

7. 35 minutes in the Prado

Two weeks later, a bigger group, the same hotel—
you skip out early of a session of fading relevance—
in your room ensure no emails are about
to blow up into something you would be responsible for—
work out a route, then go—
amongst talk of celebrating success, well find your way,
make work work for you, take advantage
of the free evening admission—
three metros, Cuzco to Banco de España—
a trot down a damp boulevard,
up steps, through security and into grand halls—
breathe a little.

Take a right into rooms you didn't visit last time,
your first time, when you stayed on in Madrid
for a few days of leisure—
Venetian stuff: Veronese, Tintoretto, Titian.
As worthy of attention as most other things
in the time you allot yourself, you suppose.
A sequence of rooms: religious groups, contemporary portraits,
“sensuality” at the end of the enfilade
but before that, religious individuals:
Christs carrying crosses, a Virgin *dolorosa*
and Salome. Biblical but not devotional.
Though modestly dressed, her pale skin glows,
white arms uplifted to hold a platter of
dead head up into shadow, almost out of the frame.
She gazes back at you over her shoulder.
Direct, but not brazen. “Sexy”, you suppose, would be anachronistic,
but what do you know about
sixteenth century Venetian concepts of attraction?
Next to nothing. Then reading the caption you discover that
the model has a name, Lavinia Vecellio, and a relation. She is
Titian's daughter.
Your twenty-first century self does not know how to deal with the conjunction
of a blood relationship and this character whose dances
could bend the will of man. What is Salome, after all? Evil?
Or innocent, acting under mother's instruction?
We are raised to obedience of our parents.
Or if pure temptation, youth abysmal, then what kind of paternity
casts a daughter in this role?
Perplexing, compelling, you cannot accommodate
the sensuality you see in this image

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with the information you read in the text.

Then unbreathе, movе—
a turning glance of the sacred El Grecos,
a series of vertical shrieks—
down the stairs—
Salome not for sale as a postcard—
a view of Fra Angelico's Annunciation,
entirely something else, its treatment,
its hope-in-womb—
a last look at Titian's daughter.
Why this today?—
up boulevard, back on metro—
a little late for dinner, fade in among the delegates