

Small Correspondence

Comment on “Pallas and the Centaur”

Luigi Fabbrizzi

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CORRESPONDENCE

Comment on "Pallas and the Centaur"

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Professor Luigi Fabbrizzi (University of Pavia) has commented on footnote 16 in the article titled "Nanoscale Borromean Rings" by Cantrill et al. in the January issue as follows: the interpretation of Botticelli's painting, "Pallas and the Centaur" as an allegory of wisdom triumphing over instinct is perhaps too simplistic and does not account for some of the details of the painting. At the time of the painting (1482), Lorenzo the Magnificent had just concluded an important peace treaty with the powerful and threatening Kingdom of Naples (1480). The painting illustrates the event in a symbolic way: the Bay of Naples is depicted in the background of the picture. In particular, Pallas represents Lorenzo the Magnificent (Flo-

rence), who uses the forces of reason and of diplomacy to tame the uncouthed enemy, the Centaur (the King of Naples), but is also supported by a well-prepared and efficient army, symbolized by the halberd. The theme of peace is also illustrated by the crown of olive branches, worn by Pallas. Lorenzo the Magnificent, who indeed was not in command of a strong army, aimed to control and possibly rule Italy by the use of diplomacy and extended political relationships. Botticelli's painting emphasizes this strategy and ambition. It should be noted that in the neoplatonic culture dominating Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century, Pallas (Minerva) symbolized political strategy in contrast to Mars, which was synonymous with military strategy. In fact, the painting was not commissioned by Lorenzo il Magnifico himself but by his cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco dei Medici, the direct patron of Sandro Botticelli. The painting was hanging in the palace in Florence of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco along with the other famous Botticelli painting, the so-called Primavera (both paintings being today exhibited at the Uffizi Gallery).

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