

Exchanging glances

The creative process behind a composition by Bernardino Licinio
from the collection of Caroline Murat



Bernardino Licinio (Venice, ca. 1490 – ca. 1550), *Young Lady and her Suitor*,
oil on wood panel, 32 x 45 in (81,3 x 114,3 cm).



Infrared reflectogram, with the outlines of the underlying composition in red.

X-radiography has brought to light exciting evidence of the creation of this canvas. Our conservator Cinzia Pasquali carried out infra-red reflectography, a procedure allowing one to study the pigment underlying the visible paint surface. When infra-red rays penetrate the painting, the various layers become transparent, and during cleaning one can thus have an essential guide to the different coats of paint and repainting, as well as a better general understanding of the whole work, from initial sketch to finished picture.

At first, the pair of lovers faced one another in a different way, with the young woman in profile and her elegant suitor on a slightly lower level. The background, too, appears to have been completely different: one can intuit the presence of buildings behind the woman, and ample

brushstrokes behind the man suggest drapery. The painter thus radically altered his carefully-studied composition, ultimately presenting his heroine head-on and inhabiting a private space, marked off by crimson-coloured drapery. Her arm rests on a piece of architecture, perhaps part of a loggia, while her lover remains in a completely open space that looks out onto a landscape. On the left, the composition is filled by architecture and a sculptural relief, and the light tones of the stonework and the reds of the marble contrast with the blue sky at right.

No doubt it was in order to adapt to the iconography of such subjects – codified in Venice in the sixteenth century, and becoming widespread through Titian and Palma Vecchio – that in the end the artist opted for a scene that probably conformed better to the expectations of his patron.
