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How Trauma and Outer Influences Collide in Art

In "Where Dance and Fashion Collide", Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen and Belgian-French choreographer Damien Jalet engage in a conversation about how dance influenced both of their artworks. While Van Herpan recognizes how dance enables them to see the movement behind every piece of art, Jalet acknowledges that unconsciously, your background and what you surround yourself with is what shapes your art in both fashion and dance. He also agrees that creating art can serve as a way for individuals to deal with trauma. They believe that pure originality does not exist in this world and that an artist's influences and experiences essentially prevent an artwork from being completely their own. Ultimately, Van Herpen and Jalet realize that one's artwork can be used as a means to cope or express trauma or one's inner struggles, and that true originality does not exist due to the shared influences with the people and culture around them.

Van Herpen and Jalet's argument resonates in several works by Frida Kahlo. *The Broken Column* (1944), *The Two Fridas* (1939), and her *Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser* (1940). Kahlo's painting *Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser* (Fig. 1.) was deeply influenced by her life experiences and Mexican heritage.



(Fig.1. Kahlo, Frida. *Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser*. 1940)

As a woman who related closely to her Mexican culture, she must have lived much of her life seeing fellow women wear brightly colored floral hair pieces. Originality is very difficult to come by, and the things that create your world and surround you can influence your artwork. This is seen when Van Herpen said “ I don’t believe pure originality exists. I think we’re all programmed and shaped by our upbringings, and by our culture, and all the art that we’ve seen in our lives” (“Where Dance and Fashion Collide”). In her self-portrait, even though it is completely original in the sense that the painting has never been replicated before, it still incorporates elements and experiences that are shared by millions of Mexican women. She

emphasizes the bright floral piece using contrast between the darker hues in the background, and brightly pigmented flowers. Even though the artwork itself is a static self-portrait, her artwork connects back to movement in the background with the cloudy sky, which one may think of as a windy day, and the leaves blowing in the background. In particular, Van Herpen and Jalet's claim that true originality does not exist can be presented here when we see aspects of her culture ingrained into her art which further illustrates their argument when they said true originality does not exist due to the shared influences and experiences of the world around them.

The painting "The Two Fridas" (Fig.2) is symbolic in a sense because it shows the two conflicting sides of herself. Throughout her life, there must have been a lot of emotional turmoil as many people who are born from two different cultures feel like they are meant to never fit in no matter where they go.

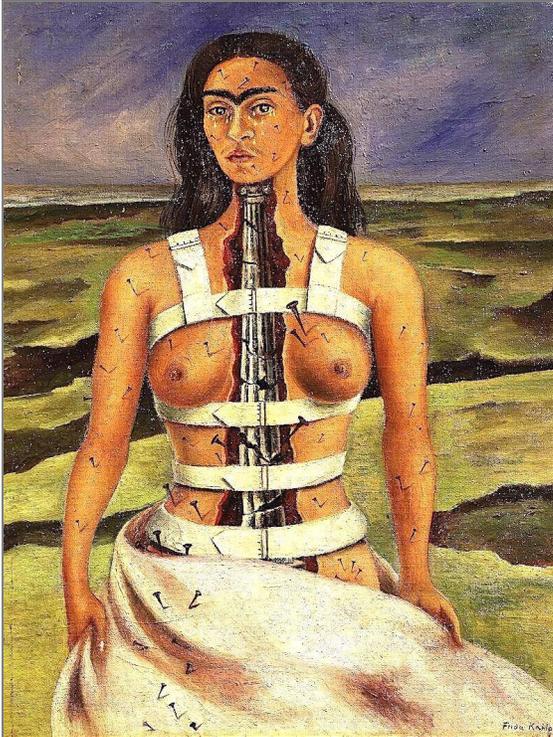


(Fig. 2. Kahlo Frida. *The Two Fridas*. 1939)

The painting depicts one half of herself as a traditional Mexican woman, while the other half

shows her as a more modern and European self. When Jalet talks about how one's art can become one's expression of one's trauma, Frida Kahlo's life experience of being born from two conflicting cultures became her source of inspiration. Using movement, "*The Two Fridas*" above symbolize how the two hearts are beating together as one, connecting to how the movement of her heart is what keeps her art alive. She utilizes texture in her artwork with the detailed dresses full of lace, ruffles, and embroidery on the dresses to show how different her two sides are, as well as the heart and veins to emphasize their presence. The composition is similar and almost symmetrical in that it is just the two identical women sitting side by side, except each shows one-half of herself. Most importantly, Kahlo's symbolism represents the dual identity of her Mexican and European heritage. She wishes that her two different identities could become one, hence the two beating hearts connected. This connects to when Van Herpen and Jalet agreed that one's inner turmoil heavily influences one artwork.

Both "*The Two Fridas*" and "*Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser*" highlight the complexity of belonging in one's culture and how it influences one's personality and art, while *The Broken Column (1944)* (Fig.2) reflects on Jalet's point about "When you create your art, you explore the little corners of yourself. You put some of your most intimate thoughts in it. And then when you share it, when you release that, it can be both exhilarating and traumatic" (Jalet, "Where Dance and Fashion Collide") and how one may use trauma to create art and use it to overcome one's struggles.



(Fig. 3. Kahlo, Frida. The Broken Column. 1944)

The painting portrays Frida Kahlo's trauma from being in a life-threatening car accident that left her health in shambles. She presents herself as standing tall and wishes to appear strong by using the corset to lift herself. However, her teary eyes reveal the emotional turmoil she feels, as well as the shattered column in place as her spine. Using lines she emphasizes the pillar that is going straight through her body. The lines of the brace also encircle her body to show how her fragile body is being stabilized and held together. The shape of the long shattered column that goes through her figure could represent the pain and hurt that she is going through from the accident and using proportion, she emphasizes her neck and torso to make it look larger or longer in comparison to her head. Connecting it back to their claim of movement in art, the tears rolling down her face depict the aching pain she is feeling. The majority of the painting uses muted colors, and the striking contrast of the white brace makes it difficult to overlook the trauma and pain she has gone through.

Frida Kahlo's interest in self-expression, allows her art to represent a spectrum of expressing one's trauma, as well as expressing one's culture and life experiences. Frida Kahlo used elements like symbolism to convey her emotions and experiences with imagery that doesn't leave your mind. Each of the three painting examined in this analysis have a pattern where repeats Van Herpen and Jalet's interest in one's art can serve as a tool for addressing trauma or the internal battles one faces, and that genuine originality is elusive due to the pervasive influence of the people and culture in one's life. Through Kahlo's art, we can recognize the power of art as a medium for expression of one's trauma and their cultural connection. In other words, art serves as the universal language that can speak to the shared human experiences of pain in one's life and identity.

Works Cited

Iris Van Herpen and Damien Jalet "Where Dance and Fashion Collide." *The New York Times*, 30

May 2020,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/opinion/dance-fashion-herpen-jalet.html>.

Note about artworks: Since I provided full source information about each artwork with each figure caption, I do not need to provide this information on the Works Cited page.

Note on the use of generative AI:

I used ChatGPT in the process of writing this paper. I did not borrow directly from the results, but I used the following prompts to expand on elements of art and principles of design that could

be applied to the artwork. The results helped me make decisions about which elements of art and principle of design to focus on.

- Apply the elements of art and the principles of design to an analysis of Frida Kahlo's "The Two Fridas."
- Apply the elements of art and the principles of design to an analysis of Frida Kahlo's "The Broken Column."
- Apply the elements of art and the principles of design to an analysis of Frida Kahlo's "Self Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser."