantically fanciful title was becoming increasingly discredited. Wilhelm R. Valentiner, while still accepting the possibility that the male figure represents a portrait of Alfonso, interpreted the picture rather in terms of mythology and called it the *Toilet of Venus*. [6] Valentiner continued, however, to support the attribution to Titian and retained an early dating to circa 1518. Subsequent adherents to this view have included Adolfo Venturi, Lionello Venturi, Wilhelm Suida, and Günther Tschmelitsch, [7] and the picture retained its attribution to Titian when it entered the National Gallery of Art in 1939. But postwar 20th-century critics have increasingly tended to see the picture as a later workshop variant of the unquestionably autograph Louvre *Woman with a Mirror* of circa 1515, and this view has been supported by the emergence of a number of other variants, likewise of less than autograph quality. Two of the best of these (Museo de Artes Decorativas, Barcelona; National Gallery, Prague) [8] show the female figure clothed, as in the Louvre original; but as pointed out by Alessandro Ballarin, another nude version, apparently by a Netherlandish hand and possibly copying another lost variant by Titian, appeared on the London art market in 1971. [9] Fern Rusk Shapley called the Gallery's picture "Follower of Titian," disassociating it even from Titian's workshop, and Harold Wethey downgraded it still further, calling it "Sixteenth-century Venetian School." [10]

The very poor condition of the painting and the presence of extensive overpaint and discolored varnish make such negative judgments understandable. The generally thin and bland application of the paint, without any of Titian's characteristically expressive brushwork, certainly argues against his personal involvement in the execution, at least of the upper layers. However, the evidence of extensive pentimenti, and the fact that the original composition was even closer to that of the Louvre *Woman with a Mirror*, suggests that the executant had access to Titian's designs, and hence that he was at least a member of Titian's workshop, and not an independent imitator. The man's costume is of a fashion dating from at least a decade after the Louvre picture: the doublet, with its short, pleated skirt,

resembles that worn by Federico Gonzaga in Titian's portrait of 1529 (Prado, Madrid); [11] and the pleated collar and cuffs of the shirt, and the cut of the hair and beard, are similarly of a style that did not become fashionable until the mid-1520s. Probably, therefore, the painter adapted Titian's design, perhaps in the form of an underdrawing begun circa 1515–1520, and completed it at some date in the 1530s. In doing so, he changed the dynamic composition of the underdrawing, in which the man appears to have just arrived, into the more static image of the completed work.

Since the female figure is not accompanied by any of the particular attributes of a mythological deity, there is no good reason to follow Valentiner's title of the *Toilet of Venus*, and still less convincing is the identification by Tschmelitsch of the two figures as Venus and Mars. Like its Louvre prototype, the picture clearly belongs rather to a category of erotic painting that hovers ambivalently on the borders of allegory, mythology, and genre, and which is much discussed in current art-historical discourse (see also *Woman Holding an Apple* and *Venus with a Mirror*). In the Louvre *Woman with a Mirror*, Titian achieved a masterly balance between erotic suggestiveness, poetic idealization, and moralizing or philosophical reflection. [12] In the Washington picture, the eroticism has become more blatant—Goffen has rightly drawn attention to the shift in the erotic balance of power between the two figures [13]—and the mirror held by the man has lost any possible reference to the passing of beauty and time and, like the perfume jar on the parapet, has become merely an accoutrement of his beloved's toilette. With more justification than its Louvre prototype, the picture may be regarded as belonging to the category of "courtesan picture," of a type practiced in Venice from the 1520s above all by Paris Bordone. [14] Yet the generalization of the features and body of the female figure, and the fact that she is incongruously set not in a boudoir but against a landscape, suggest that she does not represent a particular courtesan, but an ideal mistress; indeed, her anonymity, as in other versions of the composition, remains central to her erotic allure. By contrast, and as in the other versions of the composition, the male figure, with his contemporary clothes and particularized features, is much more portraitlike. Goffen expressed sympathy with the 19th-century tradition that he represents Alfonso d'Este; [15] although there is no substance in this identification, the figure may well represent a portrait of the original owner. Essentially constituting, therefore, a personalized erotic fantasy, the picture may nevertheless retain sufficient allegorical content to justify the present title of an *Allegory of Love*.

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** Titian, *Woman with a Mirror*, c. 1515, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Martine Beck-Coppola / Art Resource, NY

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**NOTES**

- [1] Leopoldo Cicognara, *Relazione di due quadri di Tiziano Vecellio* (Venice, 1816), 3–14.
- [2] Stefano Ticozzi, *Vite dei pittori Vecelli di Cadore* (Milan, 1817), 52–64. Titian's portrait is now universally identified with that in the Kisters collection, Kreuzlingen.
- [3] For the story of the discovery of the portrait and Cicognara's dealings with

- Stewart, see Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara* (Venice, 1888), 2:113–114, 125–133.
- [4] Frédéric Villot, *Notice des tableaux exposés dans les galeries du Musée Impérial du Louvre* (Paris, 1869), 289; Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara* (Venice, 1888), 2:128–129.
- [5] Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Titian, His Life and Times* (London, 1877), 1:268–269; Carl Justi, *Miscellaneen aus drei Jahrhunderten spanischen Kunstlebens* (Berlin, 1908), 2:169; Seymour de Ricci, *Description raisonnée des peintures du Louvre* (Paris, 1913), 163–164.
- [6] Wilhelm R. Valentiner, “Ein unbekanntes Meisterwerk Tizians,” *Belvedere* 1 (1922): 91; Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *The Henry Goldman Collection* (New York, 1922), no. 6.
- [7] Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell’arte italiana*, vol. 9, part 3 (Milan, 1928), 230–234; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, trans. Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott (New York and Milan, 1933), 3: no. 508; Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 30, 158, no. 121a; Günther Tschmelitsch, *Harmonia est Discordia Concors* (Vienna, 1966), n.p.
- [8] For the Barcelona and Prague variants, see Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:163–165, nos. 23–24; for the latter see also Jaromír Neumann, *The Picture Gallery of Prague Castle* (Prague, 1967), 280. Variants showing the female figure alone include those exhibited in Venice in 1947 (Alberto Riccoboni, ed., *Pittura veneta: Prima mostra dell’arte antica delle raccolte private veneziane* [Venice, 1947], pl. 37), and in Toledo, OH, in 1940 (see *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting* [Toledo, OH, 1940], no. 62).
- [9] Alessandro Ballarin in *Le siècle de Titien: L’âge d’or de la peinture à Venise* (Paris, 1993), 363; the sale was Christie’s, London, May 14, 1971, no. 24, as a Flemish copy (98 × 74.9 cm). Formerly in the Pierre Bezine collection (sold Fievez, Brussels, June 14, 1927, no. 124) and in the collections of Prince Ourasoff and Prince Menschikoff, as Paris Bordone. It is not clear whether this is the same as the picture that appeared in a sale at Christie’s, South Kensington, July 9, 2010, no. 45 (102 × 73.7 cm). Paul Joannides and Rupert Featherstone, “A Painting by Titian from the Spanish Royal Collection at Apsley House, London,” *Hamilton Kerr Institute Bulletin* 5 (2014): 73, surmised that the latter is a copy after a lost Titian.
- [10] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XV–XVI Century* (London, 1968), 189–190; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:498–500; Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:212–213.
- [11] As pointed out by Jane Bridgeman, this type of doublet was fashionable throughout the 1530s, but had become obsolete by c. 1540 (letter to Peter Humfrey, Sept. 11, 2000).

- [12] For recent divergent interpretations, see Elise Goodman-Soellner, “A Poetic Interpretation of the ‘Lady at Her Toilette’ Theme in Sixteenth-Century Painting,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 426–442; Rona Goffen, *Titian’s Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 66–67; and Cathy Santore, “The Tools of Venus,” *Renaissance Studies* 11 (1997): 181–182.
- [13] Rona Goffen, *Titian’s Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 67.
- [14] For which see Patricia Simons, “Portraiture, Portrayal and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women,” in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford, 1995), 294–301; Cathy Santore, “The Tools of Venus,” *Renaissance Studies* 11 (1997): 179–207. The term may be a misnomer, however, since portraits of real courtesans are more likely to show them as accomplished ladies of fashion than in dishabille. See Carol M. Schuler, “The Courtesan in Art: Historical Fact or Modern Fantasy?” *Women’s Studies* 19 (1991): 209–221; Mary Rogers, “Fashioning Identities for the Renaissance Courtesan,” in *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*, ed. Mary Rogers (Aldershot, 2000), 91–105; and Luke Syson, “Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women,” in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New Haven and London, 2008), 246–254.
- [15] Rona Goffen, *Titian’s Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 67.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support consists of four pieces of fabric sewn together. The largest piece is in the center, and most of the composition fits onto this piece. One strip of fabric was sewn to the length of the right side, and two shorter pieces of fabric were sewn together with a horizontal seam and then sewn to the left side of the large center piece of fabric. Although all of the fabrics are plain-weave, the center piece is much coarser and looser than the fine-weight additions. The support has been lined, and the tacking margins have been removed. Tack holes and lines of losses indicate that the painting was reduced in size at least once, possibly twice, and later opened up again.

The support was prepared with a light ground, and the original paint appears to have been applied fairly thinly in the flesh areas, with soft modeling and blended brushstrokes. The costumes are painted with more visible brushwork, but apart from in small details, such as the jeweled ring, there is very little impasto. X-radiographs show no trace of Titian’s customarily vigorous undermodeling. However, x-radiographs and infrared reflectography at 1.5 to 1.8 microns [1] reveal

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several major changes in the composition, which originally much more closely resembled that of Titian's *Woman with a Mirror* in the Louvre [fig. 1]. Originally, the man's left arm was placed higher, presumably to hold a circular mirror above the woman's left shoulder; traces of the red paint of the earlier sleeve are still visible to the naked eye. The man's right hand held the rectangular mirror from the side rather than from below. A drapery hung from his right arm, his beard was shorter, and his white collar was wider and simpler in design.

The paint layer is very worn, with numerous scattered losses and discolored retouchings, and is covered with a thick accumulation of discolored varnish. Technical examination has revealed several campaigns of overpainting, the heaviest of which is in the upper right. Two losses below the man's chin have been repaired with insets. The painting was last treated in 1937 by Stephen Pichetto, who lined and "slightly restored" it. [2]

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Jane Tillinghast

March 21, 2019

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### TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Titian, *Woman with a Mirror*, c. 1515, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Martine Beck-Coppola / Art Resource, NY

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#### TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.
  - [2] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:500.
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#### PROVENANCE

Counts Benacosi, Ferrara;<sup>[1]</sup> on consignment 1815 with Count Leopoldo Cicognara, Venice; sold 1815 to Charles William Vane, Lord Stewart [1778-1854, later 3rd marquess of Londonderry], but returned 1816 to Cicognara;<sup>[2]</sup> sold after 1821 to



James-Alexandre, comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier [1776-1855], Paris; (Pourtalès-Gorgier sale, Paris, 27 March-4 April 1865, no. 118); purchased by Comte Charles de Pourtalès, Paris. private collection, England;[3] Baron Michele Lazzaroni, Paris and Rome; sold March 1920 to (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);[4] purchased February 1922 by Henry Goldman [1857-1937], New York, until at least 1933.[5] (Duveen Brothers, Inc.); sold March 1937 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[6] gift 1939 to NGA.

[1] These owners are first mentioned in the catalogue of the Pourtalès-Gorgier sale: *Catalogue des Tableaux Anciens et Modernes Dessins qui composent les Collections de M. le Comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier*, Paris, 1865: 43-44, no. 118. According to Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara*, 2 vols., Venice, 1888: 2:113-114, the painting was found by Cicognara in the attic of an old house in Ferrara.

[2] Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara*, 2 vols., Venice, 1888: 2: 113-114, 125-133. Stewart's brief ownership is also recorded in a seal bearing his coat of arms now affixed to the stretcher of the relined canvas. Ross Watson identified the seal in 1971; see his notes in NGA curatorial files.

[3] The Paris branch of Duveen Brothers wrote to the New York branch on 29 December 1920, describing the visits of Henry Goldman (they spell the name Goldmann) to see "the Titian" and, after Goldman asked them where the picture "had turned up," their telling him "that Lazzaroni, who was an amateur and had been studying Titian for some years, having spent some years tracing it from the time it left the Pourtalès Collection, had found the picture in England" (Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series III.I, Collector's files, reel 312, box 457, folder 1 [Goldman #1, 1911-1925], copy in NGA curatorial files).

[4] Duveen records document their possession of the painting: it is entered under Lazzaroni's name on 26 March 1920 in their Paris ledger, and the earliest date listed in the "X Book" entry for the painting is 30 September 1920, where it is described as "Painting by Titian, 'Lady at Toilet', ex Baron Lazzaroni" (Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research

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Institute, Los Angeles: Series I.C. Business records, Paris House, reel 27, box 75, Paris ledger 3, June 1917-May 1922, page 372; Series V. Duveen Brothers records at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, reel 422 [Berenson X book, 1910-1927]; copies in NGA curatorial files).

[5] The invoice for the painting is dated 3 February 1922, and Goldman responded the same day, outlining his plan to pay the price in three installments no later than 10 October 1924 (Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series II.I, Collector's files, reel 312, box 457, folder 1 [Goldman #1, 1911-1925], copy in NGA curatorial files). The painting was published later the same year: Wilhelm R. Valentiner, "Ein unbekanntes Meisterwerk Tizians," *Belvedere* 1 (1922): 91; Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *The Henry Goldman Collection*, New York, 1922: no. 6. It continued to be published as in the Goldman collection by both Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1932: 573, and Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, trans. Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott, 3 vols., New York and Milan, 1933: 3:no. 508.

[6] The invoice for 24 paintings, including "An Oil Painting on Canvas representing Alfonso D'Este and Laura Dianti known as A Lady at a Mirror - by Titian," is dated 9 March 1937. Payment was to be made in five installments, the last no later than 5 May 1938. (Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series II.I, Collector's files, reel 329, box 474, folder 5 [Kress, Samuel Henry, c. 1936-1939]; copies in NGA curatorial files.)

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### EXHIBITION HISTORY

1924 Loan Exhibition of Important Early Italian Paintings in the Possession of Notable American Collectors, Duveen Brothers, New York, 1924, no. 33 as by Titian (no. 46, as *The Toilet of Venus* in illustrated 1926 version of catalogue).

1939 *Classics of the Nude: Loan Exhibition, Pollaiuolo to Picasso, for the Benefit of the Lisa Day Nursery*, M. Knoedler and Co., New York, 1939, no. 4, repro.

1989 *Image and Word*, Elizabeth Myers Mitchell Art Gallery, St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, 1989, no. 14.

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