

Frederick A. Ilchman. *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*.

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On view during the spring and summer of 2009 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the exhibition *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice* presented the visitor with an impressive ensemble of works carefully chosen and

arranged to illustrate how ambition, competition, and rivalry shaped the stylistic development and self-fashioning of the three masters. The opening spaces provided a concentrated survey of Titian's career from his time in Giovanni Bellini's workshop to his rise to international fame and dominance of the Venetian scene. This period also saw canvas supplant panel as a support. Tintoretto and Veronese then joined the milieu, and from this point forward works with comparable themes and formats (e.g., "armored saints and reflective surfaces," "women in peril") by two or all three of the painters were juxtaposed under the broader divisions of the exhibition: large-scale religious subjects, the female nude, portraiture, and the painters' late styles.

A section dedicated to the conservation work performed on three paintings from the museum's own collection provided a brief yet fascinating detour from the show's thematic groupings. The most significant discovery came with the restoration of the *Nativity* (cat. 26), previously attributed not to Tintoretto but to his son, Domenico. Examinations revealed not only the presence of multiple hands in the painting, but also that its canvas support contains substantial segments that were cut from an earlier work (a *Crucifixion*), reused, and modified to satisfy the new composition. These revelations open the possibility that Tintoretto himself played a larger role in the work than was previously believed.

The catalogue contains four extended essays. The first, by curator Frederick Ilchman, surveys the dynamics of artistic rivalry and competition in Venice. Ilchman encourages us to remember that art-historical inquiry "not only is about setting, patronage, and technique, but also stems from such basic human passions as jealousy, competitiveness, and pride" (36). His essay displays a talent for extrapolating the psychological circumstances that fed the artists' desires from the historical (and often anecdotal) record. The often-recounted episode from Vasari, in which Tintoretto is said to have conspired to present a finished painting to the Scuola di San Rocco instead of a presentation drawing as had been specified, is often treated as little more than an anecdote revealing the painter's unprincipled method of doing business. Ilchman instead presents a shrewd and calculating Tintoretto: aware of standing little chance against his competitors in a contest of drawing skill, the painter realized he had in fact no choice but to present a complete painting in order to secure the commission — perhaps even dispensing with the preparatory drawing altogether. In her essay, Patricia Fortini Brown contributes a synopsis of Venetian art patronage and the manner in which Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese maneuvered within the city's art market. Noting the large number of portraits and palace façades that Tintoretto executed, Brown challenges the widely held notion that Veronese was the more adept at obtaining commissions from the Venetian patriciate. The afterlife of the painters' rivalry is the focus of Linda Borean's study: she traces their critical fortunes by examining the number of copies and replicas after the three painters in the inventories of collectors from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Robert Wald's essay provides a valuable overview of the technical and material factors that shaped the appearance of Venetian painting in the sixteenth century. Particularly striking is a set of

close-up details showing the effects that different canvas weaves have upon the application of paint.

In keeping with the exhibition's emphasis on comparative analysis, the catalogue does not provide a separate entry for each individual painting, but instead discusses them in unified thematic essays written by a group of established scholars of Venetian painting. This format successfully preserves the show's spirit and focus, though at times some pertinent material receives brisk treatment. (For instance, a more sustained analysis of Tintoretto's Gesuiti *Assumption of the Virgin* — a work too large for transport to Boston — intentionally painted in the style of Veronese according to Tintoretto's biographer, Carlo Ridolfi, might have offered further insight into what the painters themselves viewed as hallmarks of each others' signature styles.) Nonetheless, this volume contains more than enough to interest the scholar while still remaining accessible and engaging to the general reader.

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