

The birth of Venus

Sandro Botticelli 1483 - 1485





From the collection of
Uffizi Gallery

The [painting](#) was commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de'Medici, a cousin of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The theme was probably suggested by the humanist Poliziano. It depicts Venus born from the sea foam, blown by the west wind, Zephyr, and the nymph, Chloris, towards one of the Horai, who prepares to dress her with a flowered mantle.

This universal icon of Western painting was probably painted around 1484 for the villa of Castello owned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de 'Medici. Giorgio Vasari saw the work there in the mid-sixteenth century – along with [Botticelli's](#) other well-known Primavera – and described it precisely as "showing the Birth of Venus." The old idea that the two Botticelli masterpieces were created for the same occasion, in spite of their substantial technical and stylistic diversity, is no longer accepted. However, rather than a birth, what we see is the goddess landing on the shore of her homeland, the island of Cyprus, or on Kithera. The theme, which can be traced back to Homer and to Ovid's Metamorphoses, was also celebrated by the great humanist Agnolo Poliziano in the poetic verses of his Stanze. The Venus of the Uffizi is of the "Venus pudica" type, whose right breast is covered by her right hand and billowing long blond hair partially shrouds her body. The goddess stands upright on a shell as she is driven towards the shore by the breeze of Zephyrus, a wind god, who is holding the nymph, Chloris. On the right is the Hora of springtime, who waits to greet Venus ashore with a cloak covered in pink [flowers](#).

The seascape, stunning for its metaphysical tone and almost unreal quality, is illuminated by a very soft, delicate light. Like Botticelli's other masterpiece, Pallas and the Centaur, the Birth of Venus is painted on canvas - fairly unusual for its time - using a technique of thin [tempera](#), based on the use of diluted egg yolk, which lends itself particularly well to give the painting that aspect of extraordinary transparency, which brings to mind the pictorial quality of a fresco. The figure recalls classical sculpture and is very similar to the famous Medici Venus found in the Uffizi, which the artist certainly knew. The real meaning of this dreamlike vision is still under scholarly debate and investigation but is undoubtedly linked with the Neo-Platonic philosophy, widely cultivated in the Medici court.

Like the Primavera, the Birth of Venus is also associated with the concept of Humanitas, or virtuous Humanity, a theory developed by Marsilio Ficino in a letter to the young Lorenzo. According to the interpretation by Ernst Gombrich, the work depicts the symbolic fusion of Spirit and Matter, the harmonious interaction of Idea and Nature. Nevertheless, the interpretations of this painting of

extraordinary visual impact are numerous and diverse. The divine ethereal figure has been viewed as an allegorical representation of Humanitas upon her arrival to Florence, while the nymph holding out the cloak of flowers for the goddess may perhaps be identified as Flora, the same depicted in this masterpiece's "twin", the Primavera, where she may be seen instead as the personification of the city of Florence. From this work emerges clear evidence of Botticelli's strive to reach perfection of form that could rival with classical antiquity. It is for this reason that the humanist Ugolino Verino in his work Epigrammata, presented in 1485 to the King of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, likened the Florentine painter to the legendary Apelles of Ancient Greece.

Details

Title: The birth of Venus

Creator: [Sandro Botticelli](#)

Date created: 1483 - 1485

Style: Renaissance

Provenance: Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici family collections

Physical Dimensions: w2785 x h1725 mm

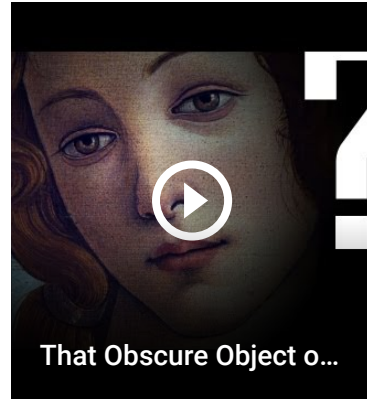
Original Title: La nascita di Venere

Type: [painting](#)

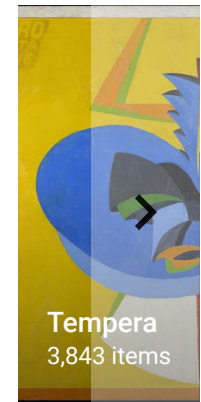
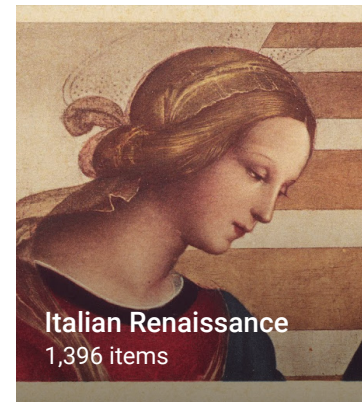
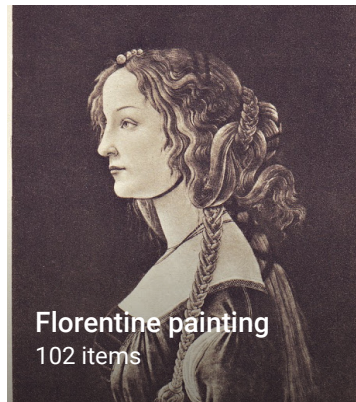
Medium: [Tempera](#) on panel



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