

Development of marriage throughout art history



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Introduction

Throughout history, marriage is a vital part of culture and influences the development of society. In some cultures, marriage is seen as a necessity that must be fulfilled in order to continue to function as a society, while in others it simply represents the connection between two individuals. Art plays a key role in documenting and understanding the importance of marriage in culture and how it varies throughout history. The overall theme of my thematic exhibition is to look at artworks that displays the development of marriage throughout time, as well as look at the development of marriage through the perspectives of different cultures. I chose this theme because marriage can be a defining factor of culture and is important for a society to continue to grow. I also chose this theme because there are a variety of mediums that can be observed. These mediums range from oil paintings to different types of stone. The artworks involved also have different purposes; some are necessary to perform the ceremony of marriage, while others are simply documenting an event or attempt to convey a message.

The artwork throughout the exhibition is placed chronologically in order to create development in the views throughout history. This placement also allows the viewer to distinguish the similarities and differences between prior pieces of artwork to more recent pieces of artwork. The exhibition also transitions through different perspectives, giving insight to the differences in culture and how latter cultures still may have views similar to ones in the past. Traditionally, as time passes, society develops and there are more evolved perspectives regarding cultural issues such as marriage. This exhibition shows how in some aspects, the views regarding marriage

develop, while at the same time certain views remain stagnant and in some ways, devolve. Beginning with the Uma-Maheswara from an older civilization and a religion that has older roots, the exhibition is arranged to show how the once ideals of balance in marriage, and how both parties in a marriage bring different benefactors have changed. Transitioning to artworks such as *Medea: Or the Marriage of Jason and Creusa* , show all views during a marriage, some in favor (Jason) while some who disapprove (Medea).

Continuing through the 18th century, and *The Marriage Settlement* , the idea of marriage has slowly devolved into a materialistic manner to higher classes. Next, the ceremonial cloth (tampan), shows how ancestral influence remains in latter cultures. Finally, ending with the helmet mask from the 20th century shows how certain cultures have yet to develop and have traditional ceremonies.

From this exhibition, I would like the audience to gain a perspective on the differences in views of marriage and how it's meaning has developed throughout history. Older artworks such as the Uma-Maheshwara show the idealized version of marriage and the balance involved, while in *The Marriage Settlement* , Hogarth shows the imperfect aspects to a marriage, contrasting the two pieces of work. I would also like to show how marriage remains a pivotal influence on culture and how it has influenced certain societies to grow and develop. In today's society, many individuals view certain concepts through a single lens, but it is important to understand other's views as well. In order to gain a better understanding of other cultures, individuals must be exposed to these cultures, which is the attempt of this exhibition. By exposing the audience to a variety of artworks of

different cultures and time-periods, they will be able to accept the cultures of others.

Unknown Artist, Hinduism, 8th Century, Uma-Maheshwara, Grayish green stone, 56 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 9 in.

This sculpture includes figures of Shiva and Parvati, deities of the Hindu religion. Together, they are known as Uma-Maheshwara which is the title of the artwork. While Shiva is known for being the god of destruction of evil, his wife, Parvati, represents fertility and compassion, making their marriage a unity of different traits that balance one another. In smaller figures below Shiva and Parvati, two figures are represented, which are most likely their two sons, Ganesh and Karttikaya. Artworks like these were often used as objects for prayer and were often placed in temples for entire villages or cities to come and worship at. The artwork ties into the exhibition theme of marriage because it shows the importance of marriage and how it idealized between a god and goddess. It represents the ideal balance when it comes to marriage and serves as a standard when Hindu worshipers seek marriage.

Multiple elements and principles of art were used by the sculptor to create this piece. The sculptor uses scale and proportion to promote certain figures in the sculpture and give importance to one over the other. Shiva is the biggest figure in the sculpture, while Parvati is the second biggest giving preference to Shiva. Their two sons are nearly disregarded in comparison due to their small size and placement below the husband and wife. Emphasis is created due to the size of Shiva and Parvati compared to the other objects/figures that are sculpted. The primary purpose of the sculpture is to

show the marriage between Shiva and Parvati and how their characteristics balance each other out, therefore by increasing their size, emphasis is placed on the two. As a sculpture, the artwork is three-dimensional, and appears to come forward towards the viewer. Shiva and Parvathi appear to come closer to the viewer, while Ganesh and Karttikaya appear to be farther. Items in Shiva's hand such as his trident, his choice of weapon, recede into the sculpture showing depth. Along with the size and shape of the figures, volume and mass come into play which leads to emphasis. Shiva and Parvathi take up more volume and appear to have more mass further emphasizing their importance.

Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch Culture, 1648, *Medea: Or the Marriage of Jason and Creusa*, Etching, 9 3/8 x 7 in.

The etching drawn by Rembrandt was made to recreate the scene of the marriage between Jason and Creusa. Jason was the leader of the Argonauts, and even though he was married to the sorceress Medea, he intended to marry the daughter of Creon: Creusa. After learning of Jason's plan to marry Creusa, Medea would attempt to poison Creusa, but in the process also poison her father and Medea's sons. Rembrandt made this etching in a time when baroque style was often incorporated into artwork. Baroque style of art often was marked with great detail and often had dramatic scenes. In the etching of the marriage between Jason and Creusa, Medea can be seen in the background with a dagger and poison, dramatizing her attempt to kill Creusa. The painting heightens the revenge that Medea seeks and has incredible detail in sketching the figures and the background. This artwork relates to Hogarth's artwork in that the people involved in the marriage are <https://assignbuster.com/development-of-marriage-throughout-art-history/>

focused on different aspects, but contrasts with the other artworks in the exhibition because it includes two contradicting views of the marriage: one individual (Creusa) would like the marriage to continue while the other (Medea) would not like it to occur.

Rembrandt incorporates many elements and principles of art into the etching. The source of light is implied through the use of different shades. The light source coming from the windows is shown as the area under the dome is lit, while the area outside is shaded darker. This causes the viewer to focus on the areas where light is entering from and where it shines. As an etching, various lines can be explicitly seen and helps bring a three-dimensional effect to the artwork. Lines are used to shade, for example parts of the pillars are shaded to create a three-dimensional effect that they are round and not flat. Lines are also used to create curvature of the ceiling, and receding lines show depth and volume. Emphasis is placed on Jason and Creusa through light and placement of the figures. The light source is implied through the windows falling on the two individuals, forcing the viewer to focus on them. Placing the figures in the center of the artwork also creates emphasis. Finally, unity is created due to the detail of the varying figures of the artwork. The individuals are depicted as focused on the marriage and these details unify the piece to show the purpose of the artwork: to show the marriage between Jason and Creusa and Medea's revenge.

William Hogarth, English Culture, 1743, *The Marriage Settlement*, Oil on canvas, 27. 5 x 35. 7 in.

This oil painting was done in response to the Rococo movement which showed the aristocratic classes. Rococo was an artistic style that had light meaning, playful, and was commissioned by the wealthy. In response, many artists decided to create artwork that had deeper meaning, rejecting the light-hearted manner of Rococo. The painting by Hogarth shows the marriage between bride and groom of a higher class. The bride and groom are disinterested in each other showing that the higher classes lacked the bonds that lower classes had. Hogarth included this painting with five other paintings in a series called Marriage a-la Mode which means a fashionable mode. Hogarth's painting can be compared to *The Marriage Contract* by Jean-Baptiste Grueze, which was an oil painting of similar style to Hogarth, but showed the true relationships in a lower-class family. The artwork contrasts from works such as the Uma-Maheshwara because it doesn't show an ideal marriage, instead focusing on the problems revolving around the wealthy couple.

Color is an element of art that is used by the artist to show the higher classes extravagance whether it came to their clothes or their house. The details and varying colors in the dresses and on the paintings in the background elevates the status of the individuals. The variety of characters and disorder creates chaos in the painting and also influences the meaning of the painting. The characters are all in different places and focused on different things helping the painter's purpose by showing disinterest. Time and motion is shown through the painting by showing the characters of the settlement as in action. Some figures are engaging in discussions, while others are immersed in themselves (such as the bride and groom). Value is

used in the artwork to show depth and to add to the setting. As the room recedes, colors become darker implying depth and giving volume to the room. Value is also used when showing the setting outside of the room; the view from the window makes it seem like the day is gloomy adding to the mellow mood of the painting.

Unknown Artist, Paminggir People, 19th Century, Ceremonial cloth (tampan), Cotton and natural dyes (textiles), 30 x 27 ¼ in.

This textile is an example of how ancestral figures play a role in ceremonies, such as marriage. A tampan is a ceremonial cloth that is used by the Parminggir people when performing certain ceremonies, such as marriage, and served to remind individuals of cultural roots and ancestral presence. This specific tampan has an ancestral boat which has serpentine prows, and includes figures of two ancestors. A large figure is shown with multiple (six) heads, and a smaller figure, placed beneath the other is shown standing in an entrance or contained in a shrine. The tree of life, showing positive future health and prosperity, rises above the two individuals and encompasses the boats. The history behind the cloth goes back to the colonization of Indonesia and shows the transition under Dutch rule. It also shows the transition to the Islamic religion throughout previous centuries. The cloth would continue to be used for ceremonies, including marriage, showing ancestral influence on marriage. This piece connects to the Uma-Maheshwara because it shows the influence of ancestry on ceremonies and how it influences cultural practices. It also connects to *The Marriage Settlement* because it depicts figures of history and documents common events that occur.

The creator of the tampan used a variety of lines and shapes to create distinct figures. One example is how the creator weaves diagonal lines but in different directions when differentiating figures. The creator also creates details by incorporating smaller shapes, one example being the eyes of the serpentine prows of the boats. As a textile, the texture of the artwork is should feel soft but the individual fibers can still be felt. The diagonal weaving creates texture and the creator also does not weave the top and leaving a fray. Importance is given to the figure situated higher because it is larger in size and has heads that extend from it. Based on hierarchy, the larger figure has more power and therefore is given more importance in the piece of art. Multiple patterns are used throughout the ceremonial cloth. A repeating pattern of diamonds is integrated in to the figures and boats, while outside are differing lines. This differentiates the background from the objects in focus. Alternating colors of maroon and black are used throughout the piece as well giving the tampan a striped pattern. Finally, the cloth is border on the top and bottom with a pattern of small black triangles. The pattern of stripes also creates rhythm in the artwork. The viewer begins at the top and follows the pattern of stripes to the bottom which may be a choice made by the creator to give importance the figures at the top.

Manowulo, Mende People, 1940-1960, Helmet mask (*sowei*), Pigmented wood, 14 ¼ x 8 ½ x 9 in.

In different cultures, different traditions are used to symbolize the development of a girl to woman. This transition marks the ability of a woman to get married, which in Sande society, the Mende people symbolized by using a helmet mask. The Mende people used the helmet mask when a girl

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came to age, and marked the readiness of a woman to become married and begin a family. Symbolizing development and independence, the helmet mask is made by men, but is only meant to be worn by women. This specific helmet mask symbolizes a water spirit named *sowej*, which was the spirit that guarded the Sande community and Mende people. Carved into the mask are attributes of women that relate to the ideal characteristics, and the power that comes with becoming an independent woman in society. This helmet mask consists of a face with a high forehead but also has eyes that look down which shows modesty which was the position of the women in this society. The mask also includes representations of natural occurrences, such as the process of giving birth. When giving birth, a woman often gains weight which is shown in the fat on the bottom of the helmet, the neck of the figure. The helmet mask connects primarily to the ceremonial cloth (*tampan*), because both are used to prepare for marriage and shows how objects are used to prepare for marriage. Connecting to the Uma-Maheshwara, both artworks show the role of a woman in marriage: the balance of Parvathi and the modesty of the women in the Sande society.

Being carved by men, the helmet mask has a rough texture in upper areas of the mask, but has a contrasting smooth texture in others. The smoothness of the forehead allows light to bounce off creating emphasis and also allowing the viewer to see the roundness of the face. A variety of shapes are used in the artwork to relay its message. On the top portion of the mask, a wishbone shape is placed to show the mask's relation to spirits of the society. The shape resembles horns of a certain animal, which connects the mask to the culture of the Mende people. Cylindrical shapes with a rectangular prism are

placed on top of the helmet to show power that is placed in the woman who is coming of age. It resembles a crown and the importance given to the individual during the ritual. Volume is used in the artwork to show a bigger forehead in comparison to the rest of the mask. The forehead takes up more space and is closer to the viewer, causing the view of the artwork to be focused on the forehead. The larger forehead causes the facial features to be closer together, making the face on the mask to appear as if it is looking down (smaller eyes also contribute to this attribute). A repeating pattern of ripples below the face causes an emphasis on the face of the viewer showing the natural process of birth.

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