Love, Envy, and Revenge

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Mythological Passions. Museo Nacional el Prado, Madrid. March 2 to July 4, 2021. *Titian: Love, Desire, Death*. National Gallery, London, March 16, 2020, to January 17, 2021. *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, August 12, 2021, to January 2, 2022.

Miguel Falomir, Sheila Barker, Javier Moscoso, and Alejandro Vergara. *Mythological Passions: Titian, Veronese, Allori, Rubens, Ribera, Poussin, Van Dyck, Velázquez*. Museo Nacional el Prado, 192pp., €32 cloth.

The most splendid art event of 2020 and, I suspect, 2021 is having a most circuitous time getting itself before the eyes of a large public. The event is the reunion—after 450 years—of Titian's six "poesie" pictures, the word used in Italian painting at the time to describe works that delight the senses and make poetry an aesthetic experience.

Mythological Passions is the exhibition, now at the Prado, and it includes Titian's six "poesie" works, done in the 1550s and 1560s, and related paintings by Titian, Veronese, Allessandro Allori, Rubens, Poussin, van Dyke, and Velazquez. Almost all are female nudes. Ganymede does a flyover, and there are lots of Cupids, but female nudes are thick on the ground, in bed, and in the air.

This is a show about sex. There's no cant and no jargon. There's little concern with oppression, repression, protest, or pretense. There are no marginalized artists. Toxic masculinity is stigmatized here and there—*The Rape of Europa* is, after all, a rape scene—yet men and women alike seem mostly happy to be in an erotic playground, learning how much can go wrong. Oh, it's about love, envy, and revenge, too. Amid all these nudes there's prudery, too, or an obsession with chastity that invites violence.

It's brilliantly old fashioned and frank at the same time. Eroticism, the show tells us, is a core subject of the art and literature of antiquity. The Renaissance, we're reminded, revived sex as a high-end subject. The exhibition is clear that Titian's paintings and

Figure 1 Titian, *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, 1523–26. Oil on canvas, 175 x 193 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

the twenty or so works by other artists are open to many interpretations and have certainly received them over hundreds of years. It disparages none. Rather, it sees Titian's works as expressing the emotional pull of desire—desire driven by the attraction of men to women. Artists like Rubens and Velazquez, who saw and studied Titian's paintings in Madrid, elaborated on Titian's take. So, the show's still about sex but also about emulation.

The paintings by Titian are among the icons of Renaissance secular art and, arguably, *Danae* from the Apsley House in London, *The Rape of Europa* from the Gardner in Boston, and *Venus and Adonis* from the Prado are foundational in the development of the female nude. You would have to be a large rock not to find them luscious.

They're both the zenith of Titian's career and its denouement. Philip II (king of Spain from 1566 to 1598) was his most important and lucrative patron, and Titian had never done a series so complex in terms of figures, settings, and narrative complexity. Its denouement? Titian died of bubonic plague in Venice's 1576 iteration, leaving *The Death of Actaeon* mostly finished. It's not counted

usually as one of the "poesie" paintings, never got to Madrid, and isn't in the exhibition there. The other paintings in Titian's series date from between 1553 and 1562. They are *Danae*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, owned by the Wallace Collection and never before lent, *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, jointly owned by the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Gallery in London, and *The Rape of Europa* from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, also never lent. For the Wallace Collection, the loan of *Perseus and Andromeda* is a first. It's never lent a work of art in its 120-year history.

Titian is after the joy and playfulness of early love, before the discovery of heartbreak.

The pandemic seems to have followed the show, but don't love and sex thrive in impediment? The exhibition was called *Titian: Love, Desire, Death* when it ran at the National Gallery in London. It opened on March 16, 2020, and remained open for exactly four days before closing in the first United Kingdom lockdown, which was ordered on March 20. *Love, Death, and Desire* was rightly touted as a focus show, since it reunited the paintings Philip II commissioned from Titian but included little else. It was a Titian feast nonetheless, and eventually did become available to the public for a few weeks between the UK's first and second lockdowns. The exhibition was extended until January 2021, but alas, very few people saw it, between the closure of the museums and the public's fear of communal spaces, even those graced by a bevy of Titians.

The exhibition was slated to go to the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh after London. Edinburgh owns *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto* with London's National Gallery, so this seemed natural. Both were famously and expensively purchased by the two museums from the Duke of Sunderland, who'd owned them since 1803. Edinburgh, alas, fell from the tour because of Scotland's stricter lockdowns and, so, to Madrid it went as *Mythological Passions*, a large show situating the Titians among later nudes. Alas, again, Spain's hard to visit because of its own travel restrictions. At least Madrileños were able to see it.

In August, yet another version of the exhibition called *Titian: Women, Myth, and Power* will open at the Gardner, unless something new happens to an exhibition that seems to have a bad whammy following it. I think it will be fine, will look fantastic, crowds will want to see it, and it'll be a revelation.

The Prado, using its own collection and borrowing some objects, expanded the project to include other artists who both treated love, beauty, and desire through mythological themes, and used Titian's "poesie" as their launch. Although the Prado owns only one of Titian's series, its collection of Titians overall as well as paintings by Rubens are the world's largest. Philip II is the genesis of the Royal collection that became the Prado, with Titian his favorite artist.

The exhibition at the Prado is about thirty objects. All except two are paintings, though the show begins with a sculpture, a first or second century CE Roman version of *Venus and the Dolphin* originally from around 250 BCE. "The goal of art," the wall text tells us, "is to make the spectator—all of us—feel strong emotions in our bodies as if we were witnessing not works of art but exciting situations in real life." This is a point worth making. We're physical and emotional creatures as well as, at times, cool, detached, and thinking.

Miguel Falomir, the director of the Prado and a scholar of Venetian painting, is the curator of the show. Philip II, Falomir tells us, seems to have given Titian wide if not complete flexibility. By the 1550s, Titian had worked for the Spanish court for more than 30 years. He'd already pried from Philip II's father, Charles V, the realization that piety and eroticism could be conveyed in art as separate concepts, with religious art serving a set of goals but erotic art having its own merit and place. And Philip II was no prude. Falomir refreshingly distances both Titian and Philip from political or ideological meanings attributed to the "poesie" by past scholars. He respects these interpretations and others deeply referencing myths, implicating Neo-Platonic theory, drawing religious implications, or evoking music.

Falomir focuses on flesh. Titian's "poesie," at least for the few years they were all together in Madrid, were displayed in private spaces near one of the palace gardens, frankly linking art depicting the female nude with nature. It's easy, the show tells us, to think paintings of nudes by Titian, Rubens, and others were mainstream since we see them in public museums and in textbooks.

They were decidedly not. Titian's nudes were neither pornographic nor pinup girls. They weren't explicit enough to be truly pornographic and, in any event, Renaissance-era pornography is its own well-documented niche. And they're too erudite to be of the pinup genre. They're erotica that arouses the emotions in addition to the libido and very much the private, (not, however, secret) pleasures of elites. They were not to every king's taste. By 1614, Philip III moved them to storage, finding them too lascivious.

I keep calling the exhibition "the Titian show" when I describe it to family and friends. There are lots of great works by other artists, though Titian's the main event. That said Titian's "poesie" aren't the only star turns the artist makes. *Venus with an Organist and a Dog* from 1550 is one of the first pieces of the puzzle to find its spot. "What is going on here?" the exhibition asks. Any number of lofty, intellectual interpretations are possible. Looking at the object, though, gives us two indisputable answers. "This painting is about sex," says the mask above the keyboard, a couple in the background walking by a fountain topped by a leering satyr, and animals sniffing each other. She's naked, suggesting the two know each other, but she's aloof, while he definitely isn't. "The woman has what he wants," the catalogue tells us, and it's not directions to Padua.

Two earlier Titians, *Worship of Venus* from 1518 and *Bacchanal of the Andrians* from 1523-26, tell us something about Titian's nudes that seems to run through his career (Figure 1). *Worship of Venus* might as well be called "Love Among the Toddlers" as it shows at least fifty three-year-olds in variously randy states. I wouldn't say it's charming, since that suggests it's fodder for a children's book. Rather, I'd say Titian is after the joy and playfulness of early love, before the discovery of heartbreak. The painting is not didactic. No one looks at it and thinks of the patriarchy. Bacchanal of the Andrians is about pure pleasure, too, though the players are adults who seem well versed in arranging an orgy. Both pictures reference antiquity—a passage from Philostratus the Elder's "Eikones" on the meaning of painting—yet the link to antiquity doesn't seem musty. Both are hedonistic, but that doesn't distract or dishonor antiquity, whether mythology or philosophy. Rather, Titian invites us to empathize with antiquity and to humanize it.

Everyone will see the show in his or her own way. I beelined first to the "poesie," not wanting to postpone time with the superstars for a second longer. Once both dazzled and reassured the exhibition was indeed worth a trans-Atlantic trip, I went to these early Titians. I didn't give works by

Rubens, or Allesandro Allori's *Venus and Cupid* from the 1570s, much time at first. Allori's splendid painting from the Musée Fabre in Montpellier is there to bring Michelangelo and Bronzino into the mix, but I decided to let Titian anchor my first round.

So, back to the main course. There are two versions of *Danae* in the exhibition, which, among much else, resolves the question of which was made for Philip II in 1553. It's not the version the Prado owns, which dates to the mid-1560s, but the Apsley House picture. Velazquez bought the Prado version on his first trip to Rome.

Dozens of writers in antiquity treated the subject of Danae, a princess locked in a tower by her father, a king who took seriously a prophesy that Danae's child would one day kill him. No male visitors, no child. Zeus, though, goes wherever Zeus wants. He appears in a shower of gold, and in both versions Danae greets the visit with a dreamy look and open legs.

Titian had painted an earlier version of the Danae story for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in 1544. There's documentary evidence, though I'm not entirely convinced by it, that Danae in this version was a surrogate for Farnese's favorite prostitute and that this painting, now at the Capodimonte in Naples, started as a nude portrait but got the false beard of the Danae myth when Farnese thought it best not to be too explicit. He was, after all, a cardinal. I can't help thinking that the shower of gold coins, a convenient fact in the Danae myth, infers the exchange of money for sex that's part of Farnese's own, definitely true story.

The exhibition, and this I buy, looks at the different versions of Danae's story from antiquity, among them written by Sophocles, Euripides, Terence, and Ovid, and finds that Terence's take is the one Titian decided to represent. In Terence's 2nd-century BCE comedy *The Eunuch*, Chaerea, a young Athenian, has broken into the private apartment of Pamphila, the woman he loves. She's looking at a painting of Danae as he contemplates her beauty, but Chaerea's an egotist. He soon thinks about himself as a contemporary Zeus, without "the lofty power of thunder," a mere mortal who's found a way to the woman he wants, and that very thought arouses him all the more.

Kinky, yes, but Terence's take does make the picture cheekier, if not utterly shameless. Kings exist by divine right, but Philip II didn't think he was Zeus. He knew he was a flesh-and-blood mortal. Terence's story proposes that Zeus's power to seduce is more broadly accessible, and that power itself is an aphrodisiac.

The side-by-side comparison of the two versions, more than ten years apart in execution, shows Titian, by the 1560s, well on his way to his late, radical handling of paint. His 1553 *Danae* has a tighter finish, the earlier nudes tighter still, but the paint in the Prado version of *Danae* is more loosely applied, denser, and more likely than in Titian's earlier work to be unblended. The look's one of pliancy in flesh and in fabric.

If Danae is about sex, transgression, and a dollop of love, *Venus and Adonis*, the next painting Titian did in his series, is about love and loss, and a dollop of sex. Adonis, centered and in red, and his hunting dogs share the spotlight with the nude Venus, awkwardly positioned and seen from behind. Her face is obscured, and as she looks at Adonis, we look at him, too. We see the handsome, determined, indeed reckless man she loves. Falomir quotes one of the few bits of correspondence between Titian and Philip. Titian, in sending *Venus and Adonis* to Madrid, told the king that while *Danae* was seen from the front, Venus is presented from the back. Eventually, Philip would get every angle the nude could supply.

Far from divine, Venus looks powerless. It's clear that her pleas to Adonis to stay won't work. We feel sorry for her, since we know the story as well as she does, though she knows it via prophecy. The mood's more serious than in *Danae*, since her fling with Zeus is a one-night stand, or a mutual crush at most. Venus is the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, a portfolio of far greater immensity than anything Danae would know.

At that point, it's not possible to move to the next Titian without leaving the "poesie" room to look at Veronese's painting of *Venus and Adonis* from 1580, a generation later. The exhibition, after all, counts artistic emulation as one of its themes, and I'd chosen up to this point to focus on Titian. Veronese's figures are life-size and so have wall power, but his palette—Adonis's orange tunic and Venus's blue and gold dress—grab even the passerby. Veronese's orange, made with arsenic, is a thing to behold and uniquely his.

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The poses of the Veronese and Titian are nearly flipped, as Veronese's Adonis is now prone—he's asleep—and Venus is upright and intensely aware. Veronese's take is still dynamic, though, since Adonis is hefty and foreshortened. His is a big look. Veronese's landscape is lusher, too. Cupid, sleeping in Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, is actively engaged in keeping Adonis's doom at bay by restraining the dog who has already caught the scent of the wild boar that'll kill Adonis before too long.

If Titian's view of the couple is noisier and more contested, Veronese's is more poignant. We see only part of Venus's face in the Titian, but Veronese presents her beautiful, deeply engaged face a central motif. Hers is a face on which inevitability registers. At that moment, she suffers in silence. If Titian gives us a couple's push and pull, Veronese presents an arresting moment. The future, Venus knows, can't and won't change, and soon, when Adonis's dead, hers will be the only broken heart.

Now hooked on the story of Venus and Adonis, I leapt into the Neapolitan Baroque and Ribera's angle, which centers on Venus's discovery of the dead Adonis (Figure 2). It's a new era, we learn, one of exaggerated emotion. Veronese's Adonis, though sleeping, is virile. He's present. While Titian's Adonis is physical, active, and impudent, Ribera's is dead, his limbs twisted. Venus isn't nude, either, since that would detract from the spectacle.

I wish I'd spent more time looking at Allori's painting, if for no other reason than to adore its palette, especially passages where green easily and slowly elides into blue. It's color that Allesandro Vergara said in the catalogue "hints at the color of glaciers, the most beautiful color in the world." Allori's *Venus and Cupid* from the 1570s is in the show to emphasize the sculptural quality of Florentine nudes, as is Hendrick van der Broeck's version of Pontormo's painting based on a highly finished, lost Michelangelo drawing of Venus and Cupid done in the 1550s, late in Michelangelo's career but concurrent with Titian's work for Philip II. Pontormo's picture, copied by van der Broeck, is seen to replicate Michelangelo's mood and style as closely as possible.

Of love, Michelangelo wrote in a sonnet, "one love draws toward heaven, the other toward earth, one draws toward the soul, the other the senses." The exhibition explains that Michelangelo's love, personified by these two figures, is most at

Figure 2 José de Ribera, *Venus and Adonis*, 1637. Oil on canvas, 179 x 262 cm. Roma, Gallerie Nazionali d'Arte Antica di Roma

home in heaven or in the soul, but not in the sack. The van der Broeck is said to evoke Michelangelo's emotional abstraction and allusiveness. Michelangelo is cryptic and didactic, and luscious female nudes were never his favorite things.

I think there are good reasons to put the Allori and the van der Broeck in the exhibition, though I wish the Pontormo itself was there to make things less convoluted. Visually, the Allori and the van der Broeck are cold, hard pictures. The nudes are sculptural. Together, they create a Florentine counterpoint to the point of the exhibition, which is the carnality of Titian's nudes, and the tradition of the voluptuous, sexually fetching nude that develops from Titian. And Michelangelo is always a good name to add to the mix. By the 1530s, Michelangelo and Titian were rivals, so the comparison sharpens the difference between the two.

We don't see Zeus at all in *Danae* or any of the other "poesie," and Adonis, for all his beauty, is the rash James Dean, seizing the car keys and riding off to oblivion. *Perseus and Andromeda*, the next "poesie" Titian painted, gives us not only a happy ending, however weird the picture looks. He gives us a rescue scene and a hero, and what's romance without heroism?

Perseus is the child Danae conceived in her liaison with Zeus, so there's a continued storyline. Both Danae and Andromeda are women under lock and key, Danae because her father fears her son will kill him, Andromeda for a more convoluted reason still related to bad parenting. Andromeda's

mother, the vain, pompous Cassiopeia, brags that she and her daughter are more beautiful than the Nereids. An infuriated Poseidon demands the sacrifice of Andromeda as penance for Cassiopeia's impertinence. Andromeda is to be chained and killed by a sea monster.

Perseus sees Andromeda in chains, the sea monster about to devour her, and is smitten, Ovid tells us, by her beautiful hair moving in the breeze and her tears. In love, he engages the monster in an air-and-sea fight to the death. It's action hero stuff.

The Wallace Collection owns the painting. Seen alone in London, it seems like an off moment for Titian. It's a turbulent picture and one of Titian's few seascapes. He's not known for monsters, either. Looking at it in context gives it more sense. Andromeda is the first in-your-face,

Figure 3 Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1556–1559. Oil on canvas, 184.5 x 202.2 cm. The National Gallery, London and The National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, with contributions from the Scottish Government, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, The Monument Trust, Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation), Artemis Investment the Management Ltd, Binks Trust, Mr Busson on behalf of the EIM Group, Dunard Fund, The Fuserna Foundation, Gordon Getty, The Hintze Family Charitable Foundation, J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust, John Dodd, Northwood Charitable Trust, The Rothschild Foundation, Sir Siegmund Warburg's Voluntary Settlement and through public appeal, 2009

standing nude that Titian supplied to the king. She's chained, which adds a frisson all its own, though obviously she's uncomfortable. Unlike Danae and Venus, she's not luscious, though I'm sure the monster expects she'd be a good lunch were it not for Perseus.

Visually, the upside-down Perseus must have been a trick to paint. We don't know how the "poesie" were arranged, though the presentation of Perseus adds variety. If Titian felt he needed to show how clever he was as a painter, producing the topsy-turvy hero is one way to do it.

Diana and Actaeon and *Diana and Callisto* were next to be sent to the king (Figure 3). Titian painted them in the late 1550s. They are the most complex of the group, each with nine or ten figures, and neither was a tried-and-true subject in Renaissance painting or storytelling. Both are, in fact, very rare. Coming after Perseus's acrobatics, Titian must have thought, "how can I top this?"

Diana, suffice to say, is the ultimate Mean Girl. She's one of the marquee goddesses, known as Artemis to the Greeks, and she is chaste, as is her coterie. In the two paintings, we don't see her as the active, pathological killer she is. Rather, we see a feast of nudes in an abundance of poses, as well as the moment when we learn something about fury and revenge.

Actaeon, a young hunter, sees her nude, a breach of etiquette for which Diana turns him into a stag ripped to shreds by his hunting dogs. Titian presents the moment of offense. Callisto sullies the cult of Diana through no fault of her own. Zeus rapes her. She manages to hide her pregnancy for months, until she disrobes for a bath before Diana and her virgins. Large and caught, Callisto is expelled. Diana knows what's she's doing. A hateful, jealous Juno punishes Callisto for being in the wrong place at the wrong time by turning her into a bear, and ultimately into a constellation of stars.

The exhibition catalogue concedes there are numberless interpretations of these two paintings but sticks to the obvious ones. Both answer a hypothetical demand from the king for more nudes with "You want nudes...I'll give you nudes." And after painting a chained nude, a rejected nude, and Danae, a one-night-stand nude, there's little more outré than a pregnant nude. And, of course, men looking at these paintings would likely conclude that some measure of emotional distortion happens to women who scorn their company. Diana's cruelty is by no means extreme, as gods go. That said, the look she gives Actaeon is a chilling one.

The Rape of Europa is the last painting Philip got from Venice (Figure 4). It's so famous, it's not easy to absorb it with a clean palate. First of all, it looks fantastic, having been cleaned. It's never traveled from the Gardner, where Mrs. Gardner installed it high on a wall. If anyone needs reminding, it's here that I again pinched myself. These Titians haven't been together in hundreds of years.

Second, it's a stranger picture than *Perseus and Andromeda*, and made me think of those Caprichos by Goya that show oddballs in flight.

A large white bull with crazed eyes—Zeus again, in disguise—carries the princess Europa away against a blue sky streaked with red, heading toward dark clouds while a befuddled crowd watches. Moments earlier, Europa had been playing with the bull in a field, decorating him with flowers.

The exhibition and catalogue correctly treat it as a rape scene, and an act of violence against a woman. Zeus and Europa eventually have three children, one of whom, Minos, established the Minoan civilization on Crete. It's a picture about violence driven by lust, but is it a love scene? The exhibition makes the point that, in part, led me to Goya. "Love is not a

Figure 4 Titian, *The Rape of Europa*, 1559–62. Oil on canvas, 178 x 205 cm. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

rational state," the final essay says. "It's a pathology." José Ortega y Gasset called it "a kind of temporary imbecility." Technically, the painting is the most daring of the six. Titian used a spatula and, in seems, his fingers, in addition to a brush, to apply the paint. This gives, the show argues, a look of quick realization on Titian's part, as if he's conveying a rapidly evolving situation.

Velazquez's *Fable of Arachne*, also called *The Spinners*, dates to 1655-60 (Figure 5). While the exhibition isn't linear and there's no narrative build to a splashy conclusion, *The Fable of Arachne* is the one painting not by Titian to hang with the "poesie." It's the latest thing in the show and comes toward the end of Velazquez's life, most of which was spent at Philip IV's palaces surrounded by Titians. It also features "the Rape of Europa," in the tapestry Velazquez painted in the picture's background.

The Fable of Arachne isn't as famous as *Las Meninas*, but it's still one of Velazquez's best and most enigmatic paintings. Arachne, a spinner, challenges Minerva to a tapestry-making contest. Challenges of this kind between god and mortal never end well for mortals. When Arachne was judged the winner, Minerva turned her into a spider.

Figure 5 Diego Velázquez, *The Fable of Arachne, or The Spinners*, c. 1655–60. Oil on canvas, 170 × 250 cm (original dimensions, without the additions made in the eighteenth century); currently 223 × 293.4 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

The painting is not a nude. Though an abduction and rape scene, neither is *The Rape of Europa*. Titian's painting has been translated into a tapestry, or a painted tapestry, and is in the very back of *The Fable of Arachne* and only partially visible. The exhibition makes a good point, though, on the point of artists emulating masters of the past, as Velazquez clearly does.

Arachne is foregrounded in a busy, surprisingly realistic scene of her working with her assistants to create the tapestry. This team is hardworking, but very average looking. That Titian made the gods seem real and occupied by the same yearnings and strivings as we mortals. Or, at least, the mortal elites at Philip II's court, who weren't doing prosaic things like spinning but had lots of time to think of other human concerns, like sex and intrigue. Velazquez is a far more reserved painter than Titian, but the analogy works. Arachne, like Velazquez, channels the gods through art.

Essential reading is Sheila Barker's essay in the catalogue, which looks at how the nudes of Titian and others were received by women. It starts with the vandalism of Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* in 1914 by a deranged suffragette. This painting, now sewn back together, could have been in the Prado show. Painted in the late 1640s, it's Velazquez's most explicit riff on Titian.

Barker's essay looks at women collectors of erotic mythological pictures like Isabella d'Este and the small number of documented responses of women who saw nudes by Titian, Rubens, and others. There's a good section on Artemesia Gentileschi's and Michaelena Wautier's

Figure 6 Peter Paul Rubens, *Nymphs and Satyrs*, c. 1615, enlarged and repainted c. 1638–40. Oil on canvas, 139.7 x 167 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

nudes. Wautier's *Triumph of Bacchus* from 1655 is packed with male nudes and a giant self-portrait of the artist herself. It's a huge, gaudy triumph of a painting, and I wonder why it isn't in the show. It's a big painting, I know, and the exhibition isn't big. Wautier's unknown to most, but so is Allori. I think the curators felt Barker's essay covered what I'd call "the woman's point of view."

Barker ties it nicely to the show's theme of artist emulation. In a section called "Viewing Titian's Women in the Age of the Guerilla Girls," she contends there's a battle in these nudes surrounding who, exactly, is objectified. Is it the women in the paintings, or the men whose lust the subject arouses? Or is the figure with real power not the male viewer but the artist, who takes control of the viewer and manipulates him?

My quibbles about the exhibition at the Prado are small. Rubens is a big name, I know, and a superlative painter, but *The Garden of Love*, from 1630–35 and owned by the Prado, doesn't really belong in the exhibition. It does indeed "incarnate the idea of joyful love" and it's got a sculpture of Venus in it, but it doesn't have anything to do with Titian. Neither does *Dance of the Mythological Figures* from the same time. It's probably true, as the catalogue says, that "no other painter made antiquity seem so natural and homely," but that is not even remotely a goal that Titian hoped painting the gods would achieve.

Neither picture has any nudes, but *Nymphs and Satyrs*, another Prado picture by Rubens, has nudes galore (Figure 6). He started it in 1615 and repainted it in the late 1630s. How it springs from Titian needs to be developed. The catalogue frankly says that Poussin's *Hunt of Meleager* from the late 1630s has nothing to do with love. Why is it in the show?

The Death of Actaeon isn't in the exhibition. It's the painting by Titian ordered, possibly, by Philip II as a 7th "poesie" but was, possibly, not finished when Titian died in 1576. It's usually not considered part of the "poesie" series, only because Titian seemed, again, possibly, never to have been satisfied with it. It never made it to Madrid, and was sold to a Venetian collector whose family later sold it to the Duke of Hamilton. It's now owned by the National Gallery in London. Some scholars feel Titian meant to see it to some other, unidentified client.

It's not unfinished in any technical respect. There is no area missing glazes, for instance. X-rays show that Titian made more changes in this painting than in any of the "poesie," which could mean that he wasn't happy with it. Titian was 86 when he died, deaf, toothless, his eyesight worsening, and he had about half a dozen paintings in process. Possibly he thought *The Death of Actaeon* too violent or too pessimistic.

The subject is, after all, mauled by his own dogs. None of the "poesie" is a death scene. The palette is browner and somber. Possibly he thought the picture wouldn't look right with the others. In any event, I would have liked to see its place in the group addressed.

The "poesie" are at Boston's Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum, starting in August. It'll be a smaller show, and more tuned to Titian and Ovid, but it will be splendid, as is the show in Madrid and as was the show in London. A