



Titian's Women

Professor Rona Goffen

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Richly illustrated with paintings by Titian, this book examines the artist's enduring fascination with the theme of the beautiful woman. Well-known Renaissance scholar Rona Goffen offers a new interpretation of Titian's secular paintings of women, setting them in the context of life in sixteenth-century Venice. Without denying the erotic appeal of Titian's women, Goffen argues that this narrow view diminishes both the artist's achievement and an appreciation of his art and empathy for women. To characterize Titian's paintings of women as pornographic, as many have, is to confuse the modern response with the historical realities of Venetian Renaissance culture, including beliefs about sex and sexuality. Goffen shows how female images relate to Titian's professional self-image and to his concern with larger themes: matrimonial images are linked to the means by which women attained and relinquished visibility in Italian Renaissance society, devotional images introduce the paradox of subject matter with a sexual component that both stimulates and inhibits, and mythological images are connected to the artist's use of the female body to demonstrate "divine" craftsmanship. Titian portrays his female subjects as fully conceived individuals whose psychological attributes are as important as their bodily charms. Through his paintings Titian invites the male beholder to respond to female emotions, Goffen contends (male, because in the act of viewing such erotic images, the viewer becomes male). And more than this, Titian's women imply his own absorption of female identity as a figure of artistic creativity.

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