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FRONT COVER

Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne* (NG 35), 1520–3 (detail).

TITLE PAGE

TOP LEFT: Titian, *The Holy Family with a Shepherd* (NG 4), c.1510 (detail).

TOP RIGHT: Titian, *The Music Lesson* (NG 3), c.1535 (detail).

BOTTOM LEFT: Titian, *Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo ('The Man with a Quilted Sleeve')* (NG 1944), c.1510 (detail).

BOTTOM RIGHT: Titian, *'The Aldobrandini Madonna'* (NG 635), c.1532 (detail).

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Recovering Titian: The Cleaning and Restoration of Three Overlooked Canvas Paintings

JILL DUNKERTON

Three of the works included in this study of Titian's painting technique in the first thirty to forty years of his career, the *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro*, *The Music Lesson* and *The Triumph of Love* (FIGS 209–11), are little known and have been largely ignored in the twentieth-century art-historical literature on Titian. Only *The Triumph of Love* was included in Harold Wethey's standard English language monograph on the artist, for example, and then as 'Venetian School, c.1560'.¹ The other two have been variously attributed since they arrived at the National Gallery, most recently as 'After Titian' and 'Imitator of Titian' respectively,² their only supporter as works by Titian being Wilhelm Suida in 1933 and 1935.³

The common factor in their obscurity was the deterioration of their appearance as a result of heavily discoloured and degraded old restorations. It might be

thought that Titian's inventions would be sufficiently robust to survive being veiled with old varnish, dirt and repaint, yet he is also a painter of great subtlety and even delicacy. His intentions are easily disrupted by alterations to the format of his works, as had occurred in all three instances. His rich colours and descriptions of texture are lost under the discoloration of old varnish, and, above all, the opacity of badly degraded varnishes can destroy any sense of volume or spatial relationship in a composition.

Reconstruction of the conservation histories of the three canvases has been important for understanding how they came to be in such an altered condition. This in turn goes some way to explaining why they were generally overlooked as possible works by Titian. Techniques such as X-radiography and infrared reflectography have played a significant role in their rehabilitation, as has the analysis and examination of paint samples. In addition, these methods of scientific examination have informed the cleaning and treatment that has led to the retrieval of some of the original quality of the three paintings, although inevitably they remain compromised to varying degrees by the consequences of previous interventions.



FIG. 209 NG 3949, *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro* (CAT. 9), before cleaning.

Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro

The *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro* entered the National Gallery collection in 1924 with the bequest of Ludwig Mond, who had acquired it, as a Titian, in London in 1895. It received little attention, in part perhaps because of its condition, but principally because J.-P. Richter, who advised Mond on his collection, had decided by 1910 that it was by the Veronese painter Francesco Torbido, who, according to Vasari, had painted a portrait of the sitter – Vasari also records that he was painted by Titian. Richter later changed his attribution to that of a copy after Titian, which, with the exception of Gronau in 1926 and Suida in 1933, is more or less how it remained until a recent revival of interest in the portrait.⁴



FIG. 210 NG 3, *The Music Lesson* (CAT. 12), before cleaning.



FIG. 211 *The Triumph of Love* (CAT. 13), before cleaning.



FIG. 212 NG 3949, detail of the printed Italian text used to secure one of the stretcher keys.



FIG. 213 NG 3949, detail of the lower left edge showing original paint on the tacking margin.



FIG. 214 NG 3949, X-radiograph, before cleaning and relining.



FIG. 215 NG 3949, detail during removal of varnish and overpaint.

When the painting arrived at the National Gallery it was described as being in a 'fair' state, and 'considerably rubbed in the paint'. It received no treatment other than being 'surface polished' in 1925 and 1937, probably in an attempt to revive an already blached and deteriorated varnish. The most likely occasion for its last full cleaning and restoration is when it was in the Brescian collection of Conte Teodoro Lechi, from where it was sold in 1854. It is recorded in the catalogues of the Lechi collection in 1824, 1837 and 1852, always as the portrait of the 'celebre Fracastoro' by Titian. The character of the lining canvas, and the presence of export seals on its reverse, together with the use of scraps of paper printed with Italian text (possibly from a Lechi catalogue) to secure the stretcher keys (FIG. 212), confirm

that the lining at least must have been carried out before the painting left Italy. The most likely candidate for its last restorer is Girolamo Romano, the 'bravo professore', who according to a guide book to Brescia of 1826, had restored the greater part of the Lechi collection. He was noted as 'eccellente nell'arte sua'.⁵ It must have been at around this date that a paper label identifying the sitter as 'Dottore Fracastoro' was pasted to the front of the canvas in the lower left corner (only a fragment had survived by this century).

If the varnishes and old restoration dated back to the early nineteenth century this would explain their degraded state. As well as the discoloration and opacity, the accumulation of darkened varnish in the depressions of the canvas weave gave the impression of

a coarsely woven canvas and of a painting that is even more badly abraded than is actually the case. X-radiography (FIG. 214) and infrared reflectography showed that although it was clearly a much damaged work, considerably more of the original paint had survived than might have been expected from its surface appearance before cleaning, especially in areas containing lead white such as the fur. Moreover, the forceful character of the X-ray image and its similarity to that of the *Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo* (FIG. 100) gave encouragement to proceed with cleaning, as did the character of the lines of underdrawing revealed by infrared.

The X-radiograph also confirmed that the painting had been extended at the upper and lower edges with strips of canvas stitched to the original. The canvas weave of the extensions was notably coarser and more open than that of the original, and areas of X-ray opaque paint unrelated to the portrait indicated that they were cut from another painting. The original tacking margins had been trimmed in order to attach the extensions, but the cusped weave distortion suggests that none of the picture area has been lost. At the sides fragments of the tacking edges survive and were folded round the stretcher. The presence of original paint on these edges, for instance the warm grey of the parapet at the lower left edge (FIG. 213), is evidence that when the portrait was painted the canvas was stretched flat, with the tacks inserted into the front face of the stretcher or strainer. The canvas must soon have been re-stretched with the edges turned around the stretcher as the paint at the edges was free of discoloured varnish layers and indeed may never have been covered with varnish.

The nineteenth-century varnish and also most of the repainting was readily soluble in normal cleaning solvents, revealing a paint surface that was badly worn in some areas but better preserved than might have been expected in others, notably the fur, the parapet and the gloved hand. The much damaged and admittedly peculiar features in the background had been emphatically restored as an arched doorway with a receding left edge and a strange stepped opening above. Since the recession contradicted that of the oculus on the left, the restorer – probably Romano – introduced a corner to the room to the left of the sitter. This dark repainting, which could be dissolved with the varnish, covered some of the largest areas of damage (FIG. 215). As is often the case, the areas of black were especially worn and had been completely repainted. The face, badly affected

by a multitude of small losses from the tops of the canvas threads and also some flake losses from the corners of cracks, had been retouched with more care, but modifications had been introduced: for example, the shadow at the outer corner of the sitter's unusually deep-set nearer eye was touched out, some dull greyish catchlights were added and also a stroke of pinkish paint to indicate an ear lobe, positioned well below the original ear, which is only glimpsed through the subject's abundant hair and beard.

There are several possible explanations as to how this portrait came to be so damaged, with the tops of the canvas threads exposed in almost all the more thinly painted areas, such as those painted with black and dark grey. As with all canvases with a gesso ground, Titian's works are particularly sensitive to moisture. Extremely damp conditions can cause the canvas fibres to swell and the ground to soften so that where it is thinner over the tops of the canvas threads it may effectively push up the paint film, causing it to flake off. Early lining techniques involving water-based glues and potentially overheated irons could also result in paint losses of this type. In the case of the *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro*, however, the more thickly painted areas with large amounts of lead white, as in the fur, have retained their brush-marked texture and impasto. This suggests that it was not a heavy lining that was the cause of the losses. The alkaline substances, such as soaps and lye, once used for cleaning and varnish removal, obviously contained water, as did the 'spirits of wine' widely used in the nineteenth century. In common with other paintings of its age, the portrait is likely to have undergone varnish removal on several occasions. Indeed, underneath the nineteenth-century varnish layers there were residues of a very insoluble older varnish, evident particularly where it had accumulated around the edges and in patches on the relatively well-preserved background at the lower left. Here its hot orange colour is apparent.⁶ It is no longer possible to remove these varnish residues safely and they have been left following the recent cleaning.

The old lining had deteriorated to the point where it no longer functioned and so it was removed, together with the extensions which turned out to have been cut from a painted canvas – possibly a piece of decorative painting – which had a red-brown ground. The canvas was relined onto a new linen canvas, using a traditional glue-paste technique that has reconsolidated the desiccated and crumbling paint and ground layers.⁷ The



FIG. 216 NG 3949, after cleaning and relining, before restoration.

surviving tacking margins are now flat again – which ensures their preservation – and the portrait has been returned to its original dimensions and therefore a format close to that of many other portraits by Titian.

The restoration consisted essentially of the touching in of the tiny points of damage from the tops of the canvas threads so that at least some of the sense of volume in the portrait could be recovered.⁸ The restoration of the face was brought to the level of the best-preserved parts around the sitter's mouth, moustache and parts of his nose, but some fine detail has probably been lost. However, the likeness may always have been somewhat generalised – Titian seems to have been as interested in the sitter's lynx-lined coat as in the man himself. Although the black parts of the costume have lost most of their internal modelling, the structure of the garment and the bulk of the sleeves were established principally by the curving outlines and by the bands of white fur trapped in the seams. The restoration presented some difficulty down the sitter's proper left side where Titian had extended the outline of the sleeve over the grey background paint – this was brushed in very approximately at an early stage, leaving an imprecisely reserved area for the figure. There was clear evidence for the bulge of fabric above the line of fur trapped in the seam (also reconstructed in this way in the previous restoration), but the original outline below was less clear. The angle of the fur seam indicates that the sitter should be thought of as with his hand on his hip and the edge was re-

established accordingly. Fortunately it merges with the dark shadow of the doorway.

The status of the background elements has been questioned. They are all painted over the lighter grey paint of the background and the yellow-grey rim of the oculus does not seem to extend onto the tacking margin in the same way as the paint of the parapet, but this could be because this part of the edge is more damaged. In cross-sections no varnish layers could be detected between the grey background paint and the superimposed architectural features, and the same paint materials, including coal black, were found in samples from the black costume and the dark doorway. Coal black was widely used, however, throughout the sixteenth century and into the next century and so this does not prove that the doorway is original. There was no question of removing this paint (although the pattern of damage suggests that a previous restorer may have attempted to do so), or retouching over it; therefore the doorway and the mysterious shape above it were retouched in an indeterminate way and without any recession to the side of the door. The illusion of there being a side to the door in the photograph taken before restoration (FIG. 216) is the result of greater abrasion along an area of particularly thick raised vertical threads in the canvas.

The restoration of the canvas to its original size has had an added advantage in that the portrait now fits an impressive so-called 'Sansovino' frame of the second half of the sixteenth century already owned by the National Gallery, for which hitherto there had not been a painting of suitable dimensions.⁹

The Music Lesson

The decline of *The Music Lesson* into obscurity is all the more remarkable as it was once a celebrated picture believed to be by Titian and has a notably distinguished provenance (see p. 92).¹⁰ Its loss of reputation demonstrably coincided with the deterioration of its condition. The painting seems to have last been cleaned, restored and relined when or shortly before it was acquired by John Julius Angerstein, some time before 1806, when it is first recorded in his collection. Before then it may have been in France, since a painting fitting its description was auctioned in Rouen in 1755. The stretcher, however, is of a type and construction used in England from the late eighteenth century onwards,¹¹ which would fit with a restoration carried out when the painting was on the market (FIG. 217). *The Music Lesson* was much

admired while it was in the Angerstein collection and subsequently, when it was bought in 1824 as part of the core of the newly founded National Gallery. By the 1830s, however, some writers were beginning to comment on its poor condition, and doubts as to the attribution began to circulate. According to the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee of 1853 on the cleaning of paintings at the National Gallery, it had already needed to be re-varnished on more than one occasion with 'mastic varnish mixed with drying oil' (the notorious 'Gallery varnish'). In 1855 its condition was described as 'not satisfactory, partly from former repairs, partly from the effects of unequally discoloured varnish'.¹² Continued deterioration is implied by the four occasions between 1862 and 1887 when the painting was surface cleaned (which usually involved sponging off the soot and grime of London pollution) and yet more varnish applied.¹³ In 1877 Crowe and Cavalcaselle published their monograph on Titian in which the painting was stated to be 'far below Titian's powers' and attributed it to a follower.¹⁴ The National Gallery finally downgraded it (together with *The Tribute Money*, long since reinstated) in the *Abridged Catalogue* of 1889 to 'School of Vecellio'. In the twentieth century the painting came to be widely considered as dating from the early seventeenth century, painted perhaps by Padovanino.¹⁵ No more attempts were made to revive the varnish and further treatments, in 1941, 1953 and 2002, were simply to secure loose paint and to repair the edges of the lining canvas.

The process of re-evaluating the painting began in 2002, following the painting's return from an exhibition in Mantua on the Gonzaga collections.¹⁶ It was by then visible only with difficulty through the thick layers of opaque and discoloured varnish. Some parts appeared to jump out, for example the head and arm of the woman and the face of the recorder player on the right, and the composition seemed flat and unbalanced in its design. Only a few details, such as the texture of the canvas, supplied any clues that it might indeed be a sixteenth-century work. It needed an X-radiograph, and also an infrared reflectogram, to reveal that underneath the layers of restoration there appeared to be a painting that exhibited extensive alterations of a kind entirely consistent with other X-ray images of paintings always accepted as being by Titian.

A few paint samples were taken and (remarkably, given the difficulty of sampling through varnish layers that had accumulated to be as thick as the paint) they



FIG. 217 NG 3, reverse, before cleaning and relining.

all revealed paint and ground layers consistent with a sixteenth-century date and with layer structures seen in samples from other paintings from Titian's workshop – for example, the interspersed layers of red glaze with opaque pink and white in a cross-section from the viol player's tunic (see FIG. 188). They also confirmed the painting's documented conservation history by revealing an exceptional number of layers of varnish. In the sample illustrated (FIGS 218, 219), taken from the brown background to the left of the viol player's face,

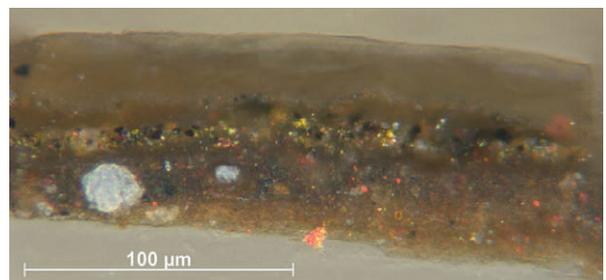


FIG. 218 NG 3, paint cross-section from the brown background showing several layers of old varnish and a layer of repaint over two layers of original paint (the gesso and *imprimitura* are missing from this part of the sample).

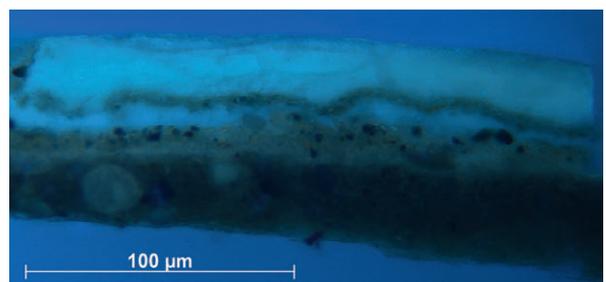


FIG. 219 NG 3, FIG. 218 photographed under ultraviolet illumination.

the gesso and *imprimitura* are present at one end of the cross-section, but are not included in the photograph. The sequence as seen therefore begins with one or possibly two layers of a mixed brown containing yellow and red earth, black, calcium carbonate, some lead white and a little vermilion. Under ultraviolet illumination these layers appear dark. Next comes a thin translucent layer that is slightly fluorescent, probably an old oil-based varnish, and then another brown layer, not unlike the original layers in composition, but containing a coarse black, probably coal, in a higher proportion than the black in the lower layers and also more yellow pigment. This probably represents a very old restoration. It is followed by a layer of highly fluorescent varnish, and then a thin layer of overpaint (more easily seen in the ultraviolet image); these layers probably relate to the Angerstein-era restoration. The uppermost layers of varnish must be those applied after the painting came to the National Gallery. Even in cross-section it could be seen that the latest varnishes, based on mastic with some pine resin, had become blanched and opaque. Some beeswax was also present on the surface which may have been added to the varnish, or could have been applied in a separate polishing treatment. This, together with a final layer of surface dirt, is likely to have contributed to the poor appearance of the painting, already condemned in 1949 as 'quite unfit for exhibition'.¹⁷

In 2007 it was decided to remove the nineteenth-century varnish layers from a few very small test

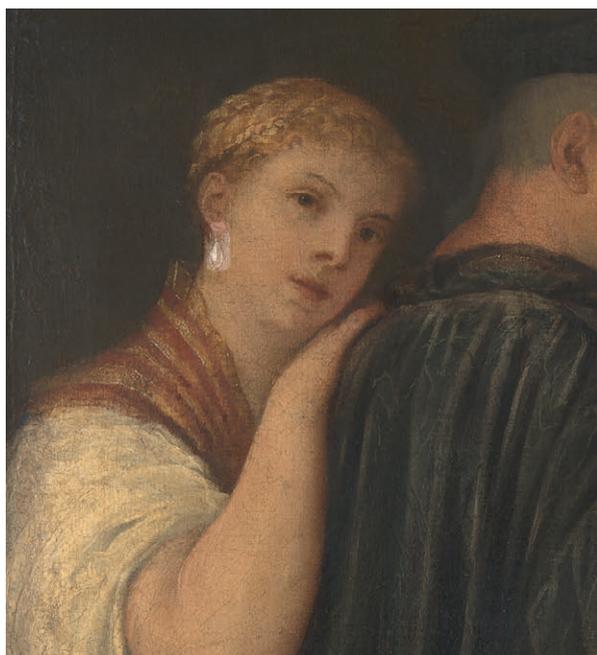


FIG. 220 NG 3, detail with a cleaning test.

areas. The varnishes proved to be easily soluble and the appearance of the cleaned areas was encouraging (FIG. 220). Study of the X-radiograph (FIG. 221; for the whole see FIG. 178) confirmed that the canvas had been extended to the left and right, most probably in the last late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century restoration.¹⁸ In addition, the X-radiograph revealed some flake losses, mainly around the edges, which show as dark patches, as well as dense white areas of lead-containing filling materials, again around the edges and also smeared over losses from the boy's hair. The boy's face was clearly worn and damaged but, apart from areas of the background, the rest of the paint film seem to be reasonably unaffected. Nevertheless, the appearance of the painting and the extreme opacity of the varnish continued to be a deterrent to cleaning, and indeed to any real consideration of the old attribution to Titian.¹⁹

Eventually, following completion of the restoration of the *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro*, it was agreed in 2011 that the treatment of *The Music Lesson* should proceed. The different ages and composition of the many layers of varnish allowed for their progressive thinning and removal, particularly important given that the condition of the underlying paint was so badly obscured. This was controlled and documented by examination and photography under ultraviolet fluorescence (FIGS 222, 223). By choice of solvent mixture it proved possible first to remove the upper varnish layers (those



FIG. 221 NG 3, detail of X-radiograph (FIG. 178).



FIG. 222 NG 3, detail during early stages of varnish removal.

applied at the National Gallery), thereby immediately recovering some clarity. In the illustrations, this stage has been reached on the face, hat and part of the tunic of the viol player, and a section of the music master's sleeve. Under ultraviolet illumination it can be seen that a substantial amount of strongly fluorescent old varnish was still clearly present over the viol player's face and hat, as well as in a patch covering the music master's shoulder and extending into the viol player's tunic. Its hot orange brown colour was particularly apparent over the red of the tunic. In a small area of the tunic the cleaning has progressed further, with more of the varnish removed, since by then it was evident that large areas of the painting were better preserved than could ever have been imagined.

In common with all paintings of its age, and especially those that have been highly valued and transferred frequently between collections, *The Music Lesson* manifestly had a history of interventions even before those made in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Following removal of most of the nineteenth-century varnish a thin residue of less soluble varnish, which seems not to have lost its transparency, remains on the surface; its presence is confirmed by the identification of pine resin in all paint samples taken for analysis of the paint medium, including those colours where there is no likelihood of pine resin being added to the medium by the artist (see p. 99). Some of the samples also included fir balsam, which seems to be associated with a layer applied over the whole painting including the extensions, and therefore probably dating from the Angerstein-era restora-



FIG. 223 NG 3, detail during early stages of varnish removal, photographed under ultraviolet illumination.

tion.²¹ This was also found in samples from the one area of residual varnish that was visually disturbing, that over the dull purple cloak of the music master (FIG. 224). Here the coarser texture of the paint resulting from the use of azurite with its large particle size meant that a greater amount of old varnish had accumulated. Its deep brown colour obscured the purple-blue hue of the drapery – already compromised by the discoloration of the medium around the azurite particles (see p. 98) – and made it appear too close in tone to the brown-glazed tunic of the child to the right. There was no question of it being the first 'original' varnish since it covered the oldest areas of putty and restoration around the edges. It was therefore removed using a solvent gel.

The putty used in the last restoration was easily distinguished since it was a dark grey colour and could be softened with moisture and scraped away; it also served as a ground on the extensions. The only retouching to have become insoluble from this restoration was that on the woman's sleeve and its extension onto the added canvas. This had to be removed mechanically with a scalpel, working under magnification with a stereobinocular microscope. Remnants of older restorations on the sleeve were even harder, and have been left. Under magnification fine scratch marks were observed in the original white paint and in a few places on the woman's face; they suggest that, at some point in the past, varnish and retouchings were removed with a knife or an abrasive. Much the most challenging part of the cleaning was the removal of the thick and lumpy grey and orange putties (containing lead white and red lead,



FIG. 224 NG 3, during further cleaning. All the varnish layers remain in the upper right corner and much of the old repaint and filling has yet to be removed.

respectively) that had been smeared around the edges and often over fragments of original paint (FIGS 224, 226). They must already have been hard more than two centuries ago, and were left by the previous restorer. In places the fillings had been pressed into underlying paint during the last lining. Since the canvas was to be lined again it was essential that they should be removed, a process that involved shaving them down with a scalpel, using the X-radiograph as a guide to where there might be original paint beneath, and then picking them off when they were thin enough. Smaller old retouchings, for example the addition of a new fingernail on the viol player's forefinger (a misunderstanding of a small pentimento), were also removed with a scalpel. These retouchings were old enough for some of the cracks to have broken through but the thickest strokes clearly go over the cracks (FIG. 225).

The cracking in parts of the paint and ground is marked and before treatment the edges of the islands

of paint were curled up and vulnerable to flaking. Sometimes the heavy cracking is related to more thickly painted areas with pentimenti, such as the recorder player's head, but in other places the cupped paint seems unrelated to forms. Similar cupped cracking can be seen on some works by Titian of this period, for instance *'La Bella'* (Galleria Palatina, Florence) and the *Venus of Urbino* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence). *The Music Lesson* was much in need of consolidation and relining.²² The paint had to be secured over the whole surface before the very degraded old lining canvas and the extensions could be removed, revealing on the back of the canvas, in the upper right corner, the monogram of Charles I (FIG. 227), previously only seen in a transmitted infrared image,²³ and also a number, probably '23', painted with a broad brush at the centre, towards the top.²⁴ During moisture treatments on a low pressure vacuum table for the reduction of distortions in the old canvas, it became apparent that some areas of the painting had



FIG. 225 NG 3, photomicrograph showing an old retouching on the forefinger of the viol player.



FIG. 226 NG 3, detail showing the grey and orange putty over losses along the lower edge.



FIG. 227 NG 3, detail of the back of the canvas following removal of the old lining, showing the monogram of Charles I.

been heavily impregnated with beeswax when securing loose paint in 1941 and 1953. The danger of differential reaction to moisture in the lining adhesive meant that a traditional paste lining was not an option and so the painting was lined onto a new linen canvas using 'Beva 371' heat-seal adhesive. Examination of the canvas edges, which include a few possibly original tack holes, as well as the format of an old painted copy,²⁵ justify the decision to return the painting to a close approximation of its original dimensions.

Following filling, mainly needed around the edges, the losses were toned in with retouching paint to match the colour of the original priming (FIG. 228). Apart from the edges, the painting is nowhere near as damaged as the *Portrait of Girolamo Fracastoro*. As with the portrait, the losses related to abrasion are worst in the most thinly painted areas, suggesting that aqueous materials used in cleaning may be partly to blame. This damage has been reduced with small touches of restoration, especially in the background.²⁶ Here it was important to retain the soft contours of the figures that had previously been lost in the overall repainting of most

of the background. Retouching was also necessary to reduce the effect of the heaviest cracks which appear dark as a result of accumulated dirt and old varnish. They were particularly disruptive to the modelling of the neck and jaw of the woman. The visible pentimenti, most notably in the head of the music master, have been reduced but not necessarily completely suppressed. The disjunction between the thickly painted parts of his hair and the thinner, and consequently more damaged, areas was particularly disturbing. The only loss that needed some reconstruction was the scroll of the bass viol in the upper right corner; here reference was made to photographs of a very rare surviving sixteenth-century instrument from Venice, and to the neck of the viol visible in the *Concert* of around 1511–12 (Galleria Palatina, Florence), now widely accepted as by the young Titian.

The wide gilded neo-classical style frame probably given to the painting by Angerstein²⁷ has been replaced by a carved pine and part-gilt Venetian 'Sansovino' frame of the second half of the sixteenth century, bought for the National Gallery with generous donations. Its design successfully evokes Mantuan palace decoration



FIG. 228 NG 3, after cleaning and relining, before restoration.

in the sixteenth century as well as the 'wooden' frame (possibly its Mantua frame) described in the 1630s by Abraham van der Doort in his catalogue of the collection of Charles I.²⁸

The Triumph of Love

Unlike the two National Gallery paintings, *The Triumph of Love* owes much of its obscurity to having been in a private family collection for several generations, although it was exhibited regularly in London in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and then in 1953 and 1960, always as by Titian. When the painting became available to scholars more recently, for many its condition had become an obstacle to the identification of Titian's hand with any degree of confidence. Its circular shape was also perplexing, especially as it had already been suggested that it might be identifiable with a painting of 'un dio d'amor sopra un lion'

listed in a notary's inventory made in 1602 of the Vendramin collection in Venice²⁹ as the cover to a portrait of a woman that was evidently rectangular. Following the acquisition of the work by the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, its full provenance was established, confirming that it was indeed the 'dio d'amor' in the Vendramin inventory.³⁰

Meanwhile, the cleaning and restoration, together with a detailed technical examination undertaken at the National Gallery, provided explanations for its altered state. In addition, its conservation history can be linked to episodes in its newly discovered provenance. An investigation of the edges (see p. 120) showed that the canvas must originally have been rectangular. It seems likely that it was cut down and glued to its circular panel constructed from thin boards of pine (see FIG. 240) in the late seventeenth century. Certainly this had happened by 1784 when it was described by the Venetian dealer and restorer Giovanni Maria Sasso as a 'rotondo



FIG. 229 *The Triumph of Love*, during removal of varnish and overpaint.

grande'.³¹ Infrared reflectography carried out shortly before the painting's acquisition by the Ashmolean Museum revealed not only an exuberant underdrawing typical of Titian (see p. 100), but also that the edges had been overpainted to cover the rim of an oculus, from which the lion with Cupid was supposed to leap.

In parts of the painting, notably the figure of Cupid, the cleaning involved little more than the removal of the layers of opaque and discoloured varnish (FIG. 229). The extensive retouching over the many small losses from the paint of the lion and foreground landscape was soluble with the varnish. The sky, however, was largely repainted and not only around the edges. Three campaigns of restoration could be identified. The latest, which was soluble with the varnish, can be seen in the patch at the edge level with the end of Cupid's arrow (FIG. 230). A sample was found by FTIR to contain lead white in a drying oil (fortunately not yet insoluble because so much varnish was present) and Prussian blue of small particle size evenly distributed throughout the sample. Its appearance is characteristic of Prussian blue manufactured in the nineteenth century³² and the restoration is likely to date from around 1874 when the painting entered the collection of the politician William Graham. His favoured restorers were Henry Merritt and Raffaele Pinti – the latter was also entrusted with National Gallery paintings by Sir Charles Eastlake and his successors. It is noteworthy that Graham's pictures were criticised for their repainted and glossy, over-varnished condition.³³



FIG. 230 *The Triumph of Love*, detail during removal of varnish and overpaint showing a patch of nineteenth-century repaint.



FIG. 231 *The Triumph of Love*, detail during removal of varnish and overpaint showing a patch of eighteenth-century repaint.

Under the nineteenth-century repaint there was another older restoration, which had perhaps been partially removed in the central area but covered the oculus completely. A patch of this repaint is present in the photograph taken during cleaning (FIGS 231, 232). It was very discoloured and had a notably coarse and gritty texture. Natural ultramarine (the same pigment as used for the final layer of the original paint) was identified but it was mixed with some Prussian blue of a different much larger particle size to that in the nineteenth-century repaint, and containing a significant proportion of alumina, both of which suggest that it was made to an earlier recipe, probably of the eighteenth century (FIG. 233).³⁴ Evidence that the oculus had already been painted out by 1810 comes from a watercolour copy made by an amateur painter, which also shows large, rather heavy clouds as in the



FIG. 232 *The Triumph of Love*, photomicrograph of the eighteenth-century repaint.

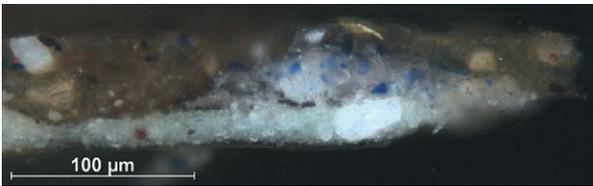


FIG. 233 *The Triumph of Love*, paint cross-section showing the very old repaint in the sky containing lead white, natural ultramarine and a little yellow earth, on top of the original paint layers of ultramarine and lead white over an underpainting of indigo and lead white.

restoration (FIG. 234). This restoration was very probably carried out in Venice by Sasso, who acted as agent for British collectors and often restored their purchases before export.³⁵ Sasso's restoration had become difficult to remove; it could be softened with a solvent gel, but then had to be carefully scraped away with a scalpel. Other contributions by Sasso probably included the added streaks of pink-tinged clouds (FIG. 235), which clearly covered cracks and damage, and a few small and unnecessary retouchings to reinforce Cupid's features or to cover spots of deeply ingrained old varnish residues (FIG. 236).

Traces of an even older restoration, now very darkened, appear at the left edge, level with the horizon. This repaint contained lead white, natural ultramarine and a little yellow earth, in an oil medium (FIG. 233). It had become extremely hard and could not safely be separated from the original paint and so was left in place. It may well date from the mounting of the painting on its circular panel.

With the exception of the more thinly painted parts of his left leg, the figure of Cupid is mostly well preserved (FIG. 237). The mounting of the canvas on a panel at



FIG. 234 Early nineteenth-century copy after Titian, *The Triumph of Love*, 1811. Gouache on vellum, diameter 51 cm. Private collection.

a relatively early date means that the painting has been spared repeated relining, which can be so detrimental to the paint texture. Most of the very fine details that might be vulnerable to overcleaning, such as the quick broken brushstroke skimming across the paint surface to indicate the bow string, remain intact (FIGS 238, 239). The more extensive damage to the sky may in part have been caused by nineteenth-century attempts to remove the repaint attributable to Sasso, who in turn may have struggled with a yet earlier repainting, of which traces survive at the left edge. It is also possible that some of the damage goes back to the mounting of the canvas on the panel, when the gesso ground may have absorbed too much moisture from the adhesive used, probably an animal skin glue. Certainly the canvas is very securely attached, conforming to the distortions in the panel, including its pronounced woodgrain, and its removal was never considered. The panel itself, however, required some attention, principally the removal of a piece of wood that had been attached to the panel to hold splits and open joints in the lower part, followed by the securing of those splits and some consolidation of old woodworm damage.³⁶

As with the other two paintings, much of the retouching was to small points of loss.³⁷ In this instance the brightness of the gesso, unstained by relining adhesives, meant that the losses often showed as disruptive light spots. A full reconstruction of the damaged clouds was impossible and so the losses were toned in to

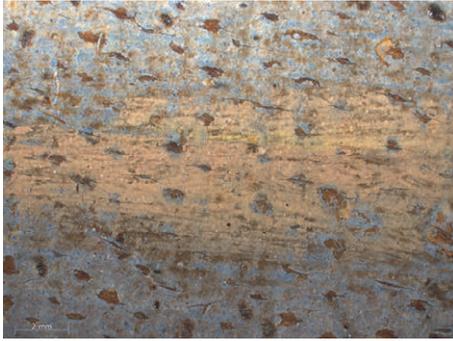


FIG. 235 *The Triumph of Love*, photomicrograph of a repainted streak of cloud added in the eighteenth-century restoration.

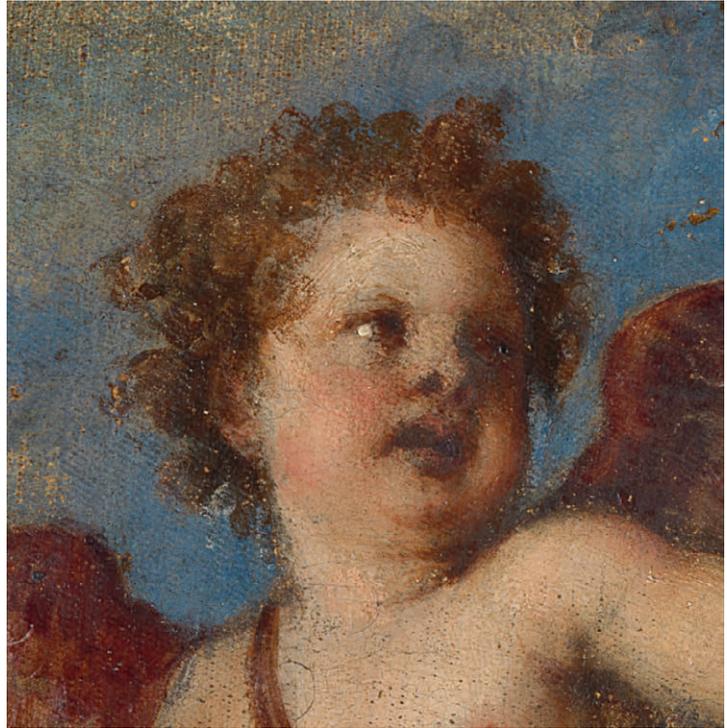


FIG. 237 *The Triumph of Love*, detail after cleaning, before restoration.



FIG. 236 *The Triumph of Love*, photomicrograph of a typical retouching on Cupid's lips.



FIG. 238 *The Triumph of Love*, detail after cleaning, before restoration.



FIG. 239 *The Triumph of Love*, photomicrograph of the bow string after cleaning, before restoration.



FIG. 240 *The Triumph of Love*, the reverse of the panel, after treatment.

render them less obtrusive. It was considered important to retain the watercolour-like freedom and translucency of the painting of the distant landscape. Similarly, suppression of all the visible underdrawing and the white marks made during revision of the design would have required extensive retouching, and might have compromised the impression of spontaneity which is such a characteristic of this work. The edge of the oculus is very damaged and not all of the old repaint could be removed, but its significance for the function of the work meant that it was restored as far as possible, if necessary painting over some of the very old restoration.

The Triumph of Love has been framed as a roundel with a simple wooden moulding. It has been possible, however, to re-establish notionally its original dimensions and to suggest how the image worked in its original context. At the left and right front edges of the wooden tondo (the reverse is shown in FIG. 240) frayed canvas and old, apparently original, tack holes are visible; they indicate that the canvas was initially stretched with the tacks inserted through the front face of a strainer. At the bottom edge there are no tack holes but the cusped distortion of the canvas suggests that very little has been lost, probably just the tacking margin. Around the rest of the tondo, including the top, the canvas has been turned around the edge of the panel and tacked into its sides (FIG. 241). There are traces of paint, but no original tack holes, on these parts of the canvas, which must presumably be the residue of the painted corners

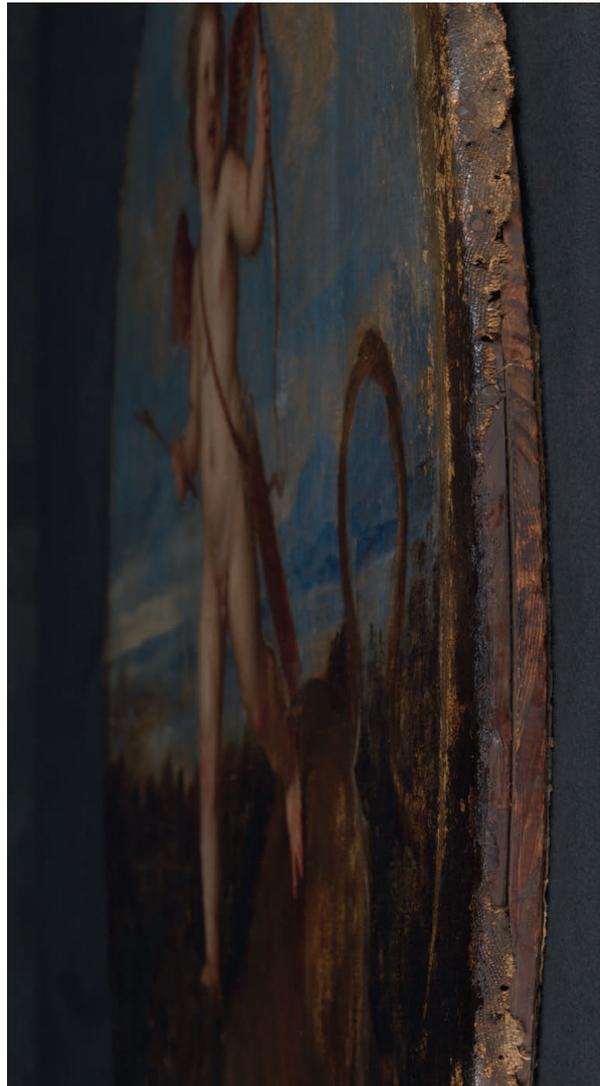


FIG. 241 *The Triumph of Love*, detail of the right side of the tondo showing canvas with old tack holes turned around the side.

of the original rectangular format. The portrait and its cover probably hung at a height that set up the playful illusion of the lion crouching on the front edge of the circular opening, about to leap into the viewer's space. The upper part of this front edge has been lost in the cutting of the painting but when it is completed in a digital reconstruction (FIG. 243), a rectangle is obtained of similar dimensions to those of the lost portrait, as given in the 1602 inventory. The proportions of the rectangle, only a little taller than it is wide, are those seen in many of Titian's portraits, including that of Girolamo Fracastoro.³⁸

The final question is how did a canvas picture cover, or *timpano* as it was often called in sixteenth-century Venice,³⁹ fit into the frame of the portrait? In the 1602 inventory the 'dio d'amor' is described as having 'soazete

de legno dorade' ('mouldings of gilded wood'). This suggests that strips of gilded wood may have been pinned to the front of the strainer, thereby covering the tacks used to attach the canvas. Such a construction could not have been fitted and removed by a sliding mechanism as sometimes seems to have been the case with painted portrait covers on panel. Recently, however, the National Gallery acquired an early sixteenth-century Tuscan frame, assigned to Palma Vecchio's *Portrait of a Poet* (NG 636). A striking feature of this frame is its very deep and flat side edge leading to the rebate that holds the painting (FIG. 242). This design element might be intended to accommodate a *timpano*, although the good condition of the gilding around the rebate does not suggest that this particular frame ever had such an attachment. Nevertheless, a *timpano*, with strip mouldings on the front face that echoed the decoration of the frame, and perhaps thin fillets of wood on the side, could easily be inserted into such a recessed rebate. With the aid perhaps of some discreet tapes with which to gain purchase, the cover could then simply be lifted out when the portrait was to be viewed.

FIG. 242 Detail of a sixteenth-century North Italian frame with a deep recess to the sight edge, a design that could hold a canvas cover or *timpano*.

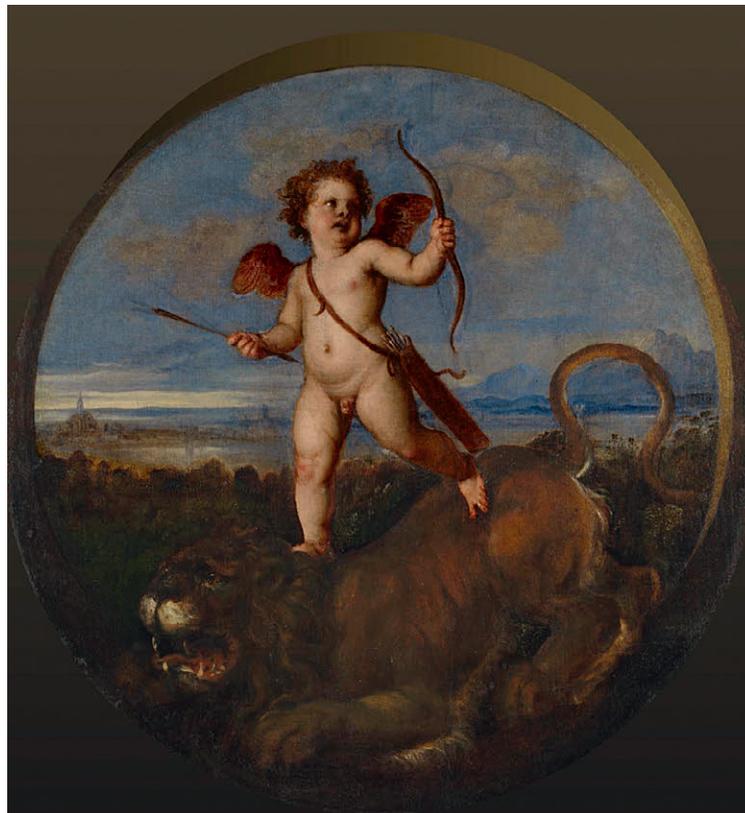


FIG. 243 *The Triumph of Love*, digital reconstruction of the original rectangular format.