

# An Exploration of Artistic Beauty in Renaissance Artworks: A Case Study of Botticelli's Spring

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**Abstract.** With more and more people beginning to enrich their spiritual world, some of them have a stronger interest in modern aesthetics and even classical aesthetics, at the same time, with the continuous development of society, more and more people attach importance to aesthetic education. Many scholars also began to conduct a deeper study of Renaissance artworks. In this context, it is necessary to explore the beauty of Renaissance art. This paper will adopt the case method, taking the representative work of Botticelli in the Renaissance as an example, to show the beauty of art in the artworks of the Renaissance through its content, painting techniques, composition, and the author's emotions was how to express. Choose to analyze this painting from various aspects in order to increase the persuasiveness of this paper. To prove that the aesthetic expression in the artworks during the Renaissance is helpful to the guidance of modern art.

**Keywords:** Renaissance; artistic beauty; Botticelli.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, many artists have set off a wave of retro trends, and they begin to imitate and create a second time on the original classical works of art. Nowadays, aesthetics is paid more and more attention, it is of great significance to study the expression of beauty in classical art. This paper will use the case method to analyze how artistic beauty is reflected in Spring from the aspects of the overall social background of the Renaissance, the author's personal experience and painting characteristics, the reasons for painting, the content of the work, the author's emotions expressed in the work, painting techniques and composition. Finally, from the expression of artistic beauty in the works of art during the Renaissance, it is concluded that classical works of art can play a guiding role in modern works of art.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Renaissance Art Background

The Renaissance originated in Florence, Italy. With the gradual development of capitalism in Italy, the resistance of the feudal ruling class was growing. Under such circumstances, they urgently needed a movement to affirm human value in order to liberate the productive forces and further strengthen the power of the bourgeoisie so as to compete with the feudal ruling class. The Renaissance was born. At the same time, Italy was also in a state of fragmentation, and the mutual absorption and compatibility between different cultures in different places also made Italy's culture reach unprecedented prosperity, which made Italy qualify as the cradle of the Renaissance. At the same time, as a country built on the ruins of the Roman Empire, the culture of ancient Rome and ancient Greece is quite popular in Italy [1]. The praise for people in ancient Rome and ancient Greece is exactly in line with the spirit needed by capitalism. Therefore, artists during the Renaissance generally liked to show a humanistic spirit in their works of art [2]. Moreover, the weak strength of the bourgeoisie at that time makes them unable to directly contend with the powerful feudal ruling class. Therefore, the Renaissance was put on the cloak of the revival of ancient Roman and Greek culture.

## 2.2. Humanistic Thought in Art

At that time, the most fashionable thought in Italy was humanism, whose spiritual core was the transformation from "God" as the center to "man" as the center. Humanism affirms the role of man, emphasizes the value of man, attaches importance to the happiness of this world, and emancipates man from the asceticism of feudal theology. Therefore, in humanism, beauty is embodied in the expression of man's desire and the nakedness of the flesh [3]. In terms of content, the definition of artistic beauty of the Renaissance is reflected in this. Influenced by ancient Greek thought, nudity during the Renaissance did not express vulgarity and indecency, on the contrary, nudity at this time expressed the purity of human beings. They believed that everyone was naked when they arrived in the world, and the newborn was the purest time in a person's life, so nudity was a symbol of cleanliness in the ideological thoughts of the time. At the same time, because humanism emphasized the pursuit of earthly pleasures and opposed asceticism, Renaissance art was encouraged to express emotions boldly and directly in terms of content. As the Renaissance set the cloak of the revival of ancient Greek culture, it was popular for artists at that time to use the stories in the Bible as the subject matter and express their thoughts implicitly in their paintings.

## 3. Botticelli's Artistic Style

### 3.1. Life Experience

Botticelli was born around 1444 in Florence, the son of the tanner Mariano di Vanni and his wife. Smeralda [4]. In Italy, and grew up in an artisan family, which provided Botticelli with an aesthetic education foundation. Early Botticelli learned how to make fine jewelry with Giorgia Vasari and later with Fra Filippo Lippi. In 1470 Botticelli chose to set up his own studio without the help of his parents. Botticelli soon attracted the patronage of the Medici family, the most prominent nobility in Florence at the time. The Medici family appreciated Botticelli's talent and ordered a large number of works from Botticelli's studio. The appreciation of the Medici family allowed Botticelli to create art free from political persecution. At the same time, with the support of the Medici family, Botticelli had access to various Italian celebrities of the time and was able to enter the various salons of the Florentine aristocracy. Relying on the massive financial support of the Medici family, Botticelli comprehensively absorbed the knowledge related to art that was inaccessible in the past, laying a good theoretical foundation for his later artworks. During the Medici reign in Florence, Botticelli was invited to paint for the Medici several times, including one of the two most famous paintings of Botticelli's career, Spring (1477).

In 1481-1482, a large number of Florentine masters were invited to Rome to paint frescoes for the famous Sistine Cathedral, and Botticelli was among those invited [5]. It can be seen that Botticelli had a high status in the art world at that time. The good times did not last long, however, as Florence experienced political turmoil during the Renaissance, and the Medici family soon fell out of favor in the change of government. After the death of their leader Lorenzo in 1492, the Medici were exiled. Gioram Savonaloi, who supported religious extremism, came to power, and Botticelli's reputation as a follower of Savonaloi declined. Botticelli's poverty in his later years is a fresh contrast to his earlier prominence. Botticelli died in poverty and solitude in 1510 and was buried in a churchyard in Florence.

### 3.2. Painting Style

Botticelli generally preferred secular subjects in his choice of subjects for painting, and later in his career preferred classical mythology as his subject matter, such as the Pilgrimage of the Three Magi (1475). Among his many works based on classical mythology, Greek and Roman mythology accounted for a considerable proportion of the works, such as Venus and the God of War (1483) and Pallas and Kentaur (1482). Botticelli boldly adopted some pagan painting themes in his painting creation, which was forbidden by the Roman Church at that time. He adopted the laws of central

perspective and studied the sculptures of antiquity, their ideal physique perhaps best manifested in his nude figures [4]. Botticelli prefers to use bright and vivid colors to depict the picture in his artistic creation [6]. At the same time, he likes to use smooth and smooth lines and extremely delicate brushstrokes to depict the characters, showing an elegant and beautiful sense of beauty on the whole. At the same time, Botticelli, under the support of the Medici family, often visited the places where the nobles were, so often can be found in his works belonging to the splendor of the nobility. In terms of painting techniques, Botticelli was not very fond of using the oil painting techniques that were already popular in Frenel at that time but preferred to use the more traditional egg-white painting. Compared with the thick feeling of oil painting, because the egg white will show a transparent texture after drying, the use of egg white painting will make the picture pure, more in line with the elegant characteristics of Botticelli's painting. At the same time, the elegance and gracefulness of Botticelli's female forms reveal his affinity to tendencies of the Late Gothic. Yet his paintings also contain philosophical, political, and religious content, far removed from a desire merely to reproduce the charm and beauty of the figures in cheerful scenes from mythology and religion; and it is this which renders his pictures key works for the comprehension or Florentine culture and politics in the second half of the 15th century [4].

## **4. Artistic Beauty in Works**

### **4.1. Creation Background of Spring**

Botticelli wrote *Spring* at the invitation of Lorenzo, then head of the Medici family. The painting was used to decorate the wedding house of Pier Francesco, Lorenzo's nephew, and Semiramude, a lady of the Appiani family [7]. The Medici family negotiated with the Appiani family for about three years about this marriage. The Appiani family had been related by marriage to members of the Kingdom of Aragon in Naples more than a decade earlier, and through this relationship controlled the important ports of Tuscany at that time. At the same time, Appiani's brother-in-law, the King of Aragon, had established a political alliance with the Pope of Rome, Sixtus IV, so the Semiramde of the Appiani family could be said to have brought rich political and economic achievements to the Medici family. It was because of the great importance of this marriage that Botticelli was invited to paint "*Spring*".

At the same time, Botticelli often studied classical poetry with some famous humanists in Italy at that time, which made Botticelli especially keen to depict the ancient Greek and Roman myths that these humanists were obsessed with on his painting paper. Moreover, Botticelli completed the creation of *Spring* with the guidance and help of the famous Italian poet Andro Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino, the unique famous Italian philosopher, aesthetician, and representative of the Platonic Academy in Florence. Botticelli was at the height of his prosperity at that time, so in his artworks at that time, he not only expressed his humanistic thoughts and love for classical literature but also showed his reverence for nature.

### **4.2. Embodiment of Artistic Beauty**

Widely acknowledged as a prime manifestation of Florentine humanist culture under Lorenzo de Medici, "*Spring*" is based on a love poem about spring by Ovid, a famous poet, which tells the story of an early spring morning, Venus, the god of love, standing in the middle of a fruit grove, holding a grand ceremony for the arrival of spring [8].



**Fig 1.** Sandro Botticelli, Allegory of Spring, 1481-1482, Tempera painting on wood. 203cmx314cm. Florence, Uffizi

As shown in Figure 1. In the center of a bower of love, the goddess of love herself, hand raised delicately in sweet salutation, beckons the beholder into her beflowered dream world, a pleasance or locus amoenus, a place of pleasure and beauty, of love past, indeed of ancient primordial love renewed as Zephyr pursues Chloris who is transformed into Flora. At Venus' side the goddess's handmaidens, the Graces, embody their very grace in dance, while Cupid above, the personification of desire, aims his flaming arrow at one of these three sisters. Turned away as if indifferent to them, Mercury gazes heavenward in contemplation of what lies beyond this enchanted world permeated by mute music, silent song [9]. Venus dressed up in the middle, can be seen staring ahead with a sad look on her face. To her left are the three goddesses of Grace playing, of which Aglaia represents beauty, Euphrosyne represents joy, and Thalia represents chastity [10]. The three goddesses of Beauty are the daughters of Zeus and Eurynome. In the writings of Homer, they are the followers of Venus, who represent desire and life in mythology. At the same time, they represent all irrational behaviors of human beings in social life, so their dance is controlled by the kithara of Apollo, the sun god [10]. To the right of the three goddesses is a handsome young man. Mercury raised his staff and looked up to his right. In Greek mythology, Mercury was the son of Zeus and Hya, who took Zeus' place as a messenger to the gods. In Roman mythology, Mercury was the messenger of the gods. In this painting, Mercury is supposed to be the messenger of spring.

To Venus's right, Zephyrus, the chilly Zephyrus, tries to embrace the fearful Chloris, who is transformed into the magnificent flower god [11]. Above Venus, Cupid, the god of love with his eyes closed, prepares to shoot an arrow to bring a chaste maiden into love. Since the purpose of this painting has been described in this article before, the analysis of the emotion expressed by Botticelli in this painting should be combined with its creative background. "Spring" expresses the theme by giving Venus "humanity" instead of "divinity" to express the physical love of Zephyrus for Chloris and the spiritual love expressed by the three goddesses, and the balance between the two is achieved in this painting.

In this painting, Venus can be seen wearing a turban on her head - a symbol of marriage (because wearing a turban is a symbol of married women in religious tradition [12]). Mercury, on the far left, is the messenger of God, symbolizing the coming of spring. It can be roughly speculated that Botticelli is reminding the newlyweds to balance the love of soul and body, and at the same time, through Cupid pointing an arrow at the three graces, wishing them harmony in their marriage. And Mercury was

supposed to symbolize the great benefit that Mademoiselle Semimund had brought to the Medici family.

In painting techniques, Botticelli still adopts the form of tempera painting. The transparent egg white makes Botticelli's human body appear more delicate, and the lines of the human body are more full of beauty. Using a mixture of lead white and tempera to depict the clothing is extremely detailed and lightweight. In the composition of Spring, Botticelli made all the figures in the picture into curves. This arrangement made the figures appear light under his brush, and at the same time reached harmony with the straight trees in the background, making the whole picture vivid and rich in content.

## 5. Conclusion

Botticelli, through tempera and its flexible and smooth lines, depicts Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, and the gods in the orchard to welcome the arrival of spring, thereby expressing guidance to Piero Francesco and his new wife Semiramud. At the same time, Botticelli boldly painted nudes in Spring, expressing his strong humanistic spirit. From the painting technique to the content expression, all reflect the "beauty". This shows that during the Renaissance, painters combined the beauty of the picture with their personal pursuit of thought in the creation of artworks, and got rid of the empty picture beauty that only existed in the creation process of artworks. This has also played a guiding role in modern art today. In the process of modern art creation, many painters will ignore the beauty reflected in the picture. The pictured beauty of the Renaissance artworks and the expression of the artist's spiritual core suggest that modern painters should balance the relationship between the beauty of the picture content and the personal emotional expression of the artist when creating artworks. In the future art, artists should reflect the beauty of art from more angles, more comprehensive, and more complete aspects.

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