

Guide to the tactile exploration of the book “Sandro Botticelli. Primavera”.

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Introduction

The following text is a guide to exploring the tactile book “Sandro Botticelli. Primavera [Allegory of the Spring]”. Its pages contain texts in braille and images in relief. The edition is bilingual, in the Italian and English languages: the Italian texts are on the upper half of each page, followed by a horizontal dashed line that separates them from the English texts on the lower half. The page numbers are at the beginning of each line of each of the two versions of the texts, while on the pages that contain only the tactile images, the page numbers are on the top left.

The book, printed with transparent ink in relief on the texts and visible colour images, offers tactile reproductions of the painting. A number of the details have been divided up so that they may be explored through touch. The volume, made of heavy paper, is in the form of a notebook measuring 22 cm wide and 28 cm high; the first part with the texts in braille and the images in relief makes up the first 14 pages contained in a cover printed in the same paper. The back of the cover has a folded flap which provides the credits and information about the edition. The second part, which comprises the back of the first 14 pages and is not made for tactile exploration, consists of texts in Italian and English printed in enlarged letters and close-up images of some details of the painting, to enable reading for the visually impaired.

On pages 1 to 4 are introductory texts in braille. Pages five and six contain the [complete painting](#); the pages that follow contain more in-depth information about the various parts of the work, with

the explanatory text in braille on the left-hand page and the illustration in relief on the right-hand page. [Back to the list](#)

Cover

The image on the cover shows the face of Flora, the patron goddess of spring.

This tactile illustration portrays the face, surrounded by flowing hair. Using your hands, the first thing you recognise is the square that borders the illustration, which you can explore starting from the top. Moving downward as far as the shoulders, you can trace the coiled hair on both sides of the face, which is in a perfectly frontal position. The flowers interrupt the curving lines of the hair, forming a type of crown that decorates the top of her head, and there are a few flowers at the sides and lower down.

At this point you can continue to move downward to the sides of the neck, where, with your fingers, you can feel other flowers that form a corona on the neckline below, of which only the upper part is evident. Moving with your fingers back toward the central part of her face, at the top you can identify the two delicate arched lines that form her eyebrows and, just below these, her eyes with their pupils. Her nose is a descending line that follows the light shadow which in the painting outlines its form. This line finishes with the nostrils below, which can be identified as two pairs of almost symmetrical arched lines. Lower still are her lips, two undulating lines in slight relief, barely open with the hint of a smile; finally, the line of the chin outlines the oval of her face and meets her hair at the sides of her cheeks. [Back to the list](#).

Page 1: index

Immediately after the [cover](#), the book begins with the index in braille: the upper half of the page is in Italian, and the half below the dashed line, in English. [Back to the list](#).

Page 2: QR codes

In each of the two sections on the page, Italian and English, there is a brief text in braille and three QR codes for each of the two languages. Each code is surrounded by a square in relief. The codes refer to a section of the Uffizi Gallery website containing in-depth audio descriptions and this guide (in Italian and English). The codes on the left take you to Botticelli's biography, those in the middle to the description of the painting, and those on the right to the guide to tactile exploration of the

book. We recommend that you listen to the audio description before beginning the tactile exploration of the illustrations in relief. [Back to the list.](#)

Page 3: introduction to the painting

Brief introduction in braille. The more detailed description can be found in the section of the site which is accessed using the QR codes on the previous page. [Back to the list.](#)

Page 4: key

The key that follows the brief opening text allows you to identify the nine figures portrayed in the painting. The names are in Italian in the left-hand column, and in English in each corresponding line in the column on the right. The Italian texts are separated from the English texts by a dashed line. Each name is appointed a letter from 'a' to 'i'. The characters in the work are appointed letters that go from the right to the left, following the sequence that, according to scholars, identifies the direction of movement in which the work should be interpreted. These letters are also at the base of the complete illustration, on [pages 5 and 6](#). In the lower part of this page 4, below the English text, you will find a diagram that shows all the portrayed figures from above. The characters are aligned in the same positions as in the painting and you can identify their orientation by observing the position of the eyes (the dots in relief within the heads, depicted by a circle) and the position of the shoulders (the arcs semi-closed around the heads).

Starting on the right, you encounter Zephyrus first (letter 'a') and Chloris (letter 'b'), who are looking at each other. Continuing left, you come to Flora (letter 'c'); then, at the centre of the group, Venus (letter 'd'), in a slightly higher position because in the painting she is set back a little from the other characters. Higher up still and proceeding left, you find the bow which is grasped by Cupid (letter 'e'), facing towards the three Graces below (letters 'f', 'g', 'h'). The group is completed on the far left by Mercury (letter 'i'). [Back to the list.](#)

Pages 5-6: the complete painting

Opening the two pages you can explore the entire illustration that portrays the scene with the nine figures whose positions you have learned in the diagram on [page 4](#).

In the upper part of the two pages are page numbers followed by the title and date of the work. The letters that indicate the figures according to the legend on page 4 are instead on the lower part of the two pages, going from letter 'a' on the right to letter 'i' on the left.

In the complete illustration, moving from top to bottom, you can identify three sections: at the top, the background of a garden with orange trees and shrubs; in the widest section in the middle, all the characters; in the lower section, the ground dotted with flowers on which their feet stand.

The background is made up of the foliage of trees, in which the plumpness of the fruit, the oranges, can be glimpsed among the leaves; the foliage is marked by vertical trunks that you can recognise by the lines that depict their bark. The dense texture of the leaves, perceivable as several lines in relief, is interrupted only at the halfway point by the figure of Cupid (letter 'e'), the winged child hovering in the air above Venus. Cupid is in a horizontal position, facing left and gripping a bow and arrow. Below him and slightly to the right, Venus (letter 'd') is surrounded by the leaves of a myrtle bush that stands behind her. The figure is wearing a full dress that can be perceived as a tactile border outlining an area of vertical lines, also in relief. Running your fingers down Venus from the top, you find her round face surrounded by the hair that falls onto her shoulders, her arms – to the left her hand in a welcoming gesture, then to the right hand holding a fold in her dress; the bottom of the dress brushes against her bare feet which stick out from beneath it. To explore Cupid and Venus in more detail, you can go to [pages 9 and 10](#).

Exploring this central figure takes you down as far as the meadow, which covers the entire lower section of the painting and is dotted with numerous flowers that you will perceive as small dots in relief. You can slide your fingers across to locate groups of flowers, some of which have enlarged tactile illustrations (on [page 14](#)).

Now you can go back to reading the central section, with the figures distributed from right to left. The first one you encounter to the right, above the page's midpoint in height, is Zephyrus (letter 'a') who is flying at a slant with his arms pointing down to the left and reaching towards Chloris (letter 'b'). To read Zephyrus, you can run your fingers over the outline that borders the vertical lines of a full garment that is wrapped around him, leaving his shoulders free and – moving slightly upward and to the left – his face and long hair. At this point, to the upper right, you can touch the relief outline of the character's wings: inside the outline you can feel an uneven surface that represents the wings partially hidden by the leaves.

Moving down along Zephyrus' arm you come to Chloris, covered by a very thin veil that reveals her contours. You can identify this very light garment by the broad weave of dots in relief (which form a net-like field) with the edges indicated by a dashed tactile line. Exploring this figure, you go down to the point where the garment ends just above her feet. Going up again you can touch the lines that

form the legs and body, so that, with her shoulders and face, the Nymph is complete. Chloris' arms overlap the figure that stands to her left and a little further back: it is Flora, goddess of spring (letter 'c') wearing a very full dress, recognisable by the denser dotting that depicts the flower designs decorating the fabric. By moving down from the top, you can perceive her face with her long wavy hair and more below her neckline; moving farther down you find her hands in her lap, close together to hold up her robe which is overflowing with roses and, further down still, her bare feet in the flowery meadow. To explore Zephyrus, Chloris and Flora in more detail, you can go to [pages 7 and 8.](#)

At this point you can feel the central figure of Venus again to recall the whole group of characters, and move your fingers toward the left, where you begin to make out the first of the three Graces (letter 'f'). The young girls are portrayed wearing thin veils like Chloris'. In this exploration you immediately come across their dotted outline, which again contains a very fine web of dots in relief and quite distant from each other. The fold of the page barely interrupts the line of the arm of the first girl, whose fingers are intertwined with those of the second figure (letter 'g'). Moving up slightly, you find the face, in profile, of the first of the three Graces, turned to the left. You can follow her arm that goes up to hold the hand of the third girl (letter 'h'). Then you can continue following the arm and go down to the head of the central figure of the trio (letter 'g'), whose body - she has her back to us - is outlined down to her feet which are dancing in the meadow. You can continue exploring the relief illustration by touching the outline to the left of this female figure: here you find the arm bent, as far as the hand near the face of the third of the Graces (letter 'h'), also covered in a thin robe and portrayed as though she were dancing. Finally, moving your fingers toward the left, you can explore the body of Mercury (letter 'i'). The god is wearing a tunic that is represented by close vertical tactile lines; this garment is wrapped around his chest, leading to his arm and his hand that rests on the sword hanging at his side. Beneath the short tunic are his bare legs and his feet in ankle high footwear, with his toes exposed. At the top, you can make out Mercury's face surrounded by thick curls that stick out from beneath a helmet, while the character raises his arm pointing upward with a staff in his hand. To the left, the last tree trunk closes the scene. To explore the three Graces and Mercury in greater detail, you can go to [pages 11 and 12.](#)
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Pages 7-8: the protagonists Zephyrus, Chloris, Flora

These pages contain the description and tactile illustration of the first group of characters, starting from the right of the illustration, which you have already encountered in the complete image. The fact that they are enlarged and isolated from the background will be helpful in identifying many details in this and the two illustrations to follow. Let's start with Zephyrus, who is caught in flight on the far right side. Exploring the figure by first examining it in detail, you notice that in the upper part there are the complicated and detailed shapes of something that was just hinted at in the complete image of the painting. In the complete image, the leaves and the trunk, from which the character appears to emerge, for the most part hide the wings portrayed here. Moving your fingers over them from the top downward, you can discern the longer feathers to the right, while on the left, going towards Zephyrus' crowned head, under your fingers you can feel the reliefs of the shorter feathers that form the wings' attachment. After analysing these, you can move on to the face which is looking at Chloris, the oval of the face and the neck that continues to the right with the shoulder and the bare arm. Below, even farther right, you come across the only leg visible in the young man's position, which is not complete because the end with the foot would already be outside the space of Botticelli's composition.

After Zephyrus, you can examine the figure of Chloris. The more detailed illustration gives us some of the nymph's more striking aspects, such as the dynamic attitude of her body in motion and startled by a sudden call; legs that were walking and suddenly stop, especially the position of her right one just before lifting her foot off the ground. The lines of the legs, torso and arms almost draw the girl's profile, with her face looking right towards Zephyrus, and are partly wrapped in the garment which, here too, can be identified through the sparse tactile points bordered by the dotted outline; this outline, where it adheres to her body more, becomes confused, in part coinciding with the outline of the figure itself. If you pause to feel the outline of her face under the flowing hair that surrounds it, moving from the top down and to the right to her shoulders and chest, you can recognise the eyes, the line of the nose, and a stream of flowers coming out of the left side of her mouth. If you then move slightly downward to the left, you come to her hands, one raised, the other much lower.

Almost nothing stands between Chloris and Flora. Spreading out behind Chloris' arms is the full garment - perceivable as a finer denser net-like texture - of Flora/Primavera who moves towards the

left. This figure can also be explored starting from the head, with her hairstyle adorned with flowers. In the smiling and perfectly oval face, you can identify her eyes and her even nose, then move down over the chin to the neckline adorned with a necklace of flowers. Under her chest, almost in her lap, her arms are holding the dress which forms a wide fold, which holds an abundance of roses; moving down to below the edge of the full dress, you come to her slender ankle on the left and her bare feet, sinking into the meadow in what is almost a dancing motion, the foot on the right barely poking out and raised higher and farther back in the step. The detail of Flora's face is drawn in relief on the [Cover](#) of the book. [Back to the list](#).

Pages 9-10: the protagonists Venus and Cupid

After the description that can be read in braille on page 9, the relief illustration on the right provides more information on how Botticelli depicted the images of Venus and Cupid, who is flying above her. The winged child is positioned in the upper centre, his body horizontal and facing left, while he pulls back the curved bow to shoot the flaming arrow: on the tip of the straight segment that represents his arrow, you can recognise the tongues of flame. If you explore the figure as a whole, starting from the right and moving across it, you come to his two legs, his plump body, the arm holding the bow, his face covered with a blindfold and his head of thick curls; above the body the two wings extend to the right and, between these and his back, above the line of his thigh, is the quiver that you can recognise by touching the cross-hatched lines in relief.

Now, leaving the outline of Cupid's body and moving downward and staying in the centre of the painting, first you come to the ornament on the peak of Venus's hairstyle; by moving downward from right to left you can follow the long hair at the side of the oval of her face, with her eyes, her straight nose and the subtle line of her mouth. Lower still is her chin, then the neckline of her garment and just beneath, a necklace of pearls holding a round pendant; the robe emphasises the outline of her breasts and falls in numerous folds, recognisable in the long vertical tactile lines that allow you to feel its wideness. You can now move your fingers first to the right to follow the arm stretched out at the side with the hand holding the robe; then to the left, where her arm is folded and her hand is making a greeting gesture and part of the robe is wrapped around it with some scrolls. You can follow these down along the robe itself until you come to its lower edges. These are adorned with small pearls that you can feel as single dots in relief, then move down towards the feet barely exposed below the hem; the edges of the garment rest on the ground to the right.

The brief text in braille on page 11, on the left, introduces the group of figures on the next page, opposite: with the three Graces, and Cupid aiming at them with his bow at the top, and in the far left corner is Mercury.

If you explore the whole illustration using both hands, you can see its structure and perceive the group of figures as a whole, identifying the three girls dancing in a circle holding hands, while Mercury stands slightly apart and is turned to the left. [Back to the list](#).

Pages 11-12: the protagonists three Graces and Mercury

After this first overall vision, you can move downward and separate and analyse each of the three figures of the Graces. The first of the Graces you come to is slightly behind the next, partially covered from view. Moving from the top downward you can make out the head turned left in profile, with long hair gathered at the nape; feel the forehead with your fingers, the only eye visible in this position, the nose, the mouth and the chin, until finally you come to a fine necklace, which is where the garment of semi-transparent light fabric begins, hiding none of the contours of the body, and surrounding them with its gauzy folds. The area of this garment can be perceived though the small spaced dots in relief inside a curving dashed line, while the contours of the arms, hips and legs are thicker and above all, have an unbroken line. The depiction of the legs continues until you come to the toes on the right, completely exposed; then moving back up, you come to the other leg and then the fingers of the hand intertwined with the fingers of the second girl in the centre.

By going up along the upper part of the arm, in the central figure you can now find the wavy hair that goes to her nape, this too a head turned in profile toward the left. The body is turned and we see the girl with her back to us in the foreground. Moving downward, you can follow the lines of her body partly covered by the almost transparent garment, indicated with net-like lines surrounded by a dotted outline, then coming to the buttocks and slender legs, and the feet which suggest a dance step. To conclude the exploration of this figure you can move up from the foot on the left, following the line of the leg, up to her hip until you come to her bent arm and hand, the fingers of which are intertwined with those of the third girl.

The young girl to the left is turned toward the viewer, with her face looking right. From above, again following the long hair that falls to her shoulders, you can detect her hip and right leg (for those of us facing her, it is seen on the left) that partially hides the other one that is slightly farther back. This body too is wrapped in a thin veil that, like those of her companions, is represented by a dotted

contour that outlines a net made of sparse dots. Moving upward again you come to the intertwined arms and hands that join the third girl to the other two. Finally, you come to the figure of Mercury. His body is partially covered by a tunic that you can identify by touching and following the area of vertical lines; this leaves parts uncovered on the right including his torso, shoulder and arm, his lower legs, and on the left, the second arm stretched upwards.

The tunic has a belt around it – indicated by a dashed line – which holds a sword. To explore the figure of Mercury, after the usual examination that helps to give an idea of the overall picture, you can begin at the feet, with exposed toes in calf-length boots with a small wing at the back (here, because of the position, only one is visible). Then, going back up the legs and tunic, move your fingers slightly to the right to find his hand on his hip, his arm and then shoulder, then coming to his face turned slightly to the left and looking up; his forehead is framed by thick hair, and you can feel the curly locks sticking out from under a helmet that comes to a point at the top. Going from here and touching the page, move slightly to the left to detect his raised arm, and his hand clutching a staff with two symmetrical decorations at the sides of the highest part: two small winged snakes. Mercury uses it to disperse a small cloud that completes the painting in the upper left corner. The cloud is indicated by some horizontal lines slightly arched at the top. [Back to the list.](#)

Pages 13-14: the Garden of Venus

These two pages are dedicated to the flowers that dot the meadow where the figures described so far are located. You can read a brief description of it in braille on page 13. Page 14 is divided into four squares, again illustrated with a dotted outline - to isolate as many species of the dozens that Botticelli included in his painting. The reading we are following is that of the sequence of letters indicated here, on the left under the squares, the letters 'l', 'm', 'n' and 'o': consider that all the flowers appear several times in various parts of the painting, and that daisies, roses and grape hyacinths are near the portion of meadow under the figure of Flora, while the iris is found near the figure of Chloris.

The square on the top left (letter 'l') allows you to explore the relief illustration of some daisies, with more or less open corollas of petals, and stems that grow out of some of the lanceolate leaves characteristic of this flower.

In the square immediately to the right (letter 'm') you come to the open corolla of a rose, seen from above. You can touch the outlines of its petals which, in concentric lines, enclose the central part with its pistils. The relief illustration was intentionally designed like this because all the roses in the

painting are instead seen from the side, from an angle that makes it difficult to do a tactile reading, as it flattens its outline.

Continuing inside the square at the bottom left (letter 'n') you find a flower, a grape hyacinth. You can make out the upper part with your fingers, the group of bell-shaped inflorescences gathered tightly together. The long stem protrudes from between the leaves at the base of the plant, and you can feel the surface subtly depicted by small strokes in relief.

The fourth rectangle (letter 'o') contains two large flowers, irises with some leaves and two still-closed buds. The surface of the petals is rendered by dense tactile lines that outline its form; some thicker strokes help show the relief of the papillae which are found on the outer petals, folding downwards. These surround the internal petals which face upwards, and closed to form the central body of the flower. [Back to the list.](#)