

## News Release

### Exhibition Highlights

#### Botticelli Reimagined

Sponsored by Societe Generale

5 March – 3 July 2016

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#### David LaChapelle, *Rebirth of Venus*, 2009



The work of American photographer, filmmaker and video artist David LaChapelle often contains references to Old Master paintings. In his vividly colourful version of *The Birth of Venus*, the goddess is transformed into a blonde model. Flanked by two muscle men, her modesty is concealed by a shell held by the figure on the left. Whereas Botticelli's goddess of beauty alights from her shell like an immaculate apparition, LaChapelle uses the shell as an ironic and frankly erotic device.

Creative Exchange Agency, New York, Steven Pranica /  
Studio LaChapelle  
© David LaChapelle

#### Yin Xin, *Venus, after Botticelli*, 2008



The hallmark of Chinese artist Yin Xin's work is the addition of Chinese characteristics to traditional Western paintings. He is especially interested in canonical works, such as the Botticelli's universally celebrated *The Birth of Venus*. Here, he depicts Venus reduced to head and shoulders, with black (rather than blonde) hair blowing in the wind, and unmistakeably Asian eyes. Xin's work combines Western and Eastern elements to stress how our perception of artistic value is determined by our cultural context.

Fine Art, Paris  
Guillaume Duhamel  
Private collection, courtesy Duhamel

#### Dolce & Gabbana, *Venus Dress: Look 15, Spring/Summer 1993*



Dolce & Gabbana's 1993 Spring/Summer collection was inspired by the 'hippy' or 'gypsy' look of the 1970s. This loose, flowing dress incorporates layers of photo-printed sections of the goddess in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* as a pattern. By fragmenting and reconstructing an image that has come to embody a universal ideal, the designers addressed issues of mass culture, femininity, and the ongoing search for a new canon of beauty. The enduring impact of this dress became apparent when the pop star Lady Gaga wore it while promoting her album *Artpop* in 2013.

Catwalking.com

## William Morris, John Henry Dearle (designed), Morris & Co (made), *The Orchard*, 1890

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



scrolling banner bears the text of William Morris's poem 'The Orchard', which he composed for the tapestry, celebrating the return of spring. This subject and the tall, elegant figures are reminiscent of Botticelli's *Primavera*.

## Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *La Ghirlandata*, 1873

© Guildhall Art Gallery 2015.  
Photo Scala Florence/ Heritage Images



Described by Rossetti as 'the greenest picture in the world', this is one of several three-quarter-length paintings of beautiful women making music made between 1865 and 1877. *La Ghirlandata* was painted at Kelmscott Manor, the country house of William Morris, whose eleven-year-old daughter May posed for the angel heads at top right and left. These closely flank the central figure like the paired angels and saints in a Botticelli workshop tondo of the *Virgin and Child* acquired by the National Gallery in 1855 and also included in the exhibition.

## Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Lady known as Smeralda Bandinelli*, c.1470–5

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



This painting was purchased in 1867 by the Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who believed the sitter was the model for the figure of Venus in Botticelli's *Primavera*. Inspired by this and a poem in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, Rossetti painted a beautiful young woman at half-length, titled *The woman at the window*. A key work in the Victorian rediscovery of Botticelli, this picture entered the V&A's collection in 1901. After over a century of speculation, a recent scientific investigation confirmed that the reddish-blonde hair of *Smeralda* is by Botticelli, and not a later intervention by Rossetti, famed for his red-headed models. Recent cleaning has removed an obscuring yellowed varnish to reveal the luminescent colours Botticelli intended.

## Sandro Botticelli, *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels*, c. 1490



Image courtesy of Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien

This elaborate composition demonstrates Botticelli's intensive and continually renewed engagement with the tondo, a Florentine devotional format intended for domestic display. The high quality of this work suggests that it is a faithful autograph copy of a lost original.

## Sandro Botticelli and workshop, *Venus*, 1490s



© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Even during Botticelli's lifetime, his contemporary, Antonio Billi, acknowledged that he painted 'the most beautiful naked women'. These monumental nudes, among the earliest such figures in Renaissance painting, were inspired by classical statues of the *Venus Pudica* – Venus covering her nakedness. Botticelli included this image in his multi-figure composition, but also used it as an autonomous figure, as here. Its statue-like character helps to explain its enduring adaptability in other visual contexts, and consequent universal popularity today.

## Sandro Botticelli, *Allegory of Abundance or Autumn*, c.1480–5



© The Trustees of the British Museum

This drawing is unique among Botticelli's graphic works and is one of the most beautiful drawings of the 15th century. This delicate image of feminine beauty clad in loose floating drapery and with a dancing gait resembles three graceful nymphs by the artist: Flora and Venus from *Primavera* and the nude figure in *The Birth of Venus*. Also reminiscent of the armed goddess in *Pallas and the Centaur*, the drawing may be intermediate in date between it and *Primavera*.

*Botticelli Reimagined* is jointly organised by the V&A and the Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

- ENDS -

## Notes to Editors

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**For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Elizabeth Barrett or Nina Sandhaus in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2502 or email l.barrett@vam.ac.uk / n.sandhaus@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).**

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