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The Construction of Female Subjectivity in Self-Portraits: Symbolism and Feminist Expression in the Paintings of Frida Kahlo

Yuan Linan

Abstract

This paper focuses on Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, analyzing how she systematically constructs female subjectivity through the use of symbolism and a feminist perspective. Using iconographic analysis and sociological critique, the study explores how Kahlo transforms personal trauma, the pain of childbirth, and experiences of marital violence into forms of public artistic expression, thereby subverting the patriarchal art tradition that has historically viewed women as "perfect vessels." The research reveals that Kahlo reshapes female discourse through three strategies: challenging the patriarchal gaze with gender-neutral facial expressions and politically charged attire in *The Two Fridas*; establishing an aesthetic of pain through the self-splitting imagery in *The Two Fridas*; and reinforcing expressions of indigenous identity by invoking Mexican cultural traditions. Her cultural practice transforms traditional symbols into feminist visual images, which, from a global perspective, continue to generate art with significant symbolic resistance.

Key Words

Frida Kahlo, self-portrait, feminism, symbolism, body politics

1. The Visual Translation of Physical Trauma: Symbolist Practices in Self-Portraits

Frida Kahlo's art is deeply rooted in her ability to transform profound and enduring physical and psychological trauma into highly symbolic visual narratives that can be interpreted by the public. Her self-portraits—particularly those that directly depict illness and suffering—are not merely records of personal pain; they are a series of visual declarations constructed through symbolic means. In these images, Kahlo turns her body into a battlefield and text that carries personal history, social critique, and cultural identity. Through unique and rich visual symbols, she elevates private suffering into universal reflections on life, gender, and power structures. This section focuses on three key strategies used in her self-portraits for visualizing trauma: the symbolic representation of physical pain, the public expression of reproductive difficulties, and the metaphorical symbiosis between nature and the body.

1.1 The Body as Battlefield: Symbolization of Physical Pain

Kahlo's artistic practice is closely connected to her traumatic bodily experiences. At the age of eighteen, a serious car accident left her with multiple fractures in her spine, pelvis, and right foot, resulting in lifelong disabilities and the loss of her ability to give birth. This ongoing physical pain became the fundamental driving force and core theme of her art. In the shocking self-portrait *The Broken Column* (1944) (figure 1), Kahlo does not resort to realistic representation but instead uses highly symbolic and metaphorical visual language to reveal the disintegration of her body. This painting draws on the techniques of devotional art—unlike conventional perspective, it employs a horizon-based composition where the significance of elements is determined by their relative scale. The lighting is rendered naturally, while the figures are deliberately flat and stylized in form.¹ In the image, her exposed torso is split vertically, and a broken, precarious Ionic column symbolizes her damaged spine, coldly supporting her

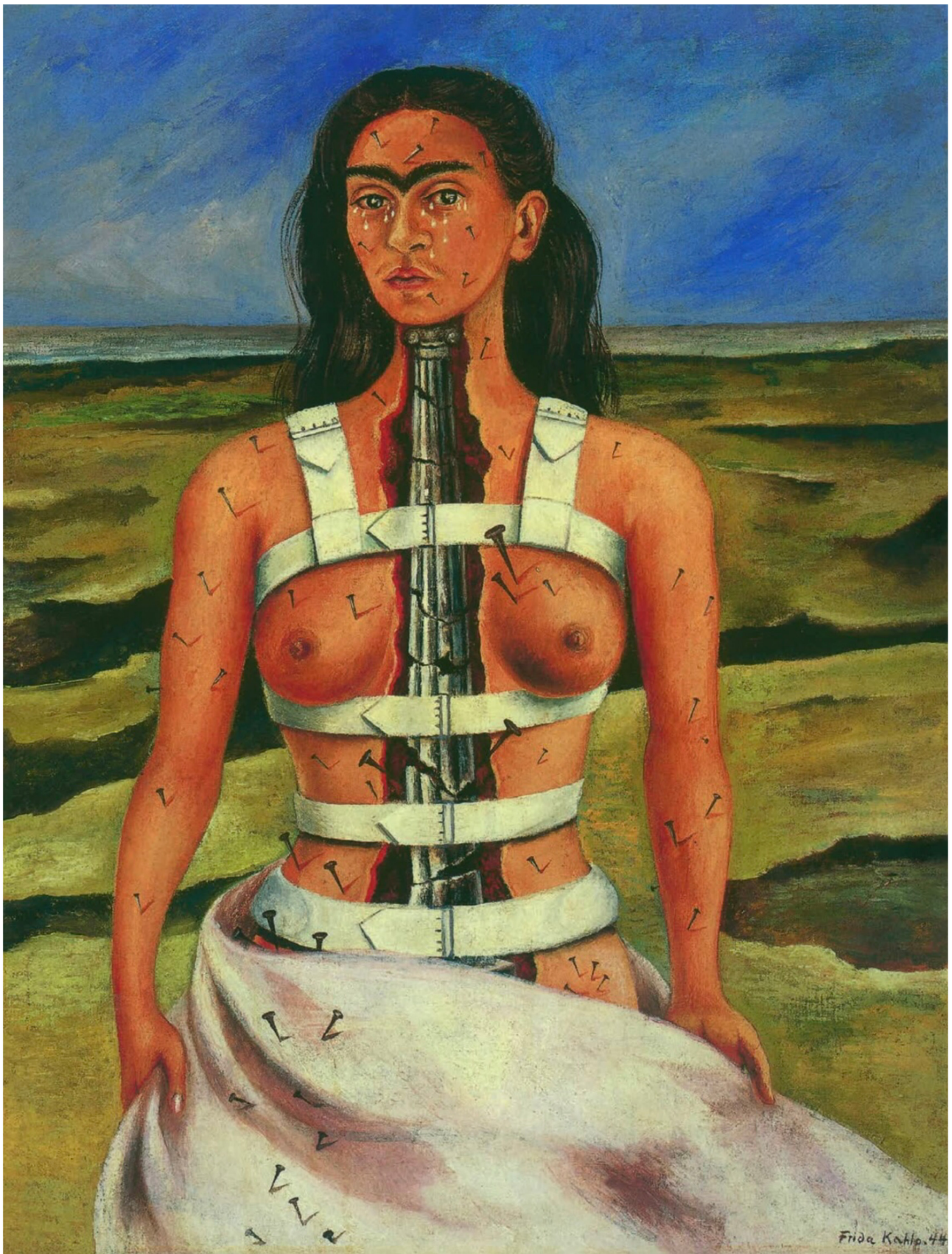


Figure 1. Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, oil on masonite, 40×30.7cm, Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo credit: Collection of Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City.

fractured body. Numerous nails, varying in size, deeply pierce her skin and muscles, covering almost every inch of her body's surface, depicting the ongoing, deep-rooted physical pain and its accompanying psychological torment. Her chest is open, revealing a solitary and unprotected heart, symbolizing the complete exposure of her emotions and their vulnerability. However, in stark contrast to the body undergoing this public dissection and torment is Kahlo's face: she gazes directly out of the painting with calm, resolute eyes, even displaying a subtle defiance. Tears slide down her cheeks, but they do not signal collapse or pleading; they echo the wounds of her body, while her unyielding expression conveys dignity and willpower transcending physical pain. This binary of suffering and resilience forms one of the most recognizable visual rhetorical strategies in Kahlo's art.

What is even more critical is the subversive art-historical significance of Kahlo's approach to the naked and brutal dissection and symbolic treatment of her body. She completely breaks away from the Western art tradition (particularly under the male gaze) that has historically molded the female body as a smooth, whole, passive entity, serving the gaze as a perfect vessel or object of desire. Kahlo actively displays her body's imperfections, scars, medical devices (such as the plaster casts or steel corsets she later used), and the pain that radiates from within, transforming her frail body into a public, accusatory monument. This monument not only marks her personal suffering but also stands as a public testimony to all the overlooked and suppressed bodily pain (particularly that of women). Through visualizing and symbolizing private trauma, Kahlo not only achieves a degree of self-healing but also transforms imperfection itself into an active form of resistance, challenging societal stereotypes of the female body and fighting for visibility and discourse for marginalized bodily experiences. The body she portrays is no longer a passive object, but a battlefield carrying history and vocalizing protests. Her paintings seem to provide a visual vocabulary, through which trauma and pain are communicated with dignity and compassion. The figures in her portraits gaze directly out at the viewer, evoking a profound sense of shared vulnerability.²

1.2 The Public Expression of Reproductive Struggles

The trauma of infertility and reproductive difficulties constitutes another core pain dimension of Kahlo's female experience, which is deeply and uniquely expressed in her art. A miscarriage in Detroit in 1932 had a profound physical and emotional impact on her, directly giving rise to *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932) (figure 2), a striking work that rejects conventional depictions of



Figure 2. Frida Kahlo, *Henry Ford Hospital* (also known as *The Flying Bed*), 1932, oil on metal, 30.5×38cm, Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo credit: Collection of Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City.

a hospital environment. Instead, it thrusts the viewer directly into one of Kahlo's most intimate, painful moments: she lies naked on a blood-soaked hospital bed, floating in an empty, desolate, industrial landscape (the Detroit backdrop), creating a powerful sense of loneliness and alienation.

The core tension of this painting derives from its surrealistic symbolic system. From Kahlo's bleeding abdomen, six bright red lines—resembling umbilical cords or veins—extend outward, connecting six floating, metaphorical objects: a male fetus, a snail, a pelvis, an orchid, discarded mechanical parts, and a model of a female torso. This juxtaposition of unreal imagery is Kahlo's core strategy for turning private experience into public political discourse. She not only represents the miscarriage itself but also sharply questions multiple forms of structural oppression: the medical intervention and alienation of the female body, the reduction of women's value to mere reproductive function, the social stigma and self-shame associated with infertility, and the systemic stripping away of women's bodily autonomy under patriarchy.

By rendering the trauma of miscarriage—typically confined to the private domain and even blamed as a deficiency in women—into such direct and symbolically powerful visual terms, Kahlo makes a bold feminist statement. Through this work, she critiques the traditional simplification of the female body as a reproductive tool, exposing the power structures and gender oppression behind childbirth, while granting the pain and silence of women in this process a public voice and visual authority.

1.3 The Metaphorical Symbiosis Between Nature and the Body

Kahlo's construction of female subjectivity is not only achieved through the direct portrayal of bodily trauma and the public expression of reproductive struggles but also through the creation of a unique symbolic system that tightly binds the female body with natural vitality. This connection is rooted in her strong identification with, and creative transformation of, Mexican indigenous culture—especially pre-Columbian Aztec mythology.

In *The Roots* (1943) (figure 3), Kahlo presents this metaphor through poetic visual language. She lies on a barren, cracked, reddish-brown earth, with her chest open, from which lush green vines emerge. These plants are not external parasites but seem to grow directly from her heart and blood, entwining her body, and ultimately sinking deep into the dry soil. Blood flows from the vines like a river, seeping into the earth's cracks, nourishing the wasteland as if giving life to the barren. Kahlo's expression is calm, even exuding a sense of serene sacrifice, as her body becomes a mediator between heaven and earth, flesh and nature.

This imagery is not mere decoration or beautification but carries deep cultural symbolism and philosophical reflection: the reverberation of Coatlicue, the Aztec

goddess of creation, death, and rebirth. Kahlo's portrayal of vines growing from her chest (the source of life) and blood nourishing the earth strongly echoes Coatlicue's cyclic concept of life through sacrifice and destruction. Kahlo equates herself with or embodies this primordial goddess, transforming her personal suffering (bodily rupture, blood loss) into a cosmic, creative force.

In this painting, a profound symbiotic relationship between the body and nature is established. The female body is no longer an isolated object but intertwines with the land and plants, forming an inseparable organic whole. The bodily trauma—the open wound—becomes the source of life, as the blood flowing through her body nourishes the parched land. This system of imagery suggests that a woman's creative power, whether in art or reproduction, shares the same essence as the life force found in nature.

In this way, Kahlo anchors her personal trauma (bodily pain and reproductive failure) into a more universal female experience, deeply rooted in the cultural resources of Mexican identity. Through the translation of indigenous cultural symbols, her personal experiences resonate with collective history, becoming a visual bridge that connects the lived experiences of women across time. This dialectical unity of pain (bodily suffering) and beauty (life creation



Figure 3. Frida Kahlo, *The Roots*, 1943, oil on metal, 30.5×49cm. Private collection. Photo credit: Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 4. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, oil on canvas, 40×27.9cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States. Photo credit: Digital image ©The Museum of Modern Art.

and cultural continuity) in her visual language not only offers the artist a path beyond individual pain but also lays the foundation for a unique aesthetic of pain based on the body. This aesthetic emphasizes the female body as the center of perception, creation, and cultural connection, affirming the strength and value of female subjectivity in a resilient and poetic form.

2. The Triple Construction of Female Subjectivity: Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Declaration

Kahlo's self-portraits transcend the realm of personal life records, becoming a profound and systematic practice of constructing female subjectivity. Through visual language, she carves out three intertwined paths between the gaps of patriarchal artistic tradition and societal regulation: actively subverting the passive gaze to reclaim subjectivity, transforming private experiences of violence into political declarations in the public sphere, and pioneering an aesthetic of pain that confronts both physical and mental trauma. This chapter aims to explain how Kahlo, through her art, achieved a fundamental transformation from being the gazed-upon object to the self-speaking subject.

2.1 Subverting the Patriarchal Gaze: Reconstructing the Politics of Viewing

Throughout Western art history, the female body has long existed as an object to be gazed upon and desired. From Botticelli's idealized Venus in *The Birth of Venus* to the docile Orientalist charm in Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, female figures have served the aesthetic and desire production of the male gaze. Kahlo's self-portraits completely overturn this power structure. She employs the strategy of the active gaze, transforming the canvas into a battleground for the contestation of subjectivity.

The Playful Deconstruction of Gender Symbols: In *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940) (figure 4), Kahlo, dressed in an oversized men's suit and holding a pair of scissors, with her black hair scattered across the floor, directly responds to her husband Diego Rivera's infidelity while also declaring a rebellion against gender norms. In the painting, she holds a pair of scissors, having cut off her long hair—a gesture that symbolizes her emancipation from the passive, subordinate role assigned to women in love and marriage. As if reborn, she embarks on a journey toward female self-reflection and autonomy.³ The most subversive aspect of the painting is her degendered treatment of her own face: thick, bird-like eyebrows, and a clearly visible mustache on her upper lip. These features, often regarded as female

imperfections by mainstream aesthetics, are intentionally exaggerated and transformed into personal trademarks. She rejects the need to beautify her appearance to conform to the feminine paradigm and instead, by emphasizing these masculine traits, she humorously deconstructs the binary opposition of gender. This face becomes an anti-mask, declaring her rejection of male aesthetic hegemony and compelling the viewer to face a woman who is not disciplined by desire and is not defined by gender labels. Her gaze is calm, direct, and even provocative, reversing the traditional passive position of the gazed-upon and realizing a declaration of subjectivity: "I am what I see."

Fashion as a Cultural and Political Declaration: Kahlo's consistent use of traditional Mexican Tehuana clothing goes far beyond a mere ethnic aesthetic. In the Zapotec cultural tradition, Tehuana dress carries significant gender-political implications. The garments, made and passed down through generations by women, with their large skirts and elaborate headpieces, are visual symbols of women's economic autonomy and social power within a matrilineal society. When men (such as her husband) were absent, women wore these clothes to assume authority over family and community affairs. Kahlo keenly recognized the rebellious potential inherent in this symbolic system.

In *Diego in My Thoughts* (1943) and other self-portraits, she appears in meticulously worn Tehuana attire, with an image of Rivera painted on her forehead. This seemingly contradictory visual arrangement forms a subtle metaphor: the clothing becomes her cultural armor, asserting her subjectivity in terms of indigenous cultural identity, while the portrait of her husband on her forehead symbolizes her conscious internalization and active control of his artistic and spiritual influence, rather than passive submission. Thus, for Kahlo, the Tehuana dress becomes a medium for dual resistance: resisting European-centric aesthetic hegemony and challenging the patriarchal assumption of women's subordinate roles, thereby constructing a composite subject position that merges ethnic identity and gender autonomy.

2.2 Artistic Protest Against Marital Violence: Publicizing Private Trauma

Kahlo's tumultuous and passionate marriage to Rivera became a central motif in her art. She refused to bury the pain within the private domain, choosing instead to elevate it into a public critique of the structural violence embedded in the institution of marriage. *A Few Small Nips* (1935) (figure 5) represents the pinnacle of this critique:

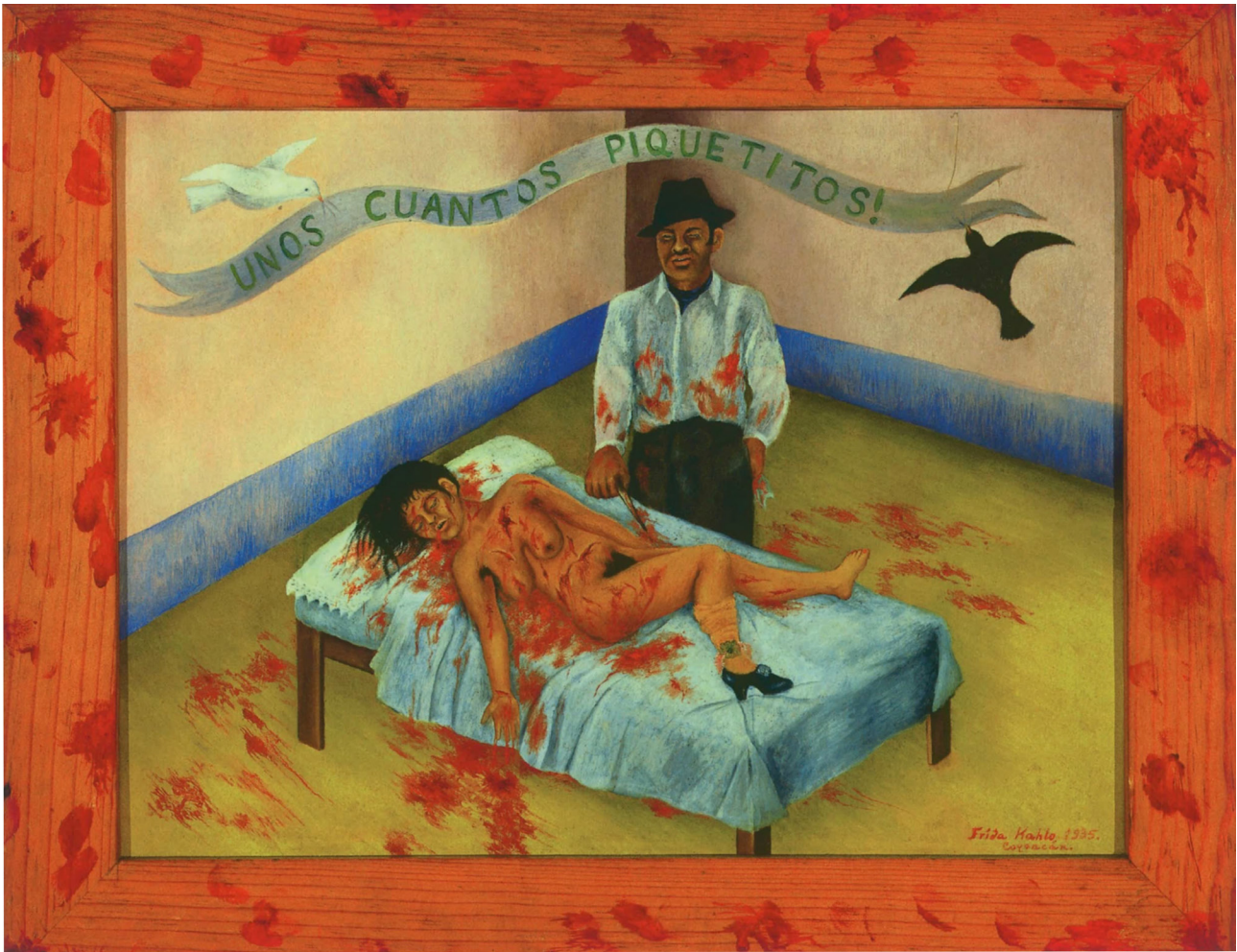


Figure 5. Frida Kahlo, *A Few Small Nips*, 1935, oil on metal, 30×40cm. Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo credit: Collection of Museo Dolores Olmedo.

Inspired by a news story in which a man, after murdering his lover, claimed “I just gave her a few small nips,” Kahlo places herself in the role of the victim. She depicts a female body repeatedly stabbed with a sharp object, blood soaking the sheets. The abuser’s figure is deliberately erased, with only a floating, indifferent giant hand hanging in the air—an implicit reference to Rivera’s (famously large) hands and his betrayal.

The spatial encoding of power in the painting is highly significant: the victim’s body occupies the center of the canvas but is shown limp and powerless, while the abuser, like a ghost, looms over her, suggesting the ubiquity and invisibility of male violence. The indifferent onlookers in the background—specifically the bird perched on the doorframe—reinforce society’s complicity in gendered violence. Kahlo’s use of surrealist, bloody imagery and the repurposing of the news headline create a sharp irony, revealing the systemic disregard and discursive erasure of violence

against women in patriarchal society. The painting is not merely a personal accusation but a profound critique of the marriage institution as an unequal structure of gendered power, forcing private emotional trauma into the public domain and marking it as an early feminist intervention in social issues.

2.3 The Aesthetic of Pain: Self-Splitting and Identity Reconstruction

Kahlo’s ultimate breakthrough was in creating an aesthetic of pain that directly confronts trauma, rejecting the idea of redemption. She rejected the romanticized transcendence of suffering, opting instead to reveal its rupturing and complex nature. *The Two Fridas* (1939) (figure 6) stands as the core declaration of this aesthetic paradigm.

The painting juxtaposes two selves: one wearing a white Victorian lace dress (symbolizing her European heritage and the failure of her first marriage) and the



Figure 6. Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, 1939, oil on canvas, 173.5×173cm. Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo credit: Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

other dressed in bright Tehuana clothing (symbolizing her Mexican roots and connection to Rivera). Both hearts are exposed and connected by a single blood vessel, which is cruelly severed by surgical scissors, causing blood to drip.

This image carries multiple deconstructions:

The Rupture of Colonial Identity: The juxtaposition of the Victorian dress and the Tehuana clothing directly addresses the colonial scars within Mexican mestizo culture and Kahlo's own conflict between her European and indigenous heritage.

The End of Marital Dependency: The blood vessel connecting the two figures symbolizes her emotional bond to Rivera, while the surgical scissors severing it signify a deliberate break from pathological dependence, declaring the painful necessity of emotional independence.

Internal Dialogue of Subjectivity: The two Fridas are not merely binary opposites but reflect the internal fluidity and negotiation of subjectivity. The Frida on the right holds a childhood portrait of Rivera, suggesting the continuity of memory, while the Frida on the left holds a

hemostat, trying to control the flow of life. Their shared seat, symbolizing the foundation of existence, suggests that the split self remains a single entity, presenting a dynamic and evolving subjectivity.

This image of self-splitting refuses to offer the illusion of healing and instead presents trauma, contradiction, and cultural hybridity as the authentic state of female existence. The exposed hearts and flowing blood are not symbols of fragility but become sources of vitality and resistance. With this, Kahlo pioneered an aesthetic paradigm in which pain is authenticity and rupture is wholeness, providing the core grammar for later female artists (such as Cindy Sherman and Tracey Emin) to address identity politics and bodily trauma, and forever altering the artistic expression of female experience.

3. The Interaction Between Cultural Contexts and Art Movements: Local Standpoints and Global Power Plays

Kahlo's artistic achievements cannot be separated from the complex cultural soil in which they were rooted and the clash with international art trends. She was not a passive recipient of influences, but instead selectively absorbed, critically transformed, and strategically broke through cultural boundaries with high cultural awareness. This chapter analyzes how Kahlo utilized the Mexican nationalist wave to empower female expression, maintained an independent position within the Surrealist movement, and how her image has been reinterpreted in the global consumption era.

3.1 The Empowerment of Mexican Nationalism: Constructing a Local Feminist Discourse

The Cultural Renaissance movement, following the Mexican Revolution (1920-1940), provided a critical framework for Kahlo's expression. With governmental support, pre-Columbian cultural heritage and folk art were elevated to symbols of national spirit. Kahlo astutely transformed these cultural resources into a unique weapon for expressing female subjectivity through hybrid symbolic coding.

In *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940) (figure 7), Kahlo creatively juxtaposed multiple cultural symbols. For example, the Aztec symbol of the thorn necklace and the bleeding heart, referencing sacrificial rituals, the hummingbird (a symbol of the souls of the dead in Mexican culture) hanging as a pendant, and Catholic imagery such as the butterfly on her forehead (symbolizing resurrection), a

black cat on her shoulder (representing misfortune), and a monkey (desire). These are symbols commonly used in devotional art, but Kahlo stripped them of their religious subjugation function. The dense jungle leaves in the background symbolize vitality, creating tension with the death implied by the thorns. This "local Surrealism" was not just a stylistic label but a cultural strategy that combined indigenous myths, colonial-era religious symbols, and personal trauma experiences. Through this, Kahlo constructed a visual language deeply rooted in national culture while carrying her feminist demands. This move effectively circumvented the limitations of feminist discourse dominated by the experiences of Western, white, middle-class women and provided a differentiated expression path for women in the Third World. In many of her self-portraits featuring flora and fauna, plants recede into the background while animals either make physical contact with the figure or remain at a measured distance—yet without any form of interaction or eye contact. This deliberate spatial and emotional separation conveys a poignant sense of Kahlo's solitude.⁴

The political potential of ethnic clothing was given a new dimension through Kahlo's continuous use of traditional Tehuana attire. While muralists like Rivera used grand narratives to depict mixed-race nationalism, Kahlo focused on the political nature of individual women's bodies in these costumes. In her self-portrait wearing Tehuana attire, such as *The Roots*, Kahlo constructed herself as a living cultural monument, both resisting European colonial aesthetics and invoking the power of indigenous mother goddesses like Coatlicue. The national cultural revival movement granted her expression official legitimacy, and she injected a gender dimension, revealing the central role of female subjectivity in the national construction process.

3.2 The Paradoxical Participation in Surrealism: Utilizing the Platform, Refusing Definition

Although André Breton praised Kahlo as a born surrealist and organized her 1938 solo exhibition in New York, Kahlo maintained a cautious distance from the Surrealist movement. Her famous statement, "I don't paint dreams; I paint my reality," directly pointed to the fundamental divergence between her work and Surrealist ideology.

Firstly, there was a disparity between aesthetic homology and philosophical heterogeneity. The fractured bodies, floating objects, and bizarre juxtapositions in Kahlo's work, such as *Henry Ford Hospital*, were formally aligned with Surrealism's pursuit of surprise. However, while Surrealism regarded the subconscious as

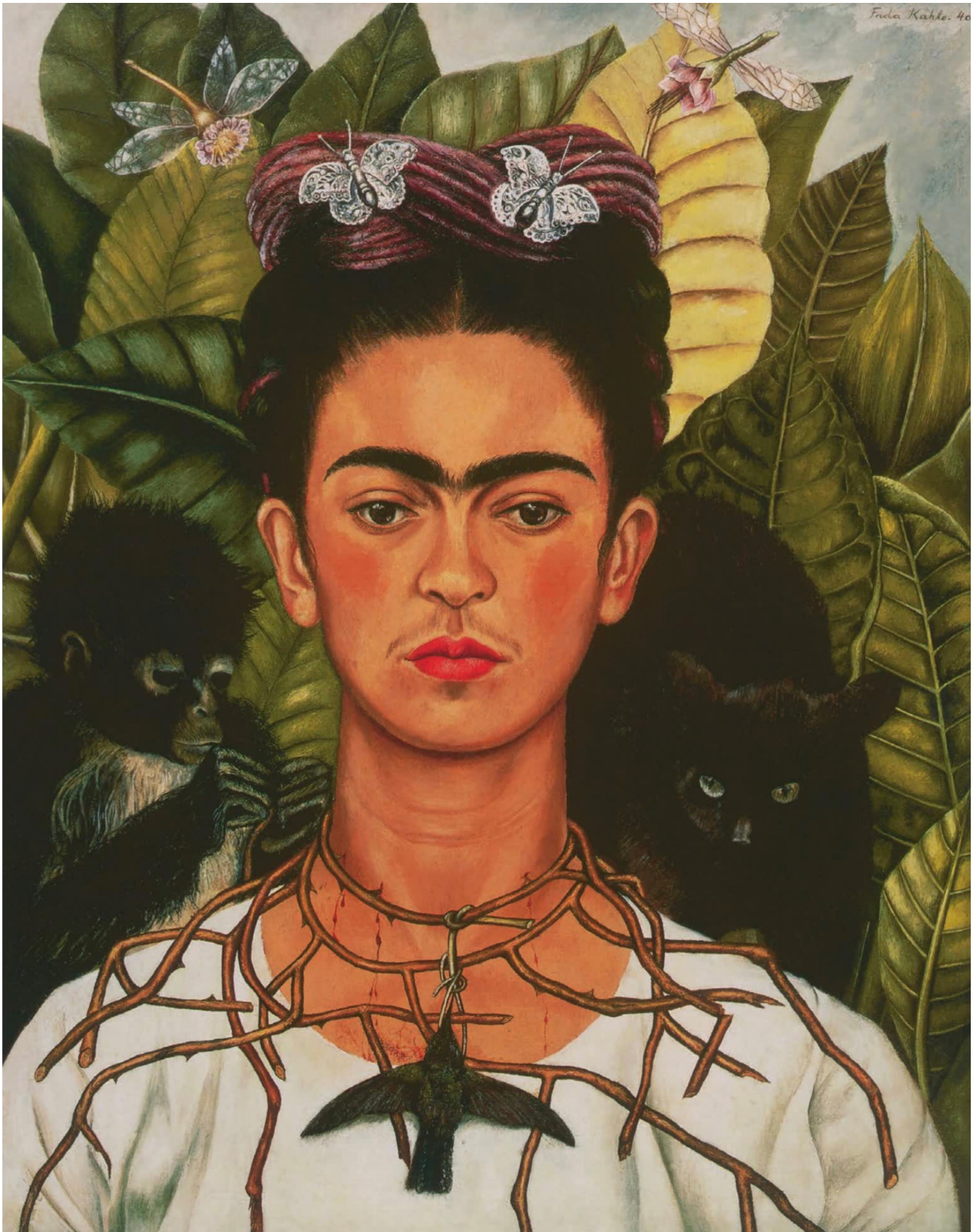


Figure 7. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940, oil on canvas, 63.5×49.5cm. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, United States. Photo credit: Collection of Harry Ransom Center.

a utopia to escape the constraints of reason, Kahlo anchored her work in concrete social-political realities—female bodily pain, reproductive trauma, colonial heritage, and class oppression. Breton’s attempt to place her blood and pain within the Surrealist aesthetic of wonders overlooked the political core of her art.

Secondly, Kahlo strategically utilized the international platform offered by Surrealism (e.g., her 1938 New York solo exhibition and 1939 Paris exhibition) while maintaining her subjectivity. In the New York exhibition, she deliberately emphasized exoticism (e.g., preparing tortillas on-site, setting up altars), cleverly using the West’s fascination with primitivism to expand her influence. However, in her paintings, she rejected any fantastical escape from reality. For example, in *What the Water Gave Me*, although the bathtub perspective presents a vision of floating imagery (dead bodies, volcanoes, relatives), these are fragmented reconstructions of her real traumatic memories. By stripping Surrealism of its escapist tendencies, Kahlo transformed its techniques into a scalpel to dissect social and gender realities, achieving both the instrumentalization of the movement and a fundamental transcendence of it.

3.3 The Global “Frida Frenzy” and Its Reinterpretation: The Political Meaning of Symbols in the Age of Consumption

Kahlo’s influence extends to numerous women artists who followed, inspiring creative dialogues across generations. Meanwhile, a “Frida Frenzy” has swept the globe, manifested in a continuous stream of films, dance works, and adaptations dedicated to her life and art.⁵ After the 1980s, Kahlo transitioned from an art historical figure to a global pop culture icon. Her image was widely commodified (e.g., fashion brand prints, dolls, coffee mugs), sparking debates about whether her politics were co-opted by consumerism. However, a deeper analysis shows that the resistance inherent in her symbols has not disappeared but has dynamically regenerated in new contexts.

This manifests in the dialectic between commodification and resistance. Mainstream media often simplifies her as a tragic legend or exotic spectacle, posing the risk of depoliticization. Yet, the complex core of her image—pain aesthetics, gender subversion, and cultural hybridity—makes her difficult to fully tame. When Madonna collected *My Birth* and declared, “Frida taught me that pain can be turned into strength,” she precisely captured the essence of Kahlo’s art—transforming trauma into agency. This appropriation, though a personal interpretation, proves that Kahlo’s

symbol still ignites discussions about female lived experiences within the consumer context.

The symbol translation in the post-feminist era aligns with the rise of post-feminism. A new generation of female artists and activists (e.g., Judy Chicago) sees her as a pioneer and continues to challenge beauty standards, reproductive rights, and gender violence based on Kahlo’s declaration “The body is a battlefield.” Latin American artists emphasize her mixed race as a deconstruction of cultural essentialism, offering a reference for identity among immigrant and diasporic groups. Her commodified image has become an entry point to engage with her political legacy—consumers may first encounter Kahlo through a printed dress, leading them to her paintings’ thorns, nails, and cracks, ultimately understanding her dual critique of patriarchy and colonial heritage.

Kahlo’s global popularity verifies the multiple interpretive possibilities and sustained relevance of her symbols. In the age of social media, her unibrow and flower headpieces have become visual markers of self-definition and declaration of difference. Her image is continuously activated by queer communities, disability rights advocates, and postcolonial theorists, demonstrating that her political expression through the body possesses the ability to engage in cross-temporal dialogue. Ultimately, Kahlo transcended the identity of an artist and became an eternal cultural metaphor for existence, resistance, and subjectivity, casting a critical shadow in the tide of consumerism.

4. Conclusion

Throughout these self-portraits, we observe Kahlo consistently employing her own body as a vehicle for artistic expression. This practice conveys a profound sense of her indomitable will to live, which leaves viewers deeply moved, while also reflecting her acceptance and reverence toward her own physical form.⁶ Kahlo’s self-portraiture was a revolution of female subjectivity, fought on the battleground of the body and armed with culture. Through symbolic visual translation, she elevated physical trauma and reproductive struggles into public accusations against patriarchy. Through her triple strategy of subjectivity construction—subverting the gaze, exposing marital violence, and establishing an aesthetic of pain—Kahlo completely reversed the traditional positioning of women as objects. Furthermore, through the dialectical interaction between the local and global, she leveraged Mexican nationalism to empower expression, critically

utilized the Surrealist platform, and ensured her symbols continued to release resistance energy in contemporary consumer culture.

Kahlo's art transcended personal healing, establishing a feminist aesthetic paradigm of pain as beauty: pain is not a symbol of fragility, but a prism that exposes power structures; brokenness is not a passive mark, but a medal of resistance. She demonstrated that female experience—particularly the concealed traumas and desires—could constitute the core of a subversive artistic language. Her legacy lies not only in challenging the narrative monopolies of male masters like Picasso but also in providing a practice template for global marginalized groups to transform individual suffering

into public discourse. Frida Kahlo thus became an indispensable coordinate in art history—a creator of eternal subjectivity declarations, drawing freedom in blood and engraving completeness in cracks.

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Editor: Wang Jing

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自畫像中的女性主體性構建：弗裡達·卡羅繪畫的象徵主義與女性主義表達

袁利楠

摘要：本文以弗裡達·卡羅的自畫像為主要研究物件，分析其如何借助象徵主義手法與女性主義視角，系統建構女性主體性。通過圖像學分析、社會學批判等研究方法，闡釋了卡羅如何將個體創傷、生育痛苦與婚姻暴力經驗轉化為具有公共意義的藝術表達，並以此顛覆父權制藝術傳統中將女性視為“完美容器”的固有範式。研究表明，弗裡達·卡羅通過三個層面的主體性建構策略重塑女性話語：以去性別化的面部表現與特旺納服飾的政治性穿戴挑戰父權凝視；憑藉《兩個弗裡達》中的自我分裂意象創立疼痛美學體系；並通過墨西哥民族文化的援引強化本土身份的表達。其文化實踐以及將傳統符號轉化為女性主義視覺圖像，並在全球視野中持續生成具有抗爭意義的藝術符號。

關鍵詞：弗裡達·卡羅；自畫像；女性主義；象徵主義；身體政治