

# A comparative analysis of two artists: joy hester and frida kahlo

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' Like everybody else, artists are effected and influenced by their personal and cultural backgrounds. Culture is learnt participatory and not genetic based , so it is strongly influenced by environment, experience and social learning.'

Artists such as Frida Kahlo and Joy Hester both explore emotional conditions and environmental influences through their artwork.

Like so many artists in the 1940s, Hester's work was deeply affected by World War II. By employing certain techniques, Joy Hester illustrates emotional conditions through her highly authentic artworks. In exploring the impact World War II had on Australian communities, Hester furthered the stark and shocking images by using minimal ink in her work.

Frida Kahlo demonstrated the many sufferings in her life through her surreal and emotional artwork. Her self portraits are emotionally demanding, vivid and intense.

Through evoking their personal feelings, artists such as Joy Hester and Frida Kahlo were better able to use their personal experiences to communicate within their artwork.

Joy Hester exemplified emotional conditions through her highly personal, autobiographical artworks. She often concentrated on the human head and face to demonstrate feeling and physiological insight. Hester recognized that with a few precise strokes of brush, pen or ink in specific locations (such as the eyes), the whole mood of her work could alter. She is often described as a visual poet, telling the stories of human struggle, love and childhood. Just

one of Hester's emotional artworks is ' Our Christ who mourns us' (1947). By using only brush and ink, the portrait of Christ, illustrates much sadness and disappointment, and appears sympathetic to the viewer. It was created around World War II, and like many of her works, explored the impact that the conflict had on every-day people in Australian communities.

The great Mexican painter Frida Kahlo is without doubt one of the most intense and emotive artists of the twentieth century. Kahlo's life changed dramatically at the age of 18, when she was involved in a terrible accident. A streetcar violently impacted the bus in which she was riding. She suffered multiple bone fractures, including the third and fourth lumbar vertebrae, and had a deep abdominal wound inflicted by a metal rod. She was confined for several months in a plaster corset. From that time on,

Kahlo suffered severe, widespread pain and profound fatigue. Generalized pain and exhaustion lingered with her for the remainder of her life.

Frida Kahlo explored emotional tension through her work. Her surreal paintings depict her anger and hurt over her unsettled marriage, painful miscarriages and the physical suffering she underwent from the horrific accident. Kahlo's paintings were often quite disturbing as she openly displayed her anguish from the many hard times in her life. "...I paint my own reality, The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint whatever passes through my head without any consideration..." (Kahlo, 1931) Her greatest artworks were believed to be painted when she was suffering from depression. Kahlo holds nothing back in her paintings and she

expresses her very deepest emotions in visual narratives. ' Henry Ford Hospital' (1932) depicts Kahlo laying on a hospital bed with strings attaching her to a uterus and a fetus. In this work her misery and pain in having another miscarriage, this image draws the viewer into her suffering.

In both pieces a feeling of infinite sadness is inherent. ' Henry Ford Hospital' presents the viewer with an automatic symbolic presentation of Kahlo's immediate grief. The vivid and blatantly obvious topic of this piece, Kahlo's miscarriage, is presented in a shocking and distressing manner. It consists of Kahlo lying naked in a hospital bed bleeding on to the sheets. In her hands are several chords reminiscent of umbilical chords or arteries which are tied to different objects. Each object has symbolic value and meaning to Kahlo at the time. A self-explanatory fetus, a diagram of the female anatomy, an intact pelvis bone; unlike Kahlo's fractured one. Kahlo also compared giving birth to her baby like giving birth to a slug. The pink orchid is reminiscent of the female genitalia , of femininity and of fertility and the machinery appears to be some kind of tool used in operation or something more symbolic like a press in which she felt placed.

' Henry Ford Hospital' uses stunning and vibrant colours. The picture is quite severe in that apart from the main focus (Kahlo and the objects), the background is desolate, much like a barren industrial wasteland. The contrast between the colours in focus, and the expanse of dry earth and open sky is immediate to the viewer.

Unlike 'Henry Ford Hospital', Hester's 'Our Christ Who Mourns Us' uses tone within the one colour of ink to show depth and focus. 'Henry Ford Hospital' is quite surreal in the use of floating objects. However in comparison, 'Our Christ Who Mourns Us' is quite abstract in the form and composition, and explores an emotional feeling of sadness. The depth and focus is immediate in the eyes of Christ, however this is achieved by brush stroke and tone, rather than detail.

'Henry Ford Hospital' has more visual impact rather than 'Our Christ Who Mourns Us'. Aesthetically, it is more demanding and thought provoking. There is definite depth in 'Our Christ Who Mourns Us', however it is not immediately grasping and demanding like 'Henry Ford Hospital'. The raw emotion and passion inherent in Kahlo's piece is gripping, being both graphically appalling and intimate for the viewer simultaneously.

Frida Kahlo and Joy Hester both explore emotional conditions through their artwork. Joy Hester concentrates her artwork on the human head and face employing precise brushstrokes, which can alter the mood of her works and the emotion they display.

Frida Kahlo displays her anguish and pain from certain instances in her life through highly original and interesting artwork. Her artwork is very confronting and can be disturbing to those who cannot see past the images that are not openly displayed in 'normal' artworks.

Within their work, the culture and background that each artist experienced personally is clearly visible. It is in their personal backgrounds that each

artist derives inspiration and stimulus. Both Kahlo and Hester use the visual medium as a means of opening windows in human emotional conditions.