

TITIAN AT APSLEY HOUSE

JULY-OCTOBER 2015



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TITIAN (c.1490–1576)

The Renaissance artist Tiziano Vecellio, known in English as Titian, was born in Pieve di Cadore in the Italian region of Veneto. He became a pupil of the painter Giovanni Bellini in Venice in 1507. He later found fame and wealth as the leading artist of his day, attracting clients from Venice and beyond. Titian ran a successful workshop which employed assistants and family members to help him paint and make copies of his work. By the time of his death in 1576, Titian's paintings were found throughout Europe.

A display of three Titian paintings from the Wellington Collection at Apsley House – *Titian's Mistress* (1550–60), *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands* (1550–60) and *Danaë* (1551–3) – reveal how recent conservation and research have shed new light on the work of Titian.

TITIAN IN THE WELLINGTON COLLECTION

Titian's Mistress (1550–60) and *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands* (1550–60) had originally belonged to the Spanish Royal Collection. The two portraits are recorded as being displayed in the Alcázar Palace in Madrid by 1666 and, following a fire there in 1734, at the new royal palace by 1747. The *Danaë* (1551–3) was also displayed in the Alcázar, but later moved to the Buen Retiro Palace, Madrid.

These paintings, along with nearly 200 others, were captured by the Duke of Wellington and his troops after the last major battle of the Peninsular Wars at Vitoria in 1813. They had been part of the baggage train of the fleeing Joseph Bonaparte. King Ferdinand VII of Spain presented these paintings to the Duke in 1816. Despite having excellent provenance, and being catalogued as Titian paintings until 1911, the two portraits were thought to be copies or emulations of Titian. Layers of black dirt, pollution, discoloured yellow varnish and overpaint had



obscured their quality, and so art historians believed they were by followers of Titian. Recent cleaning and conservation has revealed their true source. Similarly, the condition of the *Danaë* had long obscured the quality of the work, although it had retained its attribution as a Titian.

Top left: *Titian's Mistress*, by Titian, 1550–60

Above: *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*, by Titian and studio, 1550–60

Left: *Danaë*, by Titian, 1551–3



TITIAN'S MISTRESS, 1550–60

AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

This painting was identified as *Titian's Mistress* in the 18th century, but the identity of the model is unknown. The earliest Spanish inventories simply described her as 'a portrait of a lady with a fur robe and a cap on her head'. It could be a depiction of Titian's own mistress, whom he took after the death of his second wife. However there are no surviving pictures or descriptions of her and in the 18th century portraits of unknown women by Titian were called 'Titian's Mistress' to make them more saleable.

She may be the mistress of one of Titian's friends or clients.

Documentary evidence indicates she could be the mistress of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Emperor Charles V's ambassador in Venice, as a painting in an inventory of his possessions has a similar description. Or she may simply represent an idealised beautiful woman. Titian had painted a series of such women in the 1530s (see below).

Right: *Titian's Mistress*, by Titian, 1550–60

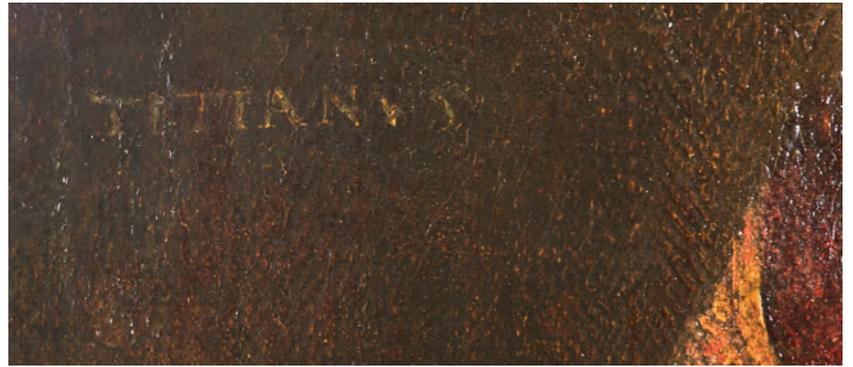
Below (left to right): The following are examples from the series of idealised beautiful women, all by Titian: *La Bella* (or portrait of a woman), 1536; *Girl in a Fur*, 1535; *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c.1536



REVEALING THE ARTIST

When the painting was cleaned an original signature 'TITIANVS' was discovered. This confirms that the painting was made in Titian's studio, rather than by a later follower. The high quality of the woman's face and body indicates that they were painted by Titian himself, but assistants could have helped him in certain passages such as the hat and left hand, which are less accomplished. Titian trained his assistants to use pigments in a similar way to himself, which means that the materials alone cannot be used to attribute the artist or artists.

The condition of the painting has been compromised. It was made into an oval painting in the 18th century and the paint was



damaged when it was converted back to a rectangle. It is very rubbed and worn, which made its attribution difficult because much of the original quality and subtle glazes are now lost. Stylistically, the work dates to Titian's later period, between the 1550s and 1560s.

Above: Detail of Titian's signature on Titian's Mistress, 1550–60, found during the conservation work

Early provenance

Evidence suggests that the artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) may have once owned *Titian's Mistress*. He made a copy of it, now lost, which survives as an engraving. It might have inspired Rubens to paint his famous nude of his wife Helene Fourment (right). Rubens also owned Titian's famous *Self Portrait*, which was later displayed with *Titian's Mistress* and *A Young Woman with Rose Garlands* in the Spanish royal palace in Madrid.



Far left: Rubens copied Titian's Mistress, but his copy is now lost. This is an engraving of the lost Rubens, by Lucas Vorstermann

Middle: The furlet. Helene Fourment, second wife of the artist, by Rubens, 1638. This work may have been inspired by Titian's Mistress

Above: Rubens also owned Titian's Self Portrait, c.1572

X-RAY

During conservation work, an unfinished painting was discovered underneath the picture of *Titian's Mistress*. The diagonal grey line on the lady's chest is not a veil, as previously thought, but a show-through from the painting below. Titian often reused his canvases, and finding a second composition underneath a painting is not unusual.

X-ray technology allowed us to examine this hidden painting in more detail. When turned anticlockwise, the x-ray revealed a seated semi-clothed lady raising her arm to pluck her veil. She is turning to look at something, or someone. There might be a second face in the top left, and tiny paint samples from this area found there is pink paint underneath (see the cross-section below right). At some point, Titian painted out the original composition and started again with the portrait now visible.

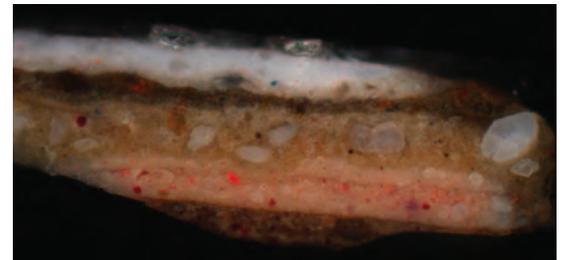
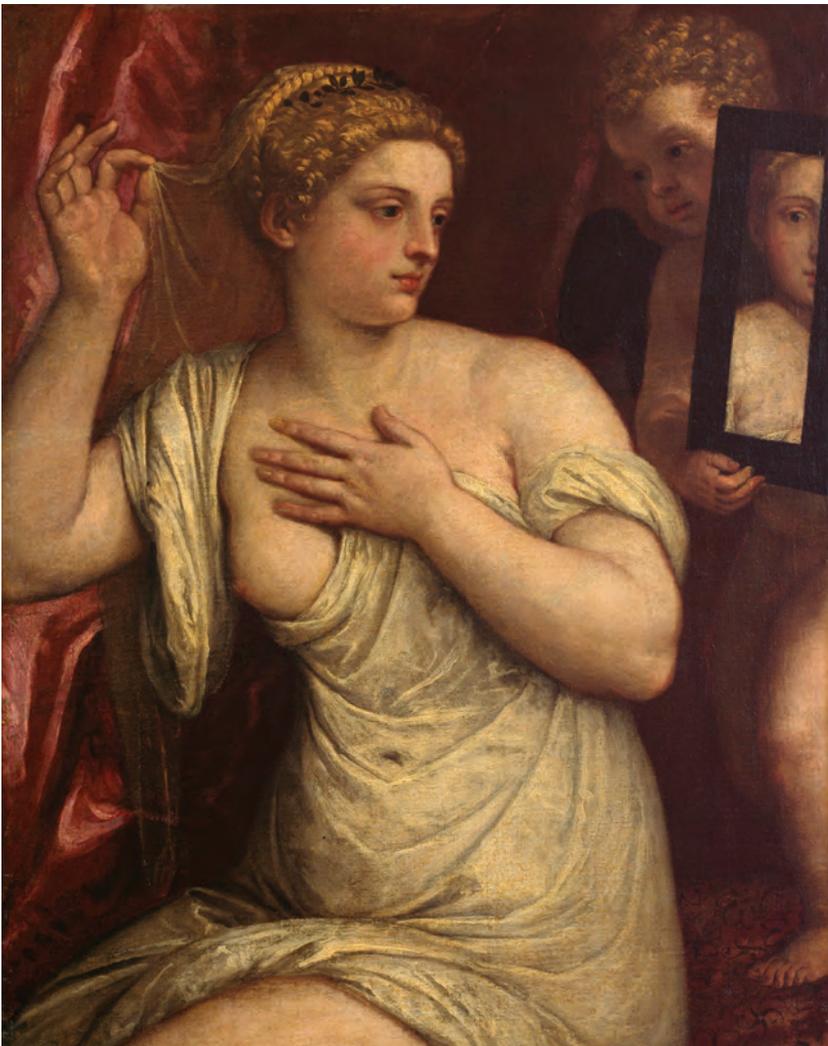
Below: *The Toilet of Venus*, by a follower of Titian, date unknown. This painting, on loan from the Courtauld Gallery, is on display at Apsley House until October 2015



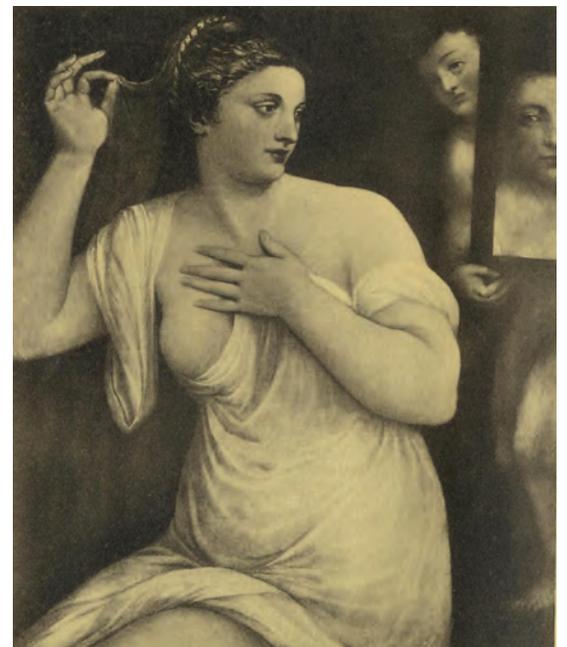
Above: X-ray of *Titian's Mistress*, 1550–60

Below right: Cross-section from *Titian's Mistress*, 1550–60, showing the pink paint which could indicate the intention to paint a second face

The figure in the x-ray is almost identical to three paintings by followers of Titian, including *The Toilet of Venus* from the Courtauld Gallery, which is currently displayed alongside *Titian's Mistress*. This suggests that Titian made a finished version of the lower composition (now lost) which was franchised out to other workshops to copy.

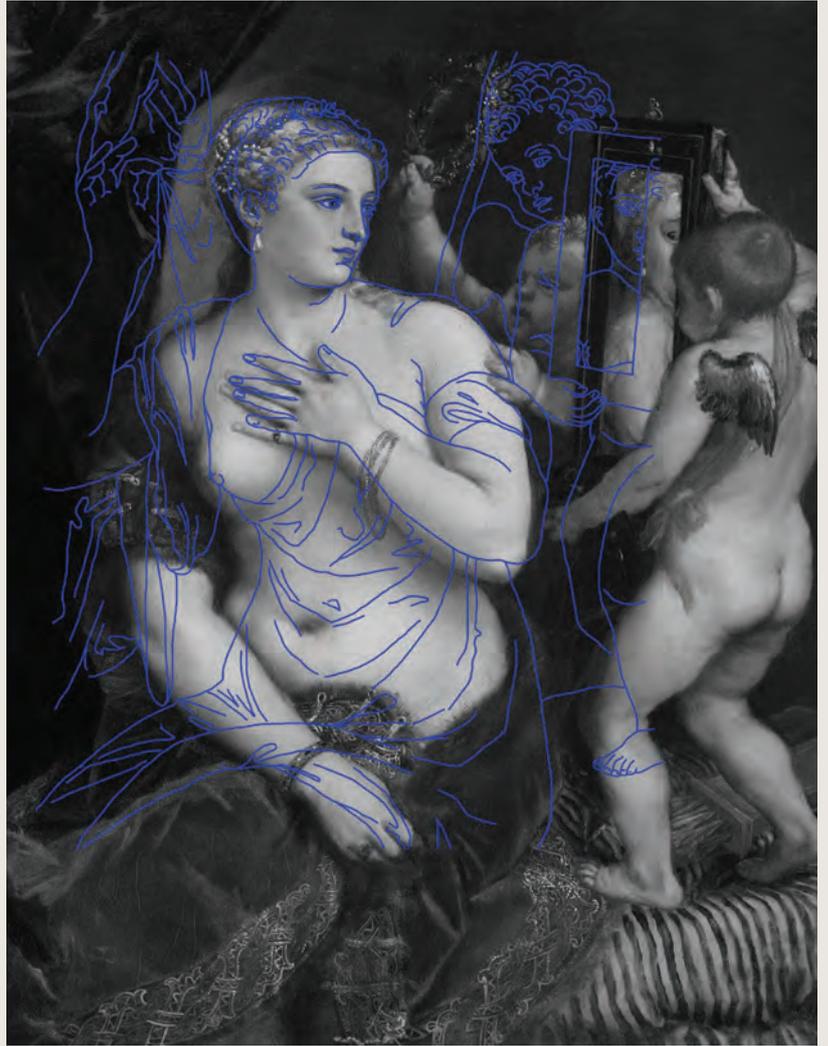


Below: *Venus at her Toilet*, date unknown. This painting, by a follower of Titian, strongly resembles the figure in the x-ray of *Titian's Mistress*



Venus with a Mirror

Titian painted the figure of Venus several times, including in the magnificent *Venus with a Mirror* now held by the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The pose of the goddess in this painting matches very closely to the pose depicted in *The Toilet of Venus*. Interestingly, this painting also hides an unfinished portrait below.



Top left: *Venus with a Mirror*, by Titian, c.1555

Bottom left: *The Toilet of Venus*, by a follower of Titian, date unknown

Top right: Blue overlay of *The Toilet of Venus* on *Venus with a Mirror*, showing the poses depicted in both paintings match closely

Right: X-ray of *Venus with a Mirror*, showing the hidden portrait underneath



TITIAN'S TECHNIQUE

The painting's technique was examined by using a microscope and analysing small paint samples. Titian used a coarse herringbone weave canvas for *Titian's Mistress*, which he prepared with a thin white gesso ground. On the lower composition, Titian sketched some of the outlines in red paint followed by an 'abozzo', or sketch, in brown and white tones, working up the female figure first and getting her face and body to a finished level.

Titian had an organic process, painting directly onto the canvas, making major changes and evolving the design as he worked. The x-ray (see page 4) shows this evolution with the changes of the placement of the woman's elbow. However, compared to other x-rays of Titian's works, these changes are fairly minor. This suggests that rather than being an original design Titian and his assistants were working from an already completed work. Traces of pink paint imply he began laying in a second figure before painting out the whole composition with a brown layer.

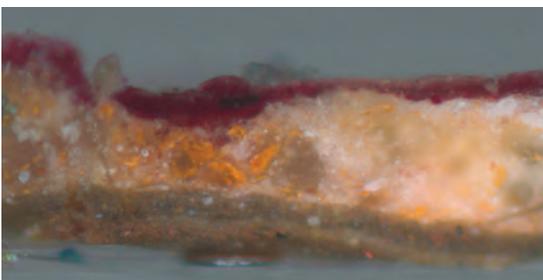
For the upper composition, Titian built up the flesh with another painted sketch and used the blue pigment azurite mixed into the pinky-white flesh paint to give a cool effect. Once the paint was dry, he applied subtle glazes of transparent earth and red lake pigments to model the flesh. The red drapery is sketched in white lines and pink paint first, followed by vermilion and red lake glazes (shown in the cross-section below). Earlier damage and previous restoration work has affected the painting. For example, the hairs of the fur on the drapery would have had greater definition and seemed more luxurious, but have now been damaged. A photograph of the painting from 1911 shows it in much better condition.



Left: X-ray detail of Titian's Mistress which shows the herringbone weave canvas

Below: A photograph of Titian's Mistress from Duchess Evelyn's Catalogue taken in 1911, which shows the painting in much better condition

Bottom left: Cross-section from Titian's Mistress showing the building of paint layers for the red drapery





CONSERVATION PROCESS

The painting had a small tear and flaking paint, which were stabilised during conservation. Surface dirt was removed from the painting using swabs of saliva, which is effective at solubilising dirt. The yellow varnish was removed by rolling swabs of solvent over the painting. Black overpaint, covering wear and damage on the background, was also

removed. This revealed the damage caused when *Titian's Mistress* was converted to an oval shape, as well as the signature which had been hidden. After cleaning, the painting was revarnished. Any paint losses were filled with chalk putty and retouched using synthetic varnish and dry pigments to build up layers and mimic the oil paint surface.

Above (left to right):
Before, during and after the conservation of *Titian's Mistress*

Below: Retouching *Titian's Mistress* in the conservation studio



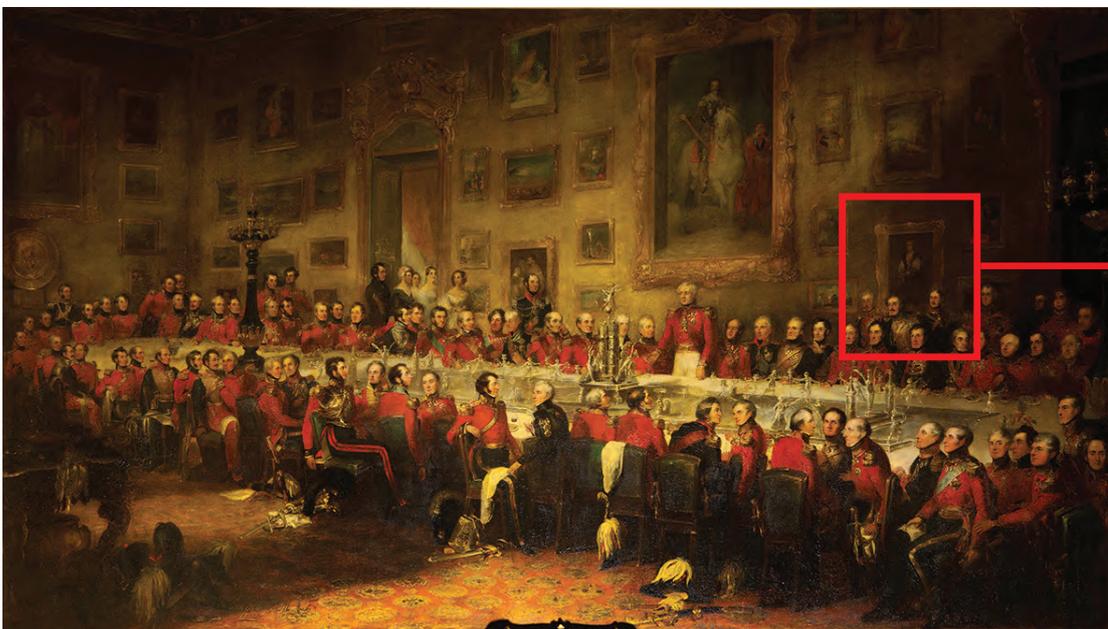
A YOUNG WOMAN HOLDING ROSE GARLANDS, 1550–60

This painting was one of a set of eight portraits of ladies, including *Titian's Mistress*, in the Spanish Royal Collection. We have evidence that this painting hung in the Waterloo Gallery at Apsley House in William Salter's *The Waterloo Banquet*. It is likely that *Titian's Mistress* and the *Danaë* were also displayed in this room.

The painting is similar to a series of seven other paintings by Titian and his studio which show women holding various props, such as a vase, a kitten, an apple and even a weasel. It is likely that the format of the painting was very lucrative, and just adapted by Titian each time to create a unique image.



Right: *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*, by Titian and studio, 1550–60.



Left and above: *The Waterloo Banquet*, by William Salter, 1836, showing the location of the portrait of *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*



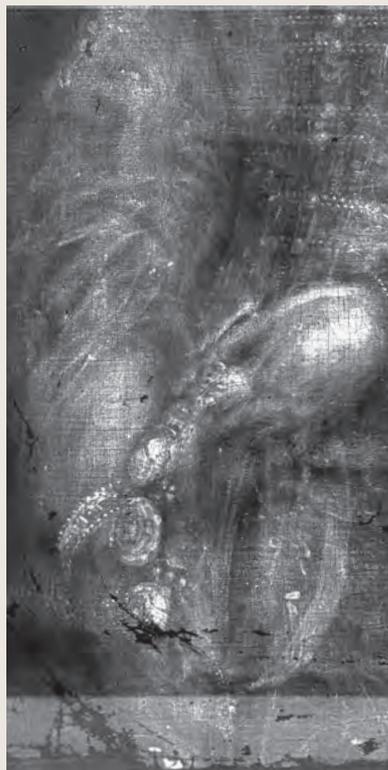
The painting in detail

CONSERVATION PROCESS

During conservation work on *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*, a signature was found on the upper right of the painting TITANVS FECIT (Titian made it). This is revealed clearly in ultraviolet light (see above). Although Titian's assistants probably helped him in some areas, the face, left arm and hand all show the finesse of Titian's own hand.

X-RAY

The X-ray taken before conservation revealed that, like *Titian's Mistress*, this painting had been made into an oval shape in the 18th century. The x-ray also showed that the painter made substantial changes to the costume and the rose garlands. Stylistically this painting also dates from the same period as *Titian's Mistress*, 1550–60.



Top left: Detail of *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands* shown under ultraviolet light. Visible is the signature TITANVS FECIT

Top right: An x-ray of *A Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*

Bottom right: Detail of the x-ray and final work of *Young Woman Holding Rose Garlands*, showing changes made to the rose garlands



Clockwise from top: All paintings by Titian; Danaë, 1551–3, from the Wellington Collection; Danaë, 1544–5, from the Capodimonte Museum, Naples (notice the drapery here hangs over the right rather than left leg); Danaë, 1560–5, from the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

DANAË 1551–3

This painting depicts the seduction of a princess called Danaë by Jupiter disguised as a golden shower. It was part of a series of paintings Titian created for King Philip II of Spain between 1553 and 1562. Known as 'poesie' works, these paintings were inspired by the Roman poet Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses* and all had mythological themes. They were intended to show both the culture of the patron and the skill of the artist.

There are six known versions of Danaë painted by Titian, all with slight variations. The version in the Wellington Collection was taken to the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid for conservation in 2013, before being displayed alongside a small group of Titian's 'poesie' works. As conservators started to remove layers of yellowed varnish and sections of over-painting, they uncovered its

high quality, especially on the left side of the painting and of Danaë herself.

The research revealed that the version of *Danaë* in the Wellington Collection was by Titian, and that Philip II had bought this painting directly from the artist. Previously it was thought that Philip II had bought the version of the *Danaë*, now in the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, directly from Titian. Further research has shown that the Prado *Danaë* was first bought by the Spanish artist Diego Velázquez and later sold to Philip II.

The *Danaë* in the Wellington Collection was Titian's second painting on this theme. The first was commissioned by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and now hangs in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples.

An X-ray of the Wellington *Danaë* revealed that the princess was originally represented in exactly the same way as in the Naples *Danaë*, but the artist later changed the drapery to hang over her left rather than right leg.



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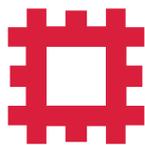
Paul Joannides & Rupert Featherstone 'A painting by Titian from the Spanish Royal Collection at Apsley House, London', *Hamilton Kerr Institute Bulletin* number 5, 2014.

The following three essays from *Dánae y Venus y Adonis: origen y evolución, las primeras "poesías" de Tiziano para Felipe II*, *Boletín del Museo del Prado, Numero Extraordinario*, accompanying an exhibition at the Prado, Madrid, 19 November 2014–1 March 2015, curated by Miguel Falomir:

Miguel Falomir, 'Poesias para Felipe II', pp.7–16 (English pp.56–60)

Miguel Falomir and Paul Joannides, 'Dánae y Venus y Adonis: origen y evolución', pp.17–51 (English pp.60–74)

Elisa Mora, 'La restauracion de Danaae y Venus y Adonis de Tician', pp.52-55 (English pp.74–75)



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