




A Closer Look At Titian

Description



Today, we are focusing on a single artist in order to more carefully examine the Renaissance period. Titian created great works of art that featured highly expressive figures that exemplified the “rebirth” spreading throughout Italy and Europe. Titian’s figures graced his altarpieces, portraits, mythologies, and pastoral landscapes.

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576), known as Titian, is perhaps the most significant Venetian artist of the sixteenth century. Titian eventually gained international fame for his exquisite painterly skills. He was known for his remarkable use of colors and his style was highly influential well into the seventeenth century.

Titian’s portraits provide a stunning history of Renaissance fashion for both men and women. We will show some wonderful examples further along in this post, but for now, let us review an insightful commentary made by Wilhelm Suida in his *New Light on Titian’s Portraits- II*:

"Titian’s portraits are of incalculable value, not only as matchless works of art, but also as historical documents. The painter of the great world of his day portrayed many of the principal actors in the important events of the period, men unequalled in the history of mankind."

Early Works and Altarpiece Paintings by Titian:

Titian trained under two Venetian artists; first Giovanni Bellini and, later Giorgione. It was largely from Giorgione that Titian developed his tonal approach to painting and his landscape art style. He atmospheric and evocative pastoral landscapes depict the beauty of nature that is celebrated alongside love and music.



Two Satyrs in a Landscape. 1509-15.

This famous early drawing shows Titian's exquisite pictorial use of pen and ink. The figures in the foreground demonstrate the sculptural effects of chiaroscuro and a landscape that seems to dissolve into the haze of a distant horizon. The mythological figures in a pastoral landscape is a perfect example of a new idiom in Venetian art that influenced European painters into the nineteenth century.



. 1516-18.

This was Titian's first major public commission in Venice for the high altar of Santa Maria della Gloriosa dei Frari. It is a novel portrayal of the Virgin Mary surrounded by the apostles. Titian depicts Mary full of life and movement, rather than the calm, subdued figure she was more commonly represented as during that time.

With the completion of this work, he successfully established his place as the most prominent painter of the city. This image broke tradition with its dynamically twisting, large scale figures. It also draws in its viewers eyes with its enticing bold colors.

Portraiture by Titian:

Our main focus in this discussion is turned to the portraits painted by Titian, for these truly show the reality of the Italian Renaissance. It is in his portraits that we see, not mythological or religious figures, but real people that lived during this fascinating period of time.

Through portraits we can piece together clues from the past that reveal otherwise unrecorded or forgotten histories. We can discover the status of an individual through their portrait and the influence of certain men.

We can also see interesting displays of fashion that are captured in these carefully executed portraits. Every stroke and object has been deliberately painted and, therefore, deserve our attention.



. 1520-23.

This famous Titian painting features a palette of limited but strongly contrasting colors. It is a psychological portrait in which the sitter's personality is conveyed through the minimal colors and his aloof, preoccupied gaze.

His complex stare has a sensitivity that is gathered through his eyes. It is a portrait, but also an image of the cultivated state of mind of this particular individual. Titian is remembered to this day for convincing psychological portrait such as this.



Portrait of Isabella d'Este. 1534-36.

Isabella d'Este was the daughter of Ercole I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, and Eleanor of Naples. She was a powerful patron of culture; collecting art and developing a highly refined court in Mantua.

Although she is portrayed as a young woman, Isabella was 62 years old when this portrait was painted. In the original painting by Titian, he painted a Isabella as the aged woman she was. She was so upset with this unflattering, albeit realistic, portrayal that she made him repaint a more idealized image of herself, requesting that she appear forty years younger.

Isabella had strong ideas on how she wished to be portrayed and saw to it that Titian captured her essence rather than her actual appearance. She was immensely pleased with the final product which shows her as a young woman. Her girlish beauty is emphasized with her gown decorated with gold and silver trim, and her luxurious balzo.

Titian flatters his sitter with an idealized image feeding into her vanity. Her self awareness was not uncommon of that time, where women of her status were constantly on public display and expected to be both physically pleasing and personally charming. At the same time, he succeeds in portraying her modesty and chastity.



. 1548.

This portrait is a tribute to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, following his victory in the Battle of Muhlberg. Titian portrays Charles V heroically, in a calm dawn setting with no signs of battle. The steady feeling of control is achieved through the dark background, evenly clouded sky and Charles' detached gaze into the distance.

The horse is shown slightly rearing with only its hind legs touching the ground, while Charles still holds the reins effortlessly. This is a departure from traditional depictions of horses in art during that time which showed only horses in a stationary pose. This was a deliberate artistic choice made by Titian to imply Charles' superior horsemanship.

The directness and sense of contained power in this portrait shows Titian's true talent as an artist, bestowing Charles with a sense of strength unachievable through typical iconographic elements.

Charles shines in his gleaming armor as the deep reds of the painting highlight his heroic victory in battle.

Here are some more portraits painted by Titian that demonstrate the complex beauty he is able to bring forth from his subjects. Also, the fashionable attire worn by the sitters shows the styles found in Venice during the Renaissance (with the exception of the Pope- who was clearly not the norm when it came to fashion!).



La Schiavona. 1510-12.



Girl with A Basket of Fruits. 1555-5.



Portrait of Pope Paul III. 1543.



Portrait Of A Lady In White. 1553.



Portrait of Titian's daughter Lavinia. 1545.

Mythology and Poesia Paintings:

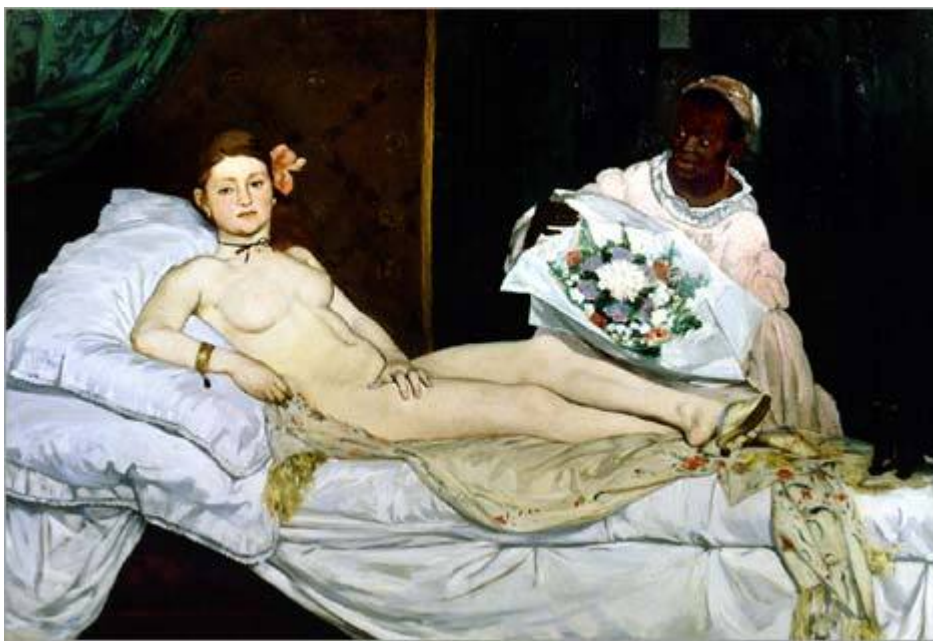
Among his other works, Titian completed a number of paintings with mythological subjects. These poesie, as he called them, were certainly a form of visual poetry.



Venus of Urbino. 1538. Venus of Urbino is a prime example of this genre; showing the freedom Titian took in order to captivate his viewers with this idealized image of a reclining nude figure. He depicts her in a domesticated, indoor setting in a highly erotic manner.

No classical or allegorical symbols are to be found in this painting to signal Venus as a goddess; yet her manner remains unapologetically sensual. She appears unconcerned with her nudity and stares frankly at her viewer.

The dog, a common sign of fidelity in art, is asleep in the background. The dog is deliberately shown sleeping, hinting that the woman portrayed is unfaithful.



Olympia. Edouard Manet. 1863

Titian's provocatively posed woman has even inspired future artists; most notably, Edouard Manet and his *Olympia* (1863).

**Give us your thoughts about Titian, Renaissance Art, Fashion, or anything else! Comments are more than welcome here on our blog or on our Facebook page. Or just leave us a "hello!"*

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