

# Out of Hours Art

## DAZZLING BRILLIANCE

Veronese:

**Magnificence in Renaissance Venice**

*National Gallery, London, ended June 2014*

Veronese (1528–1588) came to maturity as Elizabeth I ascended the English throne, and yet the contrast between his accomplishments and the antiquated state-approved images of that marvellous woman could hardly be greater. The central thesis of the recent series of TV programmes about the English Renaissance is, I regret to say because I admire James Fox, blown out of the water by this show. For sheer, dazzling brilliance no one to compare with Veronese appeared in the British Isles until

the age of Raeburn and Lawrence.

The exhibition was built round the very fine Veronese holdings of the National Gallery itself, and the pictures are too large in many cases to be confined to the more usual exhibition space in the Sainsbury Wing. Parts of the permanent collection have been moved to accommodate some enormous works of art. Sadly, some of the very biggest of Veronese's works — such as the *Feast in the House of Levi* in the Accademia in Venice — are too large to be moved, and shifting the immense *The Family of Darius before Alexander* in the National Collection must itself have been quite a feat. However, the impact is astonishing: for composition, use of colour and sheer bravura, notably in the

depiction of rich fabrics, these are some of the greatest paintings in Western art.

And yet, amid the grandeur, there is a wonderful humanity. In the bottom left hand corner of *The Mystical Marriage of St Catherine* a musical angel is trying to teach another what must be quite a difficult piece. Her pupil has a really beautifully caught expression of distress on his face — 'I'm never going to learn this' — and when you see things like that you have to love the man that painted them.

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*Paolo Veronese, The Family of Darius before Alexander, 1565–1567. ©The National Gallery, London.*

