

PRESS RELEASE

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TITIAN TO CANALETTO DRAWING IN VENICE

15 October 2015–10 January 2016



Giambattista Piazzetta (1682–1754)
Detail of *Head of a Youth*
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Featuring a hundred drawings from the Uffizi, the Ashmolean, and Christ Church, Oxford, **TITIAN TO CANALETTO** is a groundbreaking exhibition based on new research. Venetian art has long been associated with brilliant colours and free brushwork, but drawing has been written out of its history. This exhibition highlights the significance of drawing as a concept and as a practice in the artistic life of Venice. It reveals the variety of purposes and techniques in drawing from Bellini, Titian and Tintoretto to Tiepolo and Canaletto. In a parallel exhibition, **JENNY SAVILLE DRAWING**, one of the UK's most celebrated contemporary artists, Jenny Saville, has produced new work on paper and canvas in response to the Venetian Old Masters.

Putting the words 'drawing' and 'Venice' together seems paradoxical. Writing on Venetian art has located creativity and artistic ambition in painting above all, emphasizing the materiality and sensuous effects achieved by Venetian artists. The intellectual and reflective qualities encapsulated in drawing are seen as irrelevant in the artistic world of Venice. The idea that Venetian artists did not use

or value drawing was articulated in Florence, in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* of 1568. Vasari's influential statements were repeated and elaborated by later writers, so that in 1770s London, Joshua Reynolds confidently asserted that artists in Venice did not care about drawing with all of its virtues of discrimination and judgement, and that they went straight to working with brushes on canvas. This potent literary tradition had a major impact on the survival of drawings.

TITIAN TO CANALETTO presents new research which traces continuities in Venetian drawing over three centuries, from around 1500 to the foundation of the first academy of art in Venice in 1750. The exhibition emphasizes the role of drawing from sculpture and from life in the education and identities of Venetian artists, and it reveals tensions between theory and practice in the activities of artists and of collectors. Venetian artists used drawing for innovating and experimenting, or as a tool for research and observation; a variety of drawings were made and admired as works of art in their own right. The exhibition poses questions about the survival and value of drawings: does the fact that we have so few by Titian mean that he did not draw? Why were many Venetian drawings thought unworthy of collecting?

Ironically, while the story that Venetian artists did not respect drawing was first told in Florence, one of the world's great collections of Venetian drawings is held at the Uffizi where many drawings were acquired in the mid-seventeenth century for Leopoldo de' Medici. Not only are there masterpieces by Carpaccio, Bassano, Titian and Tintoretto, and high-quality works by lesser-known seventeenth-century artists, there are also drawings that reveal early attitudes to collecting and connoisseurship. The Uffizi will also lend drawings by Tiepolo that have never been shown before, to be grouped with the Ashmolean's own superb collection. Pioneering collectors in England owned Venetian drawings, and loans of important works by Veronese and Tintoretto will come from the intact early eighteenth-century collection at Christ Church, Oxford, together with the extraordinary *Portrait of a man*, by Giovanni Bellini.

Dr Catherine Whistler, Keeper of the Department of Western Art, Ashmolean Museum, and curator of the exhibition, says: 'The beauty and visual impact of these drawings speak eloquently of the importance of drawing in Venice. We hope this exhibition will challenge traditional views of Venetian art and provoke new thinking on some of the greatest names in Italian art from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century'

Dr Alexander Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean, says: 'The Ashmolean is bringing to a close its year of drawings exhibitions with this landmark show. TITIAN TO CANALETTO includes some of the Ashmolean's greatest treasures, brought together with examples from two of the world's finest collections of Old Master drawings – that of the Uffizi and the Christ Church Picture Gallery. Many of the works in the exhibition have not been displayed in public since the 1950s.

'The captivating beauty of these drawings is evident in the response they have elicited from one of this country's most distinguished contemporary artists, Jenny Saville, who has produced a new body of work inspired by pieces in the exhibition and her enduring love of Venetian art.'

In **JENNY SAVILLE DRAWING**, Jenny Saville will present a body of drawings, including several new and unseen works in a dedicated exhibition space that accompanies TITIAN TO CANALETTO: DRAWING IN VENICE. The rich material and gestural qualities of Venetian drawings have been an inspiration for the thoughtful yet visceral works on paper and canvas that will be on view. For Jenny Saville, the blurred or grainy charcoal marks and the agile, robust pen lines of Venetian artists such as Titian or Palma Giovane become catalysts for exploring the nature and power of drawing, in new, highly charged works of art.

Exhibitions: TITIAN TO CANALETTO: DRAWING IN VENICE
&
JENNY SAVILLE DRAWING
Dates: 15 October 2015–10 January 2016
Venue: The John Sainsbury Exhibition Galleries
Press View: Wednesday 14 October 2015, 10am–12pm
Catalogue: A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition: www.ashmolean.org/shop

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▪ **NOTES TO EDITORS**

TITIAN TO CANALETTO: DRAWING IN VENICE is organised by the Ashmolean Museum in collaboration with the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence. The exhibition will be shown at the Uffizi in spring 2016.

The exhibition has been supported by:

The Wolfgang Ratjen Foundation; the Friends of the Ashmolean; the Gladys Kriebble Delmas Foundation

The Ashmolean Museum

Founded in 1683, the Ashmolean Museum is the most significant museum of art and archaeology in the heart of Britain and the finest university museum in the world. Its collections are large, rich and unusually diverse, ranging from archaeology to fine and decorative arts, and from numismatics to casts of classical sculpture from the great museums of Europe. The Ashmolean is home to the best collection of Predynastic Egyptian material in Europe; the only great collection of Minoan antiquities outside Greece; the largest and most important group of Raphael drawings in the world; the greatest Anglo-Saxon collections outside the British Museum; a world-renowned collection of coins and medals; and outstanding holdings of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Islamic art. The works and objects in these remarkable collections tell the story of civilisation and the aspirations of mankind from Nineveh and ancient Egypt, to the Renaissance, right up to the triumphs of twentieth century Europe. Admission to the Museum is free.