



Titian  
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576

## *Venus with a Mirror*

c. 1555

oil on canvas

overall: 124.5 x 105.5 cm (49 x 41 9/16 in.)

framed: 157.48 x 139.07 x 10.8 cm (62 x 54 3/4 x 4 1/4 in.)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.34

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### ENTRY

Usually and reasonably dated to circa 1555, the picture is widely accepted as the finest surviving version of a composition known in at least 30 variants executed by Titian's workshop. It is also usually regarded as the earliest in the series, but following evidence presented in greater detail elsewhere, [1] it will be argued that the Gallery's picture was preceded by an autograph version painted for the Spanish crown, now lost, but known in a copy by Rubens now in the collection of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Further, it will be argued that this earlier version, which is first definitely recorded in 1552/1553, may well be identical with a *Venus* painted by Titian in 1545 for the emperor Charles V. Key evidence for supposing that the Gallery's picture postdated the lost picture recorded by Rubens is provided by the pentimenti visible in the x-radiographs [fig. 1] and infrared reflectograms [fig. 2]. [2]

An older x-radiograph of 1971, which was studied in detail by Fern Rusk Shapley, [3] was already also of exceptional interest in revealing the double portrait underlying the *Venus* composition (see Technical Summary). Shapley compared the double portrait with the so-called *Allegory of Alfonso d'Avalos* of circa 1532 (Musée du Louvre, Paris) and suggested that it may similarly have represented an allegory on youth, beauty, and love. This interpretation was partly dependent, however, on the probably mistaken assumption that the male figure, like that in the Louvre picture, was wearing armor, and there may have been no allegorical content. Giorgio Tagliaferro suggested that the double portrait was begun by the young Paris Bordone when he was an assistant in Titian's workshop, on the basis that such compositions are more characteristic of this painter than of Titian himself. [4] Examples by Bordone, however, are all much later than the likely period of his

association with Titian, around 1520, and it is highly improbable in any case that the master would have kept an unfinished work by a former assistant for another 30 years. More plausible is the conclusion by Shapley that the abandoned double portrait dated from only shortly before Titian reused the canvas for the *Venus* composition.

The picture is first certainly recorded in the will of the Venetian nobleman Cristoforo Barbarigo in 1600 (see Provenance). Barbarigo is known to have acquired Titian's house at Biri Grande in Venice from his son Pomponio Vecellio in 1581, five years after the painter's death, and it is usually assumed that at the same time Barbarigo acquired a group of paintings by Titian left in the house. Although Charles Hope has cautioned against a too-ready acceptance of such an assumption, he admits that it is likely that Barbarigo did acquire the *Venus* from Pomponio, together with three other pictures now in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, at around the same time. [5] It remains a matter of debate why Titian should have retained a high-quality picture such as the *Venus* in his own possession for 20 years after it was painted. Perhaps the artist painted it on speculation, with an eye to selling it eventually to a suitable customer. Or perhaps he saw an advantage in keeping it in his own house at Biri Grande, where it could have prompted visitors to order similar pictures for themselves, or it could have served as a model for replication by members of the workshop, or both. It may be no accident, as pointed out by Wolfgang Braunfels, [6] that not only the *Venus*, but at least one other picture retained by the painter and then apparently sold by his son Pomponio to Cristoforo Barbarigo, the *Saint Mary Magdalen* (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg), was among his most popular and frequently replicated compositions.

In any case, there is widespread scholarly agreement that the *Venus* is not a very late work and that for stylistic reasons it is datable to the mid-1550s. As first pointed out by Stephan Poglayen-Neuwall, [7] it shows close parallels with the great mythologies painted by Titian for Philip II in the 1550s: the *Venus and Adonis* of 1553–1554 (Prado, Madrid; see *Venus and Adonis* for illustration), and the *Diana and Callisto* and *Diana and Actaeon* of 1556–1559 (jointly owned by the National Gallery, London, and the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh). In all these works, although Titian's handling of paint has become much looser than in his earlier career, selected details, such as jewelry, remain relatively precise, and in some passages the brushwork continues to evoke the specific textures of velvet, fur, metal, and, especially, flesh. By the mid-to-late 1560s, in a picture such as the Galleria Borghese *Venus Blindfolding Cupid* (see *Venus Blindfolding Cupid* for

illustration), textures have become more generalized, the brushwork has become more broken, and areas of strong local color have become further reduced. It is true that Titian's style and pictorial technique were never uniform and could vary from one work to another, as well as from one decade to another. But even a relatively precise late work, such as the *Tarquin and Lucretia* of 1568–1571 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), is characterized by an iridescent shimmer that transcends the tactile sensuousness still very much evident in the Gallery's *Venus*.

All this applies to the principal figure and her draperies, but it is less true of the more sketchily painted cupids and striped cloth at the lower right. Jodi Cranston has argued that the broad handling at the right was intentional, and was part of the painter's expressive purpose, but did not note any difference between the left and the right sides. [8] As suggested above, however, the execution of the right side is decidedly weaker, and the anatomy of the foremost cupid is poorly articulated, so that his left wing is too planar and (unlike the other wing) awkwardly sprouts from his shoulder, instead of from his shoulder blade. If, indeed, an assistant was largely responsible for completing the right side of the composition, it cannot be excluded that this was done contemporaneously with Titian's work on the left side. Yet it seems much more likely that Titian left the right side unfinished, [9] and that the assistant brought it to completion in the 1560s, or even after the painter's death, for the purpose of selling the picture. It was pointed out in this context by Tamara Fomichova that the motif of the cupid presenting Venus with a garland is otherwise known only in Titian's works of the mid-1560s, such as the versions of the *Venus and Cupid with a Lutenist* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [10]

The complex task of surveying and listing the many known versions of the *Venus* composition was undertaken in 1934 by Poglayen-Neuwall. [11] The author convincingly concluded that the Gallery's picture is the only surviving example of autograph quality, dismissing the claims of earlier writers, such as Hugo von Kilény and Erich von der Bercken, that it is inferior to the variant formerly in the Nemes collection (now Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne); [12] at the same time, he argued that two other versions, now lost, are also likely to have been autograph. One of these, known in a workshop replica in the Hermitage (usually but not necessarily correctly attributed to Orazio Vecellio) [fig. 3], was recorded by Anthony van Dyck in his *Italian Sketchbook* [fig. 4]. [13] *Like the Gallery's picture, it showed Venus in the Pudica pose, nude to the waist, with two cupids standing on her couch; but unlike in the present work, both the cupids supported the mirror,*

while the more prominent one turned his head toward the spectator. Carlo Ridolfi records in the house of Niccolò Crasso in Venice a “very rare Venus, admiring herself in the mirror, with two cupids,” [14] which the owner had inherited with other pictures by Titian from his grandfather of the same name; and it is often assumed that this is the picture copied by Van Dyck, on his visit to the city in the autumn of 1622. It is not, however, necessary to infer from this evidence either that Crasso’s picture or the original of Van Dyck’s drawing (if a different work) was of autograph quality. Nor is there any reason to think that this version of the composition predated the gallery’s Venus. [15]

The other version of the composition identified by Poglayen-Neuwall as probably autograph is the one recorded in a memorandum sent by Titian to Philip II on December 22, 1574, in which it is described as “Venus con amor gli tien il specchio” (a Venus with a cupid holding a mirror). [16] This picture, which belonged to the Spanish royal collections until it was carried off by Joseph Bonaparte in 1813 and lost, is recorded in a copy by Rubens [fig. 5]. [17] The Pudica pose is identical to that in the Washington and Crasso versions; but Venus instead wears a chemise and her legs are bared, and there is only one cupid (as Titian’s letter states), who looks toward Venus in near-profile and stands on a stone plinth rather than on her couch.

It has been traditionally assumed that the version for Philip II is identical with a “Venere ignuda” sent by Titian to Spain in 1567. [18] This title is equally likely, however, to refer to a recumbent Venus, and Philip’s *Venus with a Mirror* may be more plausibly identified with “Una venere que se sta mirando en un espejo que lo tiene Cupído” (A Venus admiring herself in a mirror held by Cupid), which is recorded as early as 1553 in an unaccountably neglected inventory of Philip’s paintings. [19] Hope had already argued that the lost picture for Philip is likely to have preceded the Gallery’s version, on the grounds that Titian only sent original inventions to the king and that the x-radiographs of the Washington picture show that Titian started by showing Venus in a chemise and with bare legs, as in the Philip II version, but then introduced alterations. [20] The latter argument is a strong one, as indeed was sensed by Shapley, who was forced to argue, somewhat perversely, that the work for Philip “was already envisioned” by Titian while working on the Gallery’s picture. [21] But Hope’s observation was widely dismissed, because like every other scholar, he accepted the identity of the Venus pictures recorded in the letters of 1567 and 1574, and he accordingly assigned an unconvincingly late date of post-1567 to the Washington version. Now that it is

clear that Rubens's copy records a lost picture that was earlier, not later, the evolution of the design becomes more comprehensible, from one to two cupids, and from Venus dressed in a chemise to Venus naked to the waist. The existence of a voluminous cloak in the underlying male portrait could then have prompted the impulse for the painter's decision to introduce into the Washington picture the swathes of red velvet that cover her previously bared legs. [22] Having formulated these revisions in the Washington picture, the painter then evidently used it as the basis for all the many other variants of the composition. In this connection it may further be noted that the original shape and position of the cupid's wing revealed by the infrared reflectogram at 1.5 to 1.8 microns corresponds closely to those recorded in Rubens's copy. Similarly, the evidence of the infrared reflectogram that the other cupid originally presented the goddess with laurel leaves is consistent with the above-mentioned observation by Fomichova that the motif of the garland does not occur in Titian's works until the mid-1560s.

The inclusion in the Spanish royal inventory of 1552/1553 of what was almost certainly the earliest version does not in itself negate Hope's assumption that the composition was invented for Philip (at that time still crown prince). Yet there is no mention of such a work in any of the ample correspondence between the painter and the prince, whereas Titian is known to have painted a *Venus* for his father, the emperor Charles V, in 1544–1545, and to have brought it with him to the imperial diet at Augsburg in 1548. It has usually been supposed that this lost *Venus* was of the full-length, recumbent type and was the prototype for Titian's various variations on this theme from the early 1550s onward. Yet there is no sound evidence for this supposition, and it is altogether more likely that this picture was identical with the *Venus with a Mirror* recorded in the possession of Philip by 1552/1553, and later copied by Rubens. [23]

In a letter of October 5, 1545, the imperial ambassador to Venice, Don Diego de Mendoza, wrote to the emperor saying that the artist had just painted for him a *quadro di fantasia*, "which people say is the best thing he has ever done." [24] Titian's subject—the pagan goddess of love at her levée or toilet, gazing at herself in a mirror, and assisted by one or two cupids—was indeed his own invention, yet it is also one rich in cultural resonance. Despite the contemporary trappings of the red velvet wrap and the mid-16th-century coiffure in the Gallery's version, the figure is unmistakably identifiable as Venus, not only because of the presence of a winged cupid with a quiverful of arrows, but also because of her Pudica pose. It has often been observed that Titian could have seen one of the most celebrated

antique examples of the Pudica type, the *Medici Venus* (Uffizi, Florence), on his visit to Rome in 1545–1546, but as pointed out by Francesco Valcanover, the painter would already have known a Hellenistic version then in the Grimani collection in Venice, and now in Venice's Museo Archeologico. [25] It is also possible, as suggested by Harold Wethey, that the painter knew some antique gem, bronze, or terracotta representing Venus at her toilet, [26] and as noted by Guy de Tervarent, a mirror is mentioned as an attribute of Aphrodite by Philostratus the Elder. [27] The figure of Venus with a mirror had a long history in medieval art, in which the goddess was portrayed in overwhelmingly negative terms, as embodying the vices of feminine vanity and luxury. [28] An echo of this moralizing tradition is still to be found in Venetian painting of the early Renaissance period, in Giovanni Bellini's allegorical panel of circa 1490 (*Vainglory?*; Accademia, Venice); but Bellini's nude and Venus-like *Woman with a Mirror* of 1515 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), the iconography of which in some respects anticipates the *Venus with a Mirror*, already reveals a response to Titian's own *Woman with a Mirror* of circa 1513–1514 in the Louvre (see *Allegory of Love* for illustration). This early masterpiece has been the subject of a number of differing interpretations in recent art-historical literature; and although in this case the young woman at her toilet and in *déshabille* is clearly not intended to represent Venus, most writers have detected close thematic links between this picture and the *Venus* of 40 years later. Elise Goodman-Soellner, for example, has seen the *Woman* as embodying the feminine ideal celebrated by Petrarchan love poetry, and has similarly seen the color harmonies chosen for the *Venus*, with their concentration on reds, whites, and golds, as closely and deliberately corresponding to those evoked by poets in praise of their mistresses. [29] Cathy Santore, for whom the *Woman* represents a courtesan, suggested that the *Venus* likewise portrays a courtesan in the guise of Venus; for the author the mirror in both cases retains its medieval significance as a symbol of lasciviousness. [30] Christaan Hart Nibbrig also interpreted the mirror in the *Venus* in moralizing terms, but as a *vanitas*, referring to the transience of life and beauty; but as pointed out by Petra Schäpers, such an allusion is incompatible with the image of the immortal goddess of love. [31]

For Rona Goffen, the subject of the earlier Louvre picture concerns the erotic balance of power in the male-female relationship; and although the lover is no longer physically present in the *Venus*, his "intimate surrogate" remains there in the form of the red velvet wrap, which the author identified as the coat of a man. [32] Although this identification cannot be sustained, [33] it is certainly true that the eye contact made between the image of Venus in the mirror and the spectator

further enhances the already substantial erotic appeal of the picture, by suggesting that she is aware of his presence and is preparing herself for his arrival. Following Jan Bialostocki and Valcanover, and in common with Schäpers, [34] Goffen also referred to the relevance of the *paragone* debate for the interpretation of the two pictures, and on the use of mirrors by a number of other 16th-century Venetian painters, including Giorgione and Savoldo, to demonstrate that the art of painting could rival that of sculpture in its ability to show the human figure from more than one angle.

Developing this idea, Irina Artemieva has interpreted the picture as a self-conscious manifesto by Titian of his own art, painted in the wake of the aesthetic debates of the 1540s and 1550s concerning the *paragone* not just between sculpture and painting, but also between *disegno* and *colorito*, and between the rival artistic traditions of Rome and Venice. [35] For Artemieva, the *Venus with a Mirror* serves as a visual counterpart to the aesthetic principles enunciated by Lodovico Dolce in his *Dialogo della pittura*, published in 1557; and she accordingly argued that the date of the picture should be narrowed down to this very year. This interpretation offers an alternative explanation of why a high-quality and iconographically apparently highly innovative painting remained in the painter's possession for some two decades and was sold only after his death. Artemieva's argument is weakened, however, by the evidence that the Gallery's picture is an elaboration of a composition devised some years earlier for the emperor (or at least, for Prince Philip) and by the probability that the right side was painted by an assistant.

Many scholars have commented on the fascination that the *Venus with a Mirror*, together with its many variants, has held for subsequent painters, from Titian's compatriot Veronese, to leading European artists of the 17th century. [36] Particularly influential was the now-lost version in the Spanish royal collection, which provided an essential point of departure both for Rubens, in his *Venus at the Mirror* of 1613–1614 (Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein, Vaduz), and for Velázquez in his *Toilet of Venus* (“*Rokeby Venus*”) of 1647–1651 (National Gallery, London).

Peter Humfrey

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** X-radiograph, Titian, *Venus with a Mirror*, c. 1555, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection



**fig. 2** Infrared reflectogram, Titian, *Venus with a Mirror*, c. 1555, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection





**fig. 3** Workshop of Titian, *Venus with Two Cupids in front of a Mirror*, 1560s, oil on canvas, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. © The State Hermitage Museum / Photo by Vladimir Terebenin



**fig. 4** Anthony van Dyck, after Titian, Leaf from *Italian Sketchbook*, with *Venus with a Mirror*, 1622/1623, brush drawing in brown wash, touched with pen and brown ink, The British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum



**fig. 5** Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1606–1611, oil on canvas, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. © Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

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## NOTES

- [1] Peter Humfrey, “The Chronology of Titian’s Versions of the Venus with a Mirror and the Lost Venus for the Emperor Charles V,” in *Artistic Practices and Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Italy: Essays in Honour of Deborah Howard*, ed. Nabahat Avcioglu and Allison Sherman (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2014), 221–232.
- [2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.
- [3] Fern Rusk Shapley, “Titian’s *Venus with a Mirror*,” *Studies in the History of Art* 4–5 (1971–1972): 93–106.
- [4] Giorgio Tagliaferro and Bernard Aikema, with Matteo Mancini and Andrew John, *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 32.
- [5] Charles Hope, “Tizians Familie und die Zerstreung seines Nachlasses,” in

*Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Vienna, 2007), 35; English edition: "Titian's Family and the Dispersal of His Estate," in *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting* (Venice, 2008), 37.

- [6] Wolfgang Braunfels, "I quadri di Tiziano nello studio a Biri Grande (1530–1576)," in *Tiziano e Venezia: Convegno internazionale di studi (1976)* (Vicenza, 1980), 409.
- [7] Stephan Poglayen-Neuwall, "Titian's Pictures of the Toilet of Venus and Their Copies," *Art Bulletin* 16 (1934): 358–384; followed (among others) by Hans Tietze, *Titian: The Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1950), 204; Francesco Valcanover, *Tutta la pittura di Tiziano* (Milan, 1960), 2:39–40; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:302; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:476–480; Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:200–201; Terisio Pignatti, *Golden Century of Venetian Painting* (Los Angeles, 1979), 76–77; David Alan Brown, in *Titian, Prince of Painters* (Venice, 1990), 302–305.
- [8] Jodi Cranston, *The Muddied Mirror: Materiality and Figuration in Titian's Later Paintings* (University Park, PA, 2010), 38–39.
- [9] Nicholas Penny commented on the poor quality of the cupid and on the possibility that the picture was not completed by Titian (letter to Peter Humfrey of Nov. 17, 2001, on file).
- [10] Tamara Fomichova, *The Hermitage Catalogue of West European Painting, Vol. 2: Venetian Painting of the Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Florence, 1992), 352. The cupid with the garland may also be compared with that in the *Venus and Cupid with a Partridge* (Uffizi, Florence), likewise datable to the 1560s.
- [11] Stephan Poglayen-Neuwall, "Titian's Pictures of the Toilet of Venus and Their Copies," *Art Bulletin* 16 (1934): 358–384.
- [12] Hugo von Kilényi, *Ein wiedergefundenes Bild des Tizian* (Budapest, 1906); Erich von der Bercken, "Some Unpublished Works by Tintoretto and Titian," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 44 (March 1924): 113. See also Brigitte Klesse, *Katalog der italienischen, französischen and spanischen Gemälde bis 1800 im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum* (Cologne, 1973), 131–135; Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:201–202, cat. 52.
- [13] Gert Adriani, *Anton Van Dyck: Italienisches Skizzenbuch* (Vienna, 1940), 79–80, no. 119.
- [14] "Una Venere rarissima, che si mira nello specchio con due Amori." Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte, ovvero Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin, 1914), 1:194; Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:243, cat. L-26.
- [15] Peter Humfrey, "The Chronology of Titian's Versions of the Venus with a

Mirror and the Lost Venus for the Emperor Charles V,” in *Artistic Practices and Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Italy: Essays in Honour of Deborah Howard*, ed. Nabahat Avcioglu and Allison Sherman (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2014), 223, 226.

- [16] Document in Matteo Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo nei documenti degli archivi spagnoli* (Venice, 1998), 402, no. 283.
- [17] See Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:70, 243–245, cat. L-27.
- [18] Letter of Dec. 2, 1567, in Matteo Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo nei documenti degli archivi spagnoli* (Venice, 1998), 344, no. 224.
- [19] Maria Kusche, “La antigua galería de retratos de El Pardo: Su reconstrucción pitórica,” *Archivo Español de Arte* 225 (1991): 277. See also Fernando Checa Cremades, “Fuori da Venezia: Tiziano e la corte spagnola,” in *L'ultimo Tiziano e la sensualità della pittura*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Venice, 2008), 57.
- [20] Charles Hope, *Titian* (London, 1980), 160.
- [21] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:478.
- [22] David Alan Brown, in *Titian, Prince of Painters* (Venice, 1990), 302.
- [23] Peter Humfrey, “The Chronology of Titian’s Versions of the Venus with a Mirror and the Lost Venus for the Emperor Charles V,” in *Artistic Practices and Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Italy: Essays in Honour of Deborah Howard*, ed. Nabahat Avcioglu and Allison Sherman (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2014), 228–229.
- [24] Document in Matteo Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo nei documenti degli archivi spagnoli* (Venice, 1998), 161, no. 39.
- [25] Francesco Valcanover, in *Le siècle de Titien: L'Âge d'Or de la peinture à Venise* (Paris, 1993), 534–535. In this version (unlike the completely nude *Medici Venus*), the figure similarly holds a drapery around her hips. See Gustavo Traversari, *La statuaria ellenistica al Museo Archeologico di Venezia* (Rome, 1986), 52–56.
- [26] Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1975), 3:69.
- [27] Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane, 1450–1600* (Geneva, 1958), 1:324. The passage from *Imagines* 1.6 was previously used by Titian as a source for his *Worship of Venus* of 1518–1519 for Alfonso d'Este (Prado, Madrid).
- [28] See John B. Friedman, “L'iconographie de Vénus et de son miroir à la fin du moyen âge,” in *L'érotisme au moyen âge: Études présentées au troisième colloque de l'Institut d'études médiévales*, ed. Bruno Roy (Montreal, 1977),

- 53–82; Jodi Cranston, *The Muddied Mirror: Materiality and Figuration in Titian's Later Paintings* (University Park, PA, 2010), 25, with references.
- [29] Elise Goodman-Soellner, "A Poetic Interpretation of the 'Lady at Her Toilette' Theme in Sixteenth-Century Painting," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 434, 440–441.
- [30] Cathy Santore, "The Tools of Venus," *Renaissance Studies* 11 (1997): 185, 189–190.
- [31] Christiaan Hart Nibbrig, *Spiegelschrift: Spekulationen über Malerei und Literatur* (Frankfurt, 1987), 18; Petra Schäpers, *Die junge Frau bei der Toilette: Ein Bildthema im venezianischen Cinquecento* (Frankfurt, 1997), 111–124.
- [32] Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 133–139. See also Diane H. Bodart, "Le reflet et l'éclat: Jeux de l'envers dans la peinture vénitienne du XVIe siècle," in *Titien, Tintoret, Véronèse: Rivalités à Venise* (Paris, 2009), 226–228; Jodi Cranston, *The Muddied Mirror: Materiality and Figuration in Titian's Later Paintings* (University Park, PA, 2010), 26–27.
- [33] As pointed out by Irina Artemieva, "Die Venus vor dem Spiegel Barbarigo und der Dialogo della Pittura von Lodovico Dolce," in *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Vienna, 2007), 230.
- [34] Jan Bialostocki, "Man and Mirror in Painting: Reality and Transience," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York, 1977), 70; Francesco Valcanover, in *Le siècle de Titien: L'Âge d'Or de la peinture à Venise* (Paris, 1993), 534–535; Petra Schäpers, *Die junge Frau bei der Toilette: Ein Bildthema im venezianischen Cinquecento* (Frankfurt, 1997), 111–124; Diane H. Bodart, "Le reflet et l'éclat: Jeux de l'envers dans la peinture vénitienne du XVIe siècle," in *Titien, Tintoret, Véronèse: Rivalités à Venise* (Paris, 2009), 216–259.
- [35] Irina Artemieva, "Die Venus vor dem Spiegel Barbarigo und der Dialogo della Pittura von Lodovico Dolce," in *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Vienna, 2007), 224–231.
- [36] See, for example, Gustav F. Hartlaub, *Zauber des Spiegels: Geschichte und Bedeutung des Spiegels in der Kunst* (Munich, 1951), 79–80, 107–108; Jan Bialostocki, "Man and Mirror in Painting: Reality and Transience," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York, 1977), 70; Julius Held, "Rubens and Titian," in *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, ed. David Rosand (New York, 1982), 291; John Shearman, *Only Connect . . . Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1992), 228; Fernando Checa Cremades, in *Titian—Rubens: Venus ante el espejo* (Madrid, 2002), 11–85; Bernard Aikema, in *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 412–414.

## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a coarse, medium–heavy-weight twill-weave fabric with original selvages comprising the left and right edges. It has been lined to two additional fabrics, and the tacking margins were removed from the top and bottom edges.

X-radiographs [fig. 1] reveal an extensive underpainted design beneath the present composition, depicting a three-quarter-length portrait of a woman and man; the top edge of the underpainted composition corresponds to the right edge of the present composition. The red drapery covering Venus's knees appears to have formed the jacket of the male figure in the underlying composition and was left exposed to form part of the new composition.

It appears the support was prepared with a thin ground, though it is difficult to characterize, due to the underlying portrait. Titian used a combination of thick, pastose paint and transparent glazes. The red and blue draperies were created by applying colored glazes over a white underpainting.

The x-radiographs, complemented by infrared reflectograms at 1.5 to 1.8 microns [fig. 2], [1] also reveal a number of pentimenti in the present composition. The red drapery at one time covered only Venus's lower torso, leaving her lower thigh, knee, and upper calf prominently exposed. Under the red drapery, she originally wore a white chemise, which she held up to her chest, leaving her right breast exposed. Adjustments were made to the position of her left elbow, to the fingers grasping the red drape, to the left leg of the foreground cupid, and possibly also to his right leg. It also appears that his fingers originally curved around the top edge of the mirror, where now they are hidden by it. Cupid's upper torso has been reworked to such a degree that the x-radiographic image is very blurred. Infrared reflectography has additionally revealed that the cupid at the back originally crowned the goddess with laurel leaves rather than with a wreath and that the more prominent wing of the foreground cupid, which was originally somewhat larger and more arched, has been shifted to the left. The painting, which is preserved in generally fair visual condition, was treated in 2011 to remove discolored varnish and retouching; beyond repair, however, is the badly damaged left hand of the foremost cupid. The green drape in the upper left corner, presumably painted in copper resinate, has also browned, while the blue drape held by the cupid has similarly discolored.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Sarah Fisher, Catherine Metzger, Elizabeth Walmsley, and Joanna Dunn

March 21, 2019

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**TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** X-radiograph, Titian, *Venus with a Mirror*, c. 1555, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection



**fig. 2** Infrared reflectogram, Titian, *Venus with a Mirror*, c. 1555, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

**TECHNICAL NOTES**

- [1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.
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## PROVENANCE

The artist [c. 1490-1576], Venice; by inheritance to his son, Pomponio Vecellio, Venice; sold 27 October 1581 with the contents of Titian's house to Cristoforo Barbarigo [1544-1614], Venice; by inheritance to his son, Andrea Barbarigo;<sup>[1]</sup> by inheritance in the Barbarigo family, Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza, Venice;<sup>[2]</sup> sold 1850 by the heirs of Giovanni di Alvise Barbarigo [d. 1843] to Czar Nicholas I of Russia [1796-1855], Saint Petersburg;<sup>[3]</sup> Imperial Hermitage Gallery, St. Petersburg;<sup>[4]</sup> purchased April 1931 through (Matthiesen Gallery, Berlin; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London; and M. Knoedler & Co., New York) by Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 5 June 1931 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh;<sup>[5]</sup> gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] See Giuseppe Cardorin, *Dello amore ai veneziani di Tiziano Vecellio delle sue case in Cadore e in Venezia*, Venice, 1833: 77, 98-101, quoting the purchase document of October 1581 and Barbarigo's will of March 1600, in which the Venus is mentioned as one of four pictures by Titian left to his heirs. See also Simona Savini Branca, *Il collezionismo veneziano del Seicento*, Padua, 1965: 47, 65, 183-186; Charles Hope, *Titian*, London, 1980: 167; Herbert Siebenhüner, *Der Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza in Venedig und seine Tizian-Sammlung*, Munich, 1981: 28; Jaynie Anderson, "Titian's Unfinished 'Portrait of a Patrician Woman and Her Daughter' from the Barbarigo Collection, Venice," *The Burlington Magazine* 144 (2002): 671, 672, 676; Lionello Puppi, *Su Tiziano*, Milan, 2004: 77; Charles Hope, "Tizians Familie und die Zerstreung seines Nachlasses," in *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, exh. cat. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, Vienna, 2007: 35 (English edition: "Titian's Family and the Dispersal of His Estate," in *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*, Venice, 2008: 37).

[2] The picture is recorded in the Palazzo Barbarigo by Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte, ovvero Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln, 2 vols., Berlin, 1914-1924 (originally Venice, 1648): 1(1914):200 ("Gli Signori Barbarighi di San Polo possiedono . . . vna Venere sino à ginocchi, che si vagheggia nello specchio con due Amori"); Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco* (1660), ed. Anna Pallucchini, Venice, 1966 (originally 1660): 664; Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare (1581) . . . Con aggiunta di tutte le cose notabili della stessa città, fatte et occorse dall'anno 1580 fino al*



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*presente 1663 da D. Giustiniano Martinioni*, Venice, 1663: 374; Arthur Young, *Travels in France & Italy during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*, London, 1915: 255; Abraham Hume, *Notices of the Life and Works of Titian*, London, 1829: 55, xxxix; Giuseppe Cadorin, *Dello amore ai Veneziani di Tiziano Vecellio*, Venice, 1833: 77, 98–101; and Gian Carlo Bevilacqua, *Insigne Pinacoteca della nobile veneta famiglia barbarigo della Terrazza*, Venice, 1845: 65, 67.

[3] Cesare Augusto Levi, *Le collezioni veneziane d'arte e d'antichità dal secolo XIV ai nostri giorni*, Venice, 1900: 281–289; Herbert Siebenhüner, *Der Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza in Venedig und seine Tizian-Sammlung*, Munich, 1981: 26.

[4] *Eremitage Impérial: Catalogue de la Galerie des Tableaux*, Saint Petersburg, 1863: 26, no. 99, and subsequent Hermitage catalogues.

[5] Mellon purchase date and date deeded to Mellon Trust is according to Mellon collection records in NGA curatorial files and David Finley's notebook (donated to the National Gallery of Art in 1977, now in the Gallery Archives).

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1979 *The Golden Century of Venetian Painting*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1979-1980, no. 21, repro.

1990 Tiziano [NGA title: Titian: Prince of Painters], Palazzo Ducale, Venice; National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1990-1991, no. 51, repro.

1993 *Le siècle de Titien: L'âge d'or de la peinture à Venise*, Galeries du Grand Palais, Paris, 1993, no. 178, repro., as *Vénus à sa toilette*.

2002 *Nicholas I and the New Hermitage*, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2002, unnumbered catalogue.

2002 Tiziano / Rubens. *Venus ante el espejo*, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2002-2003, no. 2, repro.

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2007 Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei / Tiziano maturo e la sensualità della pittura, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 2007-2008, no. 2.5, repro. (shown only in Vienna).

2009 Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2009-2010, no. 30 (no. 29 in French catalogue), repro.

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