

# 20th-century western painting

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Evaluate how practitioners use text, symbols and compositional strategies to construct meaning in artworks. Artists such as Mexican Frida Kahlo and British Francis Bacon are two 20th Century practitioners who employ text, symbols and compositional strategies to construct meaning about themselves and the wider world in their paintings. Kahlo's artworks such as her " Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego in my thoughts)" and " Henry Ford Hospital 1932" provide an insight of her life and her obsessions with child-bearing and her husband, Diego Rivera.

Likewise, Francis Bacon's " Three Studies for the Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion" and his " Self-portrait 1971" conveys the suppression of his sexuality and inhumanity of one man to another. Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on my thoughts) 1943 Oil On Masonite 29 7/8 " x 24 " Gelman Collection, Mexico City Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on my thoughts) 1943 Oil On Masonite 29 7/8 " x 24 " Gelman Collection, Mexico City Frida Kahlo's artworks usually construct meaning through compositional strategies including autobiographical references and personal symbolism.

Kahlo's ethnicity also has a significant impact towards her art making practices such as the repetitive themes of life and death. Her excessive fascination towards childbearing and her husband, Diego Rivera was evidently portrayed in her artworks such as her " Self-Portrait as a Tehuana" and " Henry Ford Hospital". Kahlo's Mexican culture is highly apparent through the traditional Tehuana costume found in her self-portraiture artwork whilst a sense of estrangement and detachment from this culture is manifested in her artwork " Henry Ford Hospital" through her representation of Detroit where she had experienced her second miscarriage.

Kahlo's life was perceptibly dominated by her obsessive love and constant thought of Diego that has impacted her artworks thematically. This notion is evident in her self-portrait painting where Diego's miniature portrait appears on her forehead that literally and metaphorically signifies Diego's presence in her mind, which was also conveyed in the subtitle of her work "Diego on my mind". Diego's repetitive influence on Kahlo's work is again presented in another artwork however conveyed in another context.

Kahlo's "Miscarriage in Detroit (Henry Ford Hospital)", painted in 1932 elucidated her emotional and physical agonies from her miscarriages within her marriage to Diego. This artwork supports the notion of Frida Kahlo's infatuation towards child-bearing whereby the six floating images that connects to her lower abdomen by an umbilical cord-looking red lines precisely references to her second miscarriage. Henry Ford Hospital, 1932 Oil on metal 32.5 x 40.2 cm Collection Museo Dolores Olmedo Patino, Mexico City. Henry Ford Hospital, 1932 Oil on metal 32.5 x 40.2 cm Collection Museo Dolores Olmedo Patino, Mexico City.

Kahlo also uses symbolism and texts to convey the depth of her artworks in relationship with her personal emotions and life experiences. The artwork "Miscarriage in Detroit" evokes the excruciating experience that she had with childbearing whereby the six floating images suggests a sense of detachment and loss of control of her body. It also educes her constant link with Diego through the floating foetus that was named Dieguito meaning "little Diego". A snail was used to represent the slow torment and horror of losing a baby while the machine is to symbolise her medical impersonality.

Frida's study of medicine prior to her bus accident enabled her awareness towards the impact of her bus accident to her body and bones. This incident significantly affected Kahlo's artworks and was evidently revealed in her "Miscarriage in Detroit" painting where the images of a pelvis and a side-view of a female anatomy represents this event along with an orchid that her husband Diego gave her. The concepts of connection and detachment are both portrayed in this artwork whereby the floating images are "connected" to her through the umbilical cord-like string connecting to her uterus.

This string-like line links the objects to herself advocating its personal connection to Kahlo. The floating images also metaphorically suggest her detachment to the place where she had her second miscarriage. Kahlo also used personal symbolism to convey meaning in her artworks, which was clearly portrayed in her "Diego on my mind" painting in 1943. Diego's obvious domination in Kahlo's life is evident in her artworks where her obsessive love and constant thought of Diego has become a thematic notion in most of her paintings.

Diego's miniature portrait on her forehead indicates her obsessive love and constant thought of him. Due to this desperate infatuation of Diego, she painted herself in the costume that he greatly admired to attract and entice him closer to her. The roots of the leaves surrounding her head metaphorically symbolises a pattern of a spider's web in which she hoped to trap her prey, Diego. The impassive image of Rivera's face on Kahlo's forehead however indicates her psychological obsession towards Diego but also of her "philandering" husband's tarnished indifference to her feelings.

Surrealist artists such as Frida Kahlo evoke the meaning of their artworks through the use of symbols, texts and various compositional strategies. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris Francis Bacon, a British painter elucidates his personal emotions through abstraction and surrealism which are evident in his artworks such as his " Self-portrait 1971" and one of his triptych series " Three Studies for the Figures at the base of Crucifixion" in 1943-1944. Bacon portrays both the suppression of his sexuality and similarly to Kahlo's feeling of detachment and hostility.

His " Self-portrait 1971" conveys a provocative and disturbing representation of Bacon, one which embodies the painter's strong feelings of despair and vulnerability that was possibly caused by the suicidal death of his lover Dyer during the same year. This distorted image of himself intensified with his use of broad-brush strokes, as well as the dark colours which are made harsher and more prominent but the added whites and blues. His emotionless state and detachment from the audience was symbolised through his blackened eyes thus also conveying his constant motif of death and " silent screams".

The name of his artwork is somewhat ironical towards his painting as the text states that it is a self-portrait however, it was distorted and perhaps metaphorically referring to his emphasis to the suppression of his sexuality. Bacon's artwork " Three Studies for the Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion" in 1943-1944 summarises themes explored in his previous paintings, including his examination of Picasso's biomorphs and his interpretations of the Crucifixion and the Greek Furies.

Bacon did not realise his original intention to paint a large crucifixion scene and place the figures at the foot of the cross. The structure of the artworks

when put together does not convey any commonality thus further emphasising his personal emotions towards the feelings of displacement. The brightness and contrasting colours used in this artwork signifies the chaotic environment that he was in. The third image illustrates an open and gaping mouth as if it was screaming out of pain.

This idea references back to his childhood and the suppression of his sexuality. The screaming object in the painting is a representation of Bacon's emotions during the times when homosexuality was a crucial topic to the society. The artists Francis Bacon and Frida Kahlo both convey the meaning of their artworks with references to their personal life experiences through the use of symbols, texts and compositional strategies.