

Isn't It Romantic?

Art for Valentine's Day

For Valentine's Day, here are ten influential works of art that evoke love and romance. Although half of them have the same title, *The Kiss*, they represent a range of art movements and media.

The oldest of the works featured is *The Kiss (Il Bacio)* by Italian artist, Francesco Hayez (1791-1881). The 1859 painting captures the spirit of Italian Romanticism. The painting was commissioned by Count Alfonso Maria Visconti of Saliceto; it is an allegoric depiction of the alliance between France and the Kingdom of Sardinia. When auctioned in 2016, Christies said "The composition, centered around a kiss between two lovers in a medieval setting, has long been regarded as a one of the most intense and sensual representations of a kiss in the history of Western art, and it is the natural and modern attitude of the couple's embrace that contributes to the painting's timeless appeal."



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Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), commissioned by the French state, initially carved *The Kiss* (Le Baiser) circa 1892. The figures represent Paolo and Francesca, two from Dante's *Divine Comedy*: slain by Francesca's husband who surprised them as they exchanged their first kiss, the two lovers were condemned to wander eternally through Hell. It has been called one of the most frank images of carnal love in the history of art. Three marble versions of the couple were sculpted during Rodin's lifetime, the earliest of which is on display at the Musée Rodin in Paris. Over 300 bronze casts of the sculpture, in varying sizes, had been produced by 1917.



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Auguste Renoir's (1841-1919) *Dance at Bougival* (1883) is part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and has been called "one of the museum's most beloved works". In this impressionist painting, at an open air café in Bougival, an amateur boatman in a straw hat sweeps his stylish partner along in a waltz. The touch of their gloveless hands, their flushed cheeks and intimate proximity, suggest a sensuous subtext to this scene.



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Marc Chagall's 1915 *Birthday* depicts a man and a woman apparently free from the laws of physics. They float free, unburdened by gravity. The woman in the painting is Chagall's beloved first wife, Bella Rosenfeld, just weeks before their wedding. Chagall (1887-1985) was a Russian-French artist of Belarusian Jewish roots. Among his best known works are the stained glass windows he created for the cathedrals of Rheims and Metz. *Birthday* is part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in NYC.



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Most people are familiar with Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. But the Norwegian painter, Munch (1863-1944) also painted *The Kiss* (1897), the first in a series of paintings spanning 30 years, showing different stages of a relationship. The figures of the man and the woman are blurred, interpreted as symbolizing the union of the two.



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Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), a Romanian born artist who made his career in France, was one of the foremost sculptors of his generation. He obtained a position in Auguste Rodin's studio in 1907, but left because he felt that he was not giving anything by following the conventional mode of sculpture. Brancusi's *The Kiss*, sculpted in 1907-1908 from limestone, reflects the artist's modernist approach and his desire to express a subject in its purest form. Brancusi sculpted a number of versions of *The Kiss*. The original is in the Muzeul de Arta in Craiova, Romania; another version is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



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Gustave Klimt's (1862-1918) *The Kiss* demonstrates the influence of the Byzantine period on the Austrian artist. Klimt travelled twice to Ravenna to see the mosaics of San Vitale, the impact of which is evident in the works of the artist's Golden Period, of which *The Kiss* (1907) is the culmination. Ironically, the painting, although influenced by religious works, was viewed by many as pornographic. The Kiss, which is Klimt's most popular work, is in the permanent collection of Vienna's Austrian Gallery Belvedere.



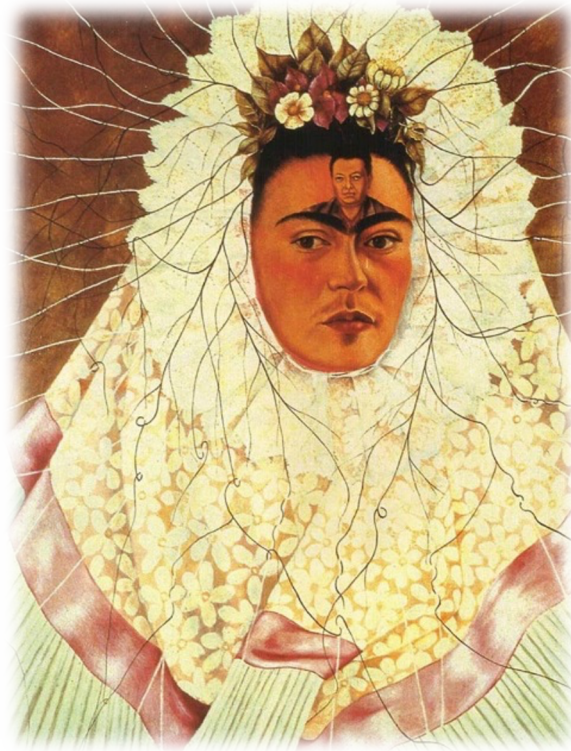
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Rene Magritte (1898-1967) was a Belgian surrealist artist, known for his witty and sometimes unsettling images. His 1928 *Les Amants* (*The Lovers*) may be reflective of the surrealists' interest in masks, disguises, and what lies beneath or beyond visible surfaces. However, it is not clear what inspired Magritte to represent the lovers shrouded in fabric, leaving the viewer to his or her own interpretation. Over the past year, Magritte's *Les Amants* has become somewhat of an artistic meme of COVID 19.



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Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) began painting *Diego on My Mind (Self-Portrait as a Tehuana)* in 1940, when she was divorced from artist husband, Diego Rivera, but did not finish it until 1943. Kahlo and Rivera, both Mexican artists, married in 1929. Rivera was 20 years Kahlo's senior. Kahlo was Rivera's fourth wife. The two had a messy relationship, marked by fights, extramarital affairs and a divorce (followed by remarriage a year later). The self-portrait incorporates a portrait of Rivera on Kahlo's forehead, indicative of her obsessive love for him. In the painting, Kahlo is dressed as a Tehuana, a matriarchal society located in Oaxaca, Mexico.



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Robert Indiana (1928-2018) created one of the most recognizable works of modern art in the world. His work, *Love*, began as a Christmas card commissioned by NYC's Museum of Modern Art in 1965. It rapidly became a symbol of the 1960s. In 1966, Indiana (birth name Clark, changed in homage of his home state) created a 6 foot by 6 foot painting of the two row rendering of the work with its tilted "O". It was followed by other variations of the work, including a sculpture, always in bright contrasting colors. In 1973, *Love* became an eight cent U.S. postage stamp. The first *Love* paintings were red, blue and green, because Indiana's father worked for Phillips 66. The Phillips signs were red and green; a large Phillips sign against a blue Indiana sky determined the painting's colors.

