



HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JACOPO COMIN

"I was never so utterly crushed to the earth before any human intellect as I was today, before Tintoret." —19th century British art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) after seeing Tintoretto's works in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice in the mid-1800s

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

"As for painting," the highly admired 19th-century British art critic John Ruskin wrote in a letter to his father while visiting Venice, "I think I didn't know what it meant until today — the fellow outlines your figure with 10 strokes, and colors it with as many more. I don't believe it took him 10 minutes to invent and paint a whole length. Away he goes, heaping host on host, multitudes that no man can number — never pausing, never repeating himself — clouds, and whirlwinds and fire and infinity of earth and sea, all alike to him."

This is not my first article in *Inside the Vatican* about Jacopo Comin (1518-1594), who was born in Venice, the eldest of 21 children, and quickly earned three nicknames: "Furioso," "Robusti" and "Tintoretto." I published the first, "Jacopo Comin: The Last Great Painter of the Italian Renaissance" in the May 2012 issue on the occasion of his first monographic exhibition in Italy since 1937. "In all fairness," I wrote, "the reason for this 'oversight' is the difficulty of transporting his enormous canvasses."

Jacopo received the nickname "Furioso" for the speed at which he painted, "Robusti" after his father, Giovanni, who had defended the gates of Padua in a way that others called "robust" against the imperial troops during the War of the League of Cambrai (1509-16). And he was called "Tintoretto" because his father was a tintore, or dyer, so "Tintoretto" means little dyer or dyer's boy.

In fact, his real last name, "Comin," which means the spice cummin in Venetian dialect, was discovered by Miguel Falomir of the Museo del Prado, Madrid, and was made public on the occasion of the retrospective of Tintoretto at the Prado in Spain in 2007.

Tintoretto was a born painter. His father, recognizing his son's talent, in around 1533 took him, at about the age of 14, to Titian's studio for professional training. But after only 10 days the older artist (1488-1576) sent him away, perhaps because from drawings Titian realized that Tintoretto possessed a far



Here, *The Miracle of the Slave* painted for the Scuola Grande di San Marco and, bottom, *The Conversion of St. Paul* from the National Gallery in Washington, DC



greater talent than his own. In fact, from this time forward Titian shunned his "rejected student" and the two remained on distant terms.

Tintoretto studied with zeal on his own, frequently by night, or worked for no pay with his fellow young painter Croatian-born Andrea Meldola, better known as Andrea Schiavone (1522-63). The two earliest of their mural paintings, said to have been *Belshazzar's Feast* and a *Cavalry Fight*, have long since perished as have all his frescoes, early or late. Also, his first painting to be admired, a portrait of his brother and himself at night, has perished.

To celebrate his 500th birthday in 2018, Venice has organized with two major exhibitions from September 7 to January 6, as well as other events

(books, conferences, and concerts) in the plans since 2015.

The exhibition at Venice's *Gallerie dell'Accademia* (entitled *Il giovane Tintoretto* or *The Young Tintoretto*) includes some 60 works from the first 10 years of the artist's activity, from 1538 when documents report him working independently in the Church of St. Jeremiah in the sestiere of Cannaregio, until 1548, the date of the clamorous success of his first public work *Il Miracolo dello Schiavo* or *The Miracle of the Slave*, painted for the Scuola Grande di San Marco, but now in the Galleria. Twenty-six of the some 60 works belong permanently to the Galleria; the others are on loan from the Louvre, The National Gallery in Washington, the Prado in Madrid, the Galleria Borghese in Rome, the Uffizi in Florence, the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna, the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, the Fabbrica del Duomo in Milan, the Courtauld Gallery in London, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut as well as from private collections.

On display in chronological order, the works here attempt to investigate Tintoretto's artistic development, since he did not have a mentor or learn in a specific workshop. Rather, Tintoretto acquired and transformed his models to

develop his own dramatic and revolutionary style thanks to the suggestions of fellow painters a generation older like Titian, Pordenone, Bonifacio de' Pitati, Paris Bordon, Francesco Salviati, Giorgio Vasari, and Jacopo Sansavino, whose works are also on display here to illustrate their influence on Tintoretto's development. Also on display are paintings and sculptures of Tintoretto's contemporaries, also working in Venice: Andrea Schiavone, Giuseppe Porta Salviati, Lambert Sustris, and Bartolomeo Ammannati.

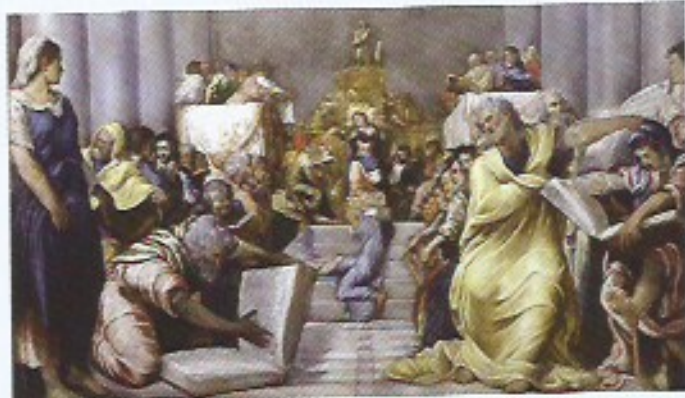
The masterpieces by Tintoretto on display in "Young Tintoretto" include *The Conversion of St. Paul* (c. 1544) on loan from the National Gallery in Washington, and *Apollo and Marsia* (1543-4), on loan from the Athenaeum in Hartford, both displayed in Italy for the first time; *Christ Among the Doctors* (1540-1) from the *Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo di Milano*; and the *Supper in Emmaus* from Budapest (1537-47), not to overlook the ceiling from the *Palazzo Pisani* in Venice (1541-2), now in Modena's *Gallerie Estensi*.

Venice's second exhibition, *Tintoretto (1519-1594)*, held in the Doge's Palace, the permanent home of several of his monumental canvases, "focuses on the most fruitful period of his art," recounts the exhibition's press release, "from his full affirmation in the mid-1540s to his last works."

"With 50 autograph paintings and 20 drawings by Tintoretto," continues the press release, "together with the famous cycles painted for the Doge's Palace between 1564 and 1592 — visible in their original position — the exhibition showcases all the visionary, bold and wholly unconventional painting of Jacopo Robusti. 'Like a single peppercorn capable of overcoming 10 bunches of poppy,' as his playwright friend Andrea Calmo described him, Tintoretto knew how to challenge the tradition embodied by Titian, overwhelming it and choosing to innovate, not only with daring technical and stylistic solutions, but also with iconographic experiments that marked an important turning point in the history of Venetian painting in the 16th century. An extraordinary storyteller, skilled director of painted actions and sophisticated colorist — he who used the full range of pigments available in the Venice of his time — Tintoretto reveals himself as a fascinating interpreter of all the different genres he explored, from religious subjects to great history paintings, and from portraiture to profane and mythological themes."

Loans come from private collections and museums all over the world: London, Paris, Ghent, Lyons, Dresden, Otterlo, Prague, Rotterdam, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC.

Of special note are five extraordinary works from the Prado which include *Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar* (c. 1555), *Judith and*



Here, *Christ Among the Doctors*.
Below, *St. Augustine Heals the Crippled*



revealed by the recent restorations of the altarpieces of *San Marziale* and of the *Atrio Veneto* [note: 18 artworks, and also the artist's tomb, were restored thanks to "Save Venice"]. "And likewise for the large canvases of his last years, in which the hand of his son Domenico and of his workshop can be discerned, but which preserve intact the whole visionary approach of the great Tintoretto in the conception of the composition."

The Doge's Palace exhibition opens and closes with two self-portraits. One was painted at the beginning of Tintoretto's career (1546-48), when he was 30, and is on loan from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It has been defined by the curators as the first "autonomous" self-portrait in European painting. The other, dating from 1588, when he was 70, is on loan from the Louvre.

From March 10-July 7, 2019, many of Tintoretto's works on display in the Doge's Palace will be on display in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, the very first blockbuster retrospective exhibition in North America dedicated to this Venetian genius, entitled *"Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice."* The curators of both these exhibitions are two American scholars, great connoisseurs of Tintoretto, Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman who, again the press release tells us, "for years have concentrated their research on drawing up a *catalog raisonné* of Jacopo's work."

There are more than 700 permanent works by Tintoretto spread all over Venice. Aside from the *Galleria* and the Doge's Palace, other Tintoretto venues include the *Scuola Grande di San Marco*, the *Museo Correr* and many churches: San Cassiano, San Geremia, San Giorgio Maggiore, Santa Maria Mater, Santa Maria della Salute, and Santa Maria dell'Orto, as well as Tintoretto's parish church, where he, his son Domenico and his daughter Marietta, both talented artists in their own right, are buried, and Tintoretto's house nearby on the *Fondamenta dei Mori*, again in the *sestiere* of *Cannaregio*.

Thus there are many works by Tintoretto in Venice all the time, but being able to admire those on loan from so many faraway locations is special as is the exhibitions' catalogue (cost: 5.3 euros), a souvenir of a unique, unrepeatable event. ☐