

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

## Student handout

**Presenter: Dr Warren Carter**

**Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*, 1932  
Collection of Manuel Reyer, New York**

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-frida-kahlo-self-portrait-along-border-line-between-mexico-and-usa-1932>

In this short film Dr Warren Carter discusses the 1932 *Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States* by the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. She produced many self-portraits during her lifetime but it was those that she painted whilst in the United States in the early 1930s that are perhaps the most fascinating. Dr Carter provides a close iconographic reading of Kahlo's painting before looking at what it might say about the complex relationship between Mexico and its more powerful northern neighbour during the depths of the Great Depression. He then finishes by looking at the work's contemporary relevance in light of ongoing political debates about the Mexican/United States border, one of the most significant international border zones in the world.

### *Before watching the film*

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1. What do you know about the artist Frida Kahlo?
2. What genre of painting is this? What can you tell about the subject/sitter at first look?
3. How has the artist depicted her home country of Mexico and its northern neighbour the United States, where she produced the work? What might the flowers in the foreground suggest?
4. Does the subject matter have any contemporary resonance? ??

### *After watching the film*

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1. What effects (aesthetic, social, political etc.) do you think the artist was trying to achieve in this work?
2. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the work? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements
3. Does it have a recognisable purpose or function? Does this relate to the time period in which it was made?
4. How has this film helped your understanding of self-portraiture?
5. What is its relevance for today?

### *Online Activity*

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Watch the documentary that was produced to accompany the important 1983 show on Kahlo and Tina Modotti at the Whitechapel Gallery in East London. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsq2umalJbw>

#### Bibliography

Andrea Kettenmann, *Kahlo* (Koln: Taschen, 1992), Margaret Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), Peter Wollen, 'Fridamania', *New Left Review*, no.22, 2003, pp.119-30.

<http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/840.html>

A link to the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s webpage relating to the show on Mexican Modernism in which a cropped image of Kahlo from the painting is used. The site also has a short preview film and slideshows relating to other works in the show, which will help contextualise Kahlo’s painting in relation to the art of her contemporaries. These examples could be used to populate the comparative analysis table below as an alternative to Rivera’s *Ballad of the Revolution* if preferred.

Comparative analysis

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Compare Kahlo’s self-portrait with how she was depicted by Rivera in the panel *Distributing Arms*, 1928, in the Secretariat of Education building in Mexico City. [https://www.diegorivera.org/diego-rivera-murals.jsp#prettyPhoto\[paintings\]/58/](https://www.diegorivera.org/diego-rivera-murals.jsp#prettyPhoto[paintings]/58/) [link only works if you copy and paste]

Works of art	<b>Frida Kahlo, <i>Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States</i></b>	<b>Diego Rivera, <i>Distributing Arms</i>, the Secretariat of Education building in Mexico City</b>
Date		
What is it?		
Material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location		
Composition		
Condition		
Function		