

Seasons of Love

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Marriage today is seen as something that is meant to be based on love, happiness and a connection between two people but in the early modern period politics and the national interest was more important than affection or love. Marriage was a transaction between two countries or dynasties. This can be seen specifically as a diplomatic exchange to bring two powers closer together and create an alliance or resolve a dispute. Many young members of the nobility or royalty were married off at young ages to people they had never met. The only way in which they knew what their future spouse looked like was through portraits made specifically to depict the sitter in their best light. The painting of *King Louis XII of France* is believed to



have been taken by envoys to the English Court of Henry VIII to show off his worthiness as a possible spouse to Henry VIII's sister Mary Tudor. This was aimed to show off himself to his future bride and the court. She was eventually married to him via proxy, without Louis even being present and was used as pawn in an alliance between France and England.

Marriage portraits were used specifically to show off the qualities of the spouses. Women were depicted as having ageless beauty, an ideal quality for women, and were often holding flowers to represent chastity, love, piety and virtue. Both the painting *Constanza Caetani* and the *Painting of a Young Lady* depict these ideal qualities of a woman. *Constanza* is depicted holding a sprig of orange blossom representing the virtue of chastity. The *Young Lady* is seen with a necklace around her neck which is a set of rosary beads which is used to symbolise her piety and religious belief. Both women also have fair skin to depict their feminine beauty. Alongside beauty, the virtues of chastity and piety were important to be seen within a woman so they could be seen as an eligible and worthy bride for a noble suitor.

Upon marriage, the two people, if nobility, would have gained new social roles and the symbolism of this is also became reflected in their marriage paintings. This includes the painting of *Lorenz Kraffter and his wife Honesta Merz*. Lorenz is shown with the castle and the church in the background being his domain because of the politics and being in charge of the land whilst Honesta is dressed in

a more domestic style because she was in charge of the household, focused on family and raising children. This painting does not depict real love but a unity and alliance created for what was best for the political situation.



Even though the majority of these paintings were created for a specific political purpose, miniatures were created and designed to show a sense of real love and affection. These paintings were designed to be small, hidden and worn near the heart to prove real love for the person that was depicted with the miniature. The *Gresley Jewel*, a rare example of a double miniature together proves and shows the real love that must have existed between the couple. Furthermore, after the death of Mary's husband Louis XII she was finally able to marry the man she truly loved, Charles Brandon, in defiance of the usual political or diplomatic

transaction that would occur with a marriage of her status. The painting of *Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon* ([Click here to view](#)) shows them very close together, holding hands and depicts a real sense of love that existed between the two. The artichoke and caduceus is used to symbolism the love and betrothal between the couple. Even though the majority of marriages that took place between royals

and within the nobility was not because of love there were still some key examples of where real love won out against the established diplomatic and political nature of marriage and love.

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