



Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens

Luba Freedman

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After classical antiquity, the Italian Renaissance raised the portrait, whether literary or pictorial, to the status of an important art form. Among sixteenth-century Renaissance painters, Titian made his reputation, and much of his living, by portraiture. Titian's portraits were promoted by his friend, Pietro Aretino, an eminent poet and critic, who addressed his letters and sonnets to the same personages whom Titian portrayed. In many of these letters (which often included sonnets), Aretino described both an individual patron and Titian's portrait of that patron, thus stimulating the reciprocal relation between a verbal and pictorial portrait. By investigating this unprecedented historical phenomenon, Luba Freedman elucidates the meaning conveyed by the portrait as an artistic form in Renaissance Italy.

Fusing iconographical analysis of the most famous Titian portraits with rhetorical analysis of Aretino's literary legacy as compared to contemporary reactions, Freedman demonstrates that it is due to Titian's many portraits and to Aretino's repeated simultaneous writings about them that the portrait ceased being primarily a social-historical document, preserving the sitter's likeness for posterity. It gradually became, as it is today, a work of art, the artist's invention, which gives its viewer an aesthetic pleasure.

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