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Art 306

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Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16 inches
(Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)

A Visual Analysis of Frida Kahlo's *The Two Fridas*

Frida Kahlo is perhaps one of the most famous and recognizable hispanic artists of modern times. Although she was plagued with polio and the painful, restricting chronic pain that it produces, Kahlo's artwork beautifully expresses her pain and conflicts she faced in life through creating symbolic self portraits. *The Two Fridas* is a primary example of Kahlo's utilization of symbols and motifs to portray the trials she faced. Kahlo's use of duplicated figures, distinct clothing, and small significant details, allows her to exemplify her inner battle to discern her identity and comprehend her suffering.

While the composition of the figures in the painting are relatively static with an immense amount of detail, the composition of the background is very simplistic. The farthest element of the painting is the minimalistic background that closely follows the rule of thirds. The top two-thirds of the background are blueish gray cloudlike forms while the bottom third is a solid area of brown values. This separation of color creates depth and provides the viewer with the illusion of looking into a part of Frida's struggles throughout her life.

Although the composition is simple and almost symmetrical, the duplicated figures force the viewer's eyes to travel back and forth between them due to their stark differences. The identity of the two figures is Kahlo herself. Kahlo paints herself seated opposite on a bench from another seated version of herself on the same bench while creating an intense juxtaposition primarily through the choice of the Fridas' clothing and other small details. On the left, The Frida can be seen wearing a white, ornate European or Victorian style dress while the right Frida can be seen dressed in a colorful traditional Hispanic or Mexican style of dress. The European dress most likely represents Kahlo's European roots while the Traditional Mexican dress may represent Kahlo's life in Mexico. The separation of these two aspects of Kahlo's identity produces a feeling of tension and independence between the two Fridas.

Another apparent difference between the two Fridas is their differing conditions of heart. The heart of the left Frida is cut open with exposed arteries and tissues while the heart of the right Frida is healthy with whole and complete cardiac structures. One noticeable aspect of the vein from the heart of the left Frida is that it can be traced down past her hands where the viewer can see her holding a pair of surgical scissors that appear to be cutting the vein. The severing of the vein from the heart of the left European Frida represents the pain and suffering she has endured and the weakness she feels. In opposition, the veins of the right traditional Mexican Frida are fully intact and connected to a whole healthy heart. This portrayal of a fully functioning heart most likely represents Kahlo's vitality that she has and feels from creating art and celebrating her Mexican heritage.

Despite the clear differences in detail between the two Fridas, Kahlo desires her viewers to recognize that even though the Fridas seem to be two entirely different individuals they both

live in harmony to compose Kahlo's true identity. The two Fridas may seem separate but are actually two parts of one being. Kahlo illustrates the unification of the Fridas through two important elements. The first unifying factor is the act of the left and right Frida interlacing hands. This act underscores the peace and love that the Fridas feel for each other. The second and most emphasized detail of cohesiveness of the Fridas is the connection between their hearts by one single vein. The link between the damaged heart of the left Frida and the healthy heart of the right Frida implies that while both Fridas are individualized they are still codependent on one another in order to keep the whole of the Fridas alive.

In conclusion, Kahlo successfully illustrates that her identity is composed of every aspect of her life including her pain and suffering through the connection of hands and hearts between the extremes of her life. Although Kahlo may wish to cut out the pain and European influence she has, this painting is evidence that she realizes those aspects of her life are also vital to the survival of joy and hispanic cultural significance in her life.



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