

As a painter, the thing about Titian that always arrests me is the flurry of activity of his brush. The figure of Danae has a luminosity and a solidity that nothing else in the painting has. And it's such an incredible representation of the humanity of the body, of the fleshiness of the body, which is so important for these stories about mythology.

I grew up reading Ovid, I loved those stories, because mostly they were about the hubris of humans against the gods. So there's this shower of gold and you can sort of see in Danae's belly the undulation that might be indicative of the beginning of pregnancy. Danae seems to be reserved to her fate. It's not like she has much of a choice in the matter. The old woman seems to try to take advantage of that shower of golden rain. And it also is this notion that the presence of the gods is beneficial to everyone.

It really is super interesting to me that this painting is for King Philip of Spain. And I think that is probably very much in line with how Philip saw himself. He really saw himself as a great benevolent force. And it's this sort of affirmation that his power – because I'm sure he identified himself with Jupiter – that his power could not be denied; that his subjects were not out of his reach, no matter where or how they tried to hide themselves away or put themselves in a position to defy him.

When you look at Danae's head, and you see the beautiful flush of her cheeks, going up to the shadow across her face, and when you start to examine everything around her, the painting devolves into nothing but paint; it doesn't really describe any forms. And that's the amazing thing about the picture: that we can envision the entire room that Danae is in, and Titian hasn't even painted it.