



Workshop of Jacopo Tintoretto
Italian 16th Century

Jacopo Tintoretto
Venetian, 1518 or 1519 - 1594

The Worship of the Golden Calf

c. 1594

oil on canvas

overall: 158.8 × 272.2 cm (62 1/2 × 107 3/16 in.)

framed: 187.6 × 300.7 × 12.7 cm (73 7/8 × 118 3/8 × 5 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.180

ENTRY

The painting depicts the events of Exodus 32, with the main events of the story appearing in the middle and background. In the center middle ground, the Israelites watch as the high priest Aaron collects golden ornaments for the making of an idol in the form of a golden calf, which he is shown casting in the far background. In the left background, the completed calf is displayed upon an altar, surrounded by worshippers; in the center right background are scenes of feasting and merrymaking. In the far upper right, the now-truncated figure of Moses on Mount Sinai (see Technical Summary) is bathed in a fiery light as he receives the Ten Commandments. In the foreground, to the left and right, are richly dressed revelers and observers. The man at the far upper left looking out of the scene appears to be a portrait.

Around the time of its purchase by the Kress Foundation in 1935, *The Worship of the Golden Calf* was attributed to Jacopo Tintoretto in manuscript opinions from Roberto Longhi, Giuseppe Fiocco, Raimond van Marle, August L. Mayer, F. Mason

Perkins, Wilhelm Suida, Adolfo Venturi, and Bernard Berenson, most of whom considered it an early work. [1] The autograph status of the work was affirmed in 1950 by Rodolfo Pallucchini, who dated it to circa 1555 or later, and by Berenson in 1957. [2] Subsequent scholars have moved away from the early dating and seen signs of studio assistance. Pierluigi De Vecchi classified it as by Jacopo with collaboration from circa 1560. Fern Rusk Shapley, too, considered it a largely studio work from circa 1560, but because of the vigor of the underpainting, suggested that Jacopo laid in the principal figures and supervised the execution. Pallucchini and Paola Rossi acknowledged considerable studio assistance, while retaining the attribution to Jacopo and the date of circa 1555. [3]

Hans Tietze, in 1948, took a different view, dating the picture late in the century and relating it to the style of Marco Tintoretto. [4] More recently, Bert W. Meijer has attributed the landscape to Paolo Fiammingo (Pauwels Franck; 1540–1596); noting that the painting is usually dated to the 1550s and that Paolo was not documented in Venice before the 1570s, he commented that either the landscape was added later or the whole painting dates from some time after Paolo's arrival. [5] Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman assigned the picture to the Tintoretto studio, 1592 or later, agreeing that the landscape suggests the work of a northern painter. [6]

The judgment of the picture first made by Tietze (although not his specific link to the name of Marco Tintoretto) remains convincing. Like a number of works assigned in the past to Tintoretto in his early years or around 1555, *The Worship of the Golden Calf* is the work of a later, different hand. [7] While the figure types are generically similar to those of Tintoretto, they lack the dynamism and convincing anatomy that appear in the master's autograph paintings. [8] The loose brushwork in the highlights is a weak imitation of Tintoretto's fluid calligraphy. Moreover, a distinctive hand seems to be present here, one that cannot be identified in other works associated with Tintoretto. It is detectable in the principal faces, the overall pastel tonalities, the northern qualities of the landscape, and the shiny texture of the fabrics on the two principal figures.

The overall composition is loosely based upon the *Gathering of the Manna* of 1592/1594, still in the church for which it was created, San Giorgio Maggiore, and one of the last works produced by the Tintoretto studio during Jacopo's lifetime [fig. 1]. That painting also features repoussoir figures at either side, with a series of vignettes carrying the narrative into the background. Particularly close is the treatment of space in the upper center of the painting, with a round hillock and

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a view of figures in a covered area (a grotto in the San Giorgio Maggiore painting, a tent in the Gallery's picture).

All of this evidence suggests that *The Worship of the Golden Calf* was painted in the Tintoretto studio around the time of Jacopo Tintoretto's death in 1594, or possibly later, when the shop was headed by Domenico Tintoretto. The northern quality of the landscape, along with the sheen of the fabrics, suggests an artist from beyond the Alps. Meijer's attribution of the landscape to Paolo Fiammingo seems apposite; however, the figure types and the technique used to render them differ from those in Paolo's paintings. It is possible that Paolo painted the landscape, but it seems more likely, given the probable date, that the entire painting was executed by another northern artist, perhaps one who had also worked with Paolo. A number of northern artists seem to have come and gone in Tintoretto's studio; however, the role of northern artists in the body of paintings associated with Tintoretto is a complicated question that has only recently begun to receive the attention it merits. [9]

Robert Echols

March 21, 2019

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Jacopo Tintoretto and Workshop, *The Gathering of the Manna*, 1592/1594, oil on canvas, Abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore, inside the Basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore. Photo: Mauro Magliani

NOTES

- [1] Those dating it were Roberto Longhi (early); Giuseppe Fiocco (1545–1548); Raimond van Marle (later part of Tintoretto’s early career); August L. Mayer (c. 1545–1548); and Wilhelm Suida (beginning of the 1540s). Copies of all manuscript opinions are in NGA curatorial files.
- [2] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *La giovinezza del Tintoretto* (Milan, 1950), 153; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School* (London, 1957), 1:183.
- [3] Pierluigi De Vecchi, *L’opera completa del Tintoretto* (Milan, 1970), 101, no. 139; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, 1973), 54–55; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:471–472; Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1:171, no. 180.
- [4] Hans Tietze, *Tintoretto: The Paintings and Drawings* (New York, 1948), 381. See also the discussion of Marco in Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat, *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (New York, 1944), 294–295. In an undated letter in NGA curatorial files, Tietze and Tietze-Conrat conclude that the picture is by a younger artist under the influence of Tintoretto’s late style.
- [5] Bert W. Meijer, “Flemish and Dutch Artists in Venetian Workshops: The Case of Jacopo Tintoretto,” in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Dürer, Bellini, and Titian*, ed. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (Milan, 1999), 143. On Paolo Fiammingo see Bert W. Meijer, “Paolo Fiammingo tra indigeni e ‘forestieri’ a Venezia,” *Prospettiva* 32 (1983): 20–32; Stefania Mason Rinaldi, “Paolo Fiammingo,” *Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte* 11 (1978): 45–80; Bert W. Meijer, “Paolo Fiammingo Reconsidered,” *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 37 (1975): 117–130.
- [6] 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), 144, no. S52.
- [7] For other works by followers that were mistakenly considered by Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi to be autograph, 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), 97.

- [8] See Robert Echols, “Tintoretto the Painter,” in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2007), 28–29; 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. The figures in the Gallery’s painting can be contrasted to Tintoretto’s powerful and dynamic figures in his treatment of the *Making of the Golden Calf* (Madonna dell’Orto, Venice); Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. no. 236; 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. 78.
- [9] See generally Robert Echols, “Tintoretto, Christ at the Sea of Galilee, and the Unknown Later Career of Lambert Sustris,” *Venezia Cinquecento* 6, no. 12 (1996): 93–149; Bert W. Meijer, “Flemish and Dutch Artists in Venetian Workshops: The Case of Jacopo Tintoretto,” in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Dürer, Bellini, and Titian*, ed. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (Milan, 1999), 132–143; 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), 107–109.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support consists of six pieces of a heavy, twill-weave fabric with four seams. Two vertical seams are located 75 centimeters from the left edge and 120 centimeters from the right edge, just in between the two repoussoir groups. The horizontal seam is located 39 centimeters from the top, through the arms of the standing figures on the left and just above the head of the balding man on the right. A seventh piece of fabric, a small strip at the bottom center, roughly 13 centimeters in height, is a later replacement. All the tacking edges have been removed, but cusping at the sides and bottom indicates that these dimensions are near the original. The lack of cusping at the top supports the visual evidence that

the canvas has been cut there, severing the kneeling figure at the upper right.

The white ground is very thin, and the x-radiographs suggest it was applied with a palette knife or spatula. The artist laid in the central composition with a free, brushy sketch in black over the ground. A thin, dark imprimatura blocks in the area of the left repoussoir, which is then sketched with white. The brown imprimatura may extend over other parts of the composition, including the right-side repoussoir, which combines differently colored underpainting layers and white-paint sketching. The paint is applied freely, using a full range of applications, from glazes through impasted linear highlights. The preliminary sketching provided a guide for the painter but is not rigorously followed, and revisions are quickly sketched over broader paint layers. Just to the right of center, a male figure and an area of green landscape are partly covered by a transparent layer of blue paint. This appears to be the result of the mistaken removal during an old restoration of the top layers of paint that the artist had added over the figure, intending to cover it. The overall condition is good, although there is scattered flaking and some abrasion of the paint, especially in the darks. The abrasion allows the dark fabric to show through in some areas. There is also an old tear extending from the top edge at the center of the composition. Some retouching has become discolored, and there are stains and remnants of old, discolored varnishes on the surface. The paint on the inserted canvas is different in color and texture; this can be assumed to be a later replacement. In 1936 Stephen Pichetto relined the picture, removed a discolored varnish, and inpainted it. Mario Modestini inpainted the picture further and applied another layer of varnish in 1955.

Robert Echols and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Catherine Metzger

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PROVENANCE

Hastings (or Hasting) collection, England.[1] possibly (David M. Koetser Gallery, New York).[2] (Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Florence); sold 26 June 1935 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[3] gift 1939 to NGA.

[1] The bill of sale to the Kress Foundation (see note 3) says the painting was

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"formerly in the Hasting's[sic] Collection, England." It has not yet been determined which collection this was; see notes in NGA curatorial files.

The Getty Provenance Index Database of the contents of sale catalogues lists a Christie's sale of 24-27 June 1833, held in Bath, England, of the large collection of "John Pura, Esq., deceased" (sale catalogue Br-13849). Lot number 130 of this sale, sold on the second day of the sale to "Rickets," was described as a painting by Tintoretto, "The Worshipping the Molten Calf, -- a grand composition of many figures." As there are no dimensions, further description, or illustration in the catalogue, it is not possible to determine if this was the NGA painting.

[2] See the letter of 27 October 1948, in NGA curatorial files, from Stephen Pichetto, Kress Foundation conservator, to John Walker, then NGA curator, in which Walker wrote that Koetser said he had once owned the painting. Koetser told Walker the painting had been purchased "at Christie's or at Sutherland's in three parts and that there was a fourth part that they did not succeed in acquiring." Walker suggested the fourth part "must have been the trees at the top."

[3] The bill of sale was for seven paintings and a number of decorative art objects (copy in NGA curatorial files).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1939 Dutch and Italian Masterpieces from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Dayton Art Institute, 1939-1940, no catalogue.

1939 Masterpieces of Five Centuries, Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, 1939, no. 55.

1940 Masterpieces of Art. European & American Paintings 1500-1900, New York World's Fair, 1940, no. 19, repro.

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- 1975 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1975: 340, repro.
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- 1982 Pallucchini, Rodolfo, and Paola Rossi. *Tintoretto: le opere sacre e profane*. 2 vols. Venice, 1982: 1:171, no. 180; 2:fig. 236.
- 1984 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. Rev. ed. New York, 1984: 230, no. 290, color repro.
- 1985 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985: 391, repro.
- 1999 Meijer, Bert W. "Flemish and Dutch Artists in Venetian Workshops: the Case of Jacopo Tintoretto." In *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Dürer, Bellini and Titian*. Edited by Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown. Exh. cat. Palazzo Grassi, Venice. Milan, 1999: 143, repro.
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*Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26-27, 2007. Madrid, 2009: 144,
no. S52.*

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