

# Veronese

DELPHI CLASSICS

# *Masters of Art*

## **Paolo Veronese**

(1528-1588)



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# PAVLVS VERONENSIS

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**Paolo Veronese**



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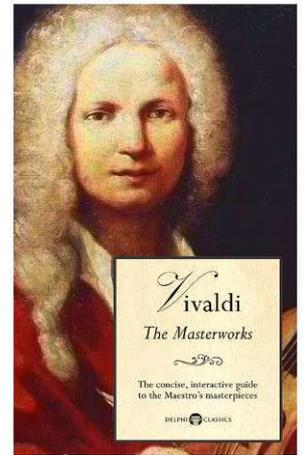
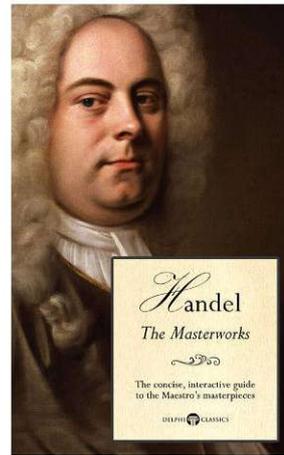
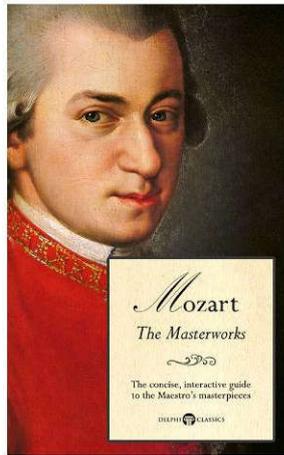
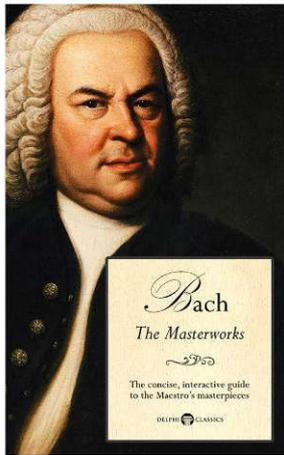
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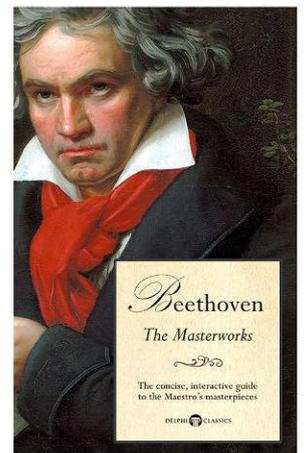
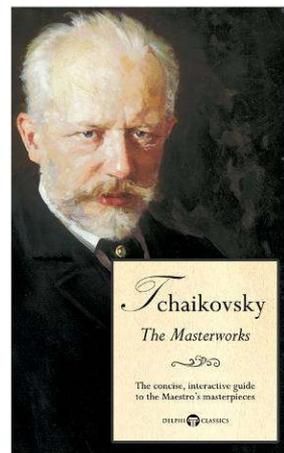
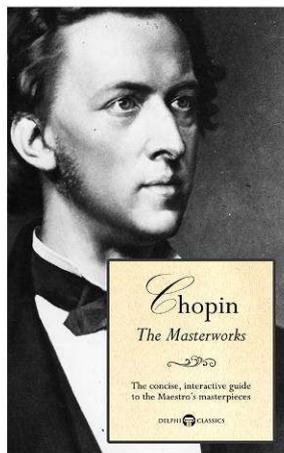
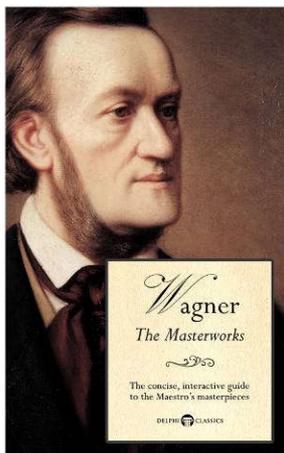
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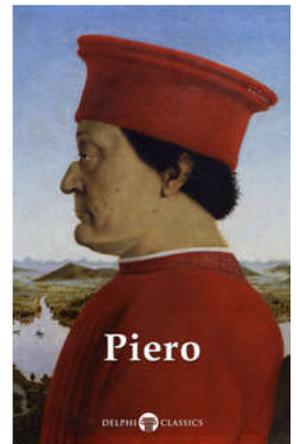
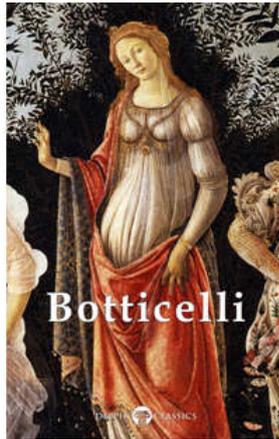
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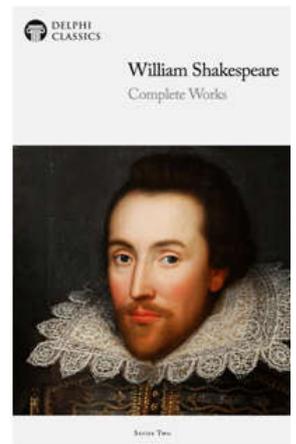
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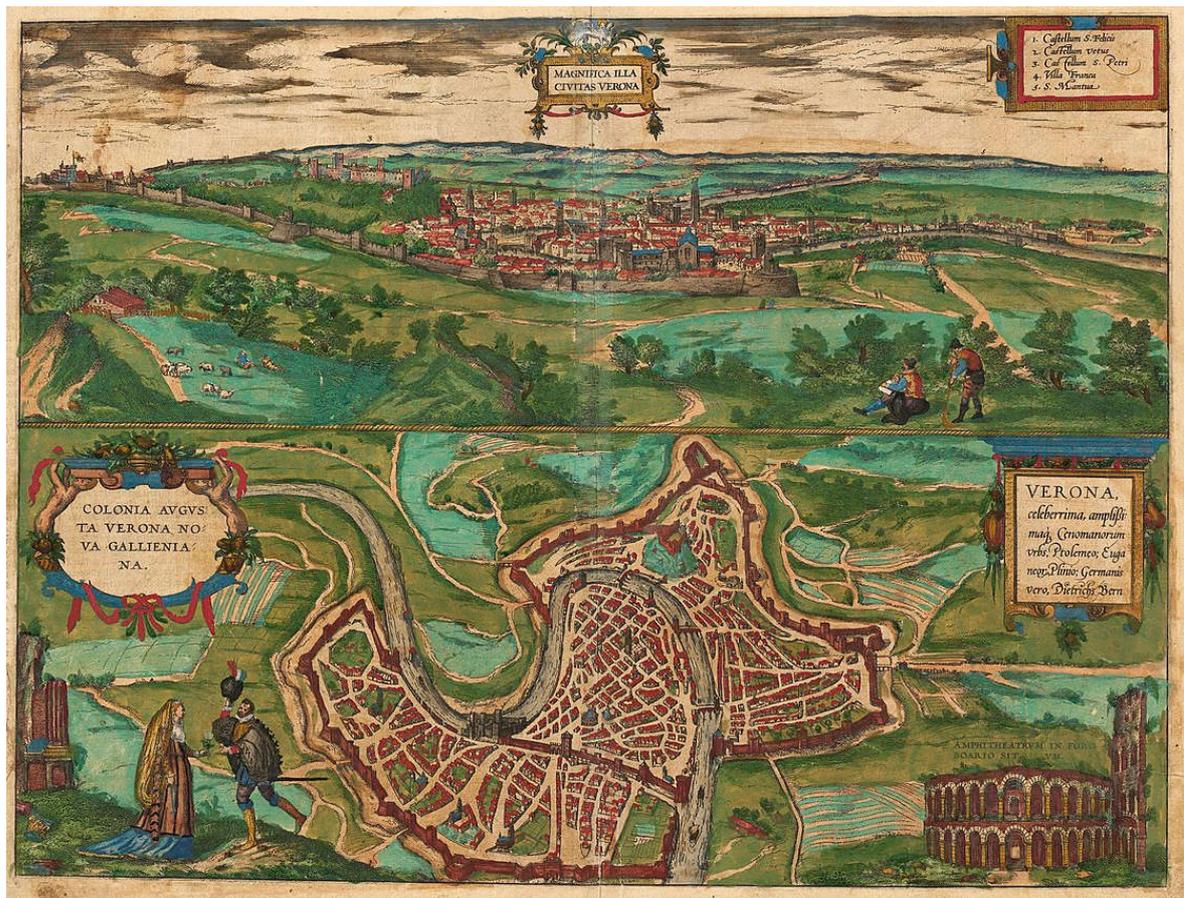


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## The Highlights



*Verona, Veneto, Italy — Paolo Veronese's birthplace*



Verona by Frans Hogenberg, 1582

## The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Veronese's most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

## Conversion of Mary Magdalene (1547)



One of the principal figures of the sixteenth century Venetian school, Paolo Veronese was born in 1528 in the San Paolo di Campo Martio district of Verona. He was the son of a stonemason named Gabriele di Piero and his wife Caterina. Of humble status, he was born without a surname and so became later known as ‘Veronese’ after his birthplace. It appears that he learnt aspects of his father’s work early, as there are reports of surviving clay models, which had been created under supervision. These models could be used to fashion complicated figural compositions — a method also used by Tintoretto while working in Venice.

The talented young artist is referenced for the first time in Verona’s records at the age of 14. In 1541 he had been apprenticed to the successful local painter Antonio Badile (1518-1560), for whom he served as an assistant in his household. His early influences would no doubt have been the great Venetian master Titian (1488-1576) and the traditions of Venice, Verona and Brescia. From Badile he absorbed the theoretical and practical conventions of the painter’s craft and he likely secured his first public commission on his master’s recommendation. It was a pendant to Badile’s *Raising of Lazarus* (1546), to be placed in the chapel of San Bernardino in Verona, which had been donated by the ancestors of Don Massimiliano Avanzi. Through Badile’s teaching, the young Veronese derived a passion for compositions in which people and architecture were fully integrated — an important facet of his later masterpieces.

The biographer Giorgio Vasari tells us that Veronese received training in Giovanni Caroto’s workshop, though the dates remain uncertain. This is likely true as Vasari personally met Veronese in 1538, while he was making sketches of classical buildings in Rome, and their friendship continued in later years. The formal influence of Caroto must have been profound, as he was the author of an important 1540 treatise *De origine et amplitudine civitatis Veronae*. This work contributed to the development of the Veronese school of painting, with numerous drawings, plans, views and architectural records of classical buildings. Art historians now believe that it was Caroto that first introduced Veronese, while serving his apprenticeship to Badile, to a seminal collection of classical architecture and works of art that belonged to Verona. The priceless classical monuments of Verona would foster in the aspiring artist a lifetime enthusiasm for architectural themes.

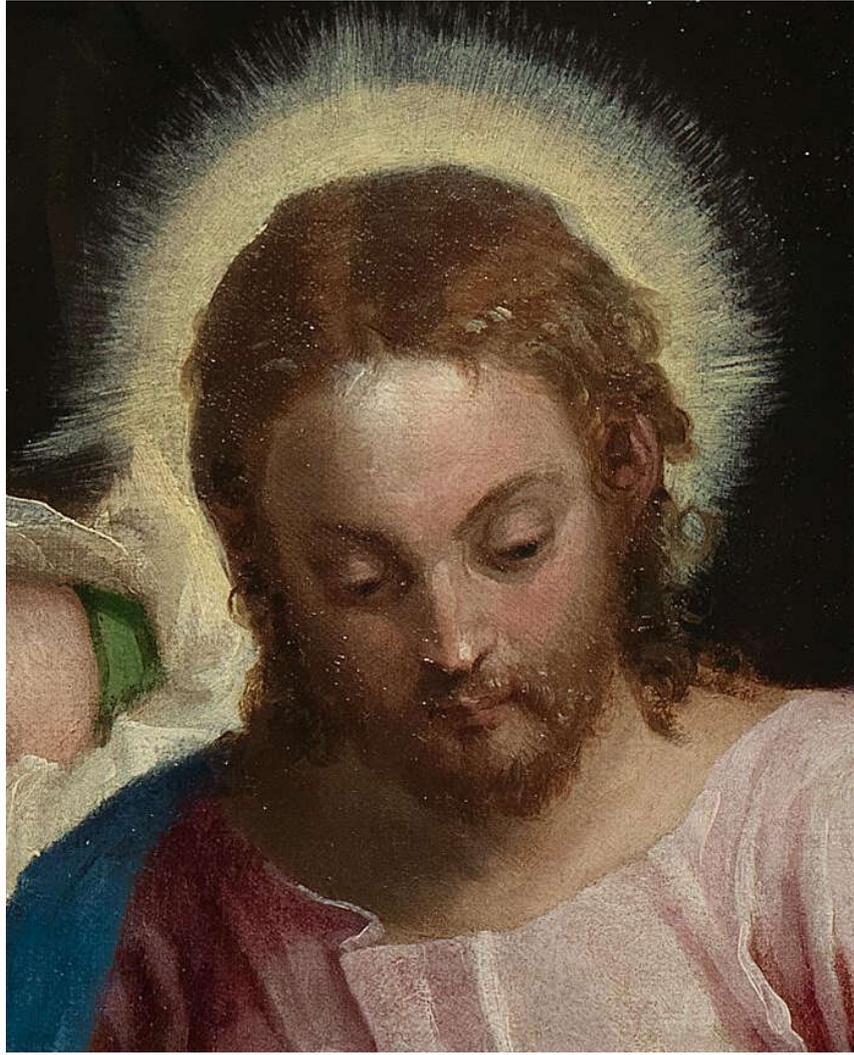
During this formative period of his career, he completed work on what is generally regarded his first masterpiece, *Conversion of Mary Magdalene*, held today in the London National Gallery. The lighting from the right indicates that it was designed for a specific location, possibly the side wall of a chapel. Completed for an unknown patron when Veronese was just eighteen years old, it presents a narrow and compact stage, comprising no less than fourteen figures. According to the stylistic teachings of Leon Battista Alberti, these figures are depicted in the most limited space. Alberti’s 1547 treatise on painting *Dellapittura* would achieve a lasting importance for the pictorial arts. It stipulated that paintings of religious and historical subjects should employ variety in their depictions, with the inclusion of men, women, children, animals and various architectures. Alberti also stressed how these figures should be alternately standing, sitting or kneeling, while expressing a range of emotions.

Veronese's strict adherence to this doctrine in *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* has helped historians to date the canvas to the same year as the treatise's publication, so closely does he seem to follow the theorist's requirements. The figures are presented in a differentiated range of poses and emotional states, while their clothing, palette tones and postures all reveal an effort to be different from each other.

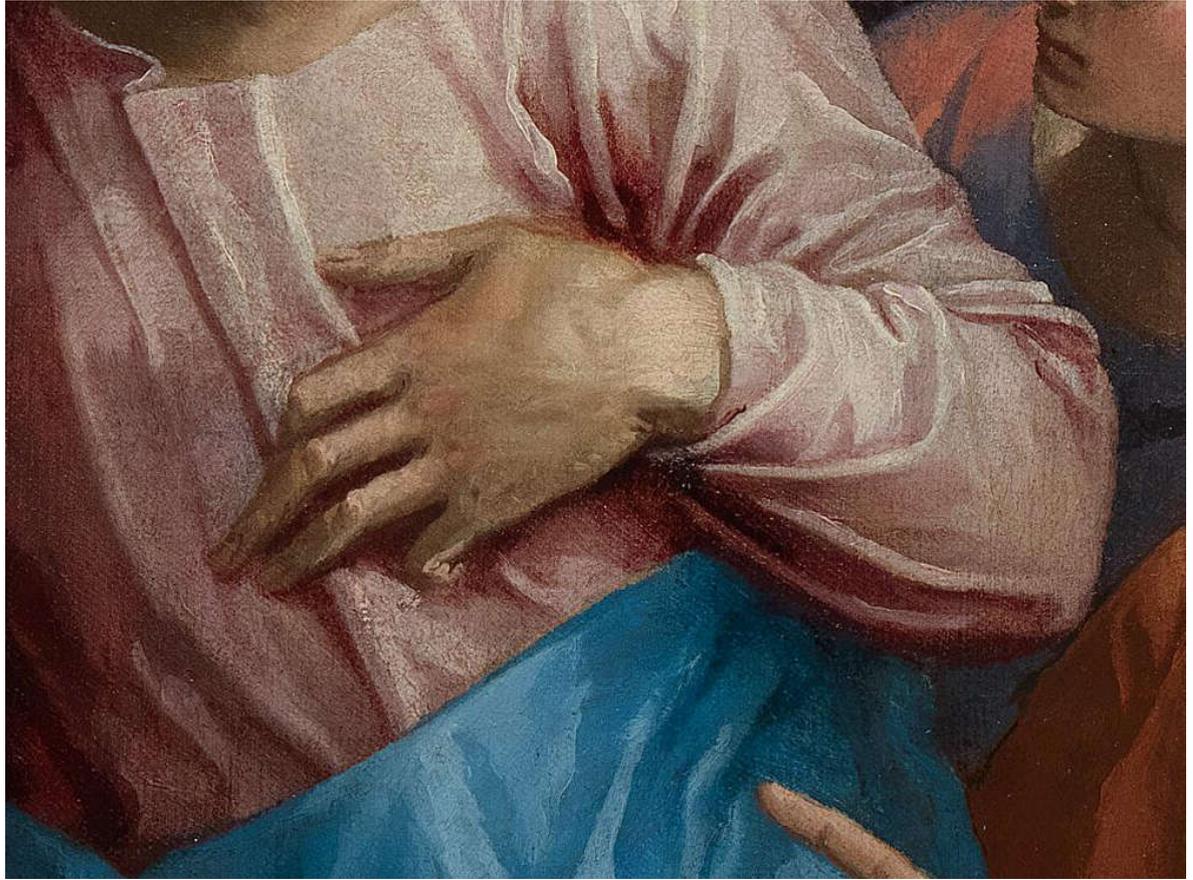
The subject of the painting is the conversion of Mary Magdalene, as described in Pietro Aretino's 1535 book *L'umanità di Cristo* — a version of the Gospels that was widely distributed and read in Northern Italy at the time. The legend tells that Martha takes her sister Mary Magdalene to the Temple to hear Christ preach, as she is concerned about her spiritual health. There, the teachings of Jesus inspire her to convert to a pious life. In the painting, she is portrayed in a low-cut dress inappropriate for the religious building, symbolising her sinful life. On her neck, her necklace is slipping off, connoting her turning away from a worldly life towards one of spiritual devotion. Veronese's fine workmanship in depicting the gold and jewels with strokes and dots of thick resplendent paint, juxtaposed to Mary's bare flesh, seems to contradict Mary's decision, as the composition itself comes across as a luxurious object. The painter tempts the viewer to enjoy the sensuous pleasures that the story had intended to teach us to reject.

The composition reveals Veronese's sophisticated approach to narrative art, demonstrating his abilities as a theatrical painter, utilising both broad and subtle gestures, including the expressive play of hands that conveys the emotional responses of the figures. The figures on the right are positioned to suggest an inward turning curve, which is counterbalanced on the left by an outward curve of the classical architecture, giving the composition — a disparate one at best — an outward sense of balance. The architecture of the courtyard is based on Sanmicheli's great curving choir screen for Verona Cathedral, which he had completed about fourteen years before. Another important compositional effect is how the heads of the crowded figures form diagonal lines, directing our gaze to Mary, who is anchored in the bottom centre of the V-shape by two columns. Her attention — as well as the viewer's — is channelled to Christ by the pointing hand of Martha. His elegant, slightly leaning posture is accentuated by the curving movement of the naked child who disappears behind the robes of the woman on the left. Veronese's lack of experience can be detected in several awkward features. Most noticeable is how the child's bare bottom is cheekily set off against the bright exterior by the silhouetted head of a dog

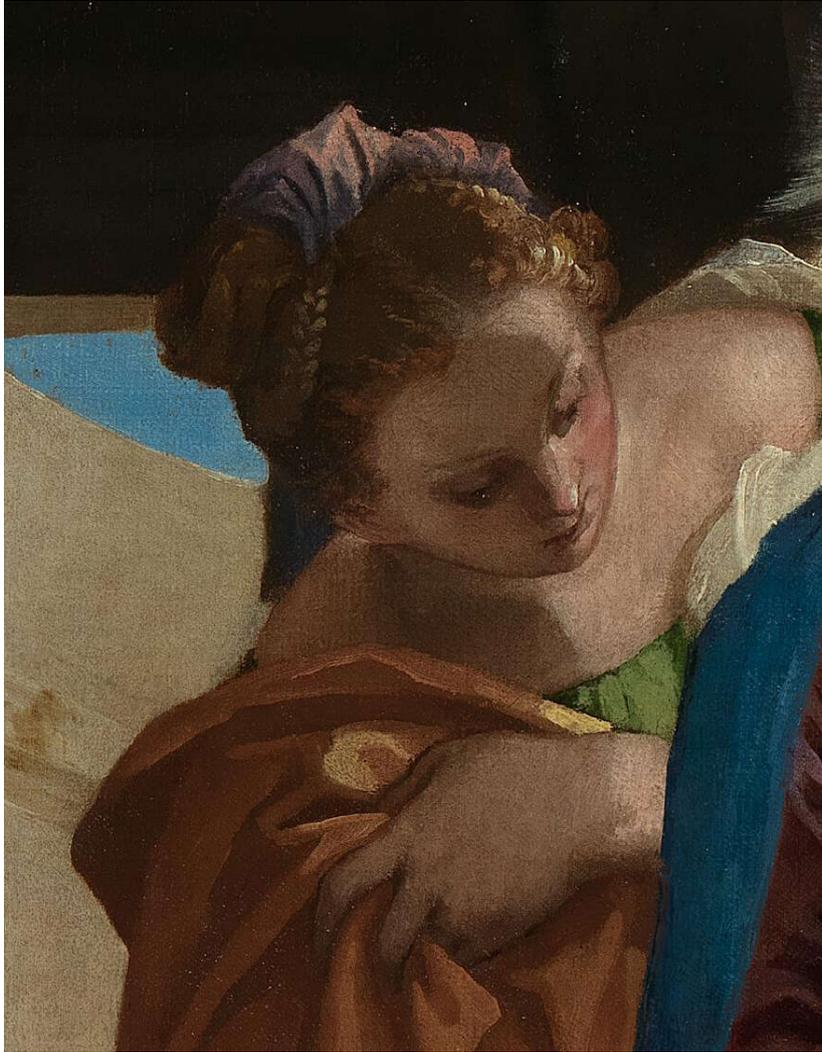




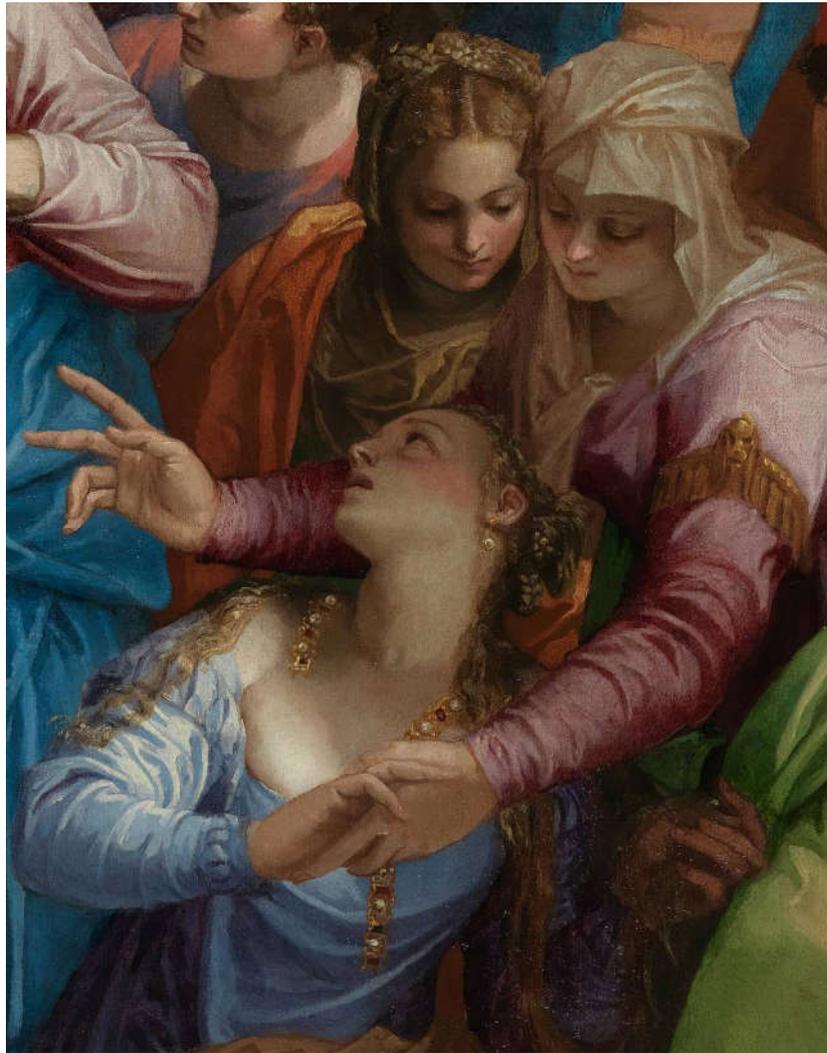
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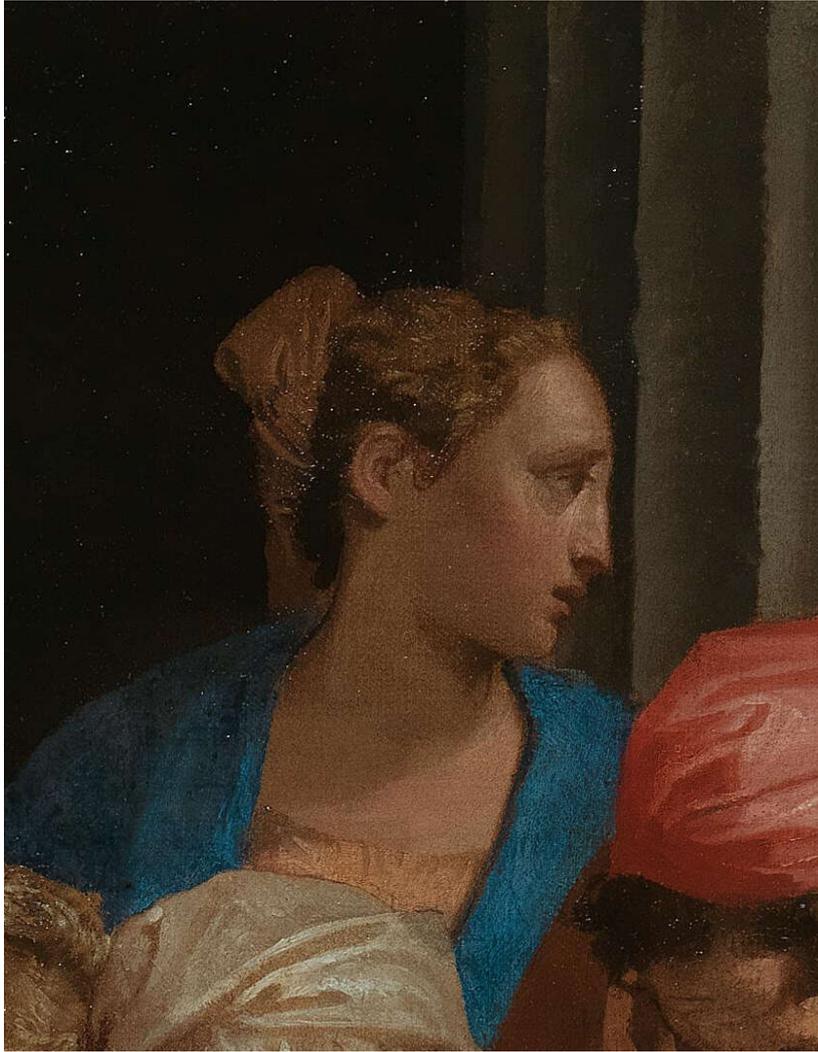
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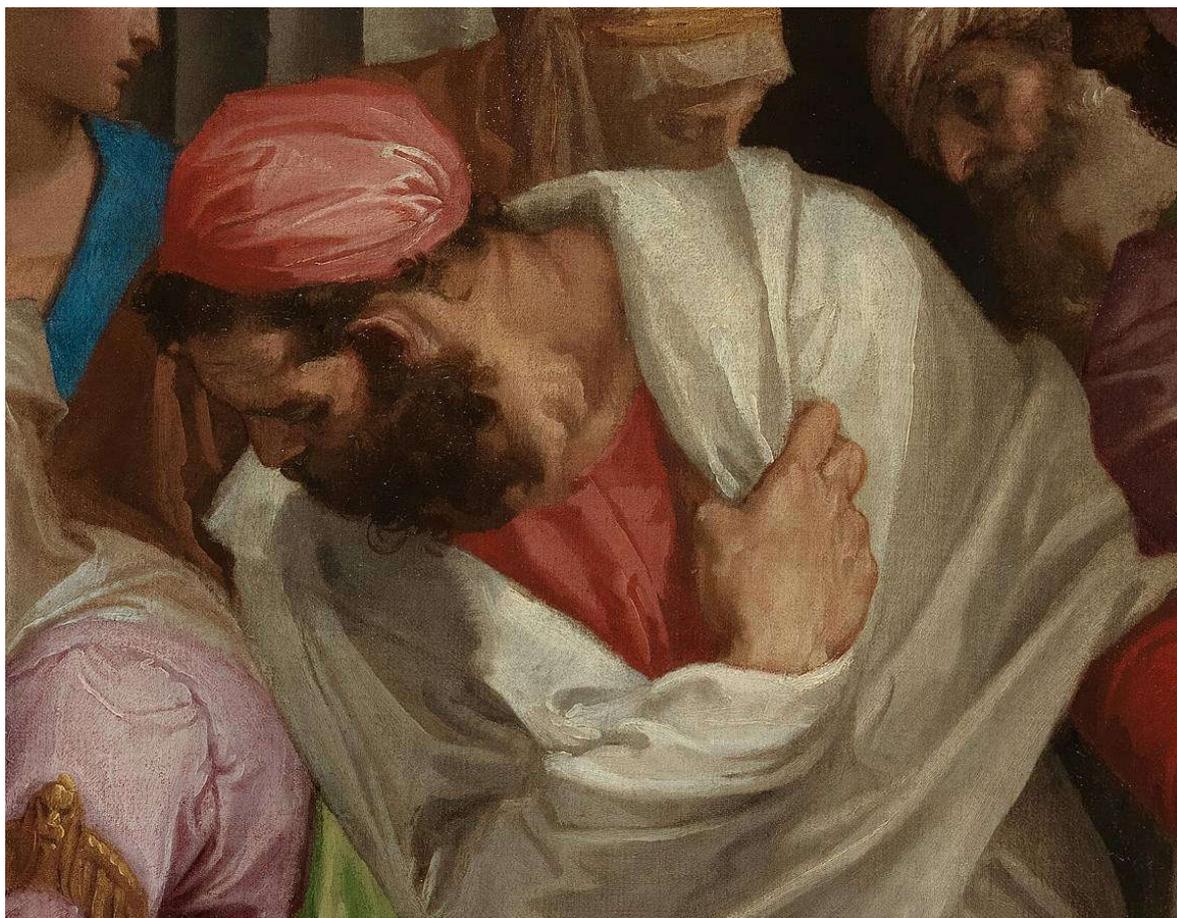
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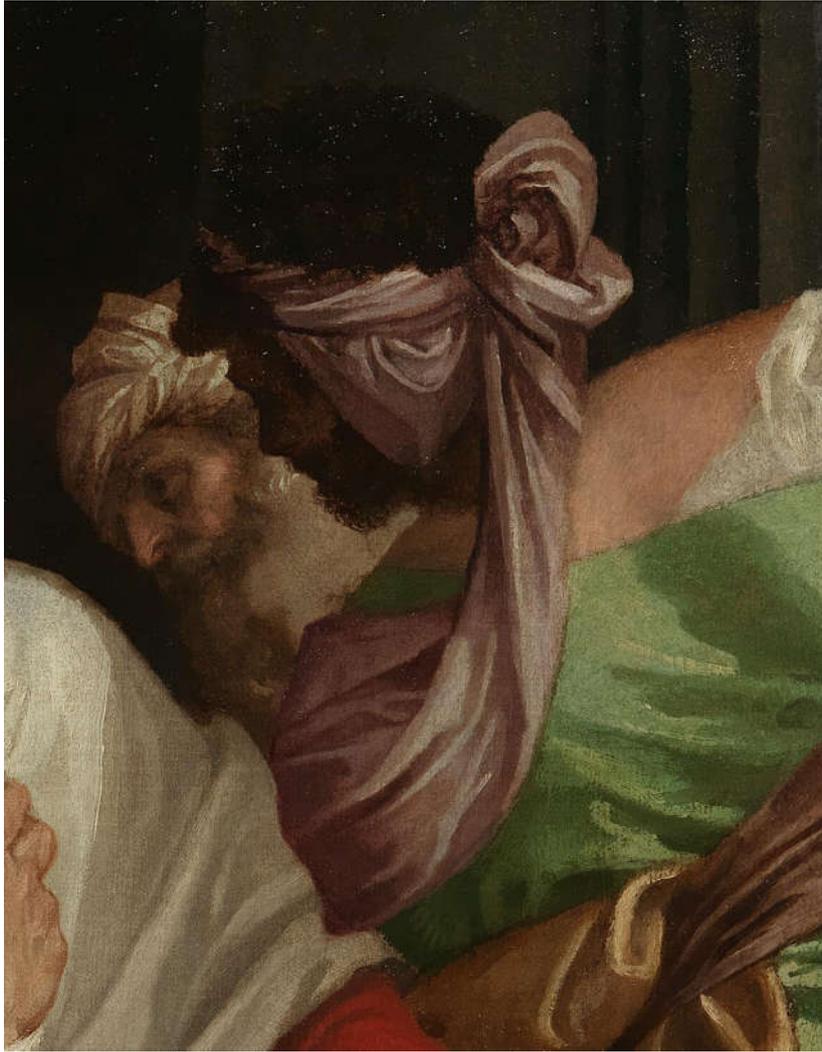
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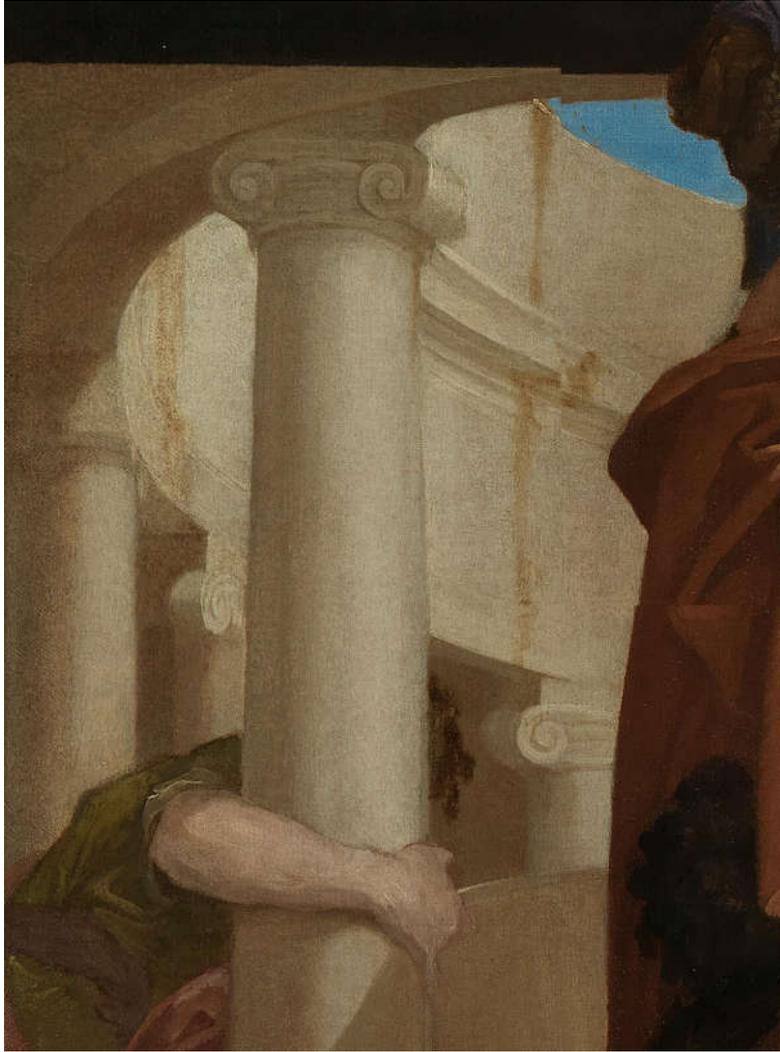
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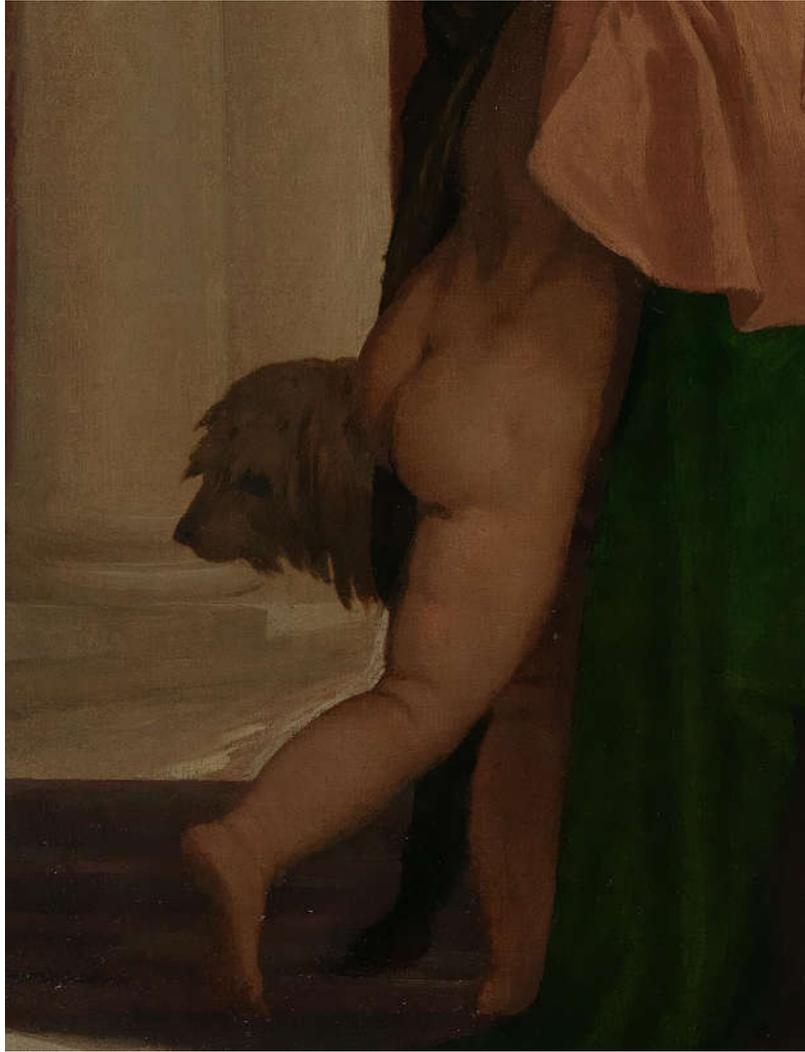
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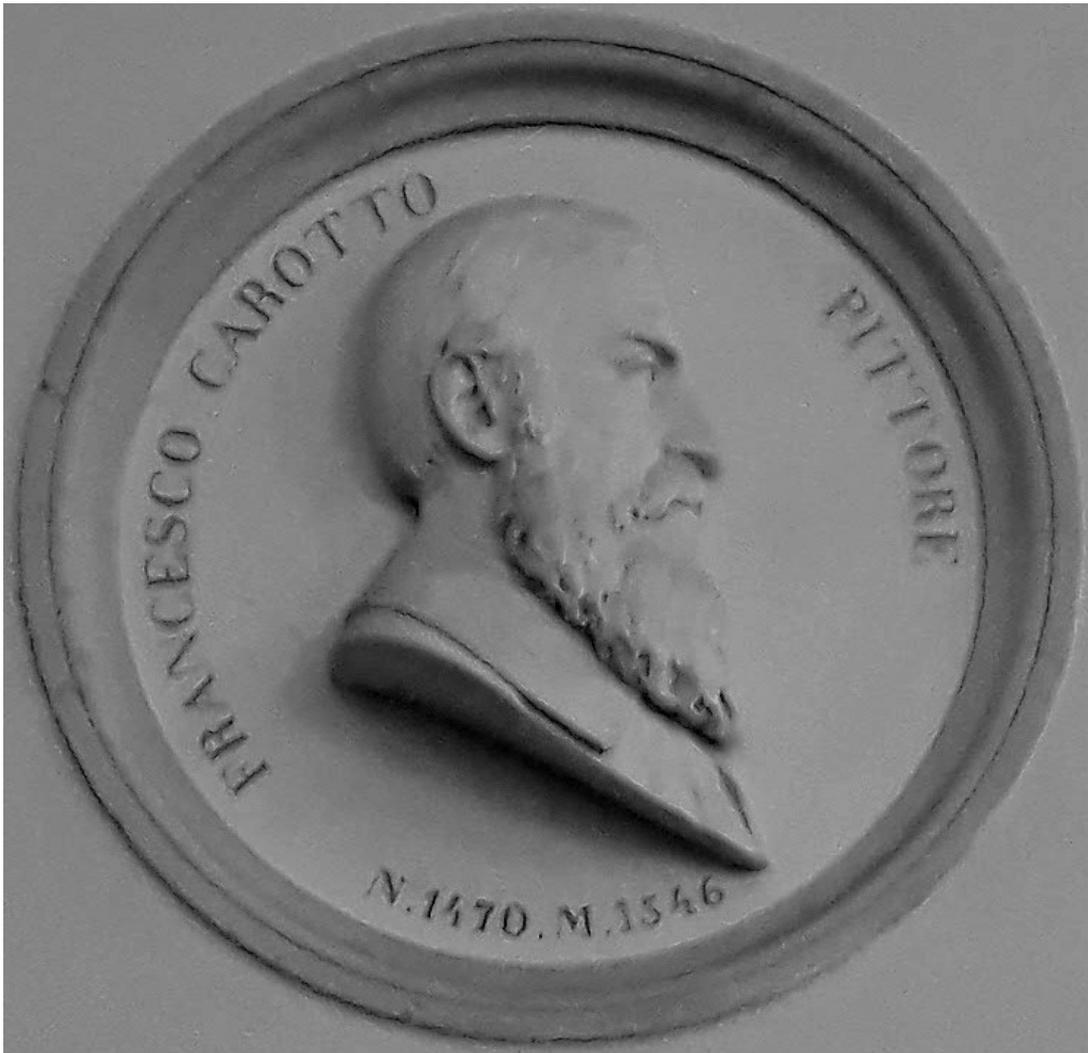
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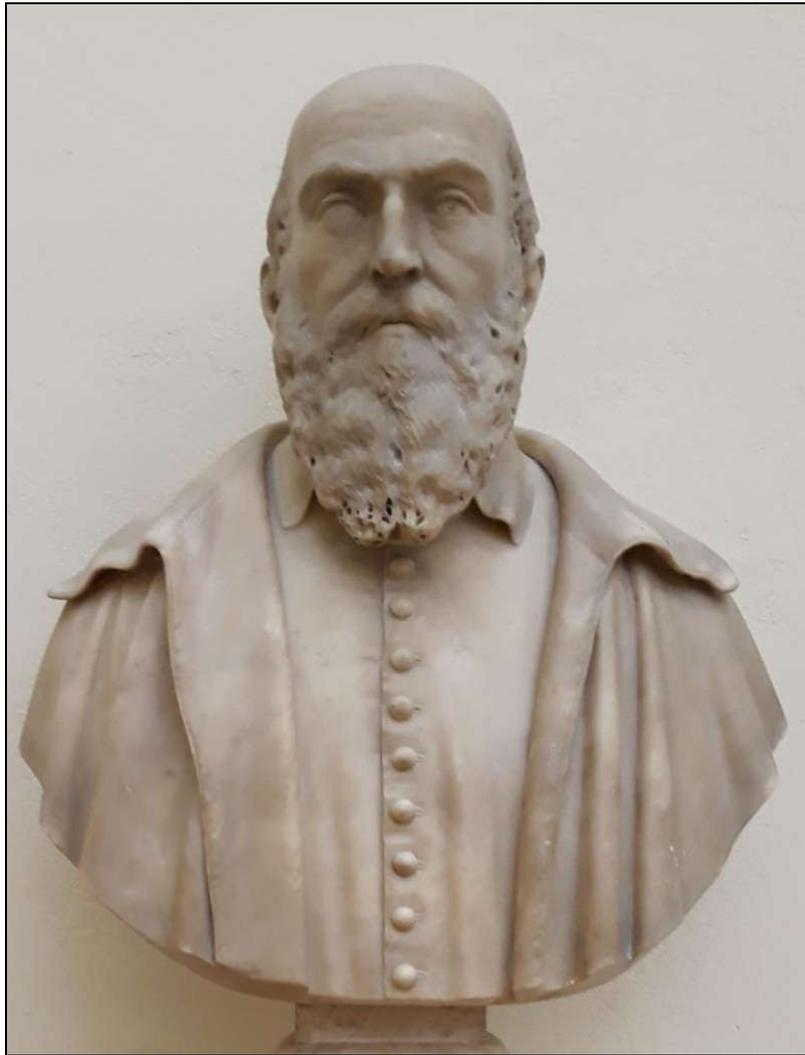
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*Nineteenth-century effigy depicting Giovan Francesco Caroto (1480-1555), a master painter of Verona, now credited with having inspired the young Veronese's love of classical architecture.*



*Veronese's important early friend and father-like figure, Michele Sanmicheli, as depicted on a bust displayed at the Verona Public Library*



*Michele Sanmicheli's celebrated curved choir screen in Verona Cathedral, c. 1534*

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