

<p>Sandro Botticelli, <i>Primavera</i>, aka <i>Allegory of Spring</i>, 1482.</p>	<p>The painting was given to Semiramide Appiani and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de'Medici on their marriage and displayed in the Villa di Castello in Florence.</p>	<p>Probably first commissioned by Giuliano de'Medici, and then recommissioned, following his assassination in 1478, by his brother, Lorenzo the Magnificent.</p>
<p>The setting is an orange grove that includes cyprus and myrtle trees. The season is spring.</p>	<p>The Bay Laurel in the circle to the right of centre was an emblem of Florence, personal emblem of Lorenzo de'Medici and traditionally associated with festival rites of Venus.</p>	<p>Scholarly advisers for the subject would have included Marsilio Ficino and Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini).</p>
<p>The Hesperides offered oranges at the wedding of Jupiter and Juno. Myrtle signifies everlasting love. Oranges also appear in some Medici emblems.</p>	<p>The central figure is Venus. Above her is Cupid about to fire an arrow.  In the allegory Venus is a metonym for Semiramide Appiani, the bride. The painting was commissioned for her bridal chamber. Her face may resemble that of Simonetta Vespucci, but she had died six years earlier in 1476 (note 1).</p>	<p>The clothing appears to derive from Roman sarcophagi.</p>
<p>Mercury (Hermes) with caduceus (usually a winged staff with two snakes entwined around it) wears winged shoes and a winged hat and has a flame motif on his tunic. He has facial resemblance with members of the Medici family. In the allegory the figure is a metonym for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de'Medici, the groom (note 2).</p>		<p>Zephyr and Chloris. Chloris, a nymph associated with spring, flowers and new growth, dwelt in the Elysian Fields. Roman authors (like Ovid in his <i>Fasti</i> book V, 2nd May) equated her with the goddess Flora, suggesting that the initial sound of her name may have been altered by Latin speakers. Myths had it that she was abducted by (and later married) Zephyrus, the god of the west wind.</p>
	<p>The Three Graces are attributes of Love, and thus Venus. They are involved in a dance: Seneca calls this giving, receiving and returning. Hesiod names them as Aglaea, Euphrosyne and Thalia, they represent Splendour, Mirth and Joy. These descriptions have been varied by later poets.</p>	<p>Chloris has become Flora and she distributes flowers.</p>
<p>According to Mirella Levi d'Ancona there are more than 400 plants depicted, of which 190 are flowering and 138 of these are identified; 33 are idealised. Many of the plants have symbolic associations derived from Roman and medieval literature, such as Pliny and Froissart's <i>Chronicles</i>, but also from Botticelli's contemporary, Marsilio Ficino. For example, the hellebore below Venus is said to prolong life and cure 'madness'; Ficino designated carnal love as 'madness' which was represented by Chloris and Zephyr.</p>		

1.

The model for Venus in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* is a combination of a Renaissance treatment of a Hellenistic Greek sculpture (*Aphrodite of Cnidos* owned by the Medici) and a Renaissance face. The face has often been named as Simonetta Vespucci. It is a face that recurs in Botticelli's work. Simonetta died in 1476 and was buried at the church of Ognissanti in Florence. Botticelli then asked that when he died he would like to be buried at her feet and his request was fulfilled at his death in 1510. All of the named portraits of Simonetta Vespucci were painted after her death. Giuliano de' Medici dedicated a joust to her in 1475 and Poliziano wrote *Stanze per la Giosta* in dedication to her (left incomplete at her death). Simonetta was married to Marco Vespucci, cousin of Amerigo Vespucci.

2.

The bridegroom addressed in *Primavera* is Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici. He was 13 years old when his father, Pierfrancesco de' Medici, died in 1476. He was put under the tutelage of Lorenzo the Magnificent and taught by Marsilio Ficino, Poliziano and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci (Amerigo's uncle). Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Amerigo were fellow pupils and continued their relationship with correspondence in which Amerigo reported his discoveries in the Americas to young Lorenzo. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici was later nicknamed Popolano. He became Florentine ambassador to France in 1483. He commissioned *The Birth of Venus* from Botticelli in 1485 and it was installed with *Primavera* and *Pallas and the Centaur* in the Villa di Castello in Florence.