

# AUTHENTICATION IN ART

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MUSEO NACIONAL  
DEL PRADO

## *Danaë and Venus and Adonis*



*Danaë*, Titian, 1551-1553. Oil on canvas, 192.5 cm x 114.6 cm. The Wellington Collection, Apsley House



*Venus and Adonis*, Titian, 1554. Oil on canvas, 186 cm x 207 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

The first "Poesie" presented to Prince Philip were *Danaë* (1553) and *Venus and Adonis* (1554), versions of other previous works, but endowed with all the prestige of the commissioning party. In turn, these works became models for numerous replicas.

*Danaë* depicts the moment in which Jupiter possesses the princess in the form of golden rain. Titian painted his first *Danaë* in Rome in 1544-45 for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, in reference to the Cardinal's love affair with a courtesan. This *Danaë* was the model for the version created for Philip II, in which Cupid was replaced by an old nursemaid, whose inclusion enriched the painting by creating a series of sophisticated counterpoints: youth versus old age; beauty versus loyalty; a nude figure versus a dressed figure.

Philip II received this work in 1553 and it was kept in the Spanish Royal Collection, first at the Alcázar and, subsequently, at the Buen Retiro Palace, until Ferdinand VII presented the work to the Duke of Wellington following the Peninsula War. Its original size was similar to that of *Venus and Adonis*, but at the end of the 18th century, the upper third of the painting was removed for reasons of preservation.

Historical descriptions and a Flemish copy reveal that the upper section included Jupiter's face and an eagle with bolts of lightning, both attributes of this particular god.

A few years later, in 1565, Titian painted the *Danaë* that belongs to the Museo del Prado, a work featuring a looser execution and an extraordinary quality, the result of the high price that must have been paid by the commissioning party, possibly Francesco Vrins, a Flemish merchant resident in Venice. Velasquez purchased this work during his first trip to Italy and he sold it to Philip IV so that it could be placed in the Palace of El Buen Retiro. However, later on, in 1666, it replaced Philip II's *Danaë* in the "Bóvedas de Tiziano" Halls at the Real Alcázar, being paired with *Venus and Adonis*.

Titian painted the first *Venus and Adonis*, which was lost but is known from the copies that were made of it, at the end of the 1520's. No other work by Titian illustrates the artist's combination of painting and poetry better, given that the episode of Venus' vain attempt to retain Adonis, which is absent from all written sources, was actually invented by Titian himself. Titian took up this theme again twenty years later in various compositions, one of which served as the point of departure for the work belonging to the Museo del Prado.

In this painting, produced in 1554, Titian presents the goddess with her back to us, demonstrating, in conjunction with the works *Danaë* and *Venus and Adonis*, that painting can represent different points of view, in a similar manner to sculpture.