

Venus and Mars
by
Botticelli

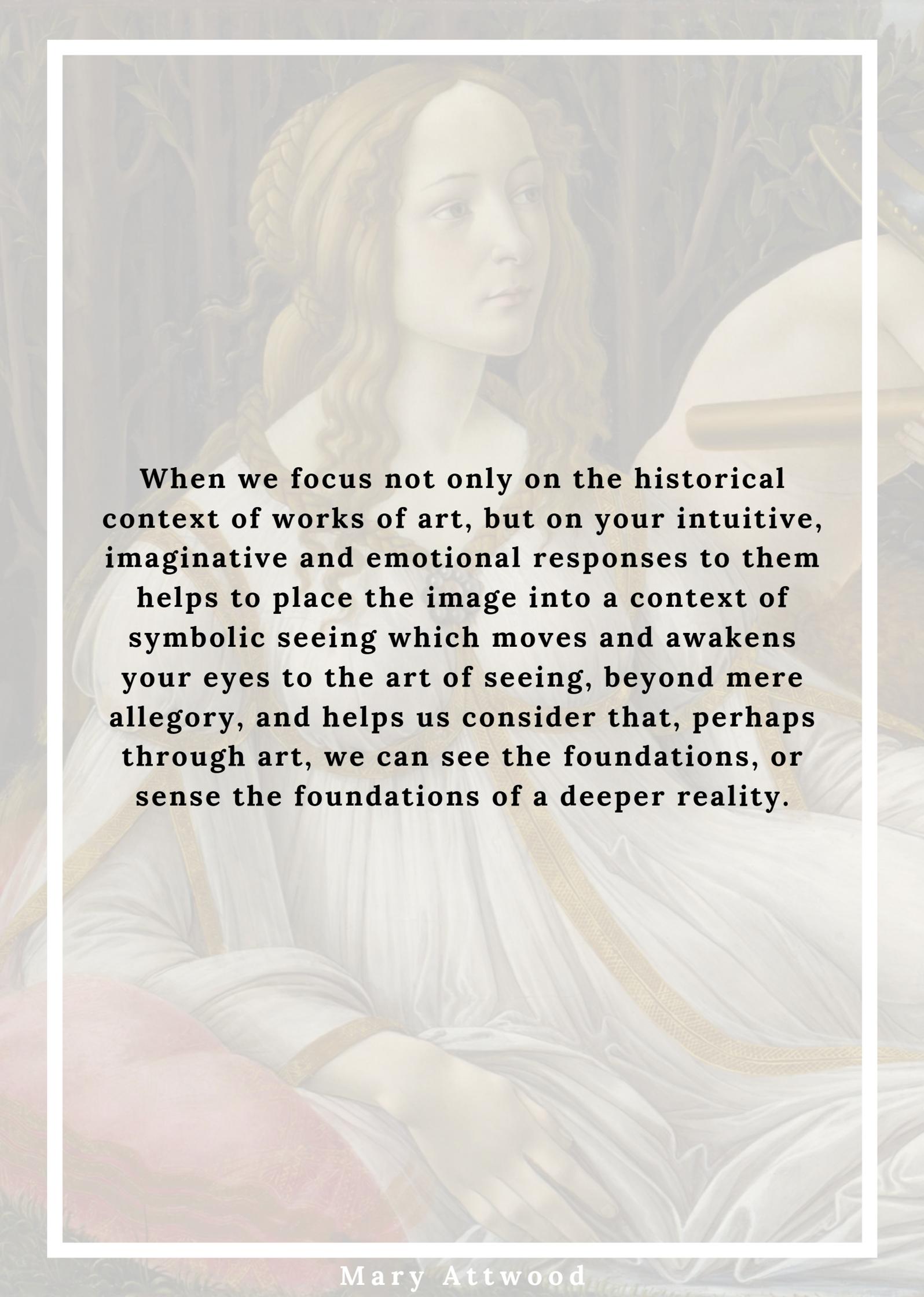
VENUS AND MARS

C. 1485

Botticelli's painting of Venus and Mars was created to help open the eyes to the art of seeing and reading paintings.

Frederick Franck, painter, sculptor and spiritual teacher said "No wonder once the art of seeing is lost, meaning is lost, and all life seems ever more meaningless." We know how to read a book and get lost in the other reality of the imagination and we engage in music and are moved by it, but have we forgotten our visionary ability when it comes to art? Have we forgotten how to really look and see and understand paintings and statues. Created for a private patron, most likely the Vespucci family, this painting is packed with symbolic details. Here we see the goddess of love, Venus, alert but relaxed while her love, Mars, the god of war, is lost in a deep sleep. He is unaware of the naughty little satyrs passing by and running off with his armour.

You can see if you look closely the little wasps swarming around his head which don't even alert him- and hence the Italian for wasp, vespa, could be the symbol here for the patron, Vespucci. But this painting wasn't just meant to be read as an allegory of Love overcoming War because we hear that a lot in descriptions of this painting. Paintings such as this would have been displayed in an important room in the patron's house where they could show their friends and dignitaries Hung at eye level, this painting and others like it, were literally windows to other worlds and a way to bring what they believed to be underlying principles of the cosmos, into the eyeline of the viewer. The figures of Venus and Mars show the Renaissance concern for the human body, reviving the appearance of ancient Greek and Roman statues - and also with a sense of humour because Mars' pose is impossible to replicate in real life which points to his wayward nature, whereas Venus is poised and in control: so here Love clearly reigns over War in more than one way.



When we focus not only on the historical context of works of art, but on your intuitive, imaginative and emotional responses to them helps to place the image into a context of symbolic seeing which moves and awakens your eyes to the art of seeing, beyond mere allegory, and helps us consider that, perhaps through art, we can see the foundations, or sense the foundations of a deeper reality.