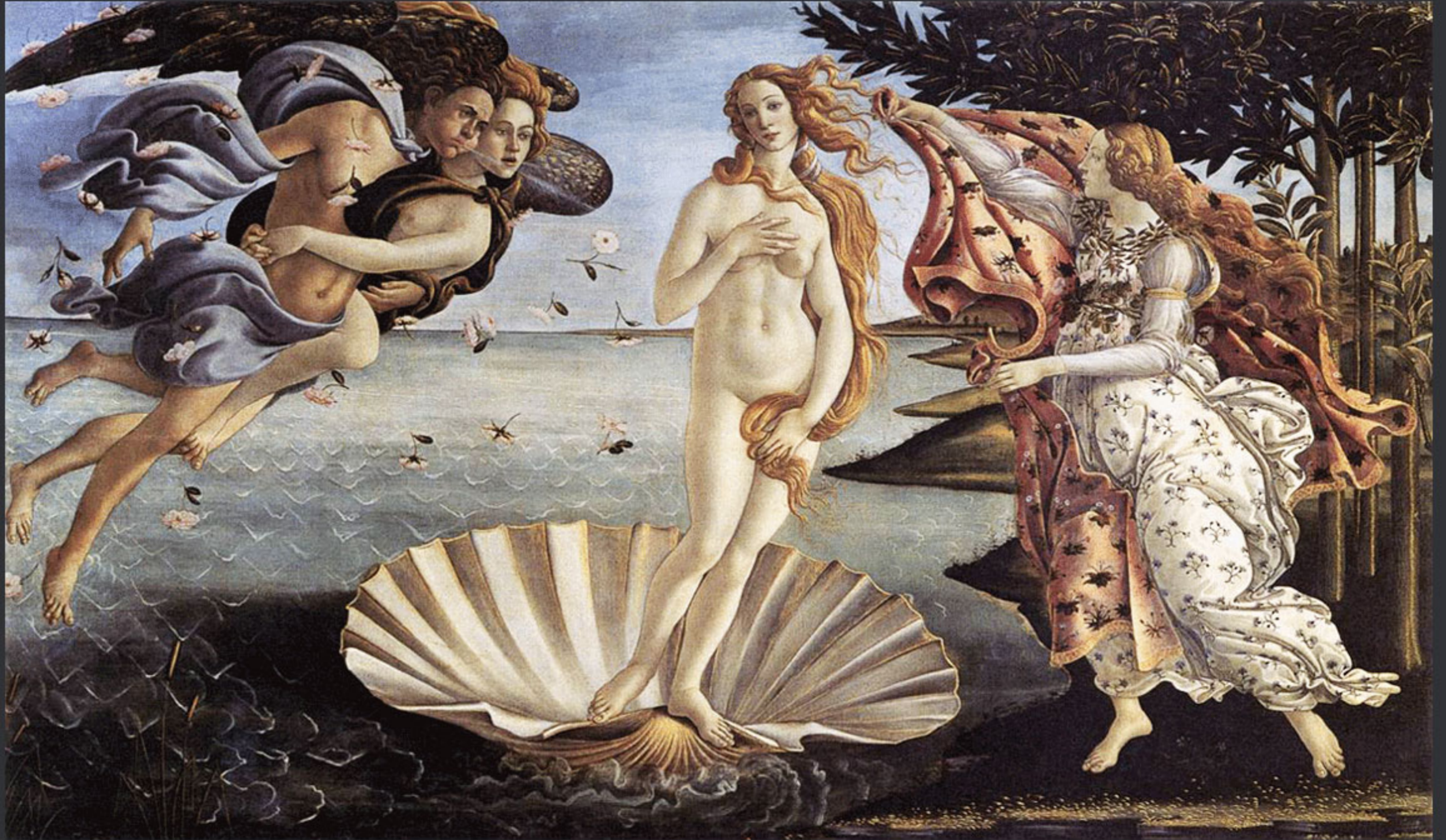


RENAISSANCE ART UNIT 06

SANDRO BOTTICELLI



The Birth of Venus



Zephyr & Aura



"The Birth of Venus" is in a gallery in Florence today. Venus was a goddess without a mother or a father, born from the foam of the sea. Botticelli paints Venus standing on a seashell, blown to shore by Zephyr and Aura. Zephyr represents the winds of spring, and Aura is the gentle breeze. They are god and goddess, shown here with their arms tightly wrapped around each other. They are surrounded by roses, and are said to have come into being with the birth of Venus. To the right, the goddess of spring rushes to cover Venus from the outside world.

Botticelli, unlike Michelangelo and Leonardo, did not stress painting the perfect human form. The body of Venus is not in proportion; her shoulders slope and her body is elongated. There is also no consistent wind source in this scene. Botticelli just did what he wanted!

Venus & Mars



This painting is about love conquering war. Venus is not tempted by the Satyrs, because she is not overcome by lust. She is clothed in pure white, representing chastity and purity. She has a gentle expression on her face.

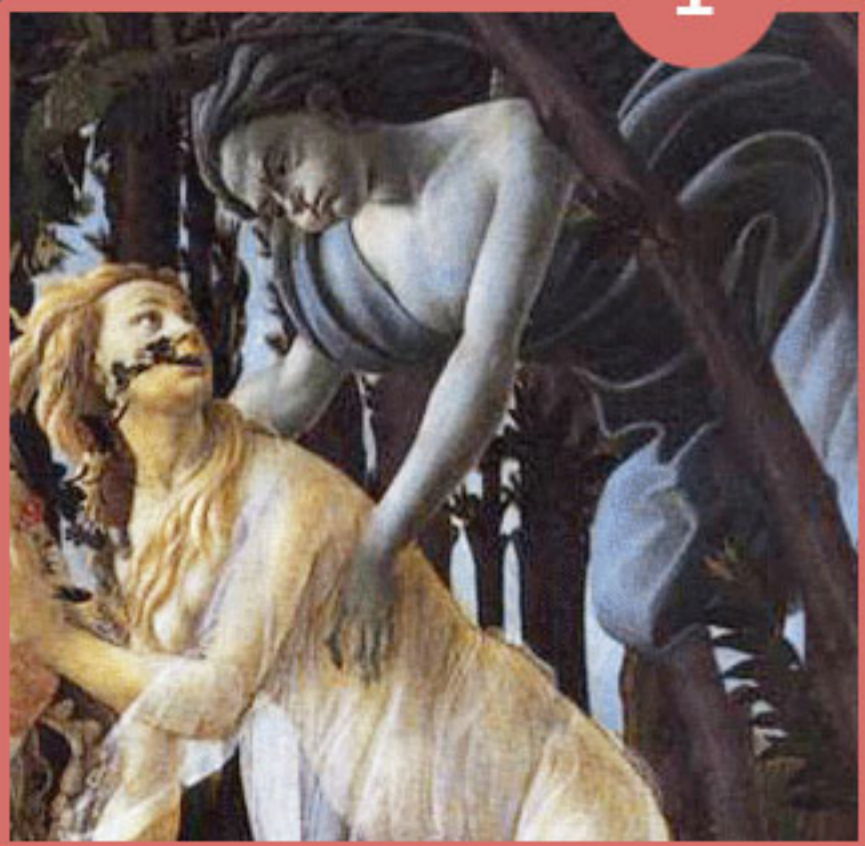
Mars is in a deep sleep, not stirring to the satyrs that try to wake him. One has a conch shell it is using like a trumpet, but to no avail! Satyrs are half goat, half human creatures that like to frolic and play. They are the party animals of the mythical world!

Primavera



Birth of Spring

1



2



"Primavera" depicts the birth of Spring after a long winter. The figures are all very symbolic. To the far right, Zephyr snatches the nymph Chloris. He was very much in love with her, and took her for himself. He later regretted kidnapping her and made her Flora, the goddess of flowers. Botticelli has painted her twice: once being snatched away, and again as a flower goddess. This was a common way for painters to illustrate a story in a painting, that is, by painting two scenes in one.

Venus stands in the middle, and her son, cupid, hovers above her shooting arrows at the Three Graces. The Graces were Venus' handmaidens. Mercury is the figure to the far left, keeping clouds out of Venus' garden with his staff. The figures illustrate the difference between lust and divine love: Zephyr acts out of lust and Venus and her Graces represent divine love.

This painting is meant to be "read" from left to right. Spring comes in with the violent winds of March, followed by April flowers, and then is gently led out by the guidance of Mercury.



Madonna of the Pomegranate



"Madonna of the Pomegranate" shows Mary and Jesus surrounded by six angels. A few of them carry lilies, a flower that represents the Resurrection. Botticelli placed these in his painting to remind the viewer that Christ died and rose again.

In Jesus' hand there is a pomegranate. The pomegranate, in Greek myth, was called "the fruit of the dead". It was the only fruit that grew in Hades. When the goddess Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, she ate three pomegranate seeds. This doomed her to return to Hades for three months of every year. Botticelli, here, uses the pomegranate to remind Christians that Christ descended into the underworld for three days and then rose into heaven.

Madonna of the Magnificat

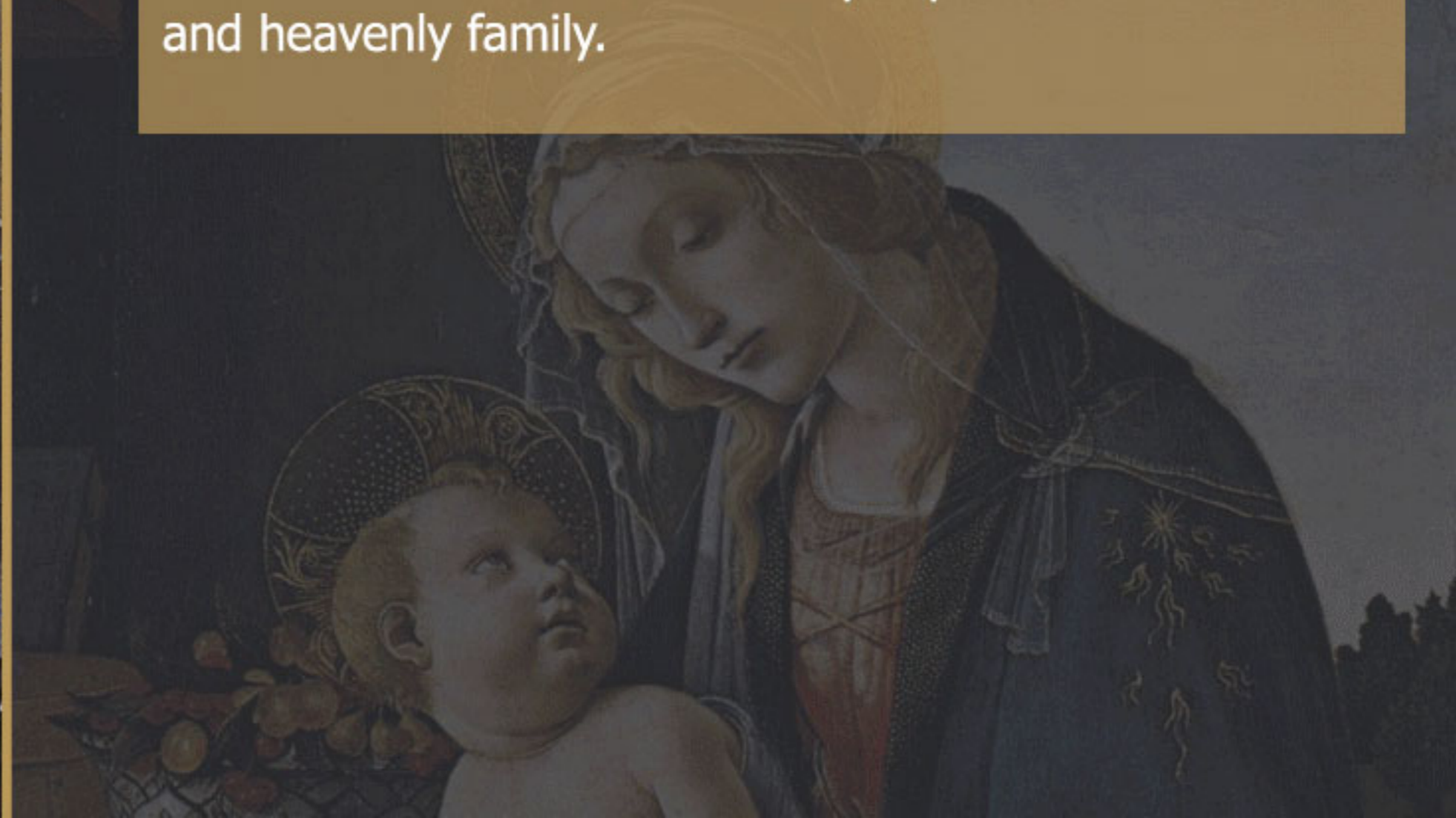


"The Madonna of the Magnificat" shows Mary and Jesus surrounded by angels as she writes a song of praise to God, the Magnificat. Two angels hold a crown of gold over Mary's head, indicating she is the queen of Heaven. Botticelli used more gold in this painting than in any of his others. Mary's robes, her crown, and the halos are all gold paint. He even used gold to highlight Mary's hair and the angels' curls.

Madonna of the Book



The "Madonna of the Book" is a depiction of the Virgin studying with her child on her lap. You may have noticed that in all of these paintings, Mary is wearing red and blue. Blue represents Heaven because it is the color of the sky. Red is the color of blood, and represents life on earth. By combining these colors Botticelli shows that Mary is part of the human and heavenly family.



Annunciation



This next scene should look very familiar. This is Botticelli's version of the "Annunciation". To the modern viewer, it may look like Mary is recoiling from the angel. What Botticelli has done is captured two moments in one: Mary is taken aback by the news the angel gives her, but accepts God's will with a mixture of joy and sorrow. The angel Gabriel bows before Mary with the news. They seem to be striving to touch one another, but an invisible barrier prevents them. One belongs to Heaven and the other to Earth.

The window behind the angel leads the viewer's eye into the beyond. There is a medieval looking castle amid craggy rocks, a bridge leading over water, and another castle in the distance. Botticelli wants to draw you deep into the painting, a skill only a Renaissance artist could have pulled off.

Look Alike?



As you might remember, Renaissance artists were fond of painting gods and goddesses. Their bodies were always idealized, reflecting the rebirth of the Classical form in painting at the time. Botticelli did a good number of paintings of Venus, the goddess of love. She is known as Aphrodite in Greek myth. Botticelli paints her as a virtuous figure, always very refined and pure. Some art critics believe that she is painted to resemble the Virgin Mary. Do you agree?