



# Book of the Month

## *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* by Daniel Silva

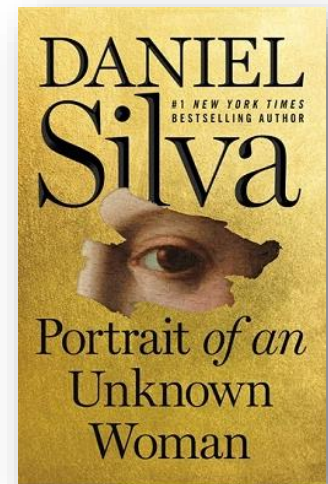
**Book Review by Wayne Wilkerson, Friends of the Starkville Library Board Member**

*Portrait of an Unknown Woman* is Daniel Silva's 22nd novel, in a series that began in 1996 with *The Unlikely Spy*. The main character, Gabriel Allon, is an Israeli whose mother was a Holocaust survivor. He was a promising artist at the time of the Black September massacre of Israeli Olympic athletes in September 1970. He was recruited to hunt down and eliminate the terrorists responsible. Once his task was complete, he tried to return to his art career, but that was not to be. He soon became a rising star within the Mossad, Israel's top intelligence community and is now working hard to balance his career and a second marriage.

As the novel opens Gabriel has severed ties with Israeli intelligence and settled quietly in Venice and resumed his career as a world class art restorer. His beautiful wife, Chiara, has taken over day-to-day management of the Tiepolo Restoration Company, and their two young children are enrolled in a neighborhood elementary school. But his days of domestic tranquility are disrupted when an old friend, the eccentric London art dealer Julian Isherwood, asks Gabriel to investigate the circumstances surrounding the rediscovery and lucrative sale of a centuries-old painting. Gabriel soon discovers that the work in question, a portrait of an unidentified woman attributed to Sir Anthony van Dyck, is almost certainly a clever fake. To find the mysterious figure who painted it—and uncover a multibillion-dollar fraud at the pinnacle of the art world—Gabriel must become the very mirror image of the man he seeks: the greatest art forger the world has ever known.

*Portrait of an Unknown Woman* is an entertaining journey through the dirty side of the art world—a place where unscrupulous dealers routinely deceive their customers, and deep-pocketed investors treat great paintings as though they were just another asset class to be bought and sold at a profit. From its elegant opening passage to the shocking twists of its climax, the novel is an enjoyable and well-crafted work of heist fiction. When it comes to international intrigue and suspense, Daniel Silva has no equal.

If you think you would be interested in reading this book, I suggest starting with *The Kill Artist*. Silva has a core of characters, both good and evil, that he uses throughout the entire Allon series. Although Silva



does give some background in each new novel, there is not enough time to fully develop each character. So start with *The Kill Artist* and read each book in sequence. Go to [Daniel Silva's Wikipedia](#) page and you will find all his novels listed in chronological order. This was a great help to me as I worked my way through the series.

Another plus for me was that Silva does a good job of describing each novel's settings as the plot moves along. If you have traveled in Europe or the Middle East, you will be able to recognize important cultural and physical landscapes. In this book Silva does an excellent job of describing the beautiful architecture and art of Venice.

One last positive comment about the series is that Silva cranks out a new book every spring like clockwork. I am sure this is to capture the summer vacation trade, because this is the perfect beach book. I hope you enjoy this work of fiction as much as I did. My copy will be available at the October book sale.

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