

# A Kiss Is Just A Kiss... Or Is It?

OVERSIZED BRONZE SCULPTURE DISPLAYS FAMOUS KISS FROM FAMOUS DAY

by Brenda Silva



1. The Victor Jorgensen V-J Day "Kiss" photo. 2. 25-foot tall sculpture of V-J Day "kiss" by Sewall Johnson. 3. "The Kiss" by Gustav Klimt (detail). 4. "Il Bacio" by Francesco Hoyez (detail). 5. "Le Baiser" by Auguste Rodin (detail). 6. The 1896 film "The Kiss." 7. The Perry Mason / Della Street kiss. 8. The kiss from "The Sound of Music"



On August 14, 1945, George Mendonsa kissed Greta Zimmer in New York City's Times Square as photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt memorialized the kiss on film. The resulting photo of that random kiss between a sailor and a dental assistant—entitled "V-J Day in Times Square" by Eisenstaedt—has become one of the most well-known symbols of V-J Day and the end of WWII; the photo appeared in *Life*. Another photographer was there that day, Victor Jorgensen, a former Navy photo journalist, who also took a photograph of the same embrace but from a different less dramatic angle. His photo appeared in the *New York Times*.

Sewall Johnson brought that kiss to oversized life as a bronze sculpture that stands 25 feet tall, weighs 15,100 pounds, and rests on a base of 15,000 pounds. Consider the irony as you try to grasp the literal enormity of the piece called "Embracing Peace," which is currently on display at McKee Botanical Gardens. Since its construction in 2005, the awe-inspiring sculpture has quickly become Sewall Johnson's most renowned and recognized sculpture which, according to Johnson, is based on Jorgensen's lesser known photograph.

Beginning his artistic career as a painter, Sewall Johnson ultimately chose sculpture as his medium, with fans worldwide grateful for his choice. As the centerpiece of Johnson's current "Celebrating the Familiar" exhibition, "Embracing Peace" arrived via a flatbed semi-trailer in December, relying on a crane to bring the celebratory smooch to a standing position. Prior to its arrival in Vero Beach, the sculpture was on display in various cities in the U.S, as well as in Italy. In addition, a casting of the sculpture has been on display in France, and is currently located in Belgium.

Since its arrival, "Embracing Peace" has subsequently been joined by 20 other life-sized bronze sculptures that are designed to depict "the beautiful moments of ordinary life," according to Johnson. The exhibition runs through April 28, with hours, admission and information about the garden available at [www.mckee garden.org](http://www.mckee garden.org) or at 772-194-0601.

## Popular Pucker-Ups

Just because Johnson's sculpture embrace is one of the largest kisses, it's not the only popular kiss to be created. While the Johnson sculpture may hold the top spot for many people when it comes to most recognizable kisses, there are certainly other famous kisses that would be strong contenders to fill out the remaining spots on a Top 10 list.

In the art world, arguably the most popular are paintings of kisses entitled "The Kiss" by Austrian Gustav Klimt and "Il Bacio" by Italian Francesco Hoyez, along with Frenchman Auguste Rodin's "Le Baiser" marble sculpture of lovers kissing.

Beyond paintings and sculptures, today's movies and television shows also offer their fair share of kisses. It's interesting to note that the first kiss ever shown on film—a barely-there kiss from Thomas Edison's 1896 film "The Kiss"—scandalized audiences. Subsequent movie kisses became much longer affairs, and eventually became cause for an industry ban in the 1930s. However, as attitudes and times changed, kisses came back to the silver screen, much to the delight of hopeless romantics.

## Swoon-worthy Smooches

Not to diminish their popularity as great works of art, paintings and sculptures can't compare to watching your favorite couples finally realize their love for each other and seal it with a kiss. On the big screen, fans held their breath as Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara kissed in *Gone with the Wind*, as well as when Captain von Trapp admitted his love for Maria and they kissed (and sang!) in the gazebo in *The Sound of Music*. On the smaller screen, loyal fans swooned (myself included) when Perry Mason finally kissed Della Street after 40 years of working together, just like how millennials cheered when Dr. Derek "McDreamy" Sheppard and Dr. Meredith Grey lip-locked on *Grey's Anatomy*.

Ultimately, whether it's romantic kisses, playful smooches or pecks of any kind, kisses are always best when shared with those we hold dear. On this Valentine's Day, keep in mind that while kisses may be as big as Sewall Johnson's sculpture or as small as Milton Hershey's chocolate, they're all enjoyed most when shared with someone special.

