

ZOE PHAM  
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CHAPMAN  
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Dear Reader,

I would like to introduce you to Frida Kahlo. You may have heard of her, or seen her before. Born in 1907 and 1910, Frida Kahlo is a widely celebrated Mexican painter who is usually mistaken for surrealist, when she claimed it was her reality. Most her works are self-portraits, due to her ailments that left her bedridden with only a mirror. Frida's paintings are easily recognizable, emphasizing traits that are not usually perceived as "beautiful", as well as adding symbols of native Mexico to represent her heritage and homeland. These works give insight to Frida's world through her eyes, and weave a story of her triumphs and tragedies.

Frida Kahlo was born in July 6, 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico with three sisters, claiming to be born in 1910, or the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, which was a major influence growing up as a girl. She saw Mexico fall and rise, and continued to be important in her art and life. Diego Rivera was one of the three "Great" muralists in Mexico at this time, incorporating people and Mexican culture into his works. He was painting a mural at Frida's school when they first met. She used to tease him. At 18, Frida was in a trolley crash, where her pelvis and spine were broken and she was bedridden. She started painting at this time, abandoning her pursuit in medicine, and turned to Diego to give her advice on her art. But this accident left her in pain the rest of her life, resulting in 35 operations related to this one incident. She married Diego, twenty years her elder, two years after asking for pointers, and traveled along with him all over the world for his art. Diego had a commission by Nelson Rockefeller in New York to paint a mural in Rockefeller Center, but was fired after Diego included a portrait of Vladimir Lenin, communist leader, in the mural, without consent. Frida and Diego had similar views on politics, and let Leon Trotsky, Soviet Communist, in their home during his exile. Their marriage was turbulent, with each engaging in multiple affairs. Frida had an affair with Leon while he stayed at their residence. Frida had found out Diego had cheated on her with her sister, Catalina, before. They were separated frequently. In 1939, Frida moved to Paris and divorced Diego. They remarried in 1940, still engaging in multiple affairs. Frida had commissions from the Mexican government, but was unable to work because of her bad health. In 1950, Frida's ailments controlled her life. But she wasn't stopped from attending her art exhibit in Mexico, arriving in her four poster bed to host it. A section of her right leg was amputated from gangrene a few months later. In 1954, Frida was hospitalized for "poor health", or a possible suicide attempt. Standing by her political views, even in sickness, Frida showed up at a demonstration to overthrow President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala. On July 13, 1954, Frida died at the house of her childhood, the Blue House, from a pulmonary embolism or possibly suicide. The Blue House still stands today, and is a museum dedicated to Frida Kahlo.

But knowing these facts isn't everything. Frida is shrouded in mystery and misconception, and while this project may leave you farther from understanding, it is a start. I hope you get to know and love the revolutionary, Frida Kahlo.

## The First Accident

**(Blood/Gore/death Trigger Warning)**

All I could think about was the balero strewn some meters away. I needed that. Alejandro had bought it for me on our way home because I wanted it but couldn't get it in right away, and it made him laugh a little too much. I hit him afterwards, but held on to it so I could prove him wrong later. Looking down I can see my obstinate, unmoving fingers, I see the trail of red. Up my arm, my naked breast, pooling where the metal hand rail impales my pelvis. I'm naked. Splintered pieces of two buses, destined to collide, lay lifeless around me. Gold dust speckles my skin. The worker on decorating the church had poured it into my hand seeing me eying it. I look forlornly back towards the toy.

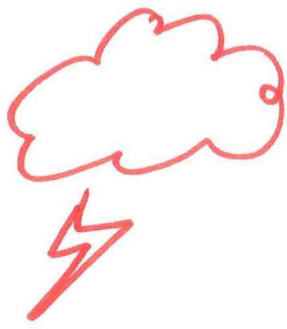
As if underwater, Alejandro's cries are garbled and slow, becoming increasingly clear as they pound on my ears. "Frida! Frida-no estás muerto todavía! Frida! Escuchame!" I feel hands grasp my arms, shaking me almost violently. I can only silently groan and realize that I am suffering. I'm in agony. I'm being ripped apart from inside. I try to scream but my mouth fails me. I faintly remember the lurching, looming, inevitable crash of our bus and the trolley. I close my eyes, and when I open them, Alejandro's face is the only thing I see, contorted and bloody. I try to ignore it because the Mexican sky is easier to focus on when you're dying.

Arms lift me, grab hold of my arms and legs, and I can hear the sickly sound of flesh against metal. I try to count and get distracted, I try to pray, but nothing comes to mind for me to wish for. As I'm being jostled and pulled apart, I think of the Revolution. The country was being split apart; the Spanish trying to tamp the native culture, the native people down, and finally, Mexico fought back. I remember the gunfire rattling the street and old Mexico as my mother struggled to get me inside the house. I never understood why we should hide, because, why run away from liberation? I feel sad, for having my life taken between two trolleys instead of on the street that day.

I don't remember much between the street and the hospital, just a hovering apathy and excruciating pain, as I look down at my broken body. Though, I know for a fact Alejandro stayed right by me.

The hospital is not white. It is the color of my yellowing cast covering my body from the neck down. I almost pass out from the pain, but instead I cry. I cry into the arms of an angel, hushing my sobs, I cry into the arms of my mother, who is leaning over and cradling me. Tears flow down my face because I don't remember life before the torture. I only want to die. I feel like being dead would save me from the quiet of the hospital, from the ache where I know a hole in me is. I look up again, and it isn't the Mexican sky, but I can promise the ceiling with a burning fire that the revolution isn't dead yet.

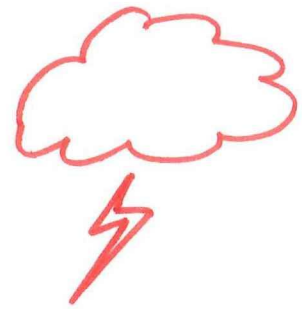




Frída y díego



Los inventores de la tormenta



To know about Frida, you must know about Diego. They were never the same person, but to truly understand her, you must understand Diego, and the force that attracted them and drew them apart and back again. Diego was one of the “Great Three”, the famous muralists of Mexico that painted the land and sky. He made the revolutionaries of Mexico with just a paintbrush and an empty wall.

Frida was a small bud at the time, blooming slowly, languidly, then all at once, almost hindering herself in her own wake. She was sickly, but strong and proud and daring. Admiring Diego painting from the sky, she told him to come down and look at her works. She was making pieces of her own world too; small bits of sky, the earth, her family.

And as Diego traveled to the heavens and back, Frida came along. They were tragically bonded, two parts of a broken whole.

And Diego denied it, whenever he could. He’d try to make something better, used other flowers and girls to make Frida hate him for it.

She did. Her pieces of her world were becoming uncontrollable, beauty and pain and sorrow until she became a black hole, sucking planets down whole. They split. And in the rift they left, a terrible, all-destructive storm brewed and lashed out, knocking angels out of the sky, ripping up the earth. The destruction of their favorite places, their little worlds, all disappeared into the monster’s maw. All they had created was burned to the ground, and nonexistent.

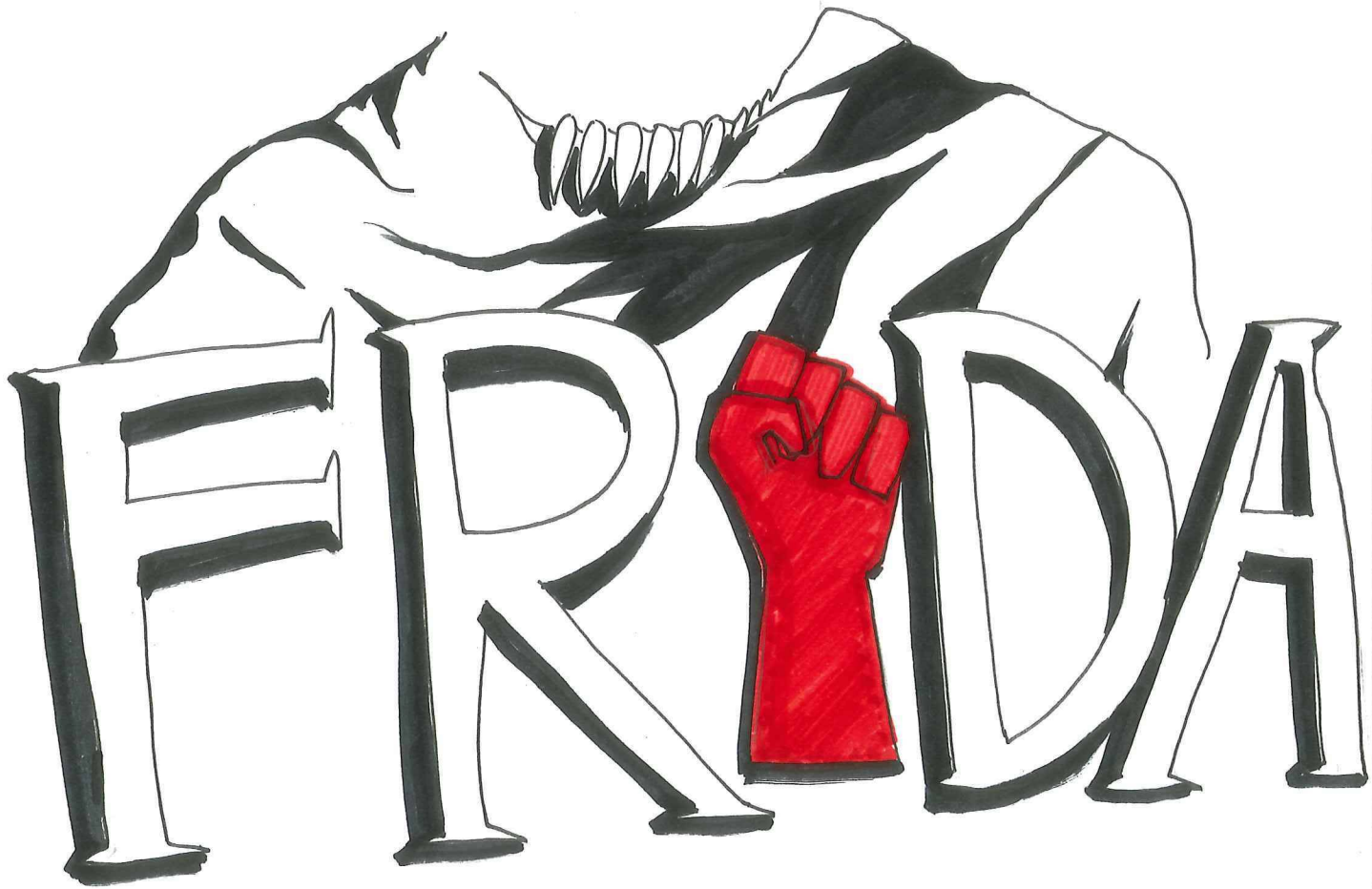
It was a force, more than nature. And Diego and Frida were too stubborn to look at the mess they’d made. But once again, Frida was a flower. She needed room to grow.

When they both managed to look to the ground once again, at all the damage they’ve created, the fight was over. It never really started.

These two world-builders, nurturers of life, started to plant, and as the first sprout appeared, the earth thrived. Frida could once again see the stars and the warmth of the sun, and Diego was humbled. And there were storms, after, but not as great as when they were apart. Two parts of a broken whole.

# WHAT FRIDA SAW

NEW YORK BURNING. SUCKING  
DIEGO INTO ITS DEPTHS.  
BATHWATER RUN COLD AND GREY.  
NEVER ENDING BACK PAINS.  
POTTED WILTED FLOWERS. CUT  
UMBILICAL CORDS. DOVES  
WEIGHED DOWN BY ELEPHANTS.  
THE THREAT OF ACID RAIN.  
HOSPITAL BEDS AND TILE FLOORS.  
THE SMELL OF WET PAINT. DO NOT  
TOUCH. REVOLVING DOORS. A  
CROWEDED SKY. AN EMPTY ROOM.  
LEFT OPEN WINDOWS. POURING  
WET CEMENT. FORGOTTEN DEAD  
LEAVES. AN INVISIBLE SUN. THE  
WIRING OF CITY PLANS. HOMESICK.



Zoe Pham  
E. Chapman  
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### Frida's Muses

The majority of Frida's works are self-portraits, but she did not just draw her art from herself. Frida was inspired by the Mexican Revolution, the bus accident and multiple ailments, and Diego Rivera.

"The Mexican Revolution, which... [lasted] for a decade, is recognized as the first major political, social, and cultural revolution of the 20th century." (The Mexican Revolution) The Revolution was a huge part of Frida's life, as she claimed to have been born in 1910, when the movement started. The Mexican Revolution encouraged the revival of indigenous art as a way of rebelling against the established government and "integrated" culture. This movement called, "... indigenismo... gained momentum during the Twenties and Thirties, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, and which was manifested in the 'rediscovery' and reevaluation of native cultures and traditions, as well as the use of Indian themes in literature and the visual arts, which are often articulated in terms of social protest." (Ades, 195) Frida grew up with these art styles and showed off her indigenous Mexican heritage, as she was also half German, through her dress in traditional attire and focus in her art on symbols of Mexico.

Frida's suffering and medical problems are consistently shown in her art, usually depicting various states of her body and well-being. Frida had contracted polio at age six, and fractured her spine and pelvis after being impaled by a handrail from a bus crash at 18. She became bedridden until she could walk again. This accident later resulted in two miscarriages, and additional surgeries and operations. Frida started painting as kind of a therapy to help cope through her bed-ridden days. This time was when she started her painting career and abandoning her study of medicine.

Diego Rivera was already one of the three "great" muralists of Mexico, and painted huge works of art to tell stories of Mexico's past. Frida and Diego first met when she was one of the scarce girls enrolled at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, and Diego was painting a mural on their wall. She had teased him then, and once told a friend she'd have his child, though she was fifteen and dating Alejandro Arias while Diego was fat and twenty years her elder. Frida was hugely inspired by Diego, and later approached him in 1957 for advice on her work. Diego was impressed and frequently visited her house. They were married in 1929. They both had affairs outside of their marriage. Frida was bisexual and had two partners of different genders, but Diego was only jealous with her relationships with men. Some of her male partners through her marriage was Leon Trotsky, Heinz Berggruen, art dealer, and Isamu Noguchi, Japanese poet. But Frida was tormented by his unfaithfulness, especially finding Diego had a relationship with her sister. Frida once stated, "There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley, and the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst." In Frida's "Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair", she had painted herself with cut hair, which was one of the things about her Diego loved, in a suit with words from a folk song reading, "Look, if I loved you it was because of your hair. Now that you are without hair, I don't love you anymore." But she also painted Diego as a part of her, in her mind and thoughts, like in her work, "Thinking of Diego". They got divorced in

1939 and remarried in 1940. Their tempestuous relationship was reflected throughout her work, and Diego was a lasting influence through his muralist style and advice and their marriage. After her death, Diego claimed that the most wonderful part of his life was his love for her.

Frida was involved socially and politically as well. Diego and Frida were communist, and harbored Leon Trotsky, leader of anti-Stalinist Left Opposition, in exile in their home in Coyoacan. Frida and Trotsky had an affair, but later broke up. Frida's political activities only lasted for a short amount of time, but her ideas on social constructs such as beauty and what her life as a woman meant was revolutionary.

Frida's examination of taboo aspects of having a vagina, such as childbirth, breastfeeding, and her naked torso, challenged many traditional depictions in art at the time. "Already in the 1950s Diego Rivera was acknowledging her as "The first woman, in the history of art to treat, with absolute and uncompromising honesty, one might even say with impassive cruelty, those general and specific themes that exclusively affect (people with vaginas)." (Kettenman 19) Her bold paintings and representation of herself helped encourage the ideas of owning your own body and beauty, and are still relevant today.

Only recognized later in her career and after death, Frida Kahlo inspires many today. She drew from her family, her culture, her love, and her passion for life, and that's what makes her paintings iconic.



### Works Cited

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## Notes

Revolution unifies nations, so why not my multigenre project? Frida Kahlo is one of the most influential Mexican painters, as well as being female, bisexual, and opinionated. She lied about the year she was born in order to coincide with the start of the Mexican Revolution, and she was an active social and political force that challenged traditional ideas while embracing her roots. The repeated use of black, white, red, and theme of change and challenging new ideas is used throughout to enforce the impacts Frida Kahlo has made.

A subconscious choice I made as I created each piece, was the use of a fantastical and surreal portrayal of the events in Frida's life and interpretation of her art. Somehow, an element of magic crept its way into my words, and I am thankful for that. This whimsicality makes the unbelievable accidents that happened to her a little more believable.

### Page 2

I created a memory of the fatal trolley crash from Frida's point of view to convey what Frida deems as important in that stage of her life, and her tragic and beautiful way of looking at change, no matter how dire it seems.

### Page 3

This myth of "The Inventors of the Storm" was used to demonstrate the magnitudes of Frida and Diego's relationship. I used the metaphor of the storm to show that their marriage was tempestuous, and the elaboration of their characters to help the reader's perception of their strange entanglement and each's roles.

### Page 4

My poem is used to demonstrate Frida's mindset and her spiralling depression being dragged along with Diego in New York, and having to watch him get sucked into this new foreign world. The large, bold text is purposely intended to capture the reader and make every detail seem important.

### Page 5

My use of the fist, the universal symbol of revolution and rebellion, is intended to enforce the idea of revolution again. This portrait is supposed to imitate campaign posters of change, but the slogan for this is simply Frida's name. Her distinct characteristics allow you to know exactly who she is without showing her actual face, and is a slight hint at how much of a symbol Frida Kahlo has become. She is the "face" of the social revolution, but loses some of her humanity and simplicity in her portrayal in media today.