

Self-Guide

Weddings

During the summer months, weddings and wedding parties are in full bloom. Walk down the aisle of the museum's galleries as this nuptial navigation explores artworks that celebrate the monumental day of matrimony.



GALLERY 297

Engagement Ring (1961) by Roy Lichtenstein

Perhaps the most potent symbol of imminent marital bliss, the engagement ring is the subject of this striking work by Roy Lichtenstein, the American artist best known for his comic strip-inspired paintings. This black-and-white oil on canvas is part of a series Lichtenstein produced between 1961 and 1962. Focusing on solitary objects such as sneakers, hot dogs, golf balls, and engagement rings, the series embraced the graphic conventions of commercial illustration. Taken out of context and avoiding any hint of branding, the abstracted *Engagement Ring* frustrates our desire for narrative, while opening a seemingly endless range of associations and interpretations.



GALLERY 208A

The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis (1636) by Peter Paul Rubens

Drawing up an invitation list is notoriously difficult, but who wouldn't leave the goddess of discord off the list? For the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal Peleus, however, that decision turned out to have disastrous consequences. Disgruntled by the snub, Discordia became the original wedding crasher and threw out a golden apple "for the fairest among the guests." This simple but incendiary gesture led to the judgment of Paris, the abduction of Helen, and the Trojan War, in which the bride and groom's future son, Achilles, would meet his death. Rubens's painting of this infamously interrupted wedding celebration was a study for a series of large paintings depicting the loves of the Olympian gods made for the king of Spain.



GALLERY 141

The Marriage of Shiva and Parvati (Kalyanasundara) (10th/11th century), India, Uttar Pradesh

Most Western marriages seal the deal with a kiss, but a traditional Hindu marriage includes numerous rituals to solemnize the bride and groom's vows. One of them is *panigrahana*, or the ceremony of hands, in which the groom takes the bride's offered hand in a gesture of protection, an important moment captured in this sandstone relief depicting the marriage of Shiva, the god of destruction, and Parvati, the mountain princess. The *panigrahana* is recognized as the couple's first physical contact, and accordingly Parvati looks demurely up at her new husband, even diverting her gaze to a handheld mirror. The couple's nuptials are attended by the creator deity Brahma, who ladles *ghee* (clarified butter) on the ritual fire, and the preserver of the universe Vishnu.



GALLERY 179

***Pitcher* (1911) by Robert Riddle Jarvie**

By the mid-19th century, silver had become one of the most popular gifts in western culture to commemorate rites of passage such as weddings and anniversaries. Self-taught Chicago metalsmith Robert Riddle Jarvie crafted this handsome pitcher as a wedding present for Charlotte Aileen Henry, integrating the bride's initials, C.A.H., into an inverted heart shape within the embossed, Celtic-inspired design. This gracefully interlaced motif—popularized during the Arts and Crafts movement—is beautifully balanced, and the elegant curve of the heart echoes the sweeping arch of the handle. According to an inscription on the underside of the vessel, the pitcher was a gift from the artist and his wife, along with several other individuals. It was fashioned at Jarvie's shop in the Fine Arts Building, located just a few blocks from the Art Institute.



GALLERY 262

***The Wedding* (1948) by Jacob Lawrence**

Joy, tears, nerves, and fear—so many conflicting emotions can accompany the momentousness of a marriage ceremony. In this brilliantly colored work, Harlem Renaissance painter Jacob Lawrence used his trademark expressive style to capture a wedding's peculiar balance between the somber and the joyous. Lawrence emphasized the solemnity of the event with a symmetrical composition: a grave-looking minister addresses the bride and groom, while two witnesses stand rigidly in profile. This nervous energy is echoed in the rhyming contour of the figures and the flower stands. However, a certain jubilation bursts into the scene with the exuberant colors of the flourishing flowers in the background and the flanking stained glass.



REGENSTEIN HALL

***The Tale of Genji* (early 17th century), Japan**

In pre-modern Japan, a wealthy woman's dowry, or *konrei chodo*, was comprised of luxury items including exquisite gold-leafed folding screens. In fact, the soon-to-be empress Tofukumon'in received a trousseau in 1619 that included a total of 30 pairs of screens. This screen pair, believed to have been part of a bridal trousseau, depicts five scenes from the 11th-century classic *The Tale of Genji*. Rather than telling the story of Genji in sequence, the chosen episodes are presented out of order and emphasize themes that would be fortuitous for a newly married couple—generational renewal, seasonal flourishing, and general felicity. The screens came into the Art Institute's collection as a gift from Robert Allerton in honor of the 50th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. William McCormick Blair.

Continue the summer wedding celebration!

On August 27 at 6:00, learn more about the matrimonial connections of the Japanese screens featured in the exhibition *Beyond Golden Clouds* as Harvard professor Melissa McCormick presents "Gifts of Wishful Thinking—Genji Screens and the Bridal Trousseau in Tokugawa Japan." Plus extend the marriage merrymaking with the exhibition *A Case for Wine*, on view July 11–September 20.