

2-8-2023

Botticelli's Marvelous Mystery: Idealized Portrait of a Lady

Alessia M. Buoso
Gettysburg College, buosal01@gettysburg.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cafe2023>



Part of the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Buoso, Alessia M., "Botticelli's Marvelous Mystery: Idealized Portrait of a Lady" (2023). *CAFE Symposium 2023*. 23.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cafe2023/23>

This open access poster is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Botticelli's Marvelous Mystery: Idealized Portrait of a Lady

Abstract

A detailed visual analysis of Sandro Botticelli's "Idealized Portrait of a Lady" that incorporates gender roles in Renaissance Florence and discusses Botticelli's hidden messages and common themes within his works.

Keywords

Sandro Botticelli, Women in Renaissance, Renaissance Florence

Disciplines

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | Art and Design | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Comments

This poster was created based on work completed for FYS 197: Florence: Art, Money, & Power, and presented as a part of the eighth annual CAFE Symposium on February 8, 2023.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Botticelli's Marvelous Mystery: *Idealized Portrait of a Lady*

Alessia Buoso, FYS 197, Gettysburg College Art History Department

Who is she? Why does her hair look like that? What is she looking at?

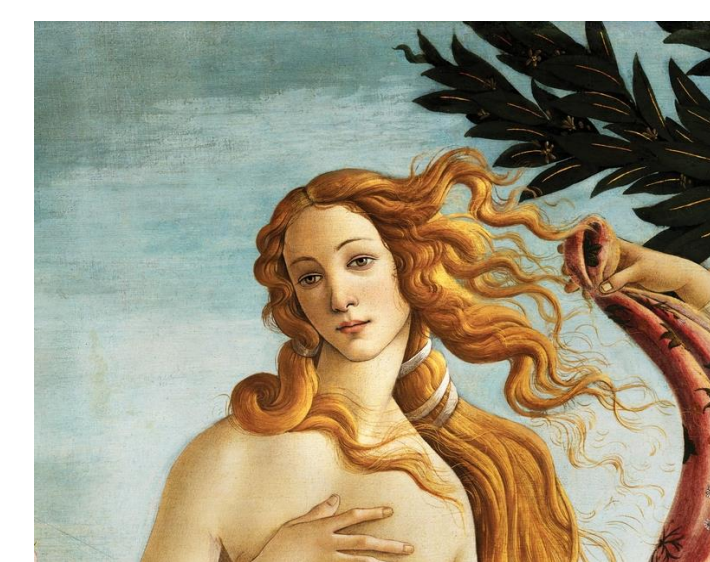
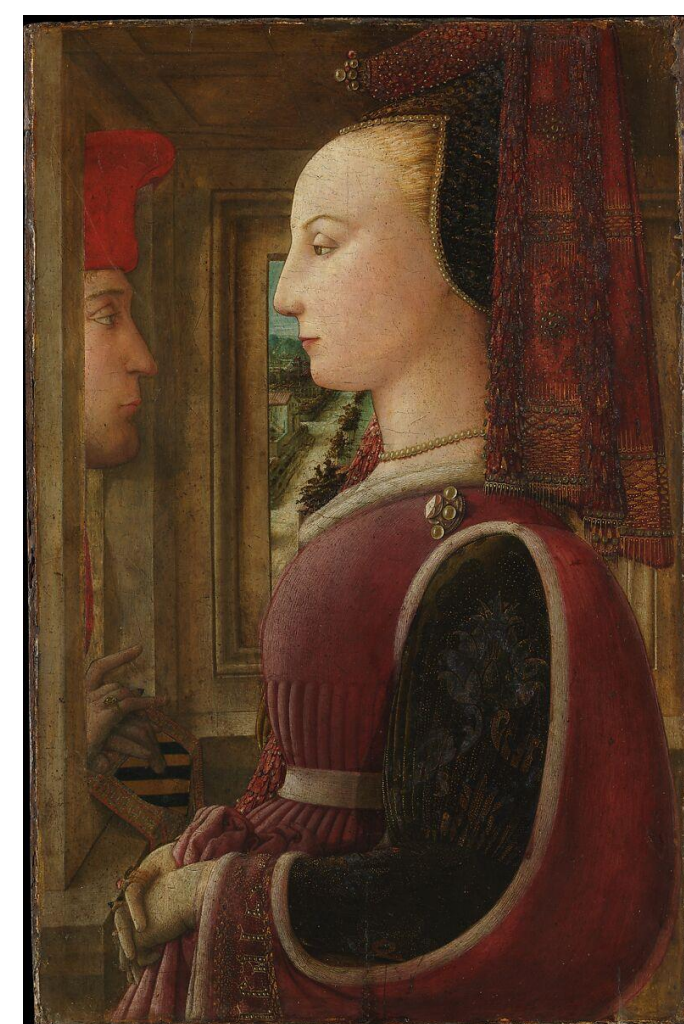
Intro

An epicenter for innovation, creativity, and utter beauty, Renaissance Florence was a city of marvel. Like every shiny object, however, things were not always as perfect as they seemed. From patronage to the patriarchy, the daily happenings in the city were a man's game, and women were viewed as nothing more than a commodity to be traded for the mutual benefit of families. Well-versed in portraiture, Sandro Botticelli brilliantly sheds light on the life of his muse and on typical societal expectations of women within the confines of a frame.

Background: Botticelli with Women and Portraiture

Commonly including "unknown and ungraspable" elements within his works, by comparing three of his most famous pieces, connections between the 15th-century Renaissance and classical times emerge.

Known to "disrupt fixed interpretations" by using a "rigidity [that] conceals dramatically different and irreconcilable [messages] with the theme," Botticelli chose not to include an elaborate background so as to not detract from the sole focus of the portrait—Simonetta Vespucci (Basta). This artistic choice varies greatly from the status quo of Renaissance portraiture, of which is exemplified below in the Lippi portrait. Although the two portraits of women greatly differ, both communicate much about familial wealth and status, as well as demonstrate how portraits conveyed social values.



"Idealized Portrait of a Lady" by Sandro Botticelli is licensed under CC0 1.0.

The Significance of Hair

A true master of his craft, Botticelli understood the complexity of art and how to manipulate the tiniest details to influence the theme of a piece.

The seemingly chaotic and fantastical coiffure of Miss Simonetta features very purposeful nuances that convey a more convoluted yet specific message. Depicting a tasseled hairstyle resembling ropes and levers, a Stanford scholar argues Botticelli attempts to "[pull] the spectator's attention in." With braids representing tension and distance, and women serving as objects of *unravelling* tension between families, Lugli proposes the hairstyle itself challenges Renaissance norms of what is versus is not allowed. Lugli further notes that hair can provide clues for identifying thought patterns and values of a subject—perhaps even suggesting that Botticelli "deliberately blurred the contours between life and dream."

Furthermore, by including such fantastical details uncommon for the Renaissance but not for the classical period, Botticelli once again draws on antiquarian themes, perhaps even suggesting a lack of differences and progression between women's roles in the two time periods (Basta).

Conclusion

Linking his passion for mythological paintings to the modern Renaissance and featuring Simonetta as the subject of not just her portrait but also as nymph-like figures in fantastical settings, Botticelli compares her beauty to that beyond the mortal realm and explicitly connects a typical Renaissance woman to antiquarian one, allowing viewers to find similarities between women's roles during the two periods themselves.

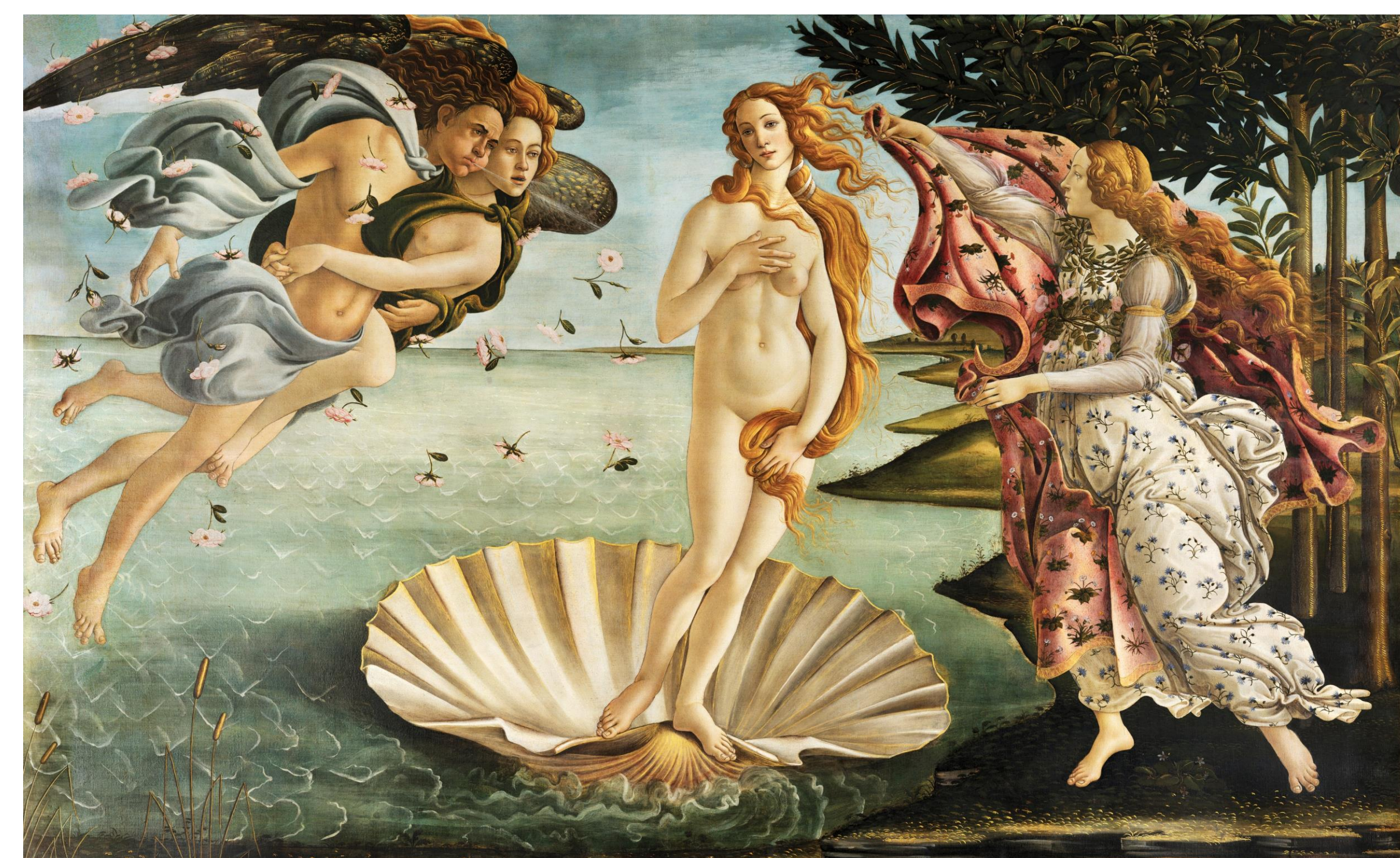
Acknowledgements

Endless gratitude to my first-year seminar professor, Professor Felicia Else, for not only encouraging, supporting, and believing in me, but also for her enthusiasm and energy that inspired me to dive deeper into the subject, just as she did in each class. By adding relevance to art history, Professor Else demonstrated that there is always more to something than what initially meets the eye.

I also would like to thank the Musselman Library librarians for all their guidance and patience during the poster making process and for organizing the CAFÉ symposium.



"Mars and Venus" by Sandro Botticelli is licensed under CC0 1.0.



"The Birth of Venus" by Sandro Botticelli is licensed under CC0 1.0.

Bibliography

Basta, Chiara. *Botticelli*. 1st ed. New York: Rizzoli, 2005.
Ettle, Ross Brooke. "THE VENUS DILEMMA: NOTES ON BOTTICELLI AND SIMONETTA CATTANEO VESPUCCL." *Notes in the History of Art* 27, no. 4 (2008): 3–10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23207901>.
Landini, Roberta Orsi and Mary Westerman Bulgarella. "Costume in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraits of Women." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, edited by David Alan Brown, 89–97. Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 2001.
Lugli, Emanuele. "The Hair Is Full of Snares: Botticelli's and Boccaccio's Wayward Erotic Gaze." *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 2019. 202–213.

Städel Museum in Frankfurt. "Sandro Botticelli: Idealized Portrait of a Lady (Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci as a Nymph ca. 1480-1485." Accessed November 8, 2022. <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/idealised-portrait-of-a-lady>
Tinagli, Paola. *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 47–77.
Zambrano, Patrizia. "Sandro Botticelli and the Birth of Modern Portraiture." In *Botticelli Past and Present*, edited by Ana Debenedetti and Caroline Elam, 10–35. UCL Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv550cjj>.