

Imperfect Venus

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In his classic history of art Ernst Gombrich offers a powerful insight into life while discussing Botticelli's famous "Birth of Venus." Botticelli deliberately misproportioned Venus and Gombrich notes that the figure emerging from the half shell is more beautiful for her flaws: "the unnatural length of her neck, the steepfall of her shoulders..." The painter's Venus is less correctly drawn than his predecessors, but "they enhance the impression of an infinitely tender and delicate being."

The great artist fashioned flaws to create a legendary effect. We are familiar with the idea of distortion augmenting beauty. How often do we recognize that the very imperfections in another endear us to them, draw our hearts in the way that an icy ideal could never do? When we hear the lyrics, "my funny valentine...your looks are laughable, unphotographable, but you're my favorite work of art" we know what lyricist Hart meant: a seeming shortcoming beguiles.

"Lord" cries out the Psalmist, "you have examined me and know me" (Psalm 139). To be known is to understand that faults need not always be cause for estrangement, but can be part of the portrait, one with steepfall shoulders and wayward hearts, that draw us to one another.