



Titian  
Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576

## *Woman Holding an Apple*

c. 1550

oil on canvas

overall: 97.8 × 73.8 cm (38 1/2 × 29 1/16 in.)

framed: 123 × 99.4 × 9.8 cm (48 7/16 × 39 1/8 × 3 7/8 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.292

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### ENTRY

The picture has been the subject of debate with regard both to its subject and its authorship. Titian and his Venetian contemporaries painted a large number of pictures representing beautiful young women in a portraitlike format, but it is often unclear whether such pictures are meant to be recognizable portraits of real members of contemporary society or idealized images of anonymous beauties—or, indeed, whether part of their allure lay in the very ambivalence of their status (see also *Allegory of Love*). Among Titian's works of his midcareer, the *Young Woman* of circa 1546 in Naples (Capodimonte) and the *Lady with a Fan* of circa 1555 in Dresden (Gemäldegalerie) both appear to be portraits since both wear fashionable contemporary dress. Yet the sitter of the so-called *Bella* of 1536 (Pitti, Florence), who is similarly richly dressed in the height of fashion, was famously described by the picture's first owner, the duke of Urbino, simply as "the woman in a blue dress"; [1] and the same model becomes even more anonymous—and eroticized—in the various versions of the *Bella*, in which she is shown in a state of undress, partly draped in a fur cloak (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Hermitage, Saint Petersburg). The present picture has been fancifully identified in the past as a portrait of Titian's daughter Lavinia, or alternatively as Caterina Cornaro, or as Giulia Gonzaga. [2] While Fern Rusk Shapley rightly rejected these identifications as without foundation, she still implicitly accepted that the picture portrays a particular woman and retained the traditional title of *Portrait of a Lady*. [3] Yet as she also recognized, the fact that the figure is shown in semiundress, with loose, untied hair and sleeves, and a richly jeweled but obviously informal gown, invites comparison with a number of other compositionally related pictures by Titian and his workshop in which a female figure is shown in fancy dress or undress and

holding an attribute-like object. Relevant examples quoted by Shapley include the *Young Woman with a Vase* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden), the *Young Woman in Turkish Dress* (John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota), and the *Young Woman with a Cat* (in 1931 in a private collection in New York); [4] and to these several more examples have been added in a recent survey of the compositional type by Paul Joannides and Rupert Featherstone. [5]

Shapley, following Detlev von Hadeln, [6] considered that such pictures represent portraits of courtesans. As recent studies have shown, however, while Venetian “beautiful woman” pictures may frequently reflect courtesan culture of the period, there is no evidence that real courtesans had themselves portrayed in this way. [7] Rather, such pictures may be interpreted as idealized images of female beauty, designed to appeal to the romantic and erotic longings of a male owner. As pointed out by Philip Rylands with reference to a comparable portrayal by Palma Vecchio of a *Woman Holding an Apple* (private collection, Paris), the attribute of the fruit carries inevitable connotations of female sexuality, [8] which in the case of the Gallery’s picture are heightened by the figure’s state of undress and her responsive gaze out at the spectator. This is not to exclude the suggestion by Harold Wethey that the apple, together with the garland of flowers in her hair, is also meant to carry some mythological or literary significance. [9] Indeed, her costume and attributes correspond remarkably closely to the figure of one of the Three Graces in the foreground of an 18th-century copy in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, after a lost version of Titian’s *Venus Blindfolding Cupid*.

Critics have varied greatly in their assessment of the quality of the picture. Wilhelm Suida, Bernard Berenson, Rodolfo Pallucchini, and Francesco Valcanover all accepted it as an autograph work by Titian. [10] But Oskar Fischel assigned it to Titian’s workshop, while Hadeln and Wethey considered it to be a poor imitation of Titian by a later follower. [11] This last judgment is certainly too harsh, especially when the poor condition of the picture is taken into account and when it is compared with the similar, but weaker Titianesque images of women just mentioned. The recent reassertion, in fact, of the autograph status of the present work by Giorgio Tagliaferro, and by Joannides and Featherstone, may be accepted as fully justified. [12]

Although Tagliaferro suggested a dating of the picture to the later 1550s, the slightly earlier dating to circa 1550/1555 suggested by Suida, Pallucchini, and Valcanover is probably more accurate. Indeed, a dating for stylistic reasons to the later 1540s cannot be excluded, [13] especially since, as was pointed out by

Joannides and Featherstone, the ultimate prototype of the series was almost certainly Titian's *Portrait of a Lady as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*. [14] Although this picture is now lost, it is recorded in a copy in the Uffizi, Florence, which is inscribed on the reverse with the date of 1542—a probably accurate record of that of the original. The composition of the Gallery's picture follows that of the *Saint Catherine* quite closely, while anonymizing and eroticizing its model, and it is likely that it in turn became the prototype for the series of *Belle* executed by, or in collaboration with, the workshop. [15] There is good evidence to show that at least one of these pictures, *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands* (Wellington Collection, Apsley House, London), took the *Woman Holding an Apple* as its starting point, since technical analysis presented by Joannides and Featherstone has shown that the figure's black overgown was painted over a lighter and looser green garment, exactly as in the Gallery's picture. At the same time, the authors cautioned against concluding that the picture of the highest quality necessarily preceded all the other variants in the series, since it cannot be excluded that the master might on occasion decide to produce an autograph variant of a design previously realized in collaboration with his assistants.

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

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## NOTES

- [1] "Quella Donna che ha la veste azurra." See Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 80–81, 296 n. 119, with references.
- [2] See Provenance notes.
- [3] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XV–XVI Century* (London, 1968), 186–187; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:495–496.
- [4] The last two of these were already quoted and illustrated by Detlev von Hadeln, "Das Problem der Lavinia-Bildnisse," *Pantheon* 7 (1931): 86. See also Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1971), 2:187.
- [5] Paul Joannides and Rupert Featherstone, "A Painting by Titian from the Spanish Royal Collection at Apsley House, London," *Hamilton Kerr Institute Bulletin* 5 (2014): 68, 72–73.
- [6] Detlev von Hadeln, "Das Problem der Lavinia-Bildnisse," *Pantheon* 7 (1931): 86.

- [7] See Carol M. Schuler, “The Courtesan in Art: Historical Fact or Modern Fantasy?” *Women’s Studies* 19 (1991): 209–221; and Mary Rogers, “Fashioning Identities for the Renaissance Courtesan,” in *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*, ed. Mary Rogers (Aldershot, 2000), 91–105; for a divergent view, see Cathy Santore, “The Tools of Venus,” *Renaissance Studies* 11 (1997): 179–207. For the wider interpretative problem, see Anne Christine Junkerman, *Bellissima Donna: An Interdisciplinary Study of Venetian Sensuous Half-Length Images of the Early Sixteenth Century* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988); Augusto Gentili, “Amore e amorese persone: Tra miti ovidiani, allegorie musicali, celebrazioni matrimoniali,” in *Tiziano: Amor sacro e amor profano*, ed. Maria Grazia Bernardini (Milan, 1995), 82–105; 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), 263–311; Rona Goffen, *Titian’s Women* (New Haven and London, 1997), 45–106; and most recently, Luke Syson, “Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women,” in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New Haven and London, 2008), 246–254.
- [8] Philip Rylands, *Palma Vecchio* (Cambridge, 1992), 92. The writer convincingly identified the picture, which he dated to circa 1516–1518, with an item described in the posthumous inventory of Palma’s possessions (1528) as “1 quareto de un retrato de una d. de q.2 in ca., con vesta de veludo cremesin con un pomo in man.” Despite the figure’s respectable dress, and the description of the picture as a “retrato,” its status as a portrait of a particular woman must remain a matter of debate.
- [9] Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1971), 2:186–187.
- [10] Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 109, 168; Wilhelm Suida, “Die Sammlung Kress: New York,” *Pantheon* 26 (1940): 278, 280; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School* (London, 1957), 1:192; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:137, 301; Francesco Valcanover, *L’opera completa di Tiziano* (Milan, 1969), 124.
- [11] Oskar Fischel, *Tizian: Des Meisters Gemälde*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart, 1924), 318, no. 176; Detlev von Hadeln, “Das Problem der Lavinia-Bildnisse,” *Pantheon* 7 (1931): 86; Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1971), 2:186–187. Similarly, Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat (MS opinion, 1946, in NGA curatorial files) denied Titian’s authorship and Hans Tietze excluded the picture from his monograph, *Titian: The Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1950). Francesco Valcanover, *Tutta la pittura di Tiziano* (Milan, 1960), 2:69, no. 165, listed it among the dubious works.
- [12] Giorgio Tagliaferro and Bernard Aikema, with Matteo Mancini and Andrew John, *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 266–267; Paul Joannides and Rupert Featherstone, “A Painting by Titian from the Spanish Royal

Collection at Apsley House, London,” *Hamilton Kerr Institute Bulletin* 5 (2014): 68, 72–73.

- [13] Nicholas Penny (letter to Peter Humfrey of Nov. 17, 2001, in NGA curatorial files) has dated the picture to the 1540s.
- [14] 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. For this painting, see Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1969), 1:130–131, cat. 97.
- [15] For which, see Giorgio Tagliaferro, in *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 265–270; and Paul Joannides and Rupert Featherstone, “A Painting by Titian from the Spanish Royal Collection at Apsley House, London,” *Hamilton Kerr Institute Bulletin* 5 (2014): 66–79, with a fuller list.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Painted on a single piece of fine-woven fabric, the picture measured 45 1/4 by 35 1/4 inches when in the Wilbraham collection (see the photographs in the catalog of the exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1915, plate 12, and in Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* [Zurich and Leipzig, 1933], p. CXCVII). The present lack of weave distortion indicates that the picture has been cut down on all four edges; yet for visual reasons, it is most unlikely that the original canvas was much larger. Documentation from a treatment that took place in Paris in 1929, including photographs, indicates that strips from another painting, each four to five inches wide, had been added to all four edges. These additions were removed or reduced during the 1929 treatment. [1] The canvas retains extensions of irregular widths, which have a different preparatory layer structure from the original. These are probably remnants of the earlier additions. The painting’s exact original dimensions remain unclear.

The painting was prepared with a very thin layer of porous material, probably gesso, laid on the fabric; it barely fills the interstices of the fabric weave and cannot be seen on top of the threads. A layer of gray lies under the background and flesh tones, while white underlies the green gown. The picture has an incomprehensible, blocky form in a material that is opaque to x-radiography (probably lead white) at the top and a band of the same material at the bottom of the present composition. Although no underdrawing has been detected, in November 2015 a tracing of the composition was laid over the probably slightly variant version in the Wellington

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Collection, Apsley House, London: *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*, attributed to Titian and a collaborator. While the scales of the respective heads match closely, and the contours of the proper right side of the face correspond exactly, other contours show a much looser correspondence, as if the master had shifted some sort of simple tracing during the process of transfer. The paint layer is extensively damaged, with abrasion and loss throughout and a good deal of retouching. In addition to the 1929 treatment, the Samuel H. Kress Collection National Gallery of Art Condition and Restoration Record reports that Stephen Pichetto “relined, cleaned, and restored [the painting] in dry color and damar” in 1937–1939, and in 1955 Mario Modestini “revived color” and applied varnish. [2]

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Catherine Metzger and Joanna Dunn

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### TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series II.A, Files regarding works of art, reel 158, box 303: Weyden, van der–Zurbarán, folder 7: Wilbraham Collection. This treatment was probably accomplished by Madame Helfer, because she restored many paintings in Paris for Duveen Brothers.
- [2] Samuel H. Kress Collection National Gallery of Art Condition and Restoration Record in NGA curatorial files. The Duveen records indicate that the painting was cleaned in 1937. Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series II.A, Files regarding works of art, reel 150, box 295: Titian, folder 18: Titian, Portrait of a Lady, ex H. E. Wilbraham.
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### PROVENANCE

Probably Michel Particelli d'Hémery [1596-1650], Paris; by inheritance to his son-in-law, Louis Phélypeaux de La Vrillière [1599-1681]. [1] George Wilbraham, M.P. [1779-1852], Delamere House, near Northwich, Cheshire, by 1829; [2] probably by inheritance to his son, George Fortescue Wilbraham [1815-1885], Delamere House, by 1883; [3] probably by inheritance to his son, Major Hugh Edward Wilbraham,

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M.B.E. [1857-1930], *Delamere House*, by 1914;<sup>[4]</sup> purchased January 1929 by (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);<sup>[5]</sup> sold 1938 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;<sup>[6]</sup> gift 1939 to NGA.

[1] As first pointed out by Christel Haffner in an unpublished dissertation of 1983, the picture is almost certainly identical with one listed as item 66 in the posthumous inventory (1650) of Particelli, Superintendent of Finance under Louis XIV of France: "Item une autre tableau du Tissien representant une dame venitienne plus qu'à demy corps tenant une grenade" (Another picture by Titian, representing a Venetian woman holding a pomegranate, longer than half-length). When it was inherited soon afterwards by La Vrillière, it was described as "portrait d'une femme tenant une pomme en ses mains ayant une guirlande de fleurs su sa tête" (portrait of a woman holding an apple in her hands, and with a garland of flowers on her head). See Mickaël Szanto, "Venise, Reni et la romanité. La collection de tableaux de Michel Particelli d'Hémery (1650)," in *Venise & Paris 1500–1700: La peinture vénitienne de la Renaissance et sa réception en France*, ed. Michel Hochmann, Geneva, 2011: 224, 259, 274.

[2] The painting was lent by G. Wilbraham to an exhibition at the British Institution in 1829.

[3] The painting was lent by G.F. Wilbraham to an exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1883.

[4] The painting was lent by H.E. Wilbraham to an exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1914.

[5] The painting was seen at Wilbraham's by Duveen agents in 1927, per the Duveen "Scout book," but at that time Wilbraham indicated he was not interested in selling his pictures. He had changed his mind by October 1928, and received the court order necessary to make the sale on 14 January 1929 (Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series I.D, General business records, reel 71, box 201: Scouts' books, folder 1: England, "Things seen"; Series II.A, Files regarding works of art, reel 150,

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box 295: Titian, folder 18: Titian, "Portrait of a Lady," ex H.E. Wilbraham; Series II.A, Files regarding works of art, reel 158, box 303: Weyden, van der - Zurbaran, folder 7: Wilbraham Collection; copies in NGA curatorial files).

[6] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series I.D, General business records, reel 54, box 151:

House invoices, 1935-1944; copy in NGA curatorial files. See also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/1673>.

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### EXHIBITION HISTORY

1829 British Institution, London, 1829, no. 161, as *Titian's Daughter*.

1883 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters and by Deceased Masters of the British School; including a special selection from the works of John Linnell and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1883, no. 191, as Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus.

1915 The Venetian School. Pictures by Titian and his Contemporaries, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1915, no. 19, pl. XII.

1939 Masterpieces of Art. European Paintings and Sculpture from 1300-1800, New York World's Fair, 1939, no. 383.

1940 Italian Renaissance Portraits, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1940, no. 21, repro., as *Presumed to be Portrait of Giulia di Gonzago-Colonna, Duchess of Trajetto*.

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

1999 Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1999, no. 78, repro.



2017 Der Poesie der venezianischen Malerei: Paris Bordone, Palma il Vecchio, Lorenzo Lotto, Tizian, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2017, no. 54, repro.

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