

The background of the cover is a reproduction of Titian's painting 'The Rape of Europa'. It depicts the Greek prince Europa being abducted by the bull Poseidon. Europa is shown lying on her back, wearing a white, translucent garment, with her head tilted back and eyes closed. The bull is positioned in the foreground, looking towards the viewer. A red cloth is draped over the scene, and a cherub is visible in the upper left corner. The overall color palette is rich and dramatic, with deep reds, oranges, and earthy tones.

# The Rape of Europa

The Intriguing History of  
Titian's Masterpiece

Charles FitzRoy

BLOOMSBURY

# THE RAPE OF EUROPA



# The Rape of Europa

The Intriguing History of  
Titian's Masterpiece

CHARLES FITZROY

B L O O M S B U R Y  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

**Bloomsbury Continuum**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square    1385 Broadway  
London                New York  
WC1B 3DP            NY 10018  
UK                      USA

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

**Bloomsbury, Continuum and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

First published 2015

© Charles FitzRoy, 2015

Charles FitzRoy has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN HB: 9781408192092  
ePub: 9781408192115  
ePDF: 9781408192122

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN

To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com). Here you will find extracts, author interviews, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for our newsletters.

*To Rob and Emily*



# *Contents*

List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	1
1 Titian	7
2 Philip II as Ruler and Patron of the Arts	31
3 The Myth of Europa	43
4 The Spanish Habsburgs and the Alcázar in Madrid	53
5 The Dukes of Orléans and the Palais-Royal in Paris	83
6 The Taste for Titian in Nineteenth-Century Britain	125
7 Isabella Stewart Gardner, Bernard Berenson and the Creation of her Museum	161
Conclusion	197
Bibliography	200
Family Trees of Habsburg and Orléans	204
Index	205

## *List of Illustrations*

- Plate 1 Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), c. 1488–1576, ‘The Rape of Europa’, (c. 1560–2). (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, USA/Bridgeman Images)  
Titian, ‘Danae Receiving the Shower of Gold’, (1553), Prado, Madrid, Spain. (Bridgeman Images)
- Plate 2 Diego Velázquez, 1599–1660, ‘The Spinners or The Fable of Arachne’, (c. 1655–60), Prado, Madrid, Spain. (Giraudon/Bridgeman Images)
- Plate 3 Titian, ‘Portrait of King Philip II’, (1551), Prado, Madrid, Spain. (Giraudon/Bridgeman Images)
- Plate 4 Sir Joshua Reynolds P.R.A., ‘Portrait of Louis-Philippe-Joseph d’Orléans, Duke of Chartres, later Duke of Orléans’, (1779), Musée Condé, Chantilly, France. (Giraudon/Bridgeman Images)  
The Palais-Royal, Paris. (Getty Images)
- Plate 5 The Picture Gallery at Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. (Corbis)  
Cobham Hall, Cobham, Kent. (Alamy)
- Plate 6 (Art historian) Bernard Berenson at his home outside Florence, *Villa I Tatti*, 1903. (Biblioteca Berenson, Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College)
- Plate 7 John Singer Sargent, ‘Portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner’, (1888). (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum /Bridgeman Images)
- Plate 8 The courtyard of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts. (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

## *Acknowledgments*

I would particularly like to thank Robin Baird-Smith and everyone at Bloomsbury for all their hard work in the production of this book, and to Jennifer Hassell for her invaluable support since the book was originally commissioned. I am extremely grateful to Lucy Morris for her editorial insight, and to Alastair Laing, Gregory Martin and Professor David Watkin for taking the trouble to read various chapters. A number of senior figures at major museums have kindly helped with my research: Dr Nicholas Penny, former Director of the National Gallery, London, and his colleagues Dr Susanna Avery-Quash, Dr Minna Moore Ede and Alan Crookham, Anne Hawley, Norma Jean Calderwood, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, and her colleagues Elizabeth Reluga, Lisa Long Feldmann, Courtney Allen and Oliver Tostmann, and Frederich Ilchmann from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I should also like to thank a number of other eminent historians and art historians: Sheila Hale, Professor Charles Hope, Baron Thomas of Swynnerton, Sir John Elliott, Professor Jeremy Black, Antonio Mazzotta, Amanda Bradley and Saraïd Jones from the National Trust, Gerry McQuillan, Senior Adviser to the Arts Council, Elodie Kong, Mona Ebert and the Earl of Darnley. Charles Hill, Richard Ellis and Ulrich Boser provided me with some fascinating material concerning the burglary at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Diana for her

understanding in putting up with what turned out to be a much longer, but considerably more interesting, project than I had originally envisaged.

## *Introduction*

When you are next in North America, take time to visit Boston, the charming, red brick capital of New England and a thriving intellectual centre, boasting seven universities. One of Boston's most attractive features is a series of parks, laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1890s. They are known as the Emerald Necklace and encircle the centre of the city. Make a trip out to Fenway Park, a place dear to the heart of all Bostonians as the home of the Boston Red Sox, the legendary baseball team.

Fenway Park is also the setting for one of the most delightful and idiosyncratic museums in North America. Soon after Olmsted had completed his work, Isabella Stewart Gardner, a vivacious and wealthy blue-stocking and one of Boston's leading society hostesses, decided to build a mansion on the edge of the park. It was designed to house her growing art collection formed with the help of the young art historian Bernard Berenson, whom she had met while he was at Harvard University.

Making your way up to the second floor of the museum, you enter the Titian Room and find your gaze immediately drawn to the painting hanging beside the window. Titian's *Rape of Europa*, the last in a series of mythological paintings commissioned by Philip II of Spain, alone merits a visit to Boston and its reputation has spread far beyond the city as one of the finest Old Master paintings in North America. The painting's brilliant colours, the deep blue of the sea and the flaming sunset, completely overshadow the other works in the room.

The lustrous flesh tones of the scantily clad princess contrast with her dazzling vermilion drapery silhouetted against the sky. The rocky landscape, viewed through an iridescent light, creates a wonderful illusion of spatial depth and atmosphere. These vibrant colours, so characteristic of all the best works by Titian, play a fundamental part in creating the emotional mood of the painting.

The bull dominates the dynamic composition, surging across the waves, with the hapless figure of Europa lying in a position of abandonment on his back. There is a palpable, erotic charge to the painting, not only in the way that the princess clutches the bull's horn, her arm encircling his neck, but also in the way the flying and swimming cupids gaze at the dishevelled clothing scarcely covering the princess' genitalia, while the fiery colours in the sky seem to match the strength of the animal's lust. The princess gazes up towards two flying cupids, but her right arm is raised, as if to protect her from their bows and arrows, traditional symbols of love.

The pose of the cupid riding a dolphin appears to mimic the two main protagonists and gives the painting a light-hearted feel; this is accentuated by the almost comical way that the bull looks fearfully at the rather harmless fish swimming beside him. The princess' face is half-hidden in shadow so that we cannot read her expression, and her body language, sprawled across the back of the bull, conveys a sense of fearful expectation.

This masterpiece by Titian has enjoyed an extraordinary history. The theme of this book traces this history as the painting has moved in succession from Venice to Spain, France, England and the United States, reflecting the rise and fall of the various nations. *The Rape of Europa* was originally painted in Titian's studio in Venice in the early 1560s. This was a golden moment in Venetian painting, when Titian, the leading artist of the Venetian School, was at the height of his powers and the most sought after artist in all Europe. Venice herself, however, had entered a period of decline as her trading monopoly in the Mediterranean was increasingly affected by wars with the Ottoman Empire and new trade routes to India and the Americas. Her place had been supplanted by

Spain, mistress of a vast empire in the Americas and the Pacific, and it was the Spanish King Philip II who commissioned the *Rape of Europa* from Titian, as part of a series of mythological paintings, based on the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. The painting was brought to Spain, where it was to reside in the private apartments of the Habsburg kings in the Alcázar in Madrid.

Although the seventeenth century was a golden age for Spanish art, dominated by major writers and artists such as Cervantes and Velázquez, the country had now entered a prolonged political and economic decline. After Charles II, the last Habsburg king, died in 1700, the great European powers fought to take possession of the Spanish Empire. France took the lion's share of the spoils, with Louis XIV's grandson succeeding to the Spanish throne as Philip V, and it was to Paris that the *Rape of Europa* moved at the beginning of the eighteenth century where it hung in the Palais-Royal, the residence of the Sun King's nephew Philippe, Duke of Orléans. For the remainder of the century it remained in the palace, where it formed part of the most celebrated art collection in France. During the French Revolution Philippe's great-grandson Louis Philippe Joseph very nearly succeeded in replacing his cousin Louis XVI as King of France, and it was his failure and subsequent bankruptcy that led to the *Rape of Europa* being brought to London, capital of the burgeoning British Empire.

Throughout the nineteenth century the painting hung in Attingham Park and Cobham Hall in England while Britain was at the zenith of her power, enjoying the enormous wealth acquired during the Industrial Revolution. By the end of the century, however, this supremacy was being challenged by America. Isabella Stewart Gardner, like a number of her newly enriched compatriots, began to collect art at the moment when the United States was beginning to overtake Britain as the world's leading economic power. The *Rape of Europa* was sold by Lord Darnley and crossed the Atlantic to enter her collection in Boston. It has resided in the museum she created ever since.

The *Rape of Europa* has been the centrepiece of a number of great art collections, but it has also survived a number of

near catastrophes. In the mid-eighteenth century the painting might easily have been destroyed by Louis, Duke of Orléans, a religious fanatic who attacked two of the finest mythological works by Correggio, a contemporary of Titian, because he disapproved so strongly of their erotic content. At the end of the century it was fortunate to emerge unscathed from the chaos of the French Revolution, when so many works of art were damaged or destroyed.

More recently, the most successful art heist in history took place in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. On the night of St Patrick's Day, 1990, two thieves, disguised as policemen, gained access to the museum, and, having tied up the two security guards, proceeded to steal works of art with a conservative value of some \$500 million, including two portraits by Rembrandt, his only seascape, and the priceless *Concert* by Johannes Vermeer, whose oeuvre consists of less than 40 paintings. Although these are all works of the highest quality, the thieves, surprisingly, also took a number of relatively minor objects such as the finial of a Napoleonic standard. More importantly, they left behind a number of far more valuable works, notably Titian's *Rape of Europa*.

The robbery remains the most important unsolved art crime in the world. Every major gangster and hoodlum in Boston has been linked to the crime, but nobody has ever been brought to trial for the heist and, despite supposed sightings of the paintings, they have never come to light. For all lovers of Titian's painting, it is a near-miracle that the *Rape of Europa* was not taken. Leading art detectives reckon that the Titian is simply too important to steal, since it would be all but unsaleable, but there are precedents. Even the *Mona Lisa*, arguably the most famous painting in the world, has been stolen, removed from the walls of the Louvre in broad daylight on 21 August 1911. It took the Parisian police two years to track it down to Florence, where an ex-museum employee, Vincenzo Peruggia, had hidden it in his apartment (much to the French police's annoyance, Peruggia claimed that he had only stolen the painting because a work by such an important Florentine artist should never have been in

France and deserved to return to Leonardo's native city). More recently, iconic works such as Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* from the Marmottan Museum in Paris, and Edvard Munch's the *Scream* from the National Museum in Oslo have also been stolen (all have, thankfully, been successfully recovered). We can only be profoundly thankful that the Titian is still hanging in pride of place in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and that we can still appreciate the beauty of a masterpiece by one of the truly great Old Masters.



# 1

## *Titian*

Titian was the grand old master of Venetian painting and enjoyed an extraordinarily long and productive life. By the time he died of the plague in 1576, he was the most esteemed artist in Europe and his works adorned the walls of the palaces of kings, princes and popes. Like many ambitious artists, from early in his career Titian sought the patronage of the most powerful rulers of the day.

He was born in Pieve di Cadore on the Venetian mainland, probably around 1490, and enjoyed a first-class training as a painter, entering the studio of Giovanni Bellini in Venice at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Under Bellini, the most brilliant Venetian painter of the *Quattrocento*, the *Serenissima* produced a painter who could vie with the best in Florence, hitherto the dominant artistic centre in Italy. Bellini's studio proved a magnet for aspiring artists in Venice, and Titian was joined by Giorgione and Sebastiano del Piombo.

The early death of Giorgione in 1510, and the departure of Sebastiano for Rome, followed by the death of the aged Bellini in 1516, left the field clear for Titian. The success of his altar-piece of the *Assumption*, with the majestic, red-robed figure of the Madonna ascending to heaven against a gold background, painted for the high altar of the Franciscan church of the Frari, proclaimed Titian as the leading painter in Venice. The

ambitious young artist now sought recognition from the rulers of neighbouring states, notably Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara and Federico Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, both leading patrons of the arts.

In the early 1520s Alfonso d'Este commissioned works for the *camerino*, or little study, in his palace in Ferrara. The duke wished to secure the services of the greatest living Italian artists: Michelangelo and Fra Bartolommeo from Florence, Raphael from Urbino, and Giovanni Bellini from Venice, with the aim to surpass his sister Isabella D'Este, whose famous *studiolo* in Mantua contained paintings by Andrea Mantegna and Pietro Perugino. Alfonso, however, was largely unsuccessful: Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo died before they could carry out the commission, and Michelangelo failed to execute a single painting, so the frustrated duke was left with just one work by Giovanni Bellini.

Alfonso therefore decided to commission Titian from nearby Venice. The ambitious artist was only too happy to oblige, and painted three mythological subjects for the duke: the *Worship of Venus*, the *Bacchanal of the Andrians* (both Prado, Madrid) and *Bacchus and Ariadne* (National Gallery, London), pastoral idylls set in beautiful landscapes filled with pagan, pleasure-loving figures. They were to serve as the prototype for Titian's second series of mythological paintings, of which the *Rape of Europa* is the last and finest example.

The mythological paintings for the Duke of Ferrara were an example of Titian's versatility; he was already regarded as a master of religious works, portraits and female nudes. Following the success of these works, he was commissioned to paint portraits by the leading rulers of Northern Italy: the Gonzaga Dukes of Mantua, the Medici Dukes of Florence and the della Rovere Dukes of Urbino. These rulers were under the suzerainty of Spain, which had defeated France in a series of wars at the beginning of the sixteenth century and now exerted direct or indirect control over the entire Italian peninsula, with the exception of the independent Republic of Venice. The King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, was the ruler

of a world wide empire encompassing Spain, the New World, Germany, the Netherlands, Milan and Naples. During the 1530s and 1540s, following an introduction by Federigo Gonzaga, a close ally of the emperor, Titian executed a number of portraits of Charles V. It was to be Charles' son Philip who was to become the Venetian artist's most important patron.

The two men met for the first time in Milan in December, 1548, when Philip was touring the Habsburg possessions in Northern Italy. The prince had been brought up in Spain and this was the first chance to visit the extensive patrimony that he was soon to inherit from his father. It was a disparate empire comprising Spain, the Netherlands, much of the Italian peninsula, extensive Habsburg landholdings in Germany, Bohemia and Austria, and the newly discovered Americas. Although Philip was given royal treatment on his travels, his reserved character and inability to speak foreign languages made a poor comparison with his father, an outgoing man, possessing regal presence, and a natural linguist.

The prince had blond hair, pale blue eyes, large lips and the prominent Habsburg jaw. The Venetian ambassador Federigo Badovaro described his appearance:

'He is small in stature and his limbs are mean. He has a fine large forehead, his eyes are large and blue, his eyebrows are thick and close together, the nose well proportioned; his mouth is big and the lower lip protuberant; this last is rather unbecoming. His beard is short and pointed. His skin is white and his hair is fair, which makes him look a Fleming; but he has the manners of a Spaniard.' Overall, Philip appeared to have made little impression on those he met on his travels. He was 'not very agreeable to the Italians, not very acceptable to the Flemish, odious to the Germans', in Badovaro's words.

At this early stage Philip was already showing an interest in the arts, and had been particularly impressed by the Palazzo Doria in Genoa and the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, with its large collection of paintings by Titian, but he was not yet a major patron. However he knew how pleased his father had been with a number of portraits he had commissioned from

Titian, including the magnificent *Equestrian Portrait of Charles V* (Prado, Madrid) celebrating the emperor's victory over the German Protestant princes at the battle of Muhlberg (since 1517, when Martin Luther had first taken a stand against the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformation had divided Germany on religious lines and Charles, as Holy Roman Emperor, had spent years attempting to control his unruly, Protestant subjects). Charles was flattered by Titian's depiction of him as a modern-day St George, mounted on his black charger, holding a spear, portrayed against a brilliant sunset. He decided to create Titian Knight of the Golden Spur and appointed him Count Palatine of the Holy Roman Empire, unheard of honours for a mere artist. The painter celebrated by commissioning the Sienese medallist Pastorino de' Pastorini to portray him in profile as an ancient Roman with the inscription *EQUES* prominently displayed beneath.

Like his father, Philip enjoyed Titian's company and decided to ask the artist to paint his portrait. The result was a splendid full length portrait of the prince wearing a suit of damascened armour, designed to show that Philip was worthy to inherit his father's mantle.

Shortly afterwards, the prince and the painter parted, and Philip continued his tour of the Habsburg patrimony in the Netherlands, where he enjoyed spectacular celebrations at the palace of Binche, the magnificent residence of Charles V's sister Mary of Hungary, an assiduous collector of the works of Titian. When he rejoined his father in Augsburg, Philip was able to admire a work that the painter had just given to his father entitled *Venus with Cupid and an Organist* (there are five versions of this painting, showing its popularity), a highly erotic work where the organist gazes back at the naked Venus lying behind him, her foot nonchalantly resting on his tunic, while Cupid fondles her breast. What is particularly remarkable about this painting is that the organist's features bear a marked resemblance to those of Philip.

If Titian intended this to be a tribute to the young prince, he was completely successful. From this moment onwards Philip

acquired a passion for the artists's work. Initially, he had voiced some criticism over the painter's technique in a portrait of his aunt Mary of Burgundy, writing: 'you can easily see the haste with which he [Titian] painted it, and if there had been more time I would have made him work on it again.' However, any reservations the prince may have held about the freedom of the painter's technique soon disappeared. In 12 September 1550, Philip wrote to the Spanish ambassador to Venice, Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, urging him to speed Titian's return to Augsburg: 'it would greatly please me that he [Titian] should come as soon as possible, I commission you, if he has not already left when you receive this, to urge him to hasten his departure'.

Titian was keen to accept such a prestigious invitation, spending the winter of 1550–1 as the prince's guest in Augsburg. By the time the two men parted (they were never to meet again), they had made an agreement whereby Titian was to supply Philip with paintings on a regular basis. In effect he was appointed court artist *in absentia*, serving his master in Spain while remaining in Venice. This was to continue for the rest of the artist's life.

The next commission that Titian executed for the prince, a series of six mythological paintings taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, depicts the loves and lusts of the Gods. He referred to these paintings as *poesie*, poems in paint, where the paintings should aspire to the level of poetry and inspire similar feelings and intellectual thoughts as the poems themselves (in the sixteenth century mythological painting was ranked alongside religious works as the highest form of art). Unlike the light-hearted nature of the mythologies that he had painted for the Duke of Ferrara, however, these works convey a more complex message. Titian, like many Renaissance humanists, was influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defined the main characteristics of tragedy as pity and fear.

All six *poesie* follow Aristotle's work in demonstrating an ambivalent mood, where the force of love between Gods and mortals is fragile and fraught with danger, and may lead either to ecstasy or to tragedy. The myths that Titian chose to depict,

in chronological order, were: *Danae*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *Diana and Actaeon*, *Diana and Callisto* and the *Rape of Europa*, the last in the series. The mood of these paintings varies, commencing with an ecstatic Danae, awaiting her ravishment by Jupiter, who descends in a cloud of gold. In contrast Venus clings to the departing Adonis, only too aware that the huntsman is going to his death. Love is triumphant once again as Perseus swoops through the air to kill the dragon threatening the chained Andromeda. But the two scenes with the goddess Diana are full of impending tragedy as the unsuspecting Actaeon comes across the naked goddess bathing with her maidens, while her maid Callisto, who is carrying Jupiter's child, tries to hide her pregnant body from the unflinching gaze of the goddess. In the last scene, Europa sprawls in a position of abandonment across the back of Jupiter, disguised as a bull, who will ravish her as soon as she arrives on the shores of Crete.

A further painting, of *Jason and Medea*, was never executed but the *Death of Actaeon* (National Gallery, London), painted after the *Rape of Europa* remained in the artist's studio until his death. It is therefore not part of the series that was sent to Philip II, and is the darkest painting of all, depicting the moment when the goddess Diana fires her arrow at the startled Actaeon, who is already being transformed into a stag. The actual myths themselves are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Various attempts have been made to give the *Rape of Europa* and the other *poesie* a Christian or philosophical interpretation. Philip was a fervent Catholic who owned a copy of the standard translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into Spanish by Jorge da Bustamente that stressed the moral and Christian content in the myths. Proponents of this interpretation put forward a metaphysical point of view, citing Philip's awareness of the prevailing Neo-Platonist philosophy, an attempt to reconcile paganism with Christianity.

But there is not a shred of evidence to support these arguments. What seems much more likely is that the time artist and patron spent together in Augsburg during the winter of 1550–1 gave them ample opportunity to discuss the commission in detail