**Titian**

**Titian** (Tiziano Vecellio) (c. 1485-1576). The greatest painter of the Venetian school.

The evidence for his birthdate is contradictory, but he was certainly very old when he died. He received the more important part of his training in the studio of Giovanni Bellini, then came under the spell of Giorgione, with whom he had a close relationship. In 1506-08 he assisted him with the external fresco decoration of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, Venice, and after Giorgione's early death in 1510 it fell to Titian to complete a number of his unfinished paintings. The authorship of certain works (some of them famous) is still disputed between them.

Titian's first great commission was for three frescos in Padua (Scuola del Santo, 1511), noble and dignified paintings suggesting an almost central Italian firmness and monumentality. When he returned to Venice, Giorgione having died and Sebastiano gone to Rome, the aged Bellini alone stood between him and supremacy, and that only until 1516 when Bellini died and Titian became official painter to the Republic. Meanwhile he was gradually winning free from the stylistic domination of Giorgione and developing a manner of his own. Something of a fusion between Titian worldliness and Giorgione's poetry is seen in the enigmatic allegory known as Sacred and Profane Love (Villa Borghese, Rome, c. 1516).

This work inaugurated a brilliant period in Titian's creative career during which he produced splendid religious, mythological, and portrait paintings, original in conception and vivid with color and movement. A series of great altarpieces opens with the Assumption (Sta Maria dei Frari, Venice, 1516-18), which in the soaring movement of the Virgin, rising from the tempestuous group of Apostles towards the hovering figure of God the Father, contradicts the stable basis of quattrocento and High Renaissance composition and looks forward to the Baroque. The strong, simple colors used here, and the artist's evident pleasure in the silhouetting of dark forms against a light background, reappear throughout the work of this period. There followed the Pesaro altarpiece (Sta Maria dei Frari, Venice, 1519-26), a bold diagonal composition of great magnificence in which architectural motifs are used to enhance the drama of the scene, and the altarpiece of St Peter Martyr (now destroyed but known to us from several copies and engravings), where trees and figures together form a violent centrifugal composition suited to the action; Vasari described it as `the most celebrated, the greatest work... that Titian has ever done'.

Titian's finest mythological works from this period are three pictures (1518-23) for Alfonso d'Este -- the Worship of Venus, the Bacchanal (both in the Prado, Madrid), and the Bacchus and Ariadne (National Gallery, London) -- and outstanding among his portraits is the exquisite Man with a Glove (Louvre, Paris, c. 1520).

About 1530, the year in which his wife died, a change in Titian's manner becomes apparent. The vivacity of former years give way to a more restrained and meditative art. He now began to use related rather than contrasting colors in juxtaposition, yellows and pale shades rather than the strong blues and reds which shouldered each other through his previous work. In composition too he became less adventurous and used schemes which, compared with some of his earlier works, appear almost archaic. Thus his large Presentation of the Virgin (Accademia, Venice, 1534-38) makes use of the relief-like frieze composition dear to the quattrocento. During the 1530s Titian's fame spread throughout Europe. In 1530 he first met the emperor Charles V (in Bologna, where he was crowned in that year) and in 1533 he painted a famous portrait of him (Prado) based on a portrait by the Austrian Seisenegger. Charles was so pleased with it that he appointed Titian court painter and elevated him to the rank of Count Palatine and Knight of the Golden Spur -- an unprecedented honor for a painter. At the same time his works were increasingly sought after by Italian princes, as with the celebrated Venus of Urbino (Uffizi, Florence, c. 1538), named after its owner, Guidobaldo, Duke of Camerino, who later became Duke of Urbino. The pose is based on Giorgione's Sleeping Venus (Gemдldegalerie, Dresden), but Titian substitutes a direct sensual appeal for Giorgione's idyllic remoteness.

Early in the 1540s Titian came under the influence of central and north Italian Mannerism, and in 1545-6 he made his first and only journey to Rome. There he was deeply impressed not only by modern works such as Michelangelo's Last Judgement, but also by the remains of antiquity. His own paintings during this visit aroused much interest, his Danaл (Museo di Capodimonte, Naples) being praised for its handling and color and (according to Vasari) criticized for its inexact drawing by Michelangelo. Titian also painted in Rome the famous portrait of Pope Paul III and his Nephews (Museo di Capodimonte). The decade closed with further imperial commissions. In 1548 the emperor summoned Titian to Augsburg, where he painted both a formal equestrian portrait (Charles V at the Battle of Mьhlberg, Prado) and a more intimate one showing him seated in an armchair (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). He travelled to Augsburg again in 1550 and this time painted portraits of Charles's son, the future Philip II of Spain, and the greatest patron of his later career. Titian's work for Philip included a series of seven erotic mythological subjects (c. 1550-62): Danaл and Venus and Adonis (Prado), Perseus and Andromeda (Wallace Collection, London), The Rape of Europa (Gardner Museum, Boston), Diana and Actaeon and Diana and Calisto (Ellesmere Collection, on load to the National Gallery of Scotland), and The Death of Actaeon (National Gallery, London). Titian referred to these pictures as poesie, and they are indeed highly poetic visions of distant worlds, quite different from the sensual realities of his earlier mythological paintings.

During the last twenty years of his life Titian's personal works, as opposed to those which busy assistants produced under his supervision and with his intervention, showed an increasing looseness in the handling and a sensitive merging of colors which makes them more and more immaterial. Autumnal tones reflected the artist's meditative spirit. About the same time his interest in new pictorial conceptions waned. About 1550-55 he had painted a powerful Martyrdom of St Lawrence (Gesuiti, Venice), which had affinities with Mannerism in the types and movements of the figures. In 1564-67 he repeated the picture (Escorial, Madrid), but now the light, which played a dramatic part in the first version, became the chief feature, creating and dissolving forms. His powers remained undimmed until the end, and his career closed with the awe-inspiring Pietа (Accademia, Venice, 1573-76), intended for his own tomb and finished after his death by Palma Giovane.

Titian's influence on later artists has been profound: he was supreme in every branch of painting and revolutionized the oil technique with his free and expressive brushwork. Vasari wrote of this aspect of his late works that they `are executed with bold, sweeping strokes, and in patches of color, with the result that they cannot be viewed from near by, but appear perfect at a distance... The method he used is judicious, beautiful, and astonishing, for it makes pictures appear alive and painted with great art, but it conceals the labor that has gone into them.'

His greatness as an artist, it appears, was not matched by his character, for he was notoriously avaricious. In spite of his wealth and status, he claimed he was impoverished, and his exaggerations about his age (by which he hoped to pull at the heartstrings of patrons) are one of the sources of confusion about his birthdate. Jacopo Bassano caricatured him as a moneylender in his Purification of the Temple (National Gallery, London). Titian, however, was lavish in his hospitality towards his friends, who included the poet Pietro Aretino and the sculptor and architect Jacopo Sansovino. These three were so close that they were known in Venice as the triumvirate, and they used their influence with their respective patrons to further each other's careers.