

Venetian School

Fire destroys much of the Doge's Palace in Venice, including works by Titian and Veronese	1577	
Venetian, Spanish and papal ships defeat the Ottoman fleet at the battle of Lepanto in the Gulf of Corinth, Greece, reducing Ottoman domination of the Mediterranean	1571	
Andrea Palladio publishes <i>quattro libri dell'architettura</i> ('The Four Books on Architecture'), inspired by the treatise of the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius	1570	
Andrea Palladio designs the Villa Rotonda in Vicenza	1566-70	
	1566	Greek painter Domenikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco) travels to Venice, where he may have worked in Titian's workshop
	1564	Tintoretto begins a monumental series of paintings for the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice
Andrea Palladio undertakes his first major commission: the renovation of the town hall, the Basilica, in Vicenza	1549	
	1547	Holy Roman Emperor Charles V invites Titian to Augsburg; around 1550, Titian begins a cycle of mythological paintings for Charles' son Philip II, later king of Spain
	1545	Titian is summoned to Rome by the Farnese, for whom he paints the portrait of Pope Paul III and His Nephews
	1529	Jacopo Sansovino designs the mint, or Zecca, the Loggetta, and the Libreria Marciana in the Piazza San Marco; the last is decorated by artists including Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese
	1509	Venetian painter Lorenzo Lotto moves to Rome to work on the Stanze of the Vatican Palace under Raphael
Albrecht Dürer visits Italy, staying mainly in Venice	1494-95	
Turks capture Athens; Greece becomes part of the Ottoman Empire	1456	
Under Mehmed II ('the Conqueror') Hagia Sophia in Constantinople becomes a mosque; he commissions Topkapi palace and the Mehmediyeh, later Fatih, mosque complex; Ottoman, Iranian and European artists and scholars flock to Mehmed's court	1453-81	
Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks; Mystras in southern Greece, last outpost of the empire, falls in 1460	1453	

The glory days of Venetian painting began in the 1450s with the career of Giovanni Bellini (c.1430-1516), and continued until the end of the sixteenth century. The main characteristics of the school are dynamic compositions, a bright, intense colour palette and energetic brushwork that contrasts to the more linear *disegno* of Florentine Mannerist painting (see pp.298-99).

The ruling class of comprised of Venetian patricians clashed continuously with the city's religious institutions as they grappled for influence. The prestige of Venetian secular powers effectively meant that the Church had less control over society in the prosperous merchant city, including its art, than it had in other regions during this period. The resulting artistic freedom can be seen in the *Sleeping Venus* (2), the earliest of many female nudes and erotically charged portraits of courtesans produced for Venetian private collections. The soft contours and warm skin tone of the goddess's body and the luxurious fabric of the blanket on which she lies emphasize her sensuality. The attributes that identify her as a deity are missing, thus leaving open to some interpretation whether the figure is meant to depict a goddess or a contemporary beauty. The sitter was painted by Giorgione (c.1478-1510); after his death the young Tiziano Vecelli, known as Titian (c.1488-1576), completed the landscape and sky. Both men were apprentices at Bellini's studio.

Titian would soon become the great painter of the Venetian Renaissance, producing religious works, portraits and history painting. The so-called *Pesaro Altarpiece* (3) contains many of the innovations this artist introduced. He relocated the Virgin from her traditional central position to the right side of the painting, combining a diagonal movement with clear Venetian

light and luminous colours to bring the scene to life. By balancing the Virgin with the banner on the left, Titian maintains a playful symmetry in composition and colour.

From the 1550s onwards, Titian worked primarily for the Habsburg king Philip II, leaving the Venetian market to Paolo Veronese (1528-88) and Tintoretto (1518-94). Both painters produced several gigantic canvases for public and religious buildings. Veronese painted the vast *Wedding at Cana* (1) for the dining hall of the monastery on the Isola di San Giorgio. A lively crowd of elegant figures in contemporary Venetian dress celebrates a sumptuous party in a sixteenth-century Venetian building. Within all this decadence the biblical subject is easily overlooked, even though Christ is placed in the centre of the composition. Once complete, the ecclesiastical court persecuted Veronese for the lack of propriety with which he depicted sacred subjects in this work, which was originally called *The Last Supper*; the authorities were mollified by the change in title.

The religious situation had tightened by the second half of the seventeenth century, and Tintoretto conformed more easily than Veronese. He created an equally monumental, yet far more appropriate canvas for one of the city's many charitable institutions, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. His *Crucifixion* (1565) has a traditional central composition, but Tintoretto emphasized the dramatic moment by means of strong diagonals and shaped the muscular bodies with his famously energetic brushstroke.

- 1 Paolo Veronese, *Wedding at Cana*, 1562-63
Oil on canvas, 666 × 990 cm / 262¼ × 389¾ in
Musée du Louvre, Paris
- 2 Giorgione and Titian, *Sleeping Venus*, c.1510
Oil on canvas, 108 × 175 cm / 43 × 69 in
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden
- 3 Titian, *Pesaro Altarpiece*, 1519-26
Oil on canvas, 480 × 270 cm / 178 × 104¾ in
Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice



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