

Sarah Jeffries (aka) PHOENIX

TRANSFORMATIVE BRIDE

"We are not the masters of our images, but rather in a sense at their mercy:
they colonize our bodies (our brains)" - Hans Belting, 2001

The work in this exhibition forms part of my PhD research at the University of Leeds which has the working title *Exorcising the Bridal Image; cut, paste, paint*.

A pertinent concern throughout my practice-led research, has been reflecting upon the German art historian and anthropologist Hans Belting's 2001 argument that an image has a life inside the body. I'm interested in the question: are we in control of the images in our lives, or are they in control of us?

Through cutting up my own wedding dress, I discovered the first cut was charged with difficult emotions. Upon taking sharp scissors to my delicate organza wedding dress, the dress seemed to have an invisible, psychological, force field around it that seemed to cry - don't cut me up! In an act of anarchy I made that first cut, pushing through the illusion of the garment being too special to destroy. Such an act felt like the spiritual cord-cutting of my childhood dream to be a bride, and a separation from the Prince Charming, happy ever after, rhetoric that goes with it. Defying the sanctity of the bridal gown creates a symbolic act of political agency over the force of such traditional imagery. Which seems far more important than keeping the dress as a keepsake stored away in a dark attic.

Reflecting on past ideas of what it means to be a bride, along with a felt reality of being a wife, has served as a platform for exploring surrealist experiments. The research embraces the French writer and poet André Breton's ideas of surrealist play, chance, and anarchy within the making process as detailed in his *Surrealist Manifesto*, published in 1929.

My visual and contextual investigations respond to acts of retracing the cyclical image of the bride within Western British history and personal history. The research utilises Levi Strauss' Bricolage methodology of making do with what is to hand. I consider each object's past life narrative in contrast with a lived experience.

Two key theoretical concepts have fuelled ideas for studio-practice experiments. The first being French philosopher and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of the 'practico-inert object' (objects that organise our lives into being a series of bodies using that same object). The second being Hans Belting's concept of our bodies becoming a living medium for the image like an entity, moving through and influencing our minds.

These studio practice experiments investigate the potential of dismantling and reconstructing the harmonic image of the bride, towards unmasking media illusions of marriage. Objects and the painted images interrupt, and critically question, the role of normalcy and harmony attached to such images of grandeur and seductive aesthetics. Multi-layered works encapsulated within individual containers, have led to uncanny embodiments of the icon of the bride.

On reflection, these works seem to embody time and space happening all at once, through retracing memory, the layering of materials, these juxtapose with the past-life narrative of each object and image within the present.

You, the viewer, now complete each work, by bringing your thoughts and ideas of this subject to the work, whatever they may be. I hope you enjoy the show!

List of Works

Boxed Bride No.1 (2022), oil on linen, 35.5 x 46 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.2 (2022), oil on linen, 35.5 x 46 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.3 (2022), oil on linen, 35.5 x 46 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.4 (2022), oil on linen, 35 x 45 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.5 – Diana (2022), acrylic on polythene, 36 x 45 cm. £325

Boxed Bride No.6 – Diana (2022), acrylic on polythene and organza wedding dress, 36 x 45 cm. £650

Double Bride (2023), acrylic on polythene, organza wedding dress, wedding day hair extensions, 73 x 100 cm. £1500

Boxed Bride No.7 - Diana (2022), acrylic on polythene and satin underlay, 46 x 36 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.8 – Elizabeth (2022), acrylic on polythene and satin underlay, 46 x 36 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.9 (2024), oil on cigar box & organza wedding gown, 126 x 30.5 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.10 (2023), oil on cigar box & organza wedding gown, 113 x 14.5 cm. £650

Boxed Bride No.11 (2024), oil on cigar box & wedding day hair extensions, 15 x 21 cm. £400

Boxed Bride No.12 (2024), oil on cigar box & organza wedding gown, 33 x 17 cm. £450

Boxed Bride No.13 (2024), oil on cigar box, 8.5 x 23 x 2 cm. £520

Boxed Bride No.14 (2024), oil on cigar box, 9.5 x 26 x 2 cm. £400

Spinning Paintings Installation (2024-26), oil on cigar boxes and lids, fishing wire. £1000

Illuminated Bride (2023), acrylic on Perspex, projected images, wooden greenhouse, bridal gown, 120 x 130 cm. £2600

Veiled Bride (2026), oil on linen, 61 x 76 cm. £1500

For more info, visit sarahjeffriesart.com and follow Sarah on Instagram [@sarahjeffriesart](https://www.instagram.com/sarahjeffriesart)

If you would like to enquire or purchase an artwork, or find out more about OWN ART purchasing scheme, please speak to the Chapel Arts Studios team or email curator@chapelartsstudios.co.uk