



 CATALOGUE ENTRY

Portrait of a Man

about 1590–1600

Attributed to Leandro Bassano

Italian, 1557–1622

oil on canvas

29-3/4 × 22-15/16 in.

(75.5 × 58.2 cm)

The Clowes Collection

2016.163

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

None

Entry

1 *Portrait of a Man* is a handsome painting stylistically rooted in the Venetian tradition. Bold, painterly brushstrokes describe a range of textures: soft fabrics, ruffled fur, crisp parchment, and buffed leather. The unidentified sitter's features are distinguished by an aquiline nose and a fashionably trimmed beard and moustache. The sumptuous, fur-lined cloak and buttoned velvet doublet suggest a nobleman or a wealthy merchant.¹ His sober gaze is matched by an earthy palette and offset by a pair of voluminous, blue sleeves and the white of the bound volume. This oversized tome alludes to an intellectual preoccupation, one seemingly interrupted as the man turns his cool gaze outward while a finely gloved hand holds a page. This self-conscious action underscores the book's importance, which may allude to his identity. (On Venetian portraiture, see also *Portrait of Andrea de' Franceschi*.)

2 Little is known of this portrait prior to its purchase in 1939 by Dr. George H.A. Clowes of Indianapolis. It was sold as the work of Titian (1490–1576) according to several connoisseurs who unanimously agreed that the painting's brushwork and use of color aligned with the artist's later period.² But in 1940 the art historian Hans Tietze put forward serious reservations over this attribution, instead suggesting it dated to a later period.³ Subsequent treatment campaigns—primarily cleaning and inpainting—support Tietze's assessment.⁴ In 1956, it was sent to William Suhr, conservator of the Frick Collection in New York. Black-and-white photographs from his archives document the painting's condition before, during and after treatment (fig. 1).⁵ Cleaning removed much of the overpaint to reveal losses throughout the background and in areas of the face. As a result, Suhr concluded it was "a perfectly genuine picture which went under the name Titian which it is not."⁶ The most recent treatment of this painting dates to 1989, during which the IMA's paintings conservator focused on areas of preexisting abrasion—centered around the chest—that were addressed with localized inpainting (see Technical Examination Report).⁷



Figure 1: Conservation photograph of *Portrait of a Man* (front, cleaned state). Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (870697), William Suhr Papers, Box 76, Folder 36. © J. Paul Getty Trust.

3 If not Titian, then who painted this *Portrait of a Man*? With the exception of overpaint from previous restorations, the materials and techniques used generally align with sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century practices, including the canvas support prepared with a red ground layer. Colored grounds (pigmented priming layer over a gesso layer) were increasingly used in Venice by the second half of the sixteenth century, in particular by Jacopo Bassano (about 1510–1592), Jacopo Tintoretto (1519–1594), and their workshops and followers.⁸ (On Tintoretto, also see *Apollo and the Muses*.)

4 Infrared reflectography examination indicates that the figure's general form was established using a wet, carbon-based medium applied by brush. This is best seen around the upper body in the head, shoulder, and chest (fig. 2). There are no pentimenti; however, there is a slight upward adjustment augmenting the curve of the shoulder. Strong lines located at the areas of the neck and beard were applied to reinforce the form, but these appear to be the result of a later intervention. Analysis of the X-radiograph reveals an odd variation in the form of a scrolling brushstroke running from the upper left of the canvas and diagonally through the figure's head and toward the book (fig. 3). This does not relate to the surface composition and suggests either an anomaly in the underlying preparatory layer or part of an image from a repurposed canvas.

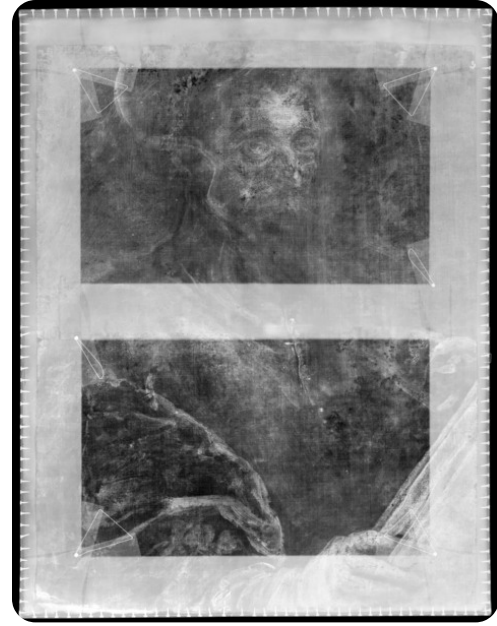


Figure 2: Infrared reflectogram showing slight adjustments of the figure and damages in the background. Attributed to Leandro Bassano, *Portrait of a Man*, about 1590–1600, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, The Clowes Collection, 2016.163.

Figure 3: X-radiograph of *Portrait of a Man*, about 1590–1600, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, The Clowes Collection, 2016.163.

5 The painting's attribution to Leandro Bassano was provisionally assigned by Mark Roskill in 1968.² Born Leandro dal Ponte (1557–1622), he was called Bassano after the northern Italian town from which his family originated.¹⁰ His father, Jacopo, was ranked highly among celebrated Venetian artists and the young Bassano worked closely alongside him in the family's flourishing workshop that included his brothers Francesco (1549–1592), Giambattista (1553–1613), and Gerolamo (1566–1621).¹¹ After the deaths of both his father and Francesco in 1592, Leandro moved permanently to Venice, where he continued to produce altarpieces and also painted for the Doge's Palace, the political seat of Venice. He was an acknowledged portraitist, and his fame in this genre was solidified in 1595 when Doge Marino Grimani (1532–1605) knighted him for the portrait now in Dresden.¹²

6 Close examination indicates the painting's canvas has been cut along all four edges (see fig. 2). The extent of the reduction is not known; however, in comparing it to other examples by Leandro, its narrative quality is a marked departure from his smaller bust-length arrangements, such as those in the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Instead, the present work suggests a similar pictorial arrangement observed among his half-length compositions, including the *Portrait of Prospero Alpino*, 1592 (42-3/4 × 33-5/8 in.; Stuttgart, Staatgalerie); the presumed *Portrait of Tiziano Aspetti Holding a Statuette*, about 1592–1593 (fig. 4); and the *Portrait of the Merchant Leonhard Hermann*, about 1595 (fig. 5). Respectively, the occupations of the sitters were scholar and physician, artist, and merchant.¹³ The width of the Aspetti portrait conforms to the Vicentine *braccio* (average 27-1/8 in. or 69 cm), the Italian unit of measure for textiles, whereas the current width of the Clowes portrait is 22-15/16 inches.¹⁴ Supposing that the original canvas conformed to the width of a single *braccio*, the difference is as much as 4 inches (10.8 cm). Regardless of a reduction to the canvas, in its current state, the portrait is a coherent and arresting image.



Figure 4: Leandro Bassano (Italian, 1557–1622), *Portrait of Tiziano Aspetti Holding a Statuette*, about 1592–1593, oil on canvas, 34-41/64 × 26-29/64 in. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022, London, RCIN 405988.



Figure 5: Leandro Bassano (Italian, 1557–1622), *Portrait of the Merchant Leonhard Hermann*, about 1595, oil on canvas, 52-33/64 × 37-19/32 in. Staatgalerie, Neue Residenz, Bamberg, Germany, Inv. 8091. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource, NY.

7 Already noted above are the paint losses throughout the composition. The portrait also suffers from surface abrasion and discolored varnish that has yellowed, affecting overall tone and brightness. Modeling around the face and proper left sleeve are somewhat muddied. The best-preserved passage is seen in the confident handling of the book and gloved hand. Notable, too, is the fur along the shoulder, expressed through lively flicks of the paintbrush. Similar detailing appears in Leandro's *Portrait of an Old Man*, late 1500s—early 1600s (Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), recalling the freer brushwork of Tintoretto (fig. 6).¹⁵ In fact, the Budapest portrait was previously assigned to Tintoretto. Similarly, the Indianapolis portrait was once published as the school of Jacopo Tintoretto.¹⁶



Figure 6: Leandro Bassano (Italian, 1557–1622), *Portrait of an Old Man*, late 16th/early 17th centuries, oil on canvas, 45-43/64 × 37-51/64 in. Museum of Fine Arts (Szepmuveszeti Muzeum), Budapest, Inv. 53.477. Photo © The Museum of Fine Arts Budapest / Scala / Art Resource, NY.

8 The question of authorship underscores the artistic confluence among artists working in Venice. Of this portrait, Porcella asserted, "At first glance, one may think of Tintoretto, more than anything else, if only an analogy, but unmistakable is the chromatic range and typical brushwork of Titian."¹⁷ By contrast, Suida argued, "Neither [Jacopo] Tintoretto nor [Jacopo] Bassano can be the authors of our painting, although this signifies one of the contact points between Titian and his two great followers."¹⁸ Importantly, this artistic legacy included their sons, Domenico Tintoretto (1560–1635) and Leandro Bassano, who shared parallel trajectories. Both trained within the workshops of their fathers and were receptive to the artistic forces in Venice, where they were leading portraitists.¹⁹ A striking comparison between their styles can be seen in Domenico's *Portrait of a Man* of about 1586–1589 (fig. 7). Upon reflection, the attribution of the Clowes portrait to Leandro Bassano is not unreasonable, but it is one that bears further examination. As to the subject matter, portraits represent a broad slice of society. They were painted to capture a likeness and were often commissioned to mark an achievement. Sixteenth-century household inventories note that portraits were displayed at home in semi-public rooms. This setting fits the intimate scale and composition of the Clowes *Portrait of a Man*; the life-sized figure shown in three-quarter view communicates a thoughtful character and encourages engagement with the viewer. Although this man's identity remains unknown, this skillful rendering has ensured a lasting impression.



Figure 7: Domenico Tintoretto (Italian, 1562–1637), *Portrait of a Man*, about 1586–1589, oil on canvas, 31-7/64 × 31-7/64 in. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, Inv. I'3-3566.

Author

[Rebecca Norris](#)

Provenance

(Jakob M. Heimann (1881–1960), Milan, later New York), by 1939;²⁰

Via (Ivan N. Podgoursky, Boston) to G.H.A. Clowes, Indianapolis, in 1939;²¹

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1958–2014, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (CI0075);

Given to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2016.

Exhibitions

Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH, 1940, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, no. 67;

Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, 1965, *Italian and Spanish Paintings from the Clowes Collection*, no. 19;

Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, 2019, *Life and Legacy: Portraits from the Clowes Collection*.

References

Adolfo Venturi, "Tre ritratti inediti di Tiziano," *l'Arte*, n. s. 8 (1937): 56, fig. 3;

Hans Tietze, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, exh. cat. (Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art, 1940), cat. no. 67 (reproduced as Titian, *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman*; however, the catalogue entry indicates "follower of Titian");

Bernard Berenson, *Pitture Italiane del Rinascimento* (London: Phaidon/Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1958), 1:179 (listed as Indianapolis, Indiana. Dr. G.H.A. Clowes, *Bust of a Bearded Man with Book*);

Italian and Spanish Paintings from the Clowes Collection (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 1965), no. 19 (as Titian, *Nobleman with the Glove*);

Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, 1968);

Paola Rossi, *Jacopo Tintoretto* (Venice: Alfieri, 1974), 1: cat. no. 224 (reproduced as School of Jacopo Tintoretto, *Bust of a bearded man with book*, Indianapolis, G.H.A. Clowes Collection?).

Technical Notes and Condition

The painting is in stable condition. There is no evidence of [cupping](#) or original tack holes. The original [plain-weave](#) canvas has been significantly trimmed along all four sides and relined. A natural cracking network beginning in the ground layer is visible. Infrared reflectography reveals the figure was generally sketched using a wet, carbon-based medium. No pentimenti are discernible, but there are slight adjustments and reinforcements using paint. Surface paint was applied using brushes of varying size with some slight [impasto](#). The paint layer in the area of the face has been delicately applied. There are large areas of loss and abrasion throughout the painting.

Notes

1. Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* (Venice, 1590). I am grateful to [Linda Witkowski](#) and [David Miller](#) for their shared insights regarding the technical analysis of this painting. I am indebted to Dr. Carlo Corsato for his perceptive comments on an earlier version of this essay. During the final stages of this essay's preparation, I benefited greatly from the thoughtful expertise of Professor Paul Joannides.
2. For the purchase agreement and signed certificates of authenticity by Lionello Venturi, Giuseppi Fiocco, Antonio Morassi, Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner, Amadore Porcella, and William Suida, see File 2016.163, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. See also Adolfo Venturi, "Tre ritratti inediti di Tiziano," *L'Arte*, n. s. 8 (1937): i, 55–59, specifically 56.
3. Hans Tietze, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, exh. cat. (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 1940), cat. no. 67.
4. The earliest documented treatment dates to 1941 by Vincent Riportella in New York, but details of this treatment are unknown. See correspondence in File 2016.163, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
5. Suhr's papers are at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Titian, *Portrait of a Man*, William Suhr Papers, Series 1, Box 80, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, The J. Paul Getty Trust.
6. Suhr's recorded dates for treatment are "In 18 April 1956; Out 7 November 1956." Titian, *Portrait of a Man*, William Suhr Papers, Series 1, Box 80, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, The J. Paul Getty Trust. As to his question of authorship, he filed a second copy of his treatment report under the artist Giovan Girolamo Savoldo (active about 1480–after 1548). Giovan Girolamo Savoldo, *Portrait of a Man*, William Suhr Papers, Series 1, Box 76, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, The J. Paul Getty Trust.
7. Linda Witkowski, treatment report, CI0075 (2016.163), November 1989, Conservation Department Files, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
8. Jill Dunkerton and Marika Spring, "The Development of Painting on Coloured Surfaces in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Painting Techniques: History, Materials, and Studio Practice*, ed. Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (London: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1998), 120–130.
9. Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" unpublished manuscript, 1968, Clowes Registration Archive, IMA.
10. On Leandro Bassano, Arslan remains the leading source. Wart Arslan, *I Bassano* (Milan: Ceschina, 1960), 245–267. See also Livia Alberton Vinco da Sesso, "Leandro Bassano," *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, accessed 23 June 2017, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dal-ponte-leandro-detto-bassano> (Dizionario-Biografico).
11. On the Bassano workshops, see Carlo Corsato, "Dai Dal Ponte ai Bassano: L'eredità di Jacopo, le botteghe dei figli e l'identità artistica di Michele Pietra, 1578–1656," *Artibus et Historiae* 73 (2016): 195–248; and Carlo Corsato, "Production and Reproduction in the Workshop of Jacopo Bassano," in *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien* 12 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2010): 41–53.
12. Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'Arte*, ed. Detlev Freiherrn von Hadeln (Rome: Società Multigrafica Editrice Somu, 1965), 165–171.

13. Object information given here is taken from the respective websites of the holding institutions. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, "Leandro Bassano, *Portrait of Prospero Alpino*, 1592 (Inv. Nr. 143)," accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.staatsgalerie.de/g/sammlung/sammlung-digital/anzelansicht/sgs/werk/anzelansicht/026BF9074BCF47FBBIDD9DF53C58E3E3.html>. Royal Collection Trust, "Leandro Bassano, Portrait of Tiziano Aspetti holding a statuette, about 1592–1593 (RCIN 405988)," accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405988/portrait-of-tiziano-aspetti-holding-a-statuette>. Claudia Kryza-Gersch, "Leandro Bassano's Portrait of Tiziano Aspetti," *The Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1141 (April 1998): 265–267. At the time of Roskill's manuscript, the Aspetti portrait was known as the *Man with a Sculpture*, and it is currently located in London at Buckingham Palace. Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968). Munich, Alte Pinakothek, "Leandro Bassano, Portrait of the Merchant Leonhard Hermann, about 1595 (8091)," accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/artwork/Qr4DyWoxpE>. By way of comparison, a smaller half-length portrait is the *Portrait of Alvise Corradini*, about 1612, 22-13/16 × 16-7/8 in. (58 × 43 cm), Padua, Museo Civico. Giorgio Cini, "Ritratto di Alvise Corradini," accessed 21 March 2022, <http://arte.cini.it/Opere/405548>.
14. Workshop methods tended toward established models. Because Leandro trained with his father, one suspects that he used his native Vicentine *braccio* (69 cm). I am grateful to Carlo Corsato for this suggestion. It is also possible that the canvas was sourced in Venice, in which case the *braccio* measured 63.8 cm. Angelo Martini, *Manuale di metrologia, ossia misure, pesi e monete in uso attualmente e anticamente presso tutti i popoli* (Turin: Loescher, 1883), 817 and 823, accessed 21 March 2022, <http://www.braidense.it/dire/martini/modweb/pagina/817.htm>, <http://www.braidense.it/dire/martini/modweb/pagina/823.htm>. Canvas paintings tended toward uniform sizes to economize fabric and minimize leftover strips.
15. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, "Leandro Bassano, Portrait of an Old Man (53.477)," accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.mfab.hu/artworks/portrait-of-an-old-man-2/>.
16. Paola Rossi, *Jacopo Tintoretto* (Venice: Alfieri, 1974), I: cat. no. 224.
17. Author's translation. "...a prima vista, far pensare al Tintoretto, piu che altro, anzi soltanto, analogie di modello: ma altra ed inconfondibile e' la gamma croma e la pennellata tipica di Tiziano..." Amadore Porcella, certificate of expertise, File 2016.163, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
18. Author's translation. "Nè il Tintoretto, nè il Bassano possono essere autori del nostro dipinto benché questo significa uno dei punti di contatto fra Tiziano e quelli due suoi grandi continuatori." William Suida, certificate of expertise, File 2016.163, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
19. For a comparative discussion on the portraits of Leandro Bassano and Domenico Tintoretto, see Meri Sclosa, "Per la ritrattistica di Leandro Bassano e Domenico Tintoretto," in *Jacopo Bassano I figli, la scuola, l'eredità*, conference proceedings from the international study at Bassano del Grappa, Università degli Studi, Archivio Antico del Bò, 30 March–2 April 2011, ed. Claudia Caramanna, Federica Millozzi, and Giuliana Ericani (Bassano del Grappa: Bollettino del Museo Civico, 2010), 1:130–140 and 286–295. Also see Meri Sclosa, "Vedute possibili: Finestre paesaggistiche nella ritrattistica di Leandro Bassano e Domenico Tintoretto," *Paragone* 94 (November 2010): 33–52.
20. The back of a photograph of this painting, bearing an expertise by Lionello Venturi dated 5 June 1939 and attributing the painting to the "late period of Titian," shows a sticker with the following information: "Jakob Heimann, Milano, Via Serbelloni 13." See File C10075, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
21. Letter from Podgorsky to G.H.A. Clowes, 12 November 1939, Correspondence Files, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. Clowes promptly lent this painting to an exhibition in Toledo in 1940; see Hans Tietze, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, exh. cat. (Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art, 1940), no. 67.