

FRIDA KAHLO (1907-1954)
Mexican artist

CATEGORIES: IDENTITY, GENDER, CULTURE, SYMBOLISM

Title: Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird
Date: 1940
Medium: oil on canvas
Size: 25“ x 19.5”; 63.5 x 49.5 cm.
Location: University of Texas, Austin, Texas

Title: Self Portrait with Monkey
Date: 1938
Medium: oil on masonite
Size: 16“ x 12”; 40.6 x 30.5 cm.
Location: Albright-Knox Art Collection, NY.

<p>KEYWORDS: Identity; Gender; Culture; Symbolism; Symbols Personal presentation Narrative; biography Identity Cultural elements Nature; relationships Female; feminine Power</p>	<p>OBSERVATIONS: Strong female image: stern, solemn?, pursed lips, eyebrows, directness. Inclusion of birds and monkeys. Familiarity with nature Foliage, setting Observations of nature, flowers, leaves, palms etc</p>	<p>DISCUSSION POINTS: How biography affects image Cultural aspects of identity, Gender, religion, politics How we ‘see’ our self; what we present as ‘self’ Relationships with nature (animals, setting, environment) Strong female image: how is this shown? Discussion of artist bio Narrative behind image</p>
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Self Portrait with Thorn necklace and Hummingbird

In this self portrait the artist, Frida Kahlo sits in a frontal pose, staring directly out at the viewer. She sits in front of green tropical leaves. Over her left shoulder sits a black cat staring out at the viewer. Over her right sits a monkey, native to the area of Coyocoán, Mexico City. The monkey is a symbol of lust in Mexican mythology. She kept monkeys as pets in the garden of the Blue House in Coyocoán. Some say her monkeys symbolised the children she was never able to have after having suffered horrific injuries from a bus accident when she was 18 (1925). (This led to complications, 35 operations and several miscarriages and was the source of much unhappiness and anguish throughout her life). Monkeys are strong symbols and important in Columbian society. She and her husband, Diego Rivera, a fellow artist, collected a great deal of Columbian artworks. The monkey in Aztec society was thought to represent the god of fertility.

Circling Frida’s neck she wears a necklace that appears to choke her. It seems to grow tightly like roots around her throat. The thorns on the necklace prick her neck and blood is shown in several places. This image reminds the viewer of Christian imagery, for eg. Christ’s crown of thorns which also pricks his skin and makes him bleed. The blood symbolises Christ’s sacrifice for mankind. It is also suggested that the thorn pricks represent the pain she is experiencing in her divorce from her philandering husband, Diego. (Although they remarried again one year later). She appears to be stoic and calm, enduring the painful thorns...

In her hair ethereal/ghostlike/colourless butterflies and insects rest or fly nearby. A hummingbird hangs from the thorn necklace, knotted around her throat. Hummingbirds sometimes symbolise fertility, resurrection, infinity, freedom and life. Usually hummingbirds are colourful, here it hangs dark and lifeless.

This is a painting about her suffering. This is a relatively small painting (2 feet by 20 inches) but powerful and full of rich and intense colours.

Self Portrait with Monkey

In this self portrait, Frida's face half turns to look out at the viewer. A small monkey sits over her shoulder with its arm around her neck. It has a green ribbon or cord fastened around its neck. The monkey expresses friendship or perhaps protection?

Behind Frida is a curtain of green leaves. Around her neck she wears a necklace of sea shells tied loosely with a leather thong.

This painting was commissioned by Conger Goodyear, president of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. He liked her paintings and wanted to buy one, but she had already given it to her friend, Mary Schapiro Sklar so she painted this little painting for Goodyear.

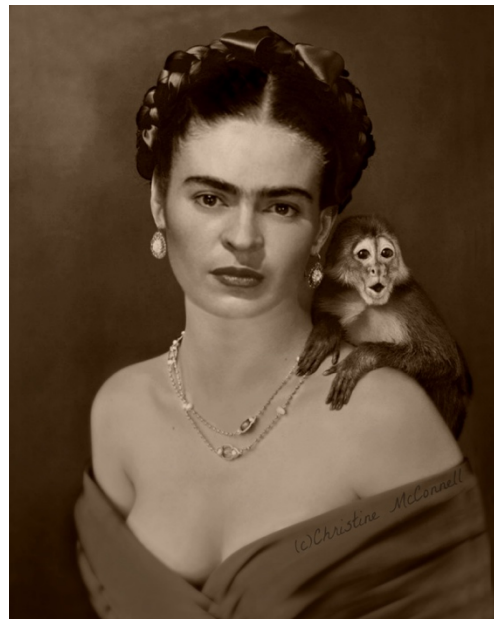
LINKS:

<http://www.fridakahlo.org/self-portrait-with-thorn-necklace-and-hummingbird.jsp>

(photographs of the artist): <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/rare-photos-frida-kahlo-legendary-photographers-gallery-1.2245199?pmSlide=1.2245187>

<http://www.fridakahlofans.com/c0250.html>

OTHER IMAGES:



BIOGRAPHY:

Artist Frida Kahlo was born on July 6, 1907, in Coyocoán, Mexico City, Mexico. Considered one of Mexico's greatest artists, Frida Kahlo began painting after she was severely injured in a bus accident. Kahlo later became politically active and married fellow communist artist Diego Rivera in 1929. They were political activists throughout their careers as artists, working in the USA for several years. She exhibited her paintings in Paris and Mexico before her death in 1954. <http://www.biography.com/people/frida-kahlo-9359496#synopsis>