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Title: “Yes I do” - Fascinating wedding dresses and celebration of love in fine arts, literature, and fashion.

Marriage holds a deep symbolic significance in both our society and personal lives. It delves into the social, cultural, and traditional rituals and more intimate aspects, a long-lasting commitment and love between two individuals. In this context, the choice of a wedding dress is a complex exercise of a fair balance between cultural injunctions and individual expression through fashion preferences – with the bride putting a lot of thought and effort into it, to look perfect and unique for her special day theatrical representation. But, despite the social and personal importance of weddings, their portrayal in fine art is scarce and often presents a dichotomy—the idealized quest for a perfect union versus the stark reality of loveless marriages marked by inequality, power displays, or solitude.

I have imagined a comprehensive multi-media exhibition exploring the wedding phenomenon, showcasing fascinating wedding dresses and accessories across different times and cultures, and inviting the visitors to discover the representation of marriage in art and literature and to consider how one can express individuality within the framework of such a significant, yet traditionally conformist event.

The V&A Museum, with its expertise in fashion exhibitions and an extensive collection of wedding dresses, is the perfect venue for this exhibition. Its strong connections with other museums and private collections and its secured facilities also would ensure a diverse and high-quality display of artworks.

This exhibition will be split into two parts: starting with three distinct rooms displaying wedding dresses and accessories each with a unique layout and a second part showcasing the representation of weddings and marriage in art and literature - ending with an interactive experience for visitors.

The first room, titled "Evolution of Wedding Dresses", is designed as a long corridor with arches separating different spaces. Each arch represents a different era, starting from the Middle Ages and progressing to the 20th century. The intention is to create a visual journey through time, showcasing how wedding dresses and accessories have evolved. Each era is represented by a wedding dress and its accessories from that period, allowing visitors to appreciate the changes in style, fabric, and design over the centuries.

The second room, "Wedding Dresses Across Cultures: Re-inventing Traditions", is a celebration of diversity and innovation. The floor is designed as a world map, with wedding dresses from different cultures displayed on it. Each traditional dress is paired with a modern interpretation by a contemporary designer, highlighting the fusion of tradition and innovation. For instance, a traditional Japanese kimono is juxtaposed with a modern interpretation by Yumi Katsura. This room also features oval glass domes, traditionally used to display wedding accessories, housing various wedding dress ornaments, gloves, and flower crowns.

The third room, "Iconic Celebrity Wedding Dresses", showcases the wedding dresses of famous personalities, from royalty to Hollywood stars. The dresses of Grace Kelly, Ellen DeGeneres, Portia de Rossi, Priyanka Chopra, Kate Middleton, Beatrice d'York (repurposing a dress from her grandmother Queen Elisabeth, Lady Diana, the bold purple outfit of Victoria Beckham, and Hailey Bieber (etc..)) are displayed on a podium, as weddings are a one-day show with brides and grooms being on stage at the centre of everyone's attention. Like in a theatre play.

The fourth room, "Influence in Paintings, Sculpture, Literature, and Movies", explores the representation of love and wedding in various art forms. While love is a classic and inspiring theme in arts, brides and weddings are not that well represented in painting¹ compared to other forms of media, for instance, literature or cinema. The large opened room is divided into several thematic areas, each focusing on a specific aspect of marriage. The themes include the expression of power and wealth, as seen in Winterhalter's paintings of Victoria and Elisabeth of Austria; the celebration of love and fusion, as depicted in Brancusi, Rodin, and Klimt's "The Kiss"; the quest for the perfect match, represented by movie extracts from Bridgerton and Pride and Prejudice and showcasing the real wedding dress of Queen Charlotte and the costume in the recent Netflix series; the capturing of special moments in paintings as the "Wedding Photoshoot" by Dagnan-Bouveret or the Wedding Reception by Swedish-Austrian painter Yvan Meytens the Younger contrasting with the Country Wedding by J.L. Krimmel. The room also explores the darker side of marriage, featuring artworks and movie extracts that depict loneliness, mismatched couples, arranged marriages, and tragic or forbidden love stories. It will showcase the photography of Frida Kahlo's wedding with Diego Riviera and the painting by Frida Kahlo herself, two years later, emphasizing her complicated marriage and undermining the role of wife. The painting from

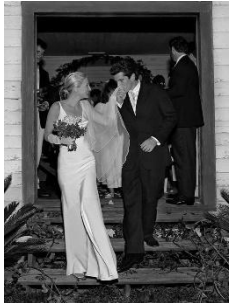
The last room aims to highlight the importance of personal expression in weddings, despite the social and cultural conventions, and will provide an interactive experience for visitors allowing them to explore their individuality and creativity in the context of weddings. While purchasing their tickets, they will be asked to store a digital picture of their wedding dress and their marriage in advance and they will be invited to upload them on a virtual wall at the end of the exhibition. There will also be a camera set up for visitors to try virtually on different hairstyles, and wedding dresses allowing them to see how they would look in various wedding styles. A last setup would virtually incorporate their faces into the paintings or artwork displayed in the exhibitions.

While the exhibition's first part showcases historical and famous wedding dresses, the second part is a curation of artworks inspired by the celebration of love and marriage. Among these, three pieces share the same name "The Kiss" - from Brancusi, Rodin, and Klimt - and would be

¹ At the Van Gogh Museum in Auvers-sur-Oise, out of all the paintings displayed, only three were related to love – none on a wedding. Neither at the Sargent and Fashion Tate Britain exhibition and only one at the permanent Tate Britain collection (The Bride by Theodor von Holst <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/examination-theodor-von-holsts-bride-enables-new-insight-artists-creative-process>)
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displayed as an echo of the famous picture taken after the wedding ceremony of Caroline Bessette and John F. Kennedy Jr. What is their specific version of a kiss in comparison with the Bessette-Kennedy captured moment of love?

Starting with Constantin Brancusi, a French Romanian-born artist (1876–1957) and his version of a kiss. Influenced by African and Oceanic art in the use of raw materials, he was a pioneer of modernism and abstraction – focusing on simplified and geometrical forms to reveal the essence of the subjects.² Between 1907 and 1925, he created six different versions of this iconic sculpture named the Kiss with slight variations. "The Kiss" depicts a couple in a close embrace: their bodies merge into a single form, like a block with long and thin arms and bodies cut under the chest; their faces are turned toward each other, and their lips meet in a kiss. Lines are simple, details are minimal and the style is almost primitive. The sculpture is carved from a single block of limestone. So Brancusi's Kiss is a powerful and evocative artwork that conveys a sense of infinite unity and raw inseparability between two lovers.

			
The Kiss Constantin Brancusi, 1923-25 Sculpture Medium: Limestone Dimensions : 58.4 × 33.7 × 25.4 cm	The Kiss Auguste Rodin, 1882 Sculpture Medium: 3 versions in marble, one larger in plaster. Dimensions : H. 181.5 cm ; W. 112.5 cm ; D. 117 cm	The Kiss Gustav Klimt, 1882 Painting Canvass, oil, and gold leaf Belvedere Museum (Vienne) Dimensions : 1,8 m x 1,8 m	Picture taken by Denis Reggie, a longtime Kennedy family photographer

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) a world-renowned French sculptor and a master of the human body celebrating sensuality and desire, proposes another approach through his sculpture, his version of a kiss in 1882. It depicts Paolo and Francesca, two lovers about to be killed by Francesca's husband but it is believed to be autobiographical, representing Rodin's relationship with her student Camille Claudel who became his lover. The figures are undressed and entwined and they are sitting, kissing. The male figure wraps his arm around the woman's waist while she is holding his neck around her arm. Rodin started with a large plaster version and three marble versions were made after 1900.³ The work is very realistic, with great attention to the anatomy, capturing the muscles' tension and the flesh textures. It is also very expressive, conveying the intense desire of the lovers.

Last but not least, "The Kiss", painted by Austrian Symbolist artist Gustav Klimt between 1907 and 1908, shows a couple embracing each other, their bodies entwined in elaborate golden

² Sources: [Philamuseum](#), [Centre Pompidou](#), [Artchive.com \(the-kiss-constantin-brancusi-1912\)](#)

³ Source: [Musée Rodin](#)

robes decorated in a contemporary Art Nouveau style. They are kissing in a meadow of flowers, and the background is filled with bronze and gold decorative flakes that add to the richness of the image. The face's peaceful expression suggests a love that is deep and spiritual. The woman is barefoot suggesting a moment of intimacy and simplicity contrasting with the luxurious feel conveyed by the rich colours and elaborate cloth patterns ⁴.

In a perfect square canvas, Klimt has captured together spiritual and physical love, the perfect connection of the masculine and the feminine, the depth and the simplicity of emotions.

⁵Carolyn Bessette asked Narciso Rodriguez, her close friend and one-time colleague to design, in 1996, her dress for her wedding to John F. Kennedy Jr, the son of the former shot president. The design was simple and minimalist with a bias-cut silk gown without embroidery at all. The lines were sharp, and perfectly tailored to the silhouette. Simple, sensual, sleek, and sculptural. Denis Reggie, an American photographer who pioneered wedding photojournalism and a longtime Kennedy family photographer, captured a very spontaneous moment while the newlyweds descended the steps of the church; the bride is sliding, flowing in her beautiful, pure dress and the groom reached for her hand and brought it to his lips. She seems happily surprised, off guard and one can feel the moment of true love and connection in real time. And one can also feel the authenticity and simplicity of a true moment.

In summary, all these artworks share the theme of a kiss, representing love and intimacy. They each capture a moment of connection between two people in different styles. Brancusi's work is minimalist with simple forms and lines, emphasising the unity and purity of love. Rodin celebrates the body of two lovers, capturing the details of the human form and the intense emotion. Klimt's is symbolic of the spiritual and physical fusion of a couple.

The image of Caroline Bessette-Kennedy in her wedding dress, with John F. Kennedy Jr. kissing her hand, is an echo of these three artworks: The wedding dress, designed by Rodriguez, with its simplicity and modern lines, mirrors the minimalist approach of Brancusi's sculpture. In Rodin's "Kiss", as in Dennis Reggie's photograph, the time is suspended to capture a moment of grace and the energy from two moving bodies. Finally, the aesthetical, spiritual, and physical connection between the newlywed aligns with Klimt's work with all characters seeming to fly like in a dream.

While the artworks are all named the same, they bring a unique perspective around the theme of love and the act of kissing, they also tie in together in the iconic image of Carolyn Bessette and John F Kennedy's wedding.

The "Yes I do" exhibition is not just a display of wedding dresses and artworks, but a celebration of love, tradition, and individuality. It invites visitors to explore the rich history and cultural significance of wedding dresses, while also encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions of marriage. The exhibition is a must-visit for anyone interested in fashion, art, and the celebration of love.

⁴ Sources: [Belvedere Museum](#), [Artsper \(a-closer-look/art-analysis-the-kiss-by-klimt\)](#)

⁵ Source: [Vanityfair \(2021/09/25-years-later-carolyn-bessette-kennedys-wedding-dress-still-stuns\)](#), [Interviewmagazine \(Narciso-rodriguez\)](#)

Sources:

1. Books:

- "The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashions": Written by Edwina Ehrman, 2014 Edition, Publisher: V & A
The book presents the evolution and cultural significance of the wedding dress since 1700, particularly the rise of the white wedding gown in the 19th century and its reinvention by designers.

2. Academic research

- ____ The Traditional Evolution of Style and Especially of Color of Bridal Dresses in Different Cultures during the Centuries (June 2014, Journal of Educational and Social Research)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272710040_The_Traditional_Evolution_of_Style_and_Especially_of_Color_of_Bridal_Dresses_in_Different_Cultures_during_the_Centuries

3. Museum collections and analysis

- **Victoria and Albert Museum** (London)
The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) has an impressive collection of wedding dresses and accessories – 991 objects – tracing the evolution of bridal fashion and societal trends over five centuries. They also provide readings about colour choices for wedding dresses: white gained popularity during Queen Victoria's reign over bolder options depending on social backgrounds, cultural influences, or individual statements.
<https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/wedding-dress>.
- **Met Museum** (NY, USA)
The Costume Institute cares for 33000 costumes and accessories from five continents, among which 412 are related to weddings.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/fr/art/collection/search?department=8&q=wedding&offset=160>
- **Musee Rodin** (Paris, France) – The Kiss (Rodin)
<https://www.musee-rodin.org/en/visiting-the-museum/exhibitions/the-kiss>
- **Centre Pompidou** (Paris, France) – The Kiss (Brancusi)
<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/exhibitions/the-kiss>
- **Belvedere Museum** (Vienna, Austria) – The Kiss (Klimt)
<https://www.belvedere.at/en/exhibitions/the-kiss>

4. Articles from trusted professional art publishers

- Fashion&Law Journal: " Evolution of Wedding Dress: History and its Cultural Significance"
The article traces the evolution of wedding dresses, from ancient times to the modern era, changing in style, colour, and symbolism, with a special mention of Queen Victoria's influence on popularizing white wedding dresses.
<https://fashionlawjournal.com/the-evolution-of-wedding-dress-history-and-its-cultural-significance/>
- Artsper magazine: "The Kiss by Klimt"
<https://www.artsper.com/a-closer-look/art-analysis-the-kiss-by-klimt>
- Artchive: "The Kiss (1912) by Constantin Brancusi"
<https://www.artchive.com/artchive/brancusi/1912/the-kiss>
- Sotheby's: "Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's Wedding Portrait"
<https://www.sothebys.com/en/videos/the-agonizing-poetry-of-frida-kahlo-and-diego-riveras-wedding-portrait-1931>
- DailyArt: "Unhappily Ever After: Unequal Marriage by Vasili Pukirev"
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/unequal-marriage-by-vasili-pukirev/>
- ____ DailyArt: "The Most Important Day! Wedding Inspiration in Art"
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/wedding-in-art/>
- ____ DailyArt: "Just Married: Wedding Paintings which Will Secure a Happy Future Together"
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/wedding-paintings/>

- DailyArt: "Most Beautiful Royal Weddings in History — Commissions by Queen Victoria"
<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/queen-victoria-weddings/>