



AiA Art News-service

## THE NATIONAL GALLERY

### The Toilet of Venus



[Venus](#), the goddess of love, is attended by three [Graces](#) who fasten Venus's sandals and jewellery. In the foreground, [Cupid](#) holds up Venus's pearl earrings, while at top left a [putto](#) arranges flowers in a vase.

Several versions of this composition are known and this painting was long thought to be a copy made in [Reni's](#) studio. However, recent conservation treatment has revealed far more of Reni's hand at work than had previously been visible. The feathery brushstrokes on the central Grace's arm, for example, are typical of Reni's style. Visible changes to the picture's design, such as the traces of pink drapery on Venus's belly, show the artist working out his design. [Infrared reflectography](#) revealed more substantial changes, such as the addition of the putto at top left over a previously painted architectural scheme. These substantial changes, made during the painting process, not only strengthen the argument that this is the original composition on which other versions are based, but also tally with contemporary accounts that Reni delayed delivery of the painting in order to add in an entirely new figure.