

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR RELEASE:

WEDNESDAY 6:00 p.m.
April 26, 1972

X RAYS REVEAL SPLENDID PORTRAITS BY TITIAN UNDER FAMED VENUS WITH A MIRROR

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 24, 1972. An unusually fine double portrait by Titian has been discovered under one of this great Renaissance master's most famous paintings, Venus with a Mirror, in the collection of the National Gallery of Art.

X rays have disclosed the portraits of a man and a woman under the painting, one of the prized pictures given to the Nation by Andrew W. Mellon in 1937. The painting and a photomontage of the X-rayed picture are on view in gallery 22 on the building's main floor.

Possibly the most exciting discovery since X rays 25 years ago revealed changes made by the young Titian in Bellini's Feast of the Gods, another of the Gallery's most important paintings, the newly-disclosed painting beneath the Venus may be an allegory of marriage, with the bride and groom in the roles of Venus and Mars.

X rays prove that the canvas was used, in fact, for three successive compositions. The three-quarter-length figures of the

(more)

man and woman, standing side by side, is the first. The canvas was turned at right angles (vertically) and Venus was painted with the two cupids much as she appears in the picture today except for a very different arrangement of her clothing. Finally the artist finished the picture as we now see it.

The portraits and other preliminary work on the canvas are among a wealth of information uncovered by the X rays and infra-red photography.

This scientific work was routinely initiated by Dr. Fern Shapley, whose investigation was for a closer examination of the painting's physical condition, which the X rays show is generally good. Mrs. Shapley, former Curator of Paintings at the National Gallery, is now cataloging the Gallery's Italian paintings.

Venus with a Mirror was painted by Titian around 1555, when the master was about eighty. The picture remained in the artist's studio until after his death.

Probably no other painting of the High Renaissance inspired so many copies and variants, but the National Gallery's picture stands unchallenged as Titian's work.

Through early documents and a number of pictures, including copies by others, Titian is known to have used two different conceptions of Venus at her toilet. Commonly known as the Venus Genetrix and the Venus Pudica, these types are both based on

(more)

classical sculpture. The National Gallery's painting is of the latter type, one which was presumably familiar to Titian in the Venus de' Medici, now in Florence.

An illustrated article on the X-ray discoveries has been written by Dr. Shapley for the National Gallery's Studies in the History of Art, a scholarly publication which will appear soon.

END



Scan of photocopy of photograph. Photograph is located in the Press Release files.

34 TITIAN
Venetian c.1477-1576
Venus with a Mirror
Canvas, 49 x 41 1/2 (1.245 x 1.055)
Andrew Mellon Collection 1937

Scan of photocopy of photograph. Photograph is located in the Press Release files.