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Western Art History

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Visual Analysis of *Spring*

Title: Spring (Primavera)

Creator: Sandro Boticelli

Date: 1480

Medium: Tempera Grassa on wood

Size: 207 x 319 cm

Website: <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/botticelli-spring>

The piece which I chose was Spring by Sandro Boticelli. This piece intrigued me because of the color, figures, and the immense detail which is woven throughout the figures and vegetation. Looking through this piece, we see many figures standing in a wooded or vegetated area. The figures are standing all together, but not in a very coherent way. Each figure in the piece is separated, while committing their own action. You can see from left to right the moment and action which the stance and posture of the figures articulates. Above the figures is a small angel flying right in the middle of the piece. Trees with a type of fruit in them surround and close in around the frame of the piece. There is also an array of different types of flowers and growth, which appear in a much darker color than expected. If you look closely, you can see the amazing detail drawn in the leaves and branches of the greenery of the background.

When looking from left to right, we can first see what appears to be a man reaching up with a staff and touching a thin grey cloud. From Greek mythology, we can see that this is Mercury, messenger of the gods. This god is known to wear a winged helmet and sandals, which is depicted in the painting as well. He wears a red robe type garb with a leather hat, shoes, and sword sheath. Next are 3 women who appear to be standing in a circle dancing while they hold hands. While they appear to be interacting, you can see the delicate and see-through dresses they are adorned in. These three women are called the Three Graces. The way they are dressed, and their hair give me the viewer a sense of importance and beauty.

In the middle of the piece is the goddess Venus who is dressed in a very traditional and royal dress. The way she dresses gives the viewer the impression of purity and innocence, which ties into the fact that she is the goddess of love and beauty. The colors and importance give the impression she is high in rank of social status. Right above her head, the angel Cupid flies with a bow and arrow. We can see from the painting that Cupid is blindfolded and drawing back to shoot his arrow. To the right of the woman is another, who is dressed in a very flowery and natural dress. She is adorned in a head of flowers. This goddess is Flora, who is the goddess of spring. This correlates greatly to the title and focus of the piece. From the way she is barefoot and so natural looking, she gives the impression of being a goddess. At the very right of the piece, is two figures who look to be chasing each other. The one being chased is of a lighter shade and is dressed in a sheer dress type robe. The Uffizi Gallery states that this is the nymph Chloris, who is shown to be “embraced” by a god called Zephyrus. The blue figure also is slightly above the golden figure, which implies that they might be flying.

When analyzing Spring, I first want to focus on lines and directions. When looking at the nature of the piece, the viewer is given an small peek of a horizontal line on the edges of the artwork. Because of this the painting does not have much depth. However, the vertical nature of the trees in the background gives the viewer a better sense of height and elongates the piece in this sense. Cupid and god Zephyrus give the work a sense of movement because of the diagonal lines that they create. From their eyes, which are positioned downward, we look up to the figures and then travel back down to the figures below.

With the next element, shape, we focus first on the figures. The figures are shown in a realistic sense, through the fact that this piece was created right at the brink of the Renaissance. At the same time however, there is an idealized look to the figures since they are gods and goddesses and are in a sense "perfect." When looking at the overall bodies, you can see that the woman is portrayed in a more natural and curvier sense, while the male men's muscle and bone structure are shown more. From looking at the trees, we can also see the circular fruit, which ties in the more organic and softer lines throughout the whole piece.

Thirdly, when we look at the form of the figures there is not a lot of depth or sense of three-dimensional space. The figures alone are quite flat, which I believe adds to the overall flatness of the piece. I believe that the darkness of the piece and way which there is not much cast shadow do not give a sense of weight to any of the forms. From looking at the figures, there is not much shading in the sense of shadows cast across their face or the ground. This may because they are set in a heavily wooded area, yet there does not seem to be sense of any natural light which would give the piece more depth.

Fourthly, I want to focus on color. When the viewer scans their eyes, there is very little color which pop out to the naked eyes. The red of the cloth is the most prominent color I think is in the whole artwork. Besides this, the rest of Spring is built up with very natural and earthy tones. The trees and ground are created in a very dark tone, which the Uffizi Galleries state: "is in part due to the ageing process of the original pigment but is lightened by the abundance of fruits and flowers". With a rather dark background, the artwork is lightened by the vegetation, figures, and the very little sky which peeks through the trees in the background. Because the piece is named and focuses on the idea of Spring, it gives me the initial impression of the dead slowly coming back to life, just as the Earth slowly comes back to life after a long winter.

The last element we will focus on is the texture throughout Spring. If we start by looking at the nature around the forms, you can see the immense detail of the flowers and vegetation. This makes the viewer step closer to examine the small leaves and blooms that litter the bottom the work. If you look up to the top third of the piece, you can also see the amazing detail and dedication Boticelli gave to this piece. The trees have hundreds of leaves which you can see are individually shaped out, not just clumped together as a mass. This same idea is amplified by the vegetation found directly in the middle behind Venus. Looking closer you can see the way the leaves overlap each other and create a sort of depth within the greenery. Continuing onto the figures, we start to see the immense detail that is worked into the clothing and fabric of the gods and goddesses. When looking at Mercury, Venus, and Flora, you can almost feel the movement and way that the clothes drape across the figure. It is amazing how Boticelli was able to create a sort of softness with the fabric. You can also see how there are simple and complex patterns that are woven into the fabric, which help show the texture of the

fabric. It is amazing the detail which Botticelli has shown towards the forms which are dressed in the sheer type dresses. Through the delicate linework and transparency, the viewer can almost imagine the soft and fragile fabric which these dresses would have been made from. Although the figures are not given too much depth, I believe that the fabric helps give a little more texture and depth to help.

Next, I want to focus on the Principles of Art. The first principle which I want to look at is Pattern. When we focus on the nature aspect of the artwork, we can see the pattern of fruits and flowers which are scattered through the top and bottom of the piece. Secondly, I am wanted to focus on movement. From my initial view, I believe that the figure of Venus in the middle takes my focus at first. The color of her clothing and the way she seems to have more lightness of color seems to draw my attention. From there I believe that the viewer travels thought the art from the middle to the sides. Once I get to the sides of the piece, my eyes are brought to Zephyrus and Cupid who are depicted above the rest. From the top of the piece my eyes then are drawn down to Venus once again. Coming off movement is also the idea of emphasis. The viewer in my opinion is drawn directly to the figure of Venus at first, which I also stated earlier about the color of her clothes and the tone of lightness. She takes the viewers eyes immediately, and then the figure of Flora takes my attention secondly. As I talked about color before, I also believe that contrast ties into this piece as well. The way in which the background is a very dark and somber tone contrast greatly to the lightness and liveliness which the figures are shown. They almost have a type of glow.

When looking into the deeper meaning of the piece, I believe that there is a common theme of rebirth. When the spring comes around, we see nature come out of the decay of

winter and the rebirth of spring. Everything grows again. So also, we can see this common idea through the way which Chloris progresses into Flora. But in another sense, I also believe that the piece has a deeper meaning of overall wealth and prosperity since there are so many gods and goddesses which the ancient people would have looked up to. These were gods who the people prayed to for health, love, and overall wellness for their life. I believe that this work was created. Although there may not be a specific reason for this painting, I believe that this piece was created for a specific client or family, like the Medici family. This family was very popular within this time period to request certain artists to commission works of art, which have become very famous for the Renaissance time period. I think that the figures themselves are symbolic over what they are ruling over. For example, the goddess Venus, the goddess of love and beauty.

With the idea of artistic style, I believe that there are multiple types of artistic styles woven throughout the work of art. The first type of artistic style which I found in this piece is Gothic style. During the Gothic art period, many pieces of Christian imagery was incorporated into the style and theme of the art. I believe that this ties into Spring by the way which the figures appear. I believe the way Venus ties into the piece, as well as the other figures in a sense that they remind me as a painting in which Christ is surrounded by His disciples. I believe that the figures remind me of this same theme, which was very popular in the Gothic style, yet the figures represent pagan gods. It is a Christian imagery with pagan figures. Yet, at the same time, Sandro Boticelli incorporates realism in the figures which correlate to the art made in the Italian Renaissance style. Boticelli take the art that was popular of the time and incorporates it with an artistic style that was popular during the 12th century. I think that the significance of

this piece during the time period, and even now, is the detail and realism which Boticelli creates in the scene. Even now, the line work and realistic qualities of even the background and fabric of clothes is impressive and awe inspiring to artists.

When seeing this piece of art, it slightly reminds me of the Birth of Venus. Not just because that piece was also created by Sandro Boticelli, but the way that there is one figure which stand in the middle of the piece and other figures full of motion and life fill in around her. I believe that the art reflects the same idea of traditional art in the time of Christ surrounded by his disciples, but also by the way in which he places one of the three Graces with her back to the viewer, which helps draw the viewer in closer to the scene and makes them feel included. Spring rejects the traditional art in the fact that he incorporates realism to the different figures. He is the beginning of many artists to use and perfect the use of realism in their art.

Work Cited

"Spring." *Uffizi Galleries*, Uffizi Galleries, www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/botticelli-spring.