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MUSEUM

***Titian: Women, Myth & Power* Reunites Artist's Renowned Series of Mythological Masterpieces at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum**

*Barbara Kruger, Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley
Create New Works in Response to Titian Paintings*



Titian (Italian, 1488–1576), *The Rape of Europa*, 1559–62.
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

BOSTON, MA (August 2, 2021) – For the first time in more than four centuries, the epic series of mythological paintings by Titian, one of the most celebrated artists of the Renaissance, is reunited in [*Titian: Women, Myth & Power*](#). The exhibition—jointly organized by The National Gallery, London; National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (ISGM)—brings together the Gardner's masterpiece, [*The Rape of Europa*](#), with its companion paintings from Spain, England, and Scotland. *Titian: Women, Myth & Power* makes its final, and only US, stop at the ISGM from August 12, 2021, through January 2, 2022.

“We are honored to partner with The National Gallery (London), National Galleries of Scotland, and Museo Nacional del Prado on this historic reunion of Titian masterworks,” says Peggy Fogelman, the ISGM's *Norma Jean Calderwood Director*. “One hundred twenty-five years ago, *The Rape of Europa* became the centerpiece of Isabella's collection and strengthened her resolve to create a world-class museum. Isabella would be delighted to witness her masterpiece reunited at the Gardner Museum with its partners, as well as the conversation and creativity it still inspires today.”

In 1550, Prince Philip, the future king of Spain and world's most powerful ruler, commissioned Titian (Italian, about 1488–1576), the most famous artist in Europe, to create a group of paintings. Inspired by the ancient Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Titian produced six large-scale canvases depicting stories from classical mythology. Calling the pictures “poesie” or “painted poems,” Titian expertly captured moments of intense drama, exploring themes of power, desire, and even death. The paintings, considered Titian's tour de force, are among the most original visual interpretations of these classical myths, touchstones in European art history, and some of the greatest Renaissance works ever made.

Titian produced the boldly executed paintings in Venice over a decade (from 1551–62) and sent them to Philip (who became King Philip II in 1556), who ultimately displayed them at the Alcazar, his royal palace in Madrid, the world's political and economic capital. Following Philip's death and over several centuries, the paintings changed hands, landing in collections throughout Europe and the United States. Today, the works belong to the following institutions: [Perseus and Andromeda](#), The Wallace Collection, UK; [Danaë](#), The Wellington Collection, UK; [Venus and Adonis](#) (the only work that remained in Spain), Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; and [Diana and Actaeon](#) and [Diana and Callisto](#), two paintings jointly owned by The National Gallery, London, and National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. However, the sixth and final work in the series, [The Rape of Europa](#), took a different path, ultimately finding its home in America.

At the end of the nineteenth century, determined to acquire a Venetian masterpiece of global significance, Isabella Stewart Gardner, with the assistance of her art advisor, Bernard Berenson, purchased the picture from an English aristocrat, setting a record for the highest price paid for a painting in the United States. *Titian: Women, Myth & Power* represents the first time that *Europa* has left the Museum since Isabella acquired it, and the exhibition at the Gardner coincides with the one hundred and twenty-fifth

anniversary of the work's arrival in Boston in August 1896. (An animated map, created by The National Gallery and on view at the exhibition's entrance, illustrates the travels of the six *poesie* paintings over the course of nearly five hundred years.)

"Titian's *Europa* is widely regarded as the most important Renaissance painting in the United States, and we are thrilled to see it return home as part of this unprecedented exhibition," says Nathaniel Silver, exhibition curator and *William and Lia Poorvu Curator of the Collection* at the Gardner.

The Rape of Europa (1559–62), which the artist characterized as the crowning achievement of his *poesie* series in a letter to Philip II, depicts the legendary founding story of Europe. The painting showcases Titian's ability to capture raw human emotion depicting Europa at the moment of her abduction, waving a swath of red fabric while clinging to Jupiter, who has transformed himself into a white bull. Two putti armed with bows tumble overhead while another riding a dolphin follows the kidnapped princess to her imminent fate. Painted at the peak of his career, Titian interprets Europa's entire story, an ancient Roman fable of lust and tragedy, within a single canvas filled with compositional richness.

Titian conceived his series of mythological tales as pendant pairs which is how they will be displayed in the Gardner's installation on view in the Museum's Hostetter Gallery. *Rape of Europa* will be joined by *Perseus and Andromeda* from London's Wallace Collection, which has never before lent a work of art to the United States. This is also the first time that *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto* (National Gallery, London / National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh) have left Europe. To further highlight the connections between the six paintings, they will be displayed in identical frames designed and built by the National Gallery Frames Department (under the leadership of Peter Schade)—cut, carved, and gilded based on a sixteenth century Venetian original. (It is possible to watch a film on that process [here](#).)

Two royal portraits complete *Titian: Women, Myth & Power* on the final wall of the gallery. Portrait of *Philip II* (Titian, 1549–50, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), Titian's greatest patron, seems to hold court over the works he commissioned. This powerful picture of the would-be King, on loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado, was painted by Titian shortly after they first met in Milan in 1548 when Titian was around sixty and the young prince was twenty-one. Hanging next to Philip is a portrait of his wife, [Mary I](#),

[Queen of England](#) (Antonius Mor and Workshop, 1554) from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's own collection, painted the year of her marriage to Philip.

Other treasures from Gardner's collection tell the story of the founder's acquisition of *The Rape of Europa* and how it began to inspire American artists. Correspondence on view in the exhibition includes letters to Isabella from: writer Henry James, a frequent guest of Isabella and her husband Jack when in Venice; art advisor Bernard Berenson, who facilitated many of Isabella's art acquisitions; and artist Paulanship, whose bronze cast of the [Rape of Europa \(1917\)](#), inspired by Titian's painting, is also on display.

The exhibition in Boston follows The National Gallery (UK) and most recently, the Museo Nacional del Prado. (Timing was delayed at all venues, and the showing in Edinburgh cancelled, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.) A [Titian catalogue](#), published by the National Gallery, features essays from an international team of scholars, curators, and conservators. Additionally, [Titian's Rape of Europa](#), a publication spotlighting the Gardner's masterpiece, was written by Nathaniel Silver in conjunction with the exhibition. These books, as well as other Titian-related publications and merchandise—including a limited edition Barbara Kruger tote bag—are available in the Museum's shop, Gift at the Gardner, and online at gift.gardnermuseum.org.

Reconsidering Titian: Contemporary Perspectives

In each of Titian's *poesie* pictures, the female subjects and the fates that befall them, especially at the hands of men, raise a range of questions about gender, power, identity, sexuality, and violence in the age of the Renaissance and today. In conjunction with *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*, the Gardner Museum has collaborated with artists and scholars to respond to Titian's paintings, using the works as catalysts to provoke ideas, inspire creativity, and foster conversation.

Contemporary artists—Barbara Kruger, and Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley—were commissioned by the Museum to create new works in reaction to Titian's paintings. *Body Language* (2021) by Barbara Kruger was made by reworking details from *Diana and Actaeon* (1559) and layering them with text. For decades, Kruger has deployed the graphic form of public art to address questions of oppression and abuse of power. Here the image of two entwined bodies in a silent nuanced frozen gesture of power and submission, invites us to reconsider the representation of women, power, and sexuality through the ages and to reflect on the art historical concept of the “gaze.”

Kruger's image of these striking figures, overlaid with her signature bold text, is installed on the *Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade* adjacent to the Museum's entrance.

"Looking at myths across the ages with a contemporary lens is a powerful tool to better understand the past and the present. I am so grateful to Barbara Kruger and Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley for giving us an extraordinary rereading of Titian through the amazing work they have created for this exhibition," shares Pieranna Cavalchini, *Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of Contemporary Art*.

Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley's 2021 film, *The Rape of Europa*, is a biting, witty, and bawdy twenty-first-century response to the scene of sexual violence romanticized in Titian's 1562 painting of the same title. Their graphically stylized short film combines painting, performance, and Mary Reid Kelley's distinctive satirical poetry, layered by Patrick Kelley into an episodic fable-like reenactment of stories from classical antiquity that gives Europa a perspective and agency excluded from historical portrayals. Mary plays a wide range of mythical characters trapped between comic and tragic scenarios. The character of Europa is updated from a Phoenician princess to a disgruntled and traumatized young professional coping with the aftermath of violent assault, that resonates with the present-day #MeToo movement. The nine-minute film is on view in the Museum's Fenway Gallery in the historic Palace, located close to the Museum's Courtyard which the artists recreated as a backdrop for Europa in their modern mythological take. The Gardner has welcomed artists to live, work, and be inspired by the collection as Artists-in-Residence since 1992, continuing Isabella's tradition of inviting artists to imagine and create at the Museum.

In addition to these two works of art commissioned in response to *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*, the Museum has also invited artists and scholars to reconsider the *poesie* paintings for the present moment, in their own words. Their responses shed new insight on the exhibition and its themes, connecting the past to the present and uncovering new perspectives about the centuries-old paintings. These personal reflections, featured on the exhibition's wall labels and audio guide, are reminders of the power of art to stimulate new thinking. The contributors and the paintings they re-examine are:

- Steve Locke: Trustee and Artist-in-Residence, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; Pratt Institute, Professor of Fine Arts (*Danaë*)
- Jill Burke: University of Edinburgh, Professor of Renaissance Visual and Material Cultures (*Venus and Adonis*)

- Helga Davis: Visiting Curator for the Performing Arts, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (*Diana and Callisto*)
- Matisse DuPont: Educator, artist, and consultant of gender, sexuality, and identity (*Diana and Actaeon*)
- Johnette Marie Ellis: Student of process and spirit whose practice crosses literary and visual art (*Perseus and Andromeda*)
- Shawon Kinew, Assistant Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, specializing in Renaissance and Baroque art (*The Rape of Europa*)

Additionally, Jenni Sorkin, Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor, History of Art & Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara, has contributed an essay to the on-line Gallery Guide and printed brochure for *The Rape of Europa* by Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley.

To further conversation and the sharing of art and ideas, the Gardner Museum is planning a series of public programs related to *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*, the exhibition's themes and responsive contemporary artworks. Both virtual and in-person programs on a range of topics—from Titian's importance in the history of Western European painting and conservation of the Gardner's *Rape of Europa*, to an investigation into the troubling stories of antiquity and a conversation about the importance of shifting the way we see and think about the representation of women in Art—will be offered. For more information, [please click here](#). Additionally, the Gardner Museum would like to thank the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), who served as an important resource on issues of sexual violence in the Museum's development of interpretive materials and programs.

Conservation of *The Rape of Europa* and Titian Room Restoration

In preparation for the international traveling exhibition, the Gardner's *Rape of Europa* was the subject of extensive research and technical analysis, and received a comprehensive restoration treatment for the first time since Isabella's purchase in 1896. The 18-month project, conducted from Spring 2018 through 2019, led to several new discoveries. High-resolution, infrared imaging and elemental mapping of the painting revealed compositional changes made by the artist and the pigments he used, increasing understanding of Titian's groundbreaking painterly technique. Armed with these findings, ISGM conservators stabilized, cleaned, and restored the painting. A short film about the conservation of *The Rape of Europa*, as well as photographs and

graphics demonstrating Titian's innovative style, are included in the Gardner Museum's exhibition and can be [seen here](#).

The Museum has also undertaken a major restoration of its Titian Room. This third-floor gallery was carefully curated by Isabella to showcase her prized acquisition, *The Rape of Europa*, amongst a rich layering of Venetian and Spanish paintings and decorative arts from the Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo periods. The sumptuous design of the gallery evokes the grandeur of Venice, a city beloved by Isabella.

ISGM conservators across disciplines have meticulously restored the gallery to closely reflect the room as conceived and installed by Isabella in her lifetime. The three-year research and conservation project began in Spring 2018 and included consultation with other experts in the field. A significant component of the room's transformation was the reproduction of Isabella's multi-colored, multi-patterned wall upholstery, which was replaced in the 1950s. Using historical photographs and fragments of the original fabrics, silk and linen reproductions were produced by La Manufacture Prelle in Lyon, France. Other highlights of the gallery restoration include the cleaning and conservation of select paintings and objects, including two large Venetian Rococo console tables, furniture upholstery, new flooring resembling the original, improved lighting, and repainting the ceiling molding. Upon conclusion of the exhibition in January (2022), *The Rape of Europa* will return to a beautiful, vibrant and fully-restored gallery, [reflecting Isabella's original vision for space](#).

[Link to Dropbox Images.](#)

The lead sponsors of Titian: Women, Myth & Power are Amy and David Abrams and The Richard C. von Hess Foundation. The presenting corporate sponsor is Bank of America. The exhibition is also supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation, Fredericka and Howard Stevenson, and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support is provided by an endowment grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Museum receives operating support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The exhibition's media sponsor is The Boston Globe. Additional media support was provided by WBUR.

The 2018-19 conservation of Titian's Rape of Europa was generously sponsored by Drew and Emily Pluhar.

The Artist-in-Residence program is directed by Pieranna Cavalchini, Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of Contemporary Art, and is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Barbara Lee Program Fund. The Rape of Europa by Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley was commissioned by the

Gardner with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Funding is also provided for site-specific installations of new work on the Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade on Evans Way.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum - a magical creation of one woman's daring vision - invites you to awaken your senses and be transported. Modeled after a Venetian palazzo, unforgettable galleries surround a luminous courtyard and are home to masters such as Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo, Whistler, and Sargent. The Renzo Piano wing provides a platform for contemporary artists, musicians, and scholars, and serves as an innovative venue where creativity is celebrated in all of its forms.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum • 25 Evans Way Boston MA 02215 • Hours: Open Daily from 11 AM. to 5 PM and Thursdays until 9 p.m. Closed Tuesdays. • Admission: Adults \$20; Seniors \$18; Students \$13; Free for members, children under 18, and all named "Isabella" • Advance reservations are required. Titian: Women, Myth & Power is included as part of general admission. • Please note: The Gardner follows the updated COVID guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the City of Boston regarding mask wearing. Please see the website for current information • \$2 off admission with a same-day Museum of Fine Arts, Boston ticket • For information 617 566 1401 • Box Office 617 278 5156 • www.gardnermuseum.org

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