

Tintoretto

Tintoretto, born **Jacopo Comin**, (1518 –1594) was born in Venice in 1518, as the eldest of 21 children. His father, Giovanni, was a dyer, or tintore; hence the son got the nickname of Tintoretto, little dyer, or dyer's boy, For his phenomenal energy in painting he was termed Il Furioso. His work is characterised by its muscular figures, dramatic gestures, and bold use of perspective in the Mannerist style, while maintaining colour and light typical of the Venetian School.



01 ***Self Portrait*** 1588 Aged 70

In childhood Jacopo, a born painter, began daubing on the dyer's walls; his father, noticing his bent, took him to the studio of Titian to see how far he could be trained as an artist. This was supposedly towards 1533, when Titian was already (according to the ordinary accounts) fifty-six years of age. Tintoretto had only been ten days in the studio when Titian sent him home once and for all, the reason being that the great master observed some very spirited drawings, which he learned to be the production of Tintoretto; and it is inferred that he became at once jealous of so promising a scholar. This, however, is mere conjecture; and perhaps it may be fairer to suppose that the drawings exhibited so much independence of manner that Titian judged that young Jacopo, although he might become a painter, would never be properly a pupil.

He sought for no further teaching, but studied on his own account with laborious zeal; he lived poorly, collecting casts, bas-reliefs etc., and practising by their aid.



02 *Finding of the body of St Mark* 1548

In 1548 he was commissioned to paint a cycle of four pictures of the patron saint of Venice in the Scuola di S. Marco: the *Finding of the body of St Mark*, the *St Mark's Body Brought to Venice*, a *St Mark Rescuing a Saracen from Shipwreck* and *The Miracle of the Slave*.

Like its companion piece, *St Mark's Body Brought to Venice*, the composition exemplifies Tintoretto's preference for dramatic effects of perspective and light. According to the art historian Thomas Nichols, "the linear logic of the emptied, boxlike perspective vistas is undermined by an irrational play of light and shade. Both paintings suggest the simultaneous existence of different levels of reality through the use of a range of pictorial techniques."

Location: a Cemetery at night.

Rushing, exaggerated perspective.

St Mark: died and buried in Alexandria. In 9th century Venetian merchants went to find the body and bring it back to Christendom from Islamic Egypt.

Current theory:

Scene 1. Deep perspectival space draws the eye to the back wall, draws attention to the raised hand which is on the vanishing point.

On the back wall a brilliantly illuminated tomb with the stone removed.

Scene 2. In the foreground the foreshortened body of the saint laid out on a carpet. (Reminiscent of Mantegna's dead Christ)

Patron: gesturing towards the body. 16th century Venetian, not from the 9th century date of the episode. Collapsing of time and space.

Scene 3. Figure standing is an apparition of St Mark, gesturing to stop the raiding of the tombs, where a corpse is being lowered.

On the right two figures, possessed by demons grabbing at a woman who is moving out of the canvas into our space.

Technique and style: radical use of light and colour, dramatic contrasts of light and

dark. Space rushing back which induces a sense of disorientation. St Mark is heroic and elongated. Expressive and Mannerist, a world of mystery with only the faintest delineation of form.

All the balance and harmony of the High Renaissance, such as we see in Raphael, is opposed in a composition that is coming apart, that is stretching at its seams.

It has recently been shown that this picture does not, as was long assumed, show the rediscovery of the body of Saint Mark on June 25, 1094, but various miracles of healing worked by the Patron Saint of Venice: he is depicted raising a man from the dead, restoring a blind man's sight, and casting out devils. As in *The Miracle of the Slave*, which he painted for the same location, Tintoretto illustrates the power of Saint Mark by placing the invisible guidelines of his construction of the perspective in the Saint's outstretched hand. The donor Tommaso Rangone, who claimed great healing powers for himself, thereby making large sums of money, had his own figure painted kneeling humbly, but none the less wearing the magnificent golden robe of a cavalier aurato.



02b Mantegna, *Lamentation over the Body of the Dead Christ* c1490

The extreme perspective in Mantegna's *Lamentation* prefigures Tintoretto's dramatic perspectives.

The realism and tragedy of the scene are enhanced by the violent perspective, which foreshortens and dramatises the recumbent figure, stressing the anatomical details: in particular, Christ's thorax. The holes in Christ's hands and feet, as well as the faces of the two mourners, are portrayed without any concession to idealism or rhetoric. The sharply drawn drapery which covers the corpse contributes to the dramatic effect. The composition places the central focus of the image on Christ's genitals - an emphasis often found in figures of Jesus, especially as an infant, in this period, which has been related to a theological emphasis on the Humanity of Jesus by Leo Steinberg and others.

Mantegna presented both a harrowing study of a strongly foreshortened cadaver and an intensely poignant depiction of a biblical tragedy. This painting is one of many examples of the artist's mastery of perspective. At first glance, the painting seems to display an exact perspective. However, careful scrutiny reveals that Mantegna reduced the size of the figure's feet, which, as he must have known, would cover much of the body if properly represented.



03 *St Mark's Body Brought to Venice* 1548

The painting is notable for its striking, deep perspective background lines. The colours are darker in the near subjects, while the figures in the background are white, nearly transparent. The strange red sky is roiling with ominous clouds, riven with a thunderbolt, affording the painting a heavy, dynamic atmosphere. Tintoretto himself is portrayed within the work as the bearded man beside the camel.

Tintoretto's wonderful painting illustrates another legend. Following the martyrdom, the pagans were going to burn the body of St Mark on the bonfire we see behind him, but a thunderstorm intervened, allowing the Venetians to make off with the body. Of course, this telescoping of history makes no sense. And it's not just history that is taken liberties with. Tintoretto's Alexandria bears an uncanny resemblance to the Piazza San Marco as it was in his day, with the saint being carted off in the direction of the basilica. Only the camel suggests a more exotic location.

An alternative view might be that the men in the picture are not the Venetians, but early Alexandrian Christians taking the body off for secret burial.



04 *Miracle of the Slave* 1548

The latter represents the legend of a Christian slave or captive who was to be tortured as a punishment for some acts of devotion to the evangelist, but was saved by the miraculous intervention of the latter, who shattered the bone-breaking and blinding implements which were about to be applied.



05 *Christ Before Pilate* 1566-67

The dramatic staging of the scene is completely original. In a very fine and measured luministic web the figure of Christ, wrapped in a white mantle, stands out like a shining blade against the crowd and the architectural scenery. He is centred by a bright ray of light and stands tall in front of Pilate who is portrayed in red robes and as if sunk in shadows. The old secretary at the foot of Pilate's throne leans against a stool covered with dark green cloth and with great diligent enthusiasm notes down every moment, every word spoken by the judge amid the murmurings of the pitiless crowd which obstinately clamours for the death of Christ.



06 *Christ at the Sea of Galilee* c1575-80

This haunting painting illustrates an episode from the Gospel of John. After his Resurrection, Christ appeared to his wonder-struck apostles as they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. The drama of the action and the supernatural nature of Jesus' appearance after the end of his earthly life were well suited to Tintoretto's highly individual style. The figure of Christ appears to be almost transparent, decorporalized by the haze of white pigment brushed over his torso with a dry brush. The surface of the water, likewise, is fragmented into waves by strong light. The whole painting seems almost to flicker restlessly, an unsettling sensation that is accentuated by its eerie green colour.

He marshals the unstable forces of nature to heighten the drama of the scene; the wind that fills the sail and bends the mast also agitates the sea and sky, and the rocky waves meet the low clouds that blow onto the land. Christ's outstretched arm draws Peter like a magnet, the charge between them creating a dynamic link between the

centre of the picture and the left foreground. Tintoretto has broken all forms into multiple planes, splintering the light, and frosting the edges with a brush loaded with dry, lead-white oil paint. This use of a thick, white impasto to accent the highlights and as a ghostly shorthand, as in the grassy shore at Christ's feet, is a hallmark of Tintoretto's bravura style



07 *Paradise* 1588-

07b *Paradise*, detail

Il Paradiso is a massive oil painting on canvas that dominates the main hall of the Doge's Palace in Venice.

The composition is crowded with around 500 figures, depicted in detail. The final effect is of an overpowering tumult that seems to celebrate the greatness of the Republic more than it does the triumph of God.

The Virgin Interceding with Christ portrays the scene surmounted by the dove of the Holy Spirit and raised upon a dense semicircular rank of cherubim and seraphim. The reference to the Annunciation that had figured in the previous fresco was present: the Archangel Gabriel is shown holding out a lily to Mary, depicted with a halo of 7 stars. The divine light emanates not from the dove of the Holy Spirit but from the figure of Christ the Judge, shown holding a globe surmounted by a cross; to his right stands the Archangel Michael holding out the scales of justice. The order of the celestial hierarchy is respected: the evangelists appear in a semi-circle immediately beneath the main scene, with the saints aligned in the same order in which they figure in church litanies. From the center of the stage a path of light opens up towards the Empyrean, allowing the souls of the Just to ascend (with the assistance of angels) and God's Grace to descend upon the Doge. At the center of this path is the radiant figure of a semi-veiled Archangel.



08 *The Last Supper* 1594

Tintoretto's painting of 1592–94, a work of his final years, departs drastically from the normal compositional formula. The centre of the scene is occupied not by the apostles but instead by secondary characters, such as a woman carrying a dish and the servants taking the dishes from the table. The table at which the apostles sit recedes into space on a steep diagonal. Also personal is Tintoretto's use of light, which appears to come into obscurity from both the light on the ceiling and from Jesus' aureola.

Tintoretto's *Last Supper* makes use of Mannerist devices, notably its complex and radically asymmetrical composition. In its dynamism and emphasis on the quotidian—the setting is similar to a Venetian inn—the painting points the way to the Baroque. "The ability of this dramatic scene to engage viewers was well in keeping with Counter-Reformation ideals and the Catholic Church's belief in the didactic nature of religious art."