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David Bowie's Tintoretto

Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom

Lorem Ipsum

Preface

Colnaghi has over the past 250 years sold many masterpieces to well-known clients on both sides of the Atlantic. One of these sales was Jacopo Tintoretto's *Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom* which in 1983 we sold to the legendary rockstar David Bowie. When Bowie died early last year, the painting was auctioned along with the rest of his collection at Sotheby's, London. In a remarkable twist of fate, the Tintoretto sold by Colnaghi was bought by a good friend and client of ours, who has now generously placed it on long-term loan at the Rubenshuis in Antwerp. We were delighted, then, when we were asked to collaborate with the Rubenshuis to produce a scholarly monograph on the work and its wider influence.

Given the profound influence of Tintoretto and Venetian art on Rubens and Van Dyck among many other Baroque artists from northern and southern Europe, the *Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom* is a work of considerable importance. It was commissioned by members of the Scuola di Santa Caterina for the Church of San Geminiano in the Piazza San Marco in Venice. This exquisite church, designed by Jacopo Sansovino, was sadly destroyed under Napoleon. The catalogue includes articles not only on the altarpiece itself but also on the church and on other painters including Rubens, Van Dyck, and Maerten de Vos whose work was influenced by Tintoretto. We are particularly pleased to include a report on the recently-completed scientific study of the altarpiece which reveals an astonishingly complete under drawing.

The final chapters of the book look at some of the other major works by Tintoretto, Titian, Rubens, and Van Dyck, sold by Colnaghi over the years, and at David Bowie as an art collector. The chapter on Bowie will surprise some readers. He was an extraordinary, chameleon-like character, and this was also true of his approach to art collecting. The final two chapters give us a vivid insight into Bowie the man, as well as Bowie the collector, as recounted by two people who actually met him. It was in one of these encounters that Bowie was first acquainted with Colnaghi, a meeting that ultimately led to his acquisition of the Venetian masterpiece that is the subject of this publication.

We are extremely grateful to a former Chairman of Colnaghi, Viscount Norwich, whose contribution to the conservation of La Serenissima is unequalled, for agreeing to write the preface. We are also fortunate to count amongst the contributors Stijn Alsteens, Ben van Beneden, Matt Collings, Christina Currie, Nicholas Hall, Jeremy Howard, Riccardo Lattuada, Maja Neerman, and Xavier Salomon. We hope you will enjoy this rich mix as well as the beautiful painting now hanging in the Rubenshuis for all the world to see.

Jorge Coll and Nicolás Cortés

Jacopo Robusti, called Jacopo Tintoretto

(Venice 1518-1594)

The Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom

Oil on canvas, 177.1 x 99.3 cm (69¾ x 39¼ in)

Provenance:

Commissioned by the Scuola di Santa Caterina for the altar of the Church of San Geminiano, Piazza di San Marco, Venice. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, after the destruction of San Geminiano in 1807. Acquired by the art dealer Angelo Barbini in 1818, in exchange for Bartolomeo Schedoni's *Deposition*. Colonel T.H. Davies, and then by descent to Lieutenant Colonel H.R. Davies, Elmley Castle, Pershore, Worcestershire. Sold at Christie's, London, 26 July 1957, lot 148 to Betts for £1100. Ernest Joresco, Chicago, by 1959. Anonymous sale, New York, Christie's, 18 January 1983, lot 169 (as Jacopo Robusti, il Tintoretto). With Colnaghi & Co. Ltd., London, from whom acquired by David Bowie. Sold at Sotheby's, London, Bowie/Collector Sale, 10 November 2016, lot 38 (as Jacopo Robusti, called il Tintoretto, and Studio), where acquired by present owner. On long-term loan to the Rubenshuis, Antwerp.

Exhibited:

London and New York, Colnaghi, *Gothic to Renaissance, European Painting 1300-1600*, 26 October - 12 November 1988 in London and 13 November 1988 - 28 January 1989 in New York, no. 19 (lent by a private collection); County Durham, Bowes Museum, March 1990 - May 1992, on loan.

Literature:

Francesco Sansovino, *Venezia città nobilissima et singolare* (Venice: 1581), p. 43; Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo*, Book IV (Florence, Giorgio Marescotti: 1584), p. 554, and subsequent editions ("in San Gimignano una tavola entrovvi Santa Caterina, e l'Angelo, che la conforta, acciò vada à disputare"); Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'arte, Ovvero Le Vite degli Illustri Pittori Veneti e Dello Stato*, vol. II (Venice: Giovan Battista Sgana, 1648), p. 33; Francesco Sansovino, *Venezia città nobilissima et singolare*, II (Venice: Stefano Curti, 1663), p. 110; Marco Boschini, *Le minee della pittura* (Venice: Francesco Nicolini, 1664), p. 101, and (Venice: 1674 ed.), p. 77 ("La Tavola à mano sinistra, entrando in Chiesa per la porta Maggiore, con Santa Catterina, e l'Angelo, che gli annuncia il martirio, e del Tintoretto"); Marco Boschini, *Il Gran Teatro delle Pitture e Prospettive di Venezia*, vol. I (Venice: Domenico Lovisa, 1720), tav. 38; Pietro Antonio Pacifico, *Cronica veneta sacra e profana, o sia Un compendio di tutte le cose più illustri ed antiche della città di Venezia* (Venice: Francesco Pitteri, 1736), p. 243, and (Venice: 1793), p. 49 (mistakenly as *Saint Helen*); Antonio Maria Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana e delle opere pubbliche de veneziani maestri*, vol. V (Venice: Giambattista Albrizzi, 1771), p. 156 ("in S. Geminiano, è cosa sua la tavola parimente di Santa Catterina, a cui da un leggiadrissimo angelo viene annunziato il martirio"); Henry Thode, "Tintoretto. Kritische Studien über des Meisters Werke," in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* XXIV, 1901, p. 442; Joshua Reynolds, *Discours sur la Peinture, Lettres au Flâneur, suivis des Voyages Pittoresques* (Paris: Éditions Librairie Renouard, H. Laurens, 1909), p. 344; Erich von der Bercken & August L. Mayer, *Jacopo Tintoretto*, vol. I (Munich: R. Piper & Co, 1923), p. 236; Mary Pitaluga, "Opere del Tintoretto Smarrite o di Malsicura Identificazione," *L'Arte* XXIX, 1926, pp. 39-40; Gert Adriani, *Anton van Dyck: Italiensches Skizzenbuch*, (Vienna: Schroll, 1940), p. 10, 6v; Sandra Moschini Marconi, *Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia. Opere d'arte dei secoli XIV e XV* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1955), p. XVI; Rodolfo Pallucchini, "Contributi alla Pittura Veneta del Cinquecento: IV. La Pala del Tintoretto per S. Geminiano," in *Arte Veneta*, XII-XIV, 1959-60, pp. 51-54; Carlo Bernari & Pierluigi De Vecchi, *L'opera completa del Tintoretto* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1970), p. 100, cat. no. 126; Rodolfo Pallucchini & Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: le opere sacre e profane* (Milan: Electa, 1982) vol. I, p. 178, cat. no. 220, reproduced in vol. II, p. 433, reproduced at pl. 286; Claudio Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto and of his Children Domenico and Marietta*, trans. Catherine & Robert Enggass (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1984), p. 46; P&D Colnaghi & Co. Ltd., *Gothic to Renaissance, European Painting 1300-1600* (London: Colnaghi, 1988), p. 102, cat. no. 19; Peter Humfrey, "Competitive Devotions: The Venetian Scuole Piccole as Donors of Altarpieces in the Years around 1500," *The Art Bulletin* LXX, no. 3, 1988, p. 416, p. 417, fig. 18, p. 421, no. 34; Daniel Arasse, "Les Annonciations de Veronese ou l'atelier de la Dévotion," in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese*, ed. Massimo Gemin (Venice: Arsenale Editrice), 1990, p. 210, p. 211, fig. 167; Michele di Monte, "La morte bella, Il martirio nella pittura di Tiziano, Tintoretto e Veronese," in *Venezia Cinquecento*, IX, 17, 1999, pp. 118-121, p. 119, fig. 20; Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, *Jacopo Tintoretto e i suoi incisori*, exh. cat., Venice, Palazzo Ducale, 12 May - 7 August 1994 (Milan: Electa, 1994), p. 69; Michael Jaffé, *The Devonshire Collection of Northern European Drawings* (Turin/London/Venice, Allemandi, 2002), vol. I, p. 76, under cat. no. 998, 6 verso b (mistakenly as lost); Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo*, ed. Lloyd H. Jr. Ellis, Book IV (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 262; Robert Echols & Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Atlas del Congresso Internazionale Jacopo Tintoretto - Proceedings of the International Symposium Jacopo Tintoretto*, Madrid 2009, ed. Miguel Falomir, p. 128, cat. no. 208 (as possibly Jacopo's design; considered to be studio execution).

Engraved: A. Zucchi, in *Il Gran Teatro delle pitture & prospettive de Venezia*, 1720, vol. II, plate 38.





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From audacious sketch to polished painting:
Tintoretto's working process revealed

Christina Currie

Although many of Jacopo Tintoretto's more well-known paintings have been investigated by scientific imagery and analysis, the altarpiece with the *Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom* has never received the same attention. The recent campaign at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage in Brussels (KIK-IRPA), which documented the painting with infrared reflectography and X-radiography, uncovered not only the steps in the working process, but also brought to light an astonishingly fresh, virtuoso underdrawing (figs. 1a & 1b).¹

The work is painted on a twill-weave canvas, probably linen, with two weft threads for every warp. Although the painting measures 177.1 cm by 99.3 cm, there are no seams, which means that the support is made up of a single piece of cloth. Examination with the binocular microscope reveals that the support was primed with a white or light ochre-coloured ground, probably gesso.



Fig. 1a & 1b.
Tintoretto, *Angel
foretelling Saint Catherine
of Alexandria of her
martyrdom*, a. infrared
reflectography (IRR),
b. normal light

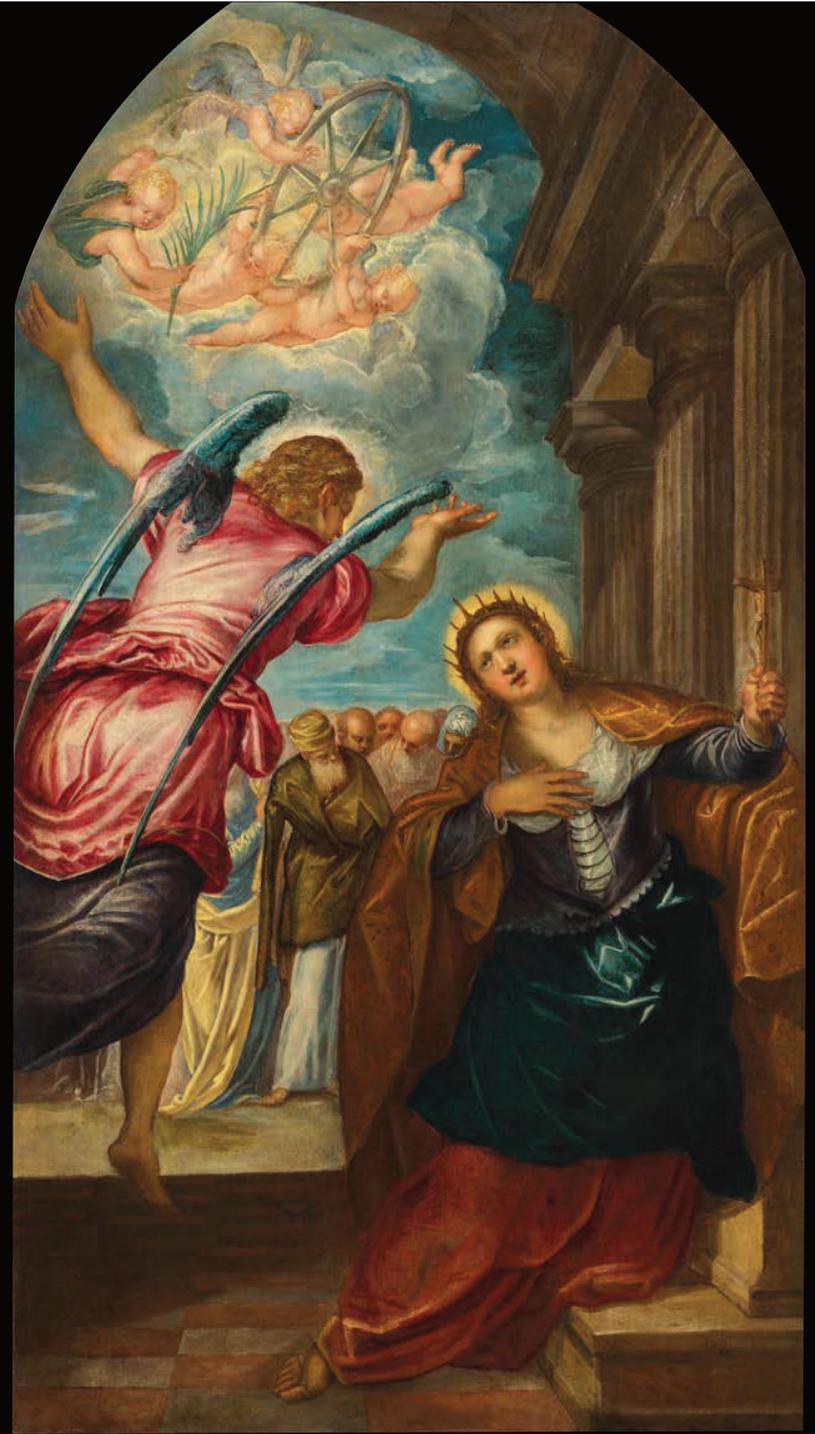




Fig. 2a. IRR, annotated with grid lines, perspective lines and incised markings (in red).

The very first step taken by the artist appears to have been the application of a series of grid lines, certain of which are seen in the infrared image (fig 2a). This may well have been a partial grid for the floor and figural area. The presence of such markings presupposes that the design was transferred by eye from a preliminary, squared-up drawing or drawings of details. The grid lines are in a dry, black medium, probably black chalk. The artist then used the same drawing material to roughly sketch in the composition. Wiry, rapidly applied contour lines can be seen in the figures, for example, in Saint Catherine, where they wrap around the bodice and breasts, and in the angel, where they encircle the buttocks. This first drawing stage is most clearly visible where the underdrawn motifs diverge from the final paint layer, for example in the lower left, where several



Fig. 2b. IRR, showing former positions of motifs in first phase of underdrawing.

positions for the angel's leg have been tried out, in early outlines for St Catherine's drapery, and in the lower sky, where there are sketchy outlines of abandoned torsos and heads, presumably the former position for the philosophers (fig. 2b). Saint Catherine's left hand clasping the crucifix can also be made out to the left of its final position.

The artist then took a broad, soft brush loaded with dilute black paint and swiftly laid in a series of perspective lines (see fig. 2a). He reinforced the steps in the lower right with the same brush using similarly bold strokes. It is not possible to make out any underdrawing in the classical colonnade in the upper right due to the presence of grey paint, although it is likely that the artist also reaffirmed this motif.



Fig. 3. Detail, angel, IRR.

The next phase is likely to have been carried out immediately afterwards, as the artist used the same type of brush and paint to establish the naked forms of St Catherine and the Angel (figs. 3 & 4). These broad, virtuoso outlines describe supremely muscular human bodies, which were later concealed beneath modest clothing. In the manner of a sculptor, the artist also reinforced the twisting pose of the angel with a single bold

stroke along the backbone and down through the buttocks. He then dressed the figures using the same type of wide sweeping brushwork. This distinctive style of underdrawing for figures has also been discovered in other paintings by Tintoretto, such as the princess in the painting *Saint George and the Dragon*, ca. 1555 (London, National Gallery, inv. NG16) (fig. 5 and see fig xx).²



Fig. 4. Detail, Saint Catherine, TRR.



Fig. 5. Detail, princess in Tintoretto's *Saint George and the Dragon*, ca. 1555, National Gallery, London.



Fig. 6. X-radiograph, showing painted forms modified or dropped in the final paint layer.

His underdrawing firmly established, the artist proceeded to apply the background, roughly painting in the clouds and turning around the forms with lead-white based paint. But we can see that he was not content to simply follow his underdrawing. The composition continued to evolve, as the X-ray image makes clear (fig. 6) He initially painted a colonnade that appears to include a third column. This continues down in sharp perspective to the centre of the composition, culminating in a backdrop of architectural stonework that is now entirely concealed behind the blue sky and group of philosophers. There are also additional underpainted forms in the upper sky area that may relate to former positions for the spiked wheel and clouds.

The underdrawing of the figures of the philosophers in the centre background is more precise than that of the sketchy first stage (figs. 7 a, b & c). This third phase of drawing, which appears to have been carried on top of the painted architectural backdrop, is executed in a dry, black medium such as black chalk. The functional, somewhat angular, abbreviated drawing lines are quite different in appearance to the sensuous flowing brushwork of the second phase. The figure outlines have been closely followed in the subsequent paint layer. It may also have been during this stage of development that the artist incised two short converging lines leading to a vanishing point, somewhat higher up than the perspective lines of the fluid underdrawing stage. The incised line to the right is marked with a pinhole at the lower end, suggesting perhaps the use of dividers.

Much of the paint layer has been applied using the time-honoured system of reserves, as can be seen from the X-ray image where there are often small gaps between forms. This would have prevented the formation of premature drying cracks and ensured that the colours retained their luminosity. Nonetheless, where the artist carried out adjustments or additions the paint layer is considerably thicker, for example in the sky, where most of the putti have been painted directly on top of the clouds. One of the more prominent additions during painting is the stone cornice above the colonnade. In this area, the arch has also been shifted left slightly.

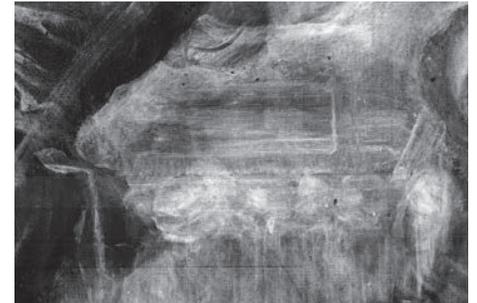


Fig. 7a, 7b & 7c. Detail, philosophers, a. IRR, b. X-radiograph, c. normal light



Fig. 8a. Detail, angel, in Tintoretto's *Appearance of the Cross to Saint Peter*, ca. 1556, Venice, Church of the Madonna dell'Orto.



Fig. 8b. Detail, angel, X-radiograph.



Fig. 8c. Detail, angel, normal light.

The angel's wings, although quite significant in size, are not reserved in the paint layer of the sky or the dress and the dark pinkish paint of the latter can be glimpsed through them. It is unlikely that the wings were an afterthought, however, as unreserved angel wings are seen in another painting by Tintoretto, *The Appearance of the Cross to Saint Peter* (Venice, Church of the Madonna dell'Orto, ca. 1556) figs. 8 a, b & c, and see fig. xx.)

The angel's head has also been rethought, as it was originally placed further to the right and at a different angle (figs. 9a, b & c). In addition, the artist added the drape over the angel's right arm and moved the profile of the left arm down slightly. In the figure of Saint Catherine, her proper right elbow is no longer visible and where she shields her right breast with her hand, there was originally more of the dress fabric in evidence. The folds in the hem of her red robe have also been altered during painting to smooth over a clumsy transition with the stonework on which she appears to be kneeling,

Catherine's blue skirt would appear to be based on azurite, given its hue and its dark appearance in the infrared photograph (fig. 10).

This first glimpse of Tintoretto's *Angel foretelling Saint Catherine of Alexandria of her martyrdom* through the eyes of scientific imagery has brought to light the hidden stages in its development from a rough sketch guided by gridlines through numerous modifications of composition to the polished final painting. The rediscovered brush underdrawing also serves to anchor the painting within Tintoretto's oeuvre, as described by Riccardo Lattuada in the present volume. Further research and analysis will be conducted at the KIK-IRPA, including cross-sectional analysis to identify the layer structure and pigments and X-ray fluorescence scanning to help decipher Tintoretto's early ideas in the upper sky and better visualize the suppressed architectural stonework. This research will be submitted for publication in the *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage*, Brussels, in 2018.



Fig. 9a. Detail, angel, IRR, 9b. X-radiograph, 9c. normal light, with former position of head marked in white.



Fig. 10. Infrared photograph.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank my colleagues Sophie De Potter for the infrared reflectography and diagrams, Catherine Fondaire for X-radiography and Jean-Luc Elias for photography. The infrared reflectogram was made by Sophie De Potter using a Lion Systems infrared camera with an InGaAs captor (900-1700 nm), 512 x 640 focal plane array, 35 mm SWIR lens and 1.1-1.7 μ narrow band width filter. X-radiography was carried out by Catherine Fondaire using GE Structurix D4 film and the film scanned with an Array corporation Laser Film Digitizer 2905HD and a Hasselblad H6D-100C. The effect of the stretcher bars was digitally reduced using Adobe Photoshop.
- 2 Jill Dunkerton, "Tintoretto's Underdrawing for *Saint George and the Dragon*", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 28 (2007), 26-35.