

Sandro Botticelli, 1445-1510

- Botticelli started his career as a goldsmith
- Botticelli as a young artist came to live in the Medici Palace. He had an interest in humanist literature and philosophy.
- Botticelli then was apprenticed to Filippino Lippi whose linear style, subtle colours, idealised and slightly melancholic image of feminine beauty influenced him greatly.
- He was influenced by Domenico Ghirlandaio, Perugino, Verrocchio and humanism
- He studied ancient Greek and Roman sculpture.
- His patrons were the Catholic Church, The Medici Family and Florentine merchants
- He spent all his life in Florence except for one year spent in Rome painting frescoes in the Sistine Chapel
- He worked with religious and mythological themes
- His style was graceful, animated and he worked with linear compositions
- His work is the most recognised from the Florentine Renaissance

During the renaissance people became interested in classical literature, poetry and mythology from ancient Greece and Rome during the Renaissance. Artists such as Botticelli were commissioned to paint scenes featuring gods, goddesses, nymphs and satyrs.

*Humanism-a Renaissance cultural movement which turned away from medieval scholasticism and revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman thought

*An Allegorical Painting uses figures and actions symbolically in order to communicate abstract ideas such as love, evil and justice.

The Primavera, C. 1478, tempura on panel

- This was painted for a member of the Neoplatonist group.
- Neoplatonists greatly admired the Greek philosopher Plato. They believed in a hidden agreement between Christianity and pagan mythology.
- The painting's true meaning may have been suppressed for religious reasons.
- This painting portrays a group of mythological figures (6 female and 2 male) in an orange grove with Cupid overhead.
- The elegant figures are three quarter life size.
- It was the first major Renaissance painting of a mythological scene.
- Botticelli was partly influenced by a poem praising spring (primavera) by the ancient Roman poet Ovid.
- Botticelli painted hundreds of types of spring flowers a symbol of fertility in great naturalistic detail.
- The background is tapestry-like. The characters stand out from the dark wood.
- Botticelli was influenced by Neo-Platonism in his choice of subject matter for his painting.

- This painting's theme is the arrival of spring and the happiness of the wedded state. It was said to have been painted for a private villa in Florence belonging to one of the Medici family, but is now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.
- Venus the goddess of love, is in the centre. The coy pose of her head and her expression of melancholy purity is sometimes associated with the Virgin Mary in religious paintings. She also stands back a little reminding us of a Madonna in a niche. There is a halo-like effect around her head created from the blue sky and the trees.
- Although Venus is the goddess of love, in her pregnant state she is the goddess of all nature and its blossoming forth in Spring. All the women are pregnant symbolising fertility.
- The nymph Chloris is seen at the right being attacked by the wind god Zephyrus, who turns her into Flora on her left, the goddess of spring. As she turns flowers pour from her mouth.
- Flora is painted to the left of Chloris. Her gown, beautifully embroidered with delicate flowers, symbolises eternal springtime.
- Mercury is featured in the right of the picture holding up his staff keeping fog at bay that could possibly hide the truth.
- The Three Graces dance in the left of the painting, celebrating the beginning of Spring. They are also thought to symbolise the three stages of love: beauty, desire and consumption and also fertility as they are all pregnant.
- These three women in their endless dance symbolise the endless circular process.
- They are three of the most appealing figures in Renaissance painting. Their tissue-thin silken gowns, flowing hair and delicate jewels, they show Botticelli's skill in creating female beauty.
- Their wrists and intertwining fingers overhead show his understanding of anatomy and his ability to use it correctly if he so wished.
- A blindfolded Cupid points a flaming arrow at one of the three graces above.

Primavera has been interpreted in many ways and expresses two main ideas:

- ❖ *Contrast between sensual human love and divine love*
- ❖ *Celebration of fertility and spring growth*

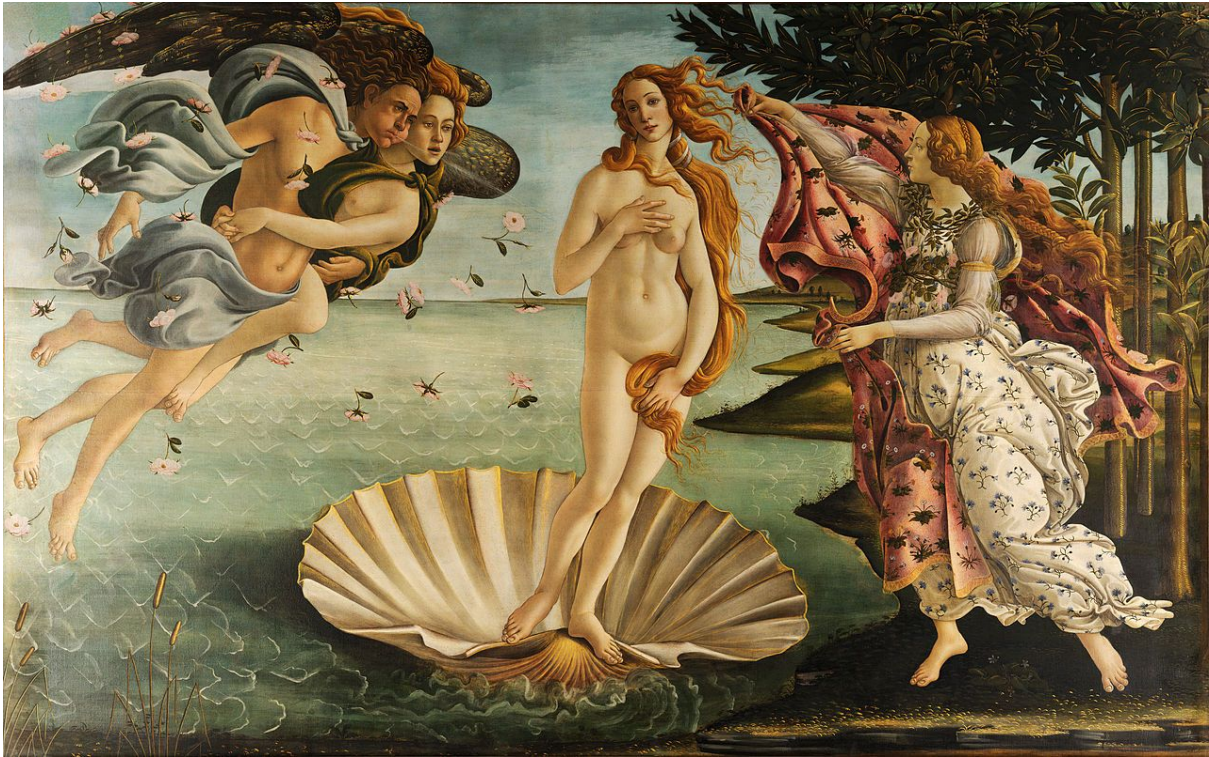
*Neo-Platonism was a Greek school of philosophy that combined the ideas of Plato, Pythagoras and Aristotle. It valued intellectual ideas and artistic beauty more than the physical world. Neo-Platonism was combined with Roman Catholic beliefs during the Renaissance. This painting's true meanings may have been suppressed for religious reasons.



The Birth of Venus, c. 1485, tempera on canvas

- This painting is an early example of tempera on canvas instead of wood panel.
- It was originally in the same villa as the Primavera, and now is in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
- It was painted as a wedding present for a member of the Medici family.
- It was unlike other paintings of that time and was kept hidden for many years. The legend of Venus' birth and arrival from the sea was well known at that time, but instead of following the text of the classical poem, Botticelli developed his own form of visual poetry.
- This painting shows the goddess of love, Venus, arriving on the shore of Cythera, Greece on a shell.
- Venus is portrayed as the ideal of feminine beauty. She is modest and serene, her body slightly elongated and leaning on one leg as she balances on the seashell which has brought her ashore.
- The wind god Zephyrus and the goddess of Dawn Aurora are on the left of the picture. They both blow gusts of wind so that Venus' hair is tossed. On the right the goddess Flora prepares to wrap Venus in a floral embroidered robe.
- Flora represents spring, the time of rebirth. around her neck she wears leaves of the myrtle, a tree sacred to Venus; her dress is sprigged with cornflowers, and she wears a high sash of roses. there are more spring flowers on the billowing pink cloak she holds out to the naked Venus.

- The sea and background is painted in a very stylised (unrealistic yet decorative) manner, as are the leaves on the trees behind the nymph.
- Venus' pose is directly based on Venus Pudica, an ancient Roman copy of Greek statue of Aphrodite and the subject of her arriving from the sea on a shell was well known from a classical poem.
- Botticelli puts Venus in a curved contrapposto pose. Her elongated body adds to the elegance, she has a very long neck and sharply sloping shoulders, but is the very image of graceful elegance with hair blowing in the wind.
- Venus is considered to have one of the most beautiful faces in art.
- Botticelli used the same model for some of his religious paintings.
- There are roses around Chloris and Zephyrus, each with a golden heart and gilded leaves. Known as the flower of Venus, the beautiful and fragrant rose is a symbol of love, with thorns that can cause pain. It also represents fertility.
- The foliage of the orange trees and the feathers on the wings of Zephyrus are picked out in gold leaf also. All the figures have gold highlights in their hair, and the veins of the shell and the grass stalks in the foreground are similarly gilded. After dark this painting would glimmer in the candlelight.
- Truth is Beauty: In humanist thinking Venus was the personification of beauty rather than erotic love, and to the philosopher Plato, truth was identified with beauty. In this painting Botticelli was able to show the female nude, not as an object of lust or a temptress, but as a symbol of untouched beauty.
- A Linear Artist: Botticelli painted almost entirely with line. He used little or no light and shade. He also kept his painted surfaces very simple. This can be seen where the waves on the sea are shown with a series of little v's.



Personal Style

- Vivid Colours
- Rhythmic contour lines- the sea in The Birth of Venus
- Simple elegance
- Harmonious compositions
- Story and emotions revealed through gesture and facial expressions

During his lifetime Botticelli was one of the most respected painters in Italy. However he was soon overshadowed by High Renaissance artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo. Their work made his paintings look old fashioned. He also became a follower of a monk who was strongly against paganism/ myths/gods and in fear for his salvation Botticelli began to paint only religious works which were not as popular with his patrons and he was forgotten after he died until the 19th C where his work became popular again.