

## A Two-Fer

# Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple

Melora Cann

**Meet the artis:** Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera

**Meet the subject:** Self-portraits of a brilliant and tragic artist and  
murals by a passionate and expansive entertainer

**9 Pages**



**A Two-Fer**

**Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple** *(continued)*

---



Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird (1940)

## A Two-Fer

### Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple *(continued)*

---



Seen while painting the self-portrait after divorcing Diego

## A Two-Fer

### Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple *(continued)*

---



Painting in bed after one of her many operations. Many of Kahlo's self-portraits are similar in format to colonial Mexican portraits, but quickly shock the viewer with her extreme surrealistic and symbolic inclusions and super-realism (more 'real' than actual sources).

Follow the link on the last page for a discussion of this portrait.



**A Two-Fer**  
**Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple** *(continued)*

---



Agrarian Leader Zapata. 1931.

**A Two-Fer**  
**Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple** *(continued)*

---



Fresco on reinforced cement in galvanized-steel framework.



## A Two-Fer

### Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple *(continued)*

---



Muralist Diego Rivera at work on a mural. The photos of his Zapata mural are from a fresco cycle at the Palace of Cortés in Cuernavaca, depicting the history of Mexico. In it Rivera shows the revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Zapata, who became a national icon, is shown holding the reins of a horse whose aristocratic owner lies dead at his feet. A group of campesinos (peasants) wearing white dress shirts follow him.\*

## **A Two-Fer**

### **Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple** *(continued)*

---

#### **The Artists:**

Diego Rivera (1886-1957) and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)

Lovers who were twice married to each other, their art went in very divergent directions.

Kahlo had a shorter, deformed leg as the result of childhood polio and then was further injured in a terrible bus accident; she was at times bed-ridden; she concentrated on painting color-filled, ornately (and deformity concealing) costumed self-portraits that incorporated nature, both flora and fauna (jungles and monkeys), revealing her natural beauty and celebrating her earthy appearance with distinctive bridging eyebrows.

Rivera was a socialist and reformer who used his art – building-covered murals – to reach the common people of his native Mexico. His first work, covering the entire history of Mexico took four years to complete and he became an instant sensation as viewers got to stroll by and watch him while he painted. After this, he became known and appreciated internationally, and did several murals for cities in the United States.

#### **Curious fact:**

She exhibited one of her final art shows from her bed with her in it, carried into the gallery.

#### **More info-bites from wiki:**

- Picasso greatly admired Kahlo's work, saying, "We are all clods next to Frida."
- New Yorkers did not care to have Rivera painting inside Radio City Music Hall and protesters destroyed his work before he could finish it.

#### **How Rivera did it:**

Working in what became known as his popular style of heroic realism, he addressed contemporary political and social concerns in Mexico and in the United States. The art was a mixture of constructivism (celebrating industry and socialism), futurism, and documentary-style simplistic representation. It tended to be complex in composition while simple and bold in forms and colors. He was best known for his mural work painted during the 1920s and 1930s. Centuries before Rivera, painters worked on interior building walls; their paintings were called frescos and reflected religious-inspired topics requested by patrons during the pre-Renaissance period in Italy.



## A Two-Fer

### Art History with Mexico's Most Famous Couple *(continued)*

---

#### How Kahlo did it:

Her artwork tended to the styles of surrealism (dreamlike) and primitivism (childlike) yet with a distinctive ornate and colorful aspect that was uniquely her own. Physically, she was frail and strong at the same time, enduring more than 50 operations to correct injuries and to survive health issues. Many times, she painted while lying on her back in bed, easel suspended above her head, and using a mirror to capture vivid self-likenesses, then adding dreamlike and often symbolic details.

"I hope they realize that she was a real pioneer, both in terms of her art and the way she lived her life, the way she dressed, the way she existed as a dominant personality in a man's world. She's curiously timeless," said Claire Wilcox, co-curator of "Making Herself Up" in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.\*\*

#### Want to hear and see more?

Visit YouTube and see a short excerpt from a movie clip / video depicting the relationship between Diego and Frida:

*Frida* (11/12) Movie CLIP - Frida's Mexican Exhibition (2002) HD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzP8k0R-USw>

\* excerpt from an essay by Harper Montgomery, in Deborah Wye, *Artists and Prints*:

Masterworks from The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004, p. 126.

\*\* The Real Frida Kahlo Comes Alive in a London Exhibit, from interview reported at: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/museums/la-et-cm-frida-kahlo-london-exhibit-20180613-story.html>