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A comparison: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1484-1486. Tempera on canvas, 5' 9" x 9' 2". Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence and Peter Paul Rubens, *Consequences of War*, 1638-1639. Oil on canvas, 6' 9" x 11' 3 7/8". Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

During the Renaissance and Baroque period religion was the dominating theme of most paintings. Religious works were heavily commissioned as the increase in demand played an important role in the social and political aspects of life. Few works depicting Mythology rather than Christian themes became a popular way to express allegories of human characteristics. This essay will compare Sandro Botticelli's, *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1484-1486. Tempera on canvas, 5' 9" x 9' 2". Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence to Peter Paul Rubens', *Consequences of War*, 1638-1639. Oil on canvas, 6' 9" x 11' 3 7/8". Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence to see how Mythology influenced both artists to incorporate classical themes in their secular art.

Sharing the infrequent theme of Mythology, both works depict Venus, the Goddess of Love. In Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, she is the first example of a full female nude Venus in the Renaissance. Her composition is inspired by classical antiquity of ancient Greek and Roman statues, as she has modestly draped her hair and arms to cover herself in the same manner of a Capitoline Venus. It's important to note that most works of the 15<sup>th</sup> century depicted nakedness as the original sin of Adam and Eve and expressed shame at their nudity. This newly born Venus has an expression of reserve as she is floated to her island Cythera. She stands on a scalloped shell that is propelled from the left by the figure of Zephyrus that carries the nymph Chloris. On the shore to Venus' right is Horae the Goddess of Seasons, waiting for Venus with a floral mantle in hand. Though the work expresses lots of movement from the wind of Zephyrus seen in how the mantle billows, Venus herself being blown into shore, and even the waves showing how choppy they have become, the work is flat. The heavy use of patterns creates a 2-dimensional space, and the figures are also all on the same level, each seems to be floating in the space they occupy. None of the subjects are closer or deeper in the scene than the other. However, it is the movement that this work expresses that is also seen in the *Consequences of War*, in a richer way than the *Birth of Venus*. Rubens' has perfected the use of foreshortening in his Baroque drama piece. The shared theme of Mythology shows Venus as the lover of Mars the God of War, she rushes to stop Mars from charging into battle. The shared movement in this piece along with the *Birth of Venus* is also being propelled to the right. Venus is grasping Mars from the left, tugging at his sword arm to try and stop him, but he is unswayed and continues his forward motion. That motion that Venus and Mars create propels the movement that the rest of the piece portrays.

In *Consequences of War*, Mars rushes forth from the Janus Temple of peace toward a flame holding Fury with armor and a bloodied sword. Below the fighting are prone figures

meant to represent the cost of war. A fallen woman with a broken lute is meant to represent that Harmony has been broken. A twisted architect is thrown on his back showing that peace constructs and war tears down. There is also a mother with child in arms that are being trampled by monsters personifying Pestilence and Famine. Mars is even trampling on books showing not only are lives lost in war, but the arts as well. Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the works is the allegorical figure of Europe. To the left of Venus dressed in blue is a woman desperately in despair. Her arms are raised expressing her anguish at the price of war. Europe was truly desperate at the time of this commission, the 30- year war had taken a significant toll on the majority of the European countries between 1618-1648. Here Europe wears a crown with no jewels, and she has tears in her eyes expressing that she would not be able to handle more war. Rubens has cleverly used the characteristics of Mythological characters to tell the story of the heavy price war costs.

Whereas Botticelli has made a visual representation of a classical mythological story, Ruben's has created his own narrative using known characters from mythology. Though Christian themes were extremely popular during the Renaissance and later the Baroque time period, the classical antiquity of Greek and Roman Mythology greatly influenced the secular arts of the time.



Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1484-1486. Tempera on canvas, 5' 9" x 9' 2". Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Consequences of War*, 1638-1639. Oil on canvas, 6' 9"x 11' 3 7/8". Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.