

# 14. Giving an edge to the beautiful line: Botticelli referenced in the works of contemporary artists to address issues of gender and global politics

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The exhibition *Botticelli Reimagined* in Berlin and London, by assembling such a great number of works directly inspired by Botticelli, has made it all the more obvious that some of his figures have to be considered not only as icons, but also as quintessences of Western art. By this I mean that they are not only instantly recognisable to the viewer as familiar compositions, but that they can be taken to represent by themselves certain general qualities of Western art.

In this paper, I would like to propose that two qualities in particular can be attributed to Botticelli: his females, especially his nude Venus, stand for the iconic representation of women in paintings, while the ubiquity of some of his most famous figures makes his name synonymous with Renaissance art, with the High Art of Europe. Obviously, it is difficult to prove these assertions on an empirical basis, and such claims can also be made for most celebrated figures by other painters, some of them even more famous, such as Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. The development of this paper will show, however, that Botticelli's inspirational quality is by no means limited to his two most famous paintings.

While the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers such as Evelyn de Morgan sought to imitate Botticelli's style and sensibility in the creation of genuinely new compositions, artists since the early twentieth century have drawn almost exclusively upon his motifs to create new works in which the whole or a part of a Botticelli painting is deliberately made visible as a reference to the original. It is important to keep the initial assertion of 'quintessentialness' in mind when examining two strings of questions that have guided contemporary artists to draw on motifs by Botticelli. If an artist wishes to express his or her concerns about imbalances in global politics, what kind of motif should be selected? A motif by Botticelli refers not only to Botticelli, but also to European culture at large. Thus this second layer of meaning raises the awareness of geography and facilitates the subsequent development of a geopolitical

reading of the work, which is not the case when the source, lacking specific features, cannot be identified in the new work.

The same choice applies with even greater pertinence to artists wanting to express their concerns with gender relations. Botticelli is known not only as the author of *The Birth of Venus* (fig.1.0), one of the most beautiful female nudes in art history, but also as the painter of one of the most violent depiction of torture against women in classical painting in the second panel of his *Nastagio degli Onesti* series.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike this contribution, the aim of the exhibition *Botticelli Reimagined* was not to focus on particular themes of Botticelli's reception. Still, it presented a significant number of works related to gender issues by artists such as ORLAN, Valie Export, Ulrike Rosenbach or Joel-Peter Witkin. Also featured was a selection of works by non-Occidental artists such as Youssef Nabil, Yin Xin and Tomoko Nagao, which served to highlight the global dimension of Botticelli in contemporary art, even if political aspects were not at the forefront. In order to avoid repetition, these works will not be part of this essay.<sup>2</sup>

One first example of Botticelli's attraction for artists wishing to express imbalances in gender relations is an oil painting by Eglè Otto. In her 2012 work *Botticelli, Giotto, Grünewald, da Vinci, Dürer, Mantegna, Rossetti, Ensor, Parmigianino, Lippi, Raffael, van der Weyden, Ingres, Ernst* (fig.4.20), she fills the light blue background of her canvas with 14 circular forms. These are copies of halos illuminating the heads of saints in paintings of the artists she lists in the title of her work. Botticelli is first in line: the halo at the top left corner surrounds the infant Jesus in *The Virgin Adoring the Sleeping Christ Child* or *Wemyss Madonna* (c.1485, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh). While pursuing her studies at HFBK art school in Hamburg during the 2000s, Otto noticed that the works presented in art history classes were almost exclusively by male artists. She started collecting the halos of male artists, which she copied, sometimes completing parts hidden by the heads, and assembled them on a pin wall like a collection of butterflies.<sup>3</sup> When transposing these halos to the canvas, the result resembles compositions by Hilma af Klint (for example, her 1907 work *The Childhood* from the series *The Ten Largest*). In this way, Otto transforms the work of male father figures of art history into an homage to the Swedish artist rediscovered in the 1980s as an early pioneer of abstract art.<sup>4</sup> This mother figure of abstraction thus plays the role of nemesis to the male-dominated art education that Otto (like so many others) received.

Another set of gender-related critiques is voiced in the work of photographer Matthias Herrmann, a former ballet dancer. In one work



**Fig.4.20** Eglé Otto (b. 1976), *Botticelli, Giotto, Grünewald, da Vinci, Dürer, Mantegna, Rossetti, Ensor, Parmigianino, Lippi, Raffael, van der Weyden, Ingres, Ernst*, 2012, oil on canvas, 130 × 107 cm. © Courtesy of the Artist.

from his artist's book *Paris Text Pieces*, a series of self-portraits in which some quotations convey additional meaning, one sees the artist with a blonde wig, donned in such a way as to reveal his real, short and dark hair, posing as *Venus pudica* (a possible shell at the bottom is not part of the photo). Next to his obviously male body a sign reads in French: '*Comment la Venus de Botticelli est devenue un top model anorexique*' (How Botticelli's *Venus* has become an anorexic top model).<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, this self-portrait can be aligned with other works in which the female characters of Botticelli undergo a sex change, such as Francis Picabia's

1930 oil painting *Salomé* (from the *Transparences* series). In this work Salomé's face has been modelled and feminised – through eye lashes, redder and fuller lips and a complete shaving of the beard – after the face of *Christ the Redeemer* (Accademia Carrara, Bergamo).<sup>6</sup> Joel-Peter Witkin's photographs featuring a transsexual Venus with breast and a penis featured in the exhibition,<sup>7</sup> while an even more sexually provocative version, *Botticelli's Venus, NYC* from 1982, depicts Venus holding 'her' erect penis in one hand. On the other hand, Herrmann's self-portrait draws attention to the well-known fact that Botticelli's *Venus* has been used abundantly in the fashion and beauty industry.<sup>8</sup> Both interpretations are a critique of contemporary society's use of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* to contribute to the formation of a normative female ideal of beauty. Such an ideal both denies beauty to queer forms of femininity and encourages women to undertake diets, cosmetic surgery and fitness training, fearing that their appearance might otherwise not conform to this canon of beauty and slenderness.

Sylvia Sleigh's 1974 oil painting *Maureen Conner and Paul Rosano* (fig.4.21) follows the composition of Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* (c.1485, National Gallery, London: fig.1.27). Leaving out the putti, she transposes the setting – appropriately for the hippie generation – into an idyllic garden; flowers in a multitude of species are reminiscent of the botanical profusion at the feet of the figures in the *Primavera* (fig.1.30). In Sleigh's painting, both protagonists are dressed in contemporary 1970s clothing, echoing the original garments. The two most gendered Olympian deities (Venus being the quintessence of femininity, Mars of masculinity) have just made love; Mars blissfully dozes off, while Venus contemplates him



**Fig.4.21** Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010), *Venus and Mars: Maureen Conner and Paul Rosano*, 1974, oil on canvas, 69.2 × 173.7 cm, Milwaukee Art Museum, Gift of the Artist and Dr and Mrs James Stadler (M1990.137). © Courtesy of the Estate of Sylvia Sleigh and Andrew Hottle.

with a face not revealing her possible thoughts. In Sleigh's 1970s version Paul Rosano is also depicted in delightful slumber, while Maureen Conner looks out of the picture in a far less satisfied way. If we agree that intercourse has occurred here as well, this last detail seems to open up a reflection on male egoism in heterosexual encounters – a topic much discussed during the times of sexual liberation.

Moving on to gender concerns in the non-Western context, Turkish artist Gülsün Karamustafa produced three works featuring the Venus from Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* during the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> The most notable of these is the 1985 assemblage, *Gold Venus with Mirror* (fig.4.22). It consists of a box covered with a glass panel to allow a view inside. The object thus creates a stage for something never seen before – the back side of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* – as an oblique look in the mirror covering the back wall confirms. Even if the auxiliary figures from Botticelli's original have been omitted, the shore setting is well recreated through crumbled aluminium foil and blue fabric, with the rain of roses hinted at by two large-scale artificial flowers. The most interesting part, however, is that the statuette is not the work of Karamustafa as a sculptor,



**Fig.4.22** Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946), *Gold Venus with Mirror*, 1985, found object, wood, plastics, mirror, 65 × 88 cm, courtesy the Artist and Rampa Gallery, Istanbul. Photo © Thomas Bruns, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie.

but the product of an anonymous industrial designer; it was bought by the artist in an Istanbul street bazaar selling cheap home decorations.

One aspect of this work plays with the notion of kitsch as a culture of interior decoration and explores its anarchic transgressions of origins and meanings. Karamustafa believes few potential purchasers would have been aware of the referenced original by Botticelli, or of the source of other statuettes for sale, such as the central figure in Botticelli's *Primavera* or the thirteen persons seated at a table from Leonardo's *Last Supper*, a subject devoid of its religious dimension for the predominantly Muslim buyers. The latter, if they take their religion seriously, should be averse to the female nudity in the *Venus*, though, according to the artist, this piece sold successfully.<sup>10</sup> Her work then presents the nude female halfway between a striptease dancer on stage and an item of natural history in a reconstructed habitat, not unlike a terrarium. Both readings present Venus as a forbidden fruit: to be seen through the glass, but not touched. The high value suggested by the display as a precious artefact (and the high cultural value commonly conceded to Botticelli's painting), combined with the cheap commercial value of the statuette, can be read as a metaphor for the status of women in Karamustafa's society. They may have value and prestige in notions of family honour, but few men value their choices for a self-determined life.

In yet another approach to the local condition of women, Iranian artist Farah Osūlī has created two gouaches in the style of Persian miniatures using the composition of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. This symbiosis of miniatures, which are traditionally flat and two dimensional, with a painting by Botticelli works rather well, given the preference in his paintings for linear composition over depth, for which he is often criticised. Bernard Berenson linked this aspect of Botticelli's style to the Oriental tradition:

The 'Birth of Venus' – take these lines alone with all their power of stimulating our imagination of movement, and what do we have? Pure values of movement abstracted, unconnected with any representation whatever. [...] Well! Imagine an art made up entirely of these quintessences of movement-values, and you will have something that holds the same relation to representation that music holds to speech – and this art exists, and it is called linear decoration. In this art of arts Sandro Botticelli may have rivals in Japan and elsewhere in the East, but in Europe never.<sup>11</sup>

What is remarkable in Osūlī's *Birth of Venus* (2007) and *Botticelli and I* (2014, [fig.4.23](#)) is that the female nymph on the right side has been



**Fig.4.23** Farah Osūli (b. 1953), *Botticelli and I*, 2014, gouache on cardboard, 75 × 100 cm. © Courtesy of the Artist.

replaced by a man, holding up the cloth in which to clad Venus, arriving on a sea shell. However, this Venus is not naked, as Botticelli accurately rendered the account of her birth given by Hesiod in his *Theogony*, but already quite heavily clothed. The cloak which the man holds in readiness at the right is not meant to protect an undressed body from the cold, as in Botticelli's version, but to hide away an already clothed body. This is precisely the role of garments such as the *chador* or the *manteau* that women have been required to wear in public to cover their body shape in Iran since the Islamic Revolution.

In Osūli's *The Birth of Venus*, the cloth the man holds is black and covered with stars. Interestingly, in Angelo Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra* – a poem composed between 1475 and 1478 – the veil the nymph holds is described as star-spangled, as a '*stellato vestimento*' (stanza CII). Botticelli did not follow this hint from Poliziano, but rather embellished the cloak with flowers, although he did adopt the sea shell proposed by Poliziano a few *stanze* earlier (XCIX), which was not mentioned by Hesiod. It appears that the man wants literally to cover and smother the woman in darkness, an interpretation reinforced in *Botticelli and I*. In the latter work the Zephyr-man on the left points an elaborately inlaid rifle at the female who, according to the title, might be the artist herself.

In *Botticelli and I*, the cloth is adorned with small swastikas, possibly a reference to the ancient religious symbol abundantly in use on the Indian subcontinent, culturally much closer to Persia in the heyday of Persian miniature paintings. But this symbol also has obvious reference to Nazi Germany and seems to reinforce the unyielding character of the ideology behind the dress codes imposed on women in present-day Iran.<sup>12</sup>

Shifting the focus from works expressing gender issues but remaining in the global dimension of artists' engagement with works by Botticelli, I would like to introduce David LaChapelle's adaptation of Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* in his photograph *The Rape of Africa* (2009). Even though it was included in the exhibition and received an entry in the catalogue, I believe the most important part for the perspective of this paper has not been presented adequately.<sup>13</sup> The more obvious message is suggested by the title: a hole in the back wall of the shack where the scene takes place is meant to evoke poor living conditions in Africa. The image offers a powerful view about excavators in an arid landscape busy removing natural resources from Africa, piled up in the lower right of the picture. The work is often undertaken in conjunction with heavy weapons, as indicated by the bazooka and machine gun held by the boys who take the place of Botticelli's putti, playing with the arms and armour of Mars.

The presence of supermodel Naomi Campbell as Venus gave the work another twist one year after its creation, as she had to appear in an international court as witness to a trial against former Liberian leader Charles Taylor. He had allegedly presented her with a so-called conflict diamond, the lack of traceability of its origins being linked to the financing of non-governmental armed groups. Campbell's testimony, the prosecutor hoped, would be another proof of the great stock of such diamonds held by Taylor, who was accused of dealing in them to finance rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone.<sup>14</sup> But this detail should not make us overlook that the god of war is sleeping on gold and diamonds while others do the dirty work of obtaining and selling them – nor the fact that this god's skin is white, unlike that of Venus Naomi Campbell, who represents the title's raped Africa. The fact that Mars is incarnated by Caleb Lane, of far less celebrity than Campbell, could be a hint at the anonymity of those who profit, when compared to the flagrance of the suffering.

Another layer of interpretation can be deduced from the wallpaper of the shack, which is covered with cardboard boxes of washing powders and bleaches. Such items were abundantly advertised in the first decades of Western colonialism in Africa, with imagery linking the superiority of



the colonisers to their higher standards of hygiene. In what were meant as attention-catching jests for Western consumers, some of these images implied that colonial subjects could move up the ladder of civilisation by using bleaches to reduce the darkness of their skin.<sup>15</sup> The racial discrimination implied by the use of bleaching agents is augmented by the blue contact lenses worn by Naomi Campbell and the boy on the far right. The rape of the continent made explicit in LaChapelle's title refers not only to the violent physical exploitation of its natural resources, but also to the technological methods of achieving this (excavators and fire weapons) and the psychological disposition (greed and consumerism, hinted at by the Warholian repetition of the detergent boxes). This destructive legacy of the colonisers has now been literally incorporated by the locals (Campbell's contact lenses) in what could be summarised as capitalism. The relative carelessness with which most people enjoy the ownership of diamonds or the sight of others wearing them is echoed in the luxurious and glossy C-Print, providing the material support for a message of such serious post-colonial implications.<sup>16</sup>

Another set of works places Botticelli's motives in a global perspective with political dimensions. In an oil painting called *Venus* (1975, Ludwig Forum für International Kunst, Aachen), the Icelandic artist Erró – known for his pop-art-style collages, including elements of Communist propaganda posters – has put Botticelli's *Venus* along with her shell and parts of the auxiliary characters in front of a Chinese *xuānchuánhuà* (propaganda illustration) showing Mao Zedong among workers and red banners. Once the clash of two distinct frames of references is acknowledged, further interpretations of this work appear rather limited and straightforward. Is Chinese propaganda art as beautiful as Botticelli's *Venus*? Is the *Venus* in itself propaganda and if so, for what? For Western hegemony in the visual arts?

A more complex message emanates from the minimal installation of the series *Triptychos Post Historicus*, by Yugoslav-born artist Braco Dimitrijević. Here a work of art from a museum's collection is grouped with both a personal, everyday object and a vegetable or a fruit. In 1996 Dimitrijević obtained permission from the Louvre to place an apple and a candle in front of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Man* (c.1470–5); he then personally lit the candle.<sup>17</sup> This series started in 1976, when it was one of the first ever systematic artistic interventions with museum collections. It questions the modes of tradition of heritage and history by engaging older works with present-day objects apparently devoid of value. What chain of circumstances is at play by which some objects are elevated to museum status while others are forgotten? Are the objects of a museum

collection locked up in some kind of a-historicity, and how do they relate to the present? Is the cultural or financial capital they represent an objective quantity? In short, these questions are of an economic order, as they address the value of master paintings measured against other items or their utility.

These questions may seem less pressing today, since interventions into museum collections have become a regular artistic practice. However, it is worth noting that they were first articulated by an artist such as Dimitrijević, who grew up in a socialist society. The last work in this set is an almost literal copy of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Man with the Medal of Cosimo de' Medici* (c.1475, Uffizi, Florence: fig.1.7). However, the Iranian painter Aydin Aghdashlou has left out the face of the man, which he now presents framed by the medal in his hands (fig.4.24). The landscape, visible where the face should have been, seems at first to be a continuation of Botticelli's background, but is in fact the view seen through the window of Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy* (c.1490, Louvre, Paris). This detail further strengthens what Aghdashlou somewhat straightforwardly expresses with his entire 1970s



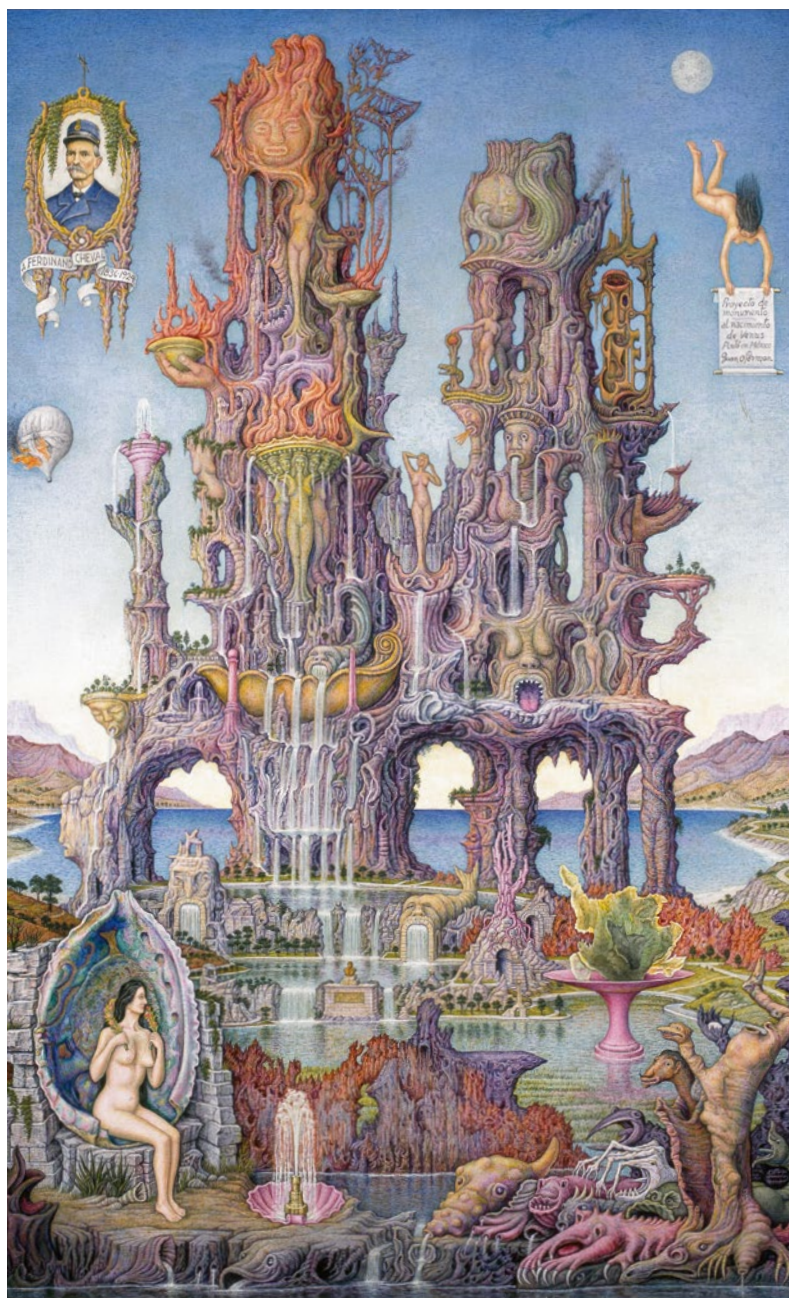
**Fig.4.24** Left: Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Man with a Medal of Cosimo the Elder*, c.1475, tempera and gilded stucco on wood, 57.5 × 44 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; Right: Aydin Aghdashlou (b. 1940), *Portrait by Sandro Botticelli (Taşvîri az Sândro Botteçelli)*, 1975, gouache on paper, 71 × 50 cm, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran. © Courtesy of the Artist.

series *Memories of Annihilation*. This has many more Western sources literally disfigured, or Persian manuscripts shown burned or crumpled. The postmodern practice of mixing different sources, Aghdashlou seems to suggest, is another point in case of our era's unwillingness to value the artistic heritage as being of so much higher quality than our own productions. Aghdashlou thus reacts to the imposed Westernisation of his country during the reign of the two Pahlavi shahs (from 1925 to 1979), as well as to the physical dismantlement of Persian manuscript books into single leaves to obtain higher prices on the Western art market.<sup>18</sup>

A rather peculiar painting is the work of the Mexican architect and painter Juan O'Gorman, *Proyecto de Monumento al Nacimiento de Venus* (1976, fig.4.25). At least two Venuses and three shells form part of an elaborate and fantastic structure, reminiscent through the ponds from which it rises of the architectural elements of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The main inspiration is credited to the *Palais Idéal* building in the French Drôme region, as indicated by a small portrait in homage to its creator, the postman Ferdinand Cheval. Another *cartellino* on the right hand side of the canvas explicitly states Mexico as the country where this monument was conceived. By mentioning this fact in writing, it seems that O'Gorman intends to challenge the geopolitical ownership of the *The Birth of Venus* – regarded, as I proposed in the introduction, as an exclusive possession of Europe (with some rights inherited by North America through cultural descent).

Last but not least, *Primavera* is an ensemble of works created in 2016 by Nigerian-born artist Sokari Douglas Camp. It consists of welded metal statues representing in different sizes all nine figures from the painting of the same name by Botticelli (fig.4.26).<sup>19</sup> The adult-size statue modelled after Flora has the face of a woman from Nigeria: brown eyes gaze out at the viewer over full red lips in a brown face. Like the light-skinned and blue-eyed woman in Botticelli's painting, Douglas Camp's statue carries flowers grouped as a bouquet in her hand and others strung like a garland around her dress, made of delicately welded and transparent leaves. They echo the pattern of the dress in Botticelli's painting, where the stems and leaves take up more space than the blossoms. However, a closer look at the petals, painted in bright colours, reveals metal items – toy cars – of equally gaudy colours, blending with the botanical decoration.

The painting's central protagonist has been constructed as another adult-size statue, a screen of branches radiating around her like a halo and crowned by the arrow-shooting putto. While the central figure and the putto have not been painted and present a uniform, silvery-metal appearance – save for the reds of the woman's veil and the putto's quiver



**Fig.4.25** Juan O'Gorman (1905–82), *Proyecto de Monumento al Nacimiento de Venus*, 1976, tempera on wood, 122 × 82 cm, Pérez Simón Collection, México. © Pérez Simón Collection, México.



**Fig.4.26** Sokari Douglas Camp (b. 1958), partial view of the work ensemble *Primavera* (presented at October Gallery between 7 April–14 May 2016), 2015–16, steel, gold and copper leaf, acrylic paint, various dimensions. © Courtesy of the Artist and October Gallery, London.

– the branches are coloured in two different greens: a more turquoise green for the small, almond-shaped leaves surrounding the head and a darker green at the bottom. This lower vegetation, covered by the other figures in Botticelli's painting, has been shaped by Douglas Camp in the form of large banana leaves. The metal she uses for the foliage is that of oil barrels, cut open to build the backdrop.

In summary, Douglas Camp not only transfers Botticelli's two-dimensional shapes to three-dimensional statues, as the maker of the Venus statue used by Gülsün Karamustafa had done, but Africanises them through two operations. One, more visible, is her rendering of Flora's face and the addition of banana leaves at the feet of *Primavera*.

The other lies in the references to oil, through the barrels used for the construction of parts of the Primavera group or the inclusion of toy cars, associated with her native Nigeria and its oil-rich Niger Delta region. This circumstance affects local life quite bitterly, in terms of pollution and especially politics. It is felt by many that most of the revenues from the oil extraction go to foreign companies and their corrupt local agents, while guerrillas conduct operations of sabotage, abduction and other violent interventions around oil-producing sites.<sup>20</sup> In Sokari Douglas Camp's ensemble *Primavera*, inspired by Botticelli, one finds similar concerns to those in David LaChapelle's *The Rape of Africa* – with the difference that in the former these are informed by the artist's close personal ties with the country, even after she took up residence in London.

In a brief conclusion, we should welcome the fact that Botticelli's originals do inspire contemporary works voicing serious concerns. They confirm that artists draw upon these sources in a reflective way and for a specific purpose, not simply because of their availability or the appealing quality of their designs. Touching on complex or edgy subjects represents an addition to the numerous possibilities of engagement with Botticelli. The new works are proofs of Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben* and facilitate the mediation of the originals with a contemporary public. Speaking both technically and metaphorically, an edge provides a further dimension. It is thus an enrichment to the beautiful and purely decorative line, criticised for its lack of depth by the likes of Bernard Berenson.

## Notes

- 1 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus: nudité, rêve, cruauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). The brutality of the depiction is even more striking as the choice of subject, a side event taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, was a whim of Botticelli's patron in search of a wedding picture and thus lacked a great deal of the moral necessity conveyed by religious commissions depicting the martyrdom of female saints, especially that of St Agatha of Sicily.
- 2 Valie Export's *LIEBESPERLEN/Nonpareille* (1976) was only on shown in Berlin and had no entry in the catalogue. This large triptych consists of three black and white self-portraits of the artist on a white background, each re-enacting the pose of one of the Three Graces in Botticelli's *Primavera*. What looks effortless and graceful in Botticelli's painting is in fact quite a contorted pose to adopt. These works are in line with the artist's mid-1970s series *Body Configurations*, mentioned in the entry for her work *Expectation* (1976; cat. no.24).
- 3 Email from Eglé Otto to the author, 19 April 2016.
- 4 Emma Enderby, Melissa Blanchflower and Melissa Lerner, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Painting the Unseen* (London: Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, 2016).
- 5 Matthias Herrmann, *Paris Text Pieces* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1998).
- 6 See *Botticelli Reimagined*, exh. cat. (London: V&A Publishing, 2016), 284–5, cat. no.133.
- 7 See *Botticelli Reimagined*, exh. cat. (London: V&A Publishing, 2016), 160–1, cat. no.18.
- 8 To just quote two examples not mentioned in or around the exhibition: The cover page of the French fashion magazine *Le Jardin des Modes* (issue dated 18 June 1937) shows the photograph of a dressed model standing on a painted sea shell with the sea and waves visible, copied exactly from Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (thanks to Adelheid Rasche for providing me with a scan). The 1966 Italian science-fiction movie by Pietro Francisci, *2 + 5 Missione Hydra* (reissued as *Star Pilot* to the US and English-speaking markets) begins with a short sequence in which we see the shooting of an advertisement for a brand of bath salts (*sali da bagno*). In this the female main character stands in an elaborate and moving set design of waves modelled after Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, explicitly shown in the movie as a photograph in the hands of the directors supervising the production (thanks to Jean-Claude Lebensztejn for introducing me to the film).
- 9 For a more detailed account of Karamustafa's engagement with the Venus figure and the notion of kitsch, see Alice Bombardier and Gabriel Montua, 'À l'est de Chypre. La Vénus de Botticelli chez Ağhdāshlū, Karamustafa et Osūli. Etude de transferts artistiques Occident-Orient', *REMMM - Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée, Arts visuels, Constextualiser nos regards* 142 (2017): 33–52. For a reproduction of Karamustafa's other Venus works see Melanie Roumiguère and Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, ed., *Chronographia: Gülsün Karamustafa* (Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2016), 112 [*Panther Venus* (1985)], 116 [*Venus in Jar* (1988)].
- 10 Email by Gülsün Karamustafa to the author, 24 December 2016.
- 11 Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 112.
- 12 For a more detailed analysis of these two works and their context with regards to the tradition of miniature painting and its present day use in Iran see Bombardier, Montua, 'A l'est de Chypre'. The veiling of Venus in post-revolution Iran is addressed also in Marjane Satrapi's animated film *Persepolis* (2007), in which a teacher of art history introduces female students to a reproduction of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, with pretty much everything blacked out except for Venus's head and the shell on which she stands. When Iranian president Hassan Rouhani was given a tour of Rome's sites during a state visit on 26 January 2016, another *Venus pudica*, the Capitoline Venus, was covered, along with other statues, as a courtesy by the hosts. Stephanie Kirchgassner, 'Rome spares Iranian president's blushes by covering nude statues', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2016, accessed 29 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/26/rome-spares-iranian-presidents-blushes-covering-nude-statues>.
- 13 *Botticelli Reimagined*, 143–5, cat. no. 6.
- 14 Lizzy Davies, 'Naomi Campbell: I had nothing to gain by lying to Charles Taylor trial', *The Guardian*, 11 August 2010, accessed 29 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/11/naomi-campbell-denies-lying-over-diamonds>. Thanks to Kumi Tanimura of the artist's studio for providing the name of the male model.
- 15 Anne McClintock, 'Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity racism and imperial advertising', in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 314, analyses an advertisement poster for a British manufacturer with the slogan 'We are

going to use Chlorinol and be like de white nigger'. The advertisement depicts three coloured boys, one of whom has apparently already applied the bleach to his skin. The wording makes it quite clear that even a change of skin colour would not promote the colonised subject to equal rights with the white, an intermediate status being all they can hope for.

- 16 The link between the diamonds and the deadly methods of obtaining them is further highlighted by the reference to Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull, *For the Love of God* (2007). A preparatory drawing by LaChapelle, shown in a video at the London venue of the exhibition, has the explicit mention: 'DIAMOND DH SKULL', the initials obviously referring to Damien Hirst.
- 17 For a reproduction of this work see Danilo Eccher, ed., *Braco Dimitrijević* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2016), 243, or the artist's home page, accessed 29 January 2017: [http://bracodimitrijevic.com/index.php?album=tryptichos&image=tryptichos\\_013.jpg](http://bracodimitrijevic.com/index.php?album=tryptichos&image=tryptichos_013.jpg).
- 18 For a more detailed account of the *Memories of Annihilation* series and the political circumstances in Iran see Bombardier and Montua, 'A l'est de Chypre'.
- 19 *Primavera. Sokari Douglas Camp C.B.E.* (London: October Gallery, 2016).
- 20 Michael Watts, 'Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict, Violence and Political Disorder in the Niger Delta', *Review of African political economy* 34, no.114 (2007): 637–60.



