

Venetian Painting in the Later Sixteenth Century

By the middle of the sixteenth century, a new generation of painters began to challenge Titian's dominance over Venetian art. The three most important artists to do so were Tintoretto, Veronese, and Jacopo Bassano.

The paintings in this gallery display the variety of painting styles practiced by these younger contemporaries of Titian. While all three painters were influenced by the older master's rich color and painterly brushwork, each developed his own, individual style. A gifted portraitist, Tintoretto is also known for his unusual interpretations of religious subjects. His dramatic use of color and light often cause him to be considered a precursor to the baroque style of the next century. Veronese painted ambitious decorative cycles and is perhaps best known for his large scenes of feasts or banquets. In contrast to the material splendor and operatic compositions of Veronese's work, Bassano's paintings quietly display his greater interest in landscape and pastoral themes.

Some of the paintings in this room, such as *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy* or *The Madonna of the Stars*, exemplify works made for the growing Counter Reformation movement, the Catholic church's response to the Protestant Reformation. To reassert Catholic doctrine and strengthen the faith of worshipers, Counter Reformation artists emphasized the role of the saints and sacraments in scenes that involved viewers on a personal, emotional level.



Jacopo Tintoretto
Venetian, 1518–1594

Portrait of a Man as Saint George, 1540/1550

The son of a cloth dyer (*tintore*), Jacopo Robusti, later called Tintoretto, was born in Venice, where he lived and worked for most of his life. Details of his artistic training are not known, although his early works show the influence of Titian.

The pose of this unidentified sitter recalls earlier portraits by Giorgione and Titian. Gazing over his right shoulder, the man rests his right arm on a cloth-covered table. In his left hand he holds a red standard emblazoned with the white cross of the Christian knight Saint George. An ornate helmet is seen on the table before him while a menacing dragon emerges from the darkness behind him. The sitter's depiction with the attributes of Saint George perhaps refers to his name or to his patron saint.

As an example of Tintoretto's early painting style, this enigmatic portrait displays a thoughtful balance of rich color and precise drawing. The bright red and teal blue of the banner and helmet are enhanced by gold highlights. In contrast to the sitter's carefully described face and beard, the dragon is merely suggested with quick, sketchy brushstrokes.

Oil on canvas, .838 x .711 m (33 x 28 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.98



Jacopo Tintoretto

A Procurator of Saint Mark's, 1575/1585

Beginning in the 1550s, Tintoretto and his studio received numerous commissions for portraits of Venetian civic leaders. This work, painted entirely by Tintoretto between 1575 and 1585, is one of the finest surviving examples of a new and fashionable portrait type.

The sitter is dressed in a crimson velvet robe lined with ermine. A richly patterned stole is draped over his right shoulder. Together, these garments identify him as a procurator, a Venetian civic official similar to a chancellor or senator. Seated in a three-quarter pose, the man turns his head as if to address the viewer. His position of authority is conveyed by his serious expression and his firm grip on the arm of the chair. The painting's large format and the voluminous bulk of the costume reinforce the unidentified sitter's high official status.

With its saturated colors and assured brushwork, this portrait stands out as a superb example of Tintoretto's later painting style. While the garment is very thinly painted with red glazes, broad strokes of white create highlights on the edges of the fabric folds.

Oil on canvas, 1.387 x 1.013 m (54 1/2 x 34 7/8 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.79



Jacopo Tintoretto

The Madonna of the Stars, second half of 16th century

Here, Tintoretto combined a traditional religious subject with a tender image of young motherhood. Shown in half-length, the Virgin Mary is seated in an unidentified space, with the Christ child lying contentedly across her knees in a pose that prefigures images of the *pietà*. With her hands joined in prayer, Mary bows her head toward her son in a gesture of adoration. The stars that encircle the Virgin's head refer to the purity of her own birth and identify her as the Immaculate Conception, an important theme in art of the Counter Reformation period. The heavenly cherubs in the background endow this earthly moment between mother and child with a supernatural quality.

In contrast to the dramatic use of color found in many of Tintoretto's late works, his palette is here light and harmonious. The warm yellow of the background balances the soft red of the Virgin's dress and the Child's rosy flesh. The paint is thinly applied with the rapid, confident brushstrokes that characterize Tintoretto's later style. The painting's small size and intimate mood suggest that it was made for personal devotion in a private home.

Oil on canvas, .927 x .727 m (36 1/2 x 28 5/8 in.).
Ralph and Mary Booth Collection 1947.6.6



Paolo Caliari, called Veronese

Venetian, 1528–1588

Rebecca at the Well, 1580/1585

As suggested by his name of Veronese, Paolo Caliari was born in the northern Italian town of Verona. Following his training and early success there, the artist moved to Venice in 1553, where he, like Tintoretto and Bassano, was influenced by Titian's bold coloristic and compositional approaches.

The story of Rebecca at the well comes from the Book of Genesis. The aged Abraham, wanting a wife for his son Isaac, sent his servant Eliezer to his homeland of Mesopotamia to find a suitable woman. Tired after his long journey, Eliezer stopped at a well and prayed for guidance. When Rebecca offered water to Eliezer and his camels, the old steward recognized her as the appointed bride and presented her with the betrothal jewels offered by the kneeling servant.

Originally part of a decorative cycle of ten biblical scenes, this large canvas displays an interest in nature that is often noted in Veronese's later works. The deeply receding landscape at right balances the large, elegantly posed figures in the left foreground. Gleaming copper pots and luxurious orange, rose, and yellow fabrics provide a sharp contrast with the darkness of the lush vegetation and the evening sky. The fanciful camels add an exotic touch to Veronese's poetic interpretation of the story.

Oil on canvas, 1.455 x 2.827 m (57 1/4 x 111 1/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.82



Veronese

The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy, about 1582

For this work, painted for the Church of Santa Croce in Belluno, Veronese combined the martyrdom of Saint Lucy with other events from her life. With an air of quiet resignation, Lucy gazes tearfully at the offered host as the executioner plunges a dagger into her chest. The flames behind her allude to an earlier attempt to kill her by burning. The oxen in the background refer to the team that failed to drag the chaste Lucy to the brothel to which she had been condemned for her Christian faith. The placement of the setting in sixteenth-century Venice rather than in Lucy's own third-century Syracuse in Sicily, and the emphasis on the sacrament of the Eucharist underscore the Counter Reformation spirit of the age.

In this outstanding example of Veronese's late style, the large figures are set close to the picture plane. Rapid, expressive brushstrokes create flickering effects of light and shadow. In contrast to the bright, decorative colors of his earlier works, Veronese darkened his palette with deeper and more muted tones. He heightened the scene's emotional impact by including at left the partial figure of an old woman—perhaps Lucy's mother Eutychia—who draws the viewer into the picture.

Oil on canvas, 1.397 x 1.734 m (55 x 68 1/4 in.).
Gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund 1984.28.1



Jacopo Bassano

Venetian, about 1510–1592

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, 1545

According to the Gospel of Luke (5:1–11), Peter and Andrew had been fishing all night without success when Jesus told them to cast their nets once more. This time the nets became so full that John and James had to help lift them into the boats. Afterward, Jesus called upon the four to be his disciples, telling Peter, "Henceforth, you will be a fisher of men."

A leading Venetian painter of the sixteenth century, Jacopo Bassano is less well known today than his contemporaries Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto. Although he spent most of his life in his native town of Bassano (seen here in the right background), Jacopo was aware of artistic developments in Venice. This work, commissioned in 1545 by Pietro Pizzamano, the Venetian governor of Bassano, reveals Jacopo's response to the stylized approach of mannerist artists at work in Venice during the 1540s. Set close to the picture plane, the two groups of monumental figures are joined by Andrew's dramatically billowing cloak. The brilliant rose, green, and ocher hues of their garments resonate against the luminous blue water.

Oil on canvas, 1.435 x 2.437 m (56 1/2 x 95 15/16 in.).
Patrons' Permanent Fund 1997.21.1



Jacopo Bassano

The Annunciation to the Shepherds, probably 1555/1560

In this inventive interpretation of the announcement of Christ's birth, Jacopo Bassano merged the biblical narrative with a pastoral scene. Rather than present the traditional image of an angel appearing before three shepherds in the field, the miracle is here experienced by a family group placed in a moonlit landscape that recalls the mountainous terrain surrounding the artist's native town of Bassano. An angel descends through dark clouds in a flash of heavenly light, and each family member reacts differently to the presence of the divine messenger. Particularly odd is the inclusion of the female figure, who kneels in the foreground milking a cow.

Unlike the bright palette and tight handling of paint in his earlier *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, Jacopo here applied darker colors with a looser and more expressive hand. The textural effects of this painterly brushwork are especially notable in the soft feathers of the angel's wings and the tiny pleats of the woman's shawl. One of several versions of this composition painted in Jacopo's studio, this canvas is universally recognized as having been painted by the master alone.

Oil on canvas, 1.061 x .826 m (41 3/4 x 32 1/2 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.126