

her life seeking treatments in Mexico and abroad for chronic back and leg problems. Her biographer estimates Kahlo underwent at least thirty-two operations on her spine and right foot.⁶⁹

By late 1927, Kahlo had recovered enough to begin socializing again. She renewed connections with old school friends and joined the Mexican Communist Party. It was through this circle of political activists and artists that she met the muralist Diego Rivera, who at forty-two was more than twenty years her senior. They were married less than two years later. The marriage was emotionally turbulent, and Rivera was chronically unfaithful. Kahlo had several affairs herself, including a relationship with Leon Trotsky. Rivera and Kahlo separated and divorced in 1939, only to remarry in 1940.

Rivera was part of the Mexican Muralist movement along with José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Backed by the government, they aimed to produce monumental public murals that mined the country's national history and identity. Rivera had an international reputation in the art world, and he introduced Kahlo to countless artists, including Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe. In 1938, she had her first one-woman show at the Surrealist-oriented Julien Levy Gallery in New York. As a result, her work was reproduced in the pages of *Vogue* and *Life*, exposing her to a wider audience. In 1939 her work was exhibited at a show organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton in Paris, and the Louvre acquired one of her paintings, making her the first Mexican artist to be included in their collection.

SUBJECT MATTER AND VISUAL ANALYSIS

Without Hope (Sin Esperanza), like many of Kahlo's works, is a self-portrait. Kahlo's self-portraits are not conventional portraits, rather they explore both the physical suffering that she endured and the emotional distress produced by her tempestuous relationship with Rivera. Filtered through a visual language that recalls surrealism, the artist uses her own highly personal iconography to explore identity and pain. "They thought I was a Surrealist," she said, "but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality."⁷⁰

In the aftermath of yet another surgery, in 1944 Kahlo was prescribed complete bed rest and was made to wear a steel corset. Confined to her bed and in tremendous pain, she had no appetite. However, as her weight dropped, she was ordered to eat pureed food every two hours. Her family started feeding her with a funnel to ensure that she was getting the correct caloric intake. Small in scale at 28 by 36 centimeters, *Without Hope (Sin Esperanza)* shows a barren landscape featuring both a sun and a moon. Kahlo is lying in bed with her head propped by a pillow. In her mouth is a monstrous-sized funnel, overflowing with dead animals and fish, and resting on top is a skull made from sugar and inscribed with her name.⁷¹ The sugar skull refers to Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations when family members bring gifts and sweets to the graves of deceased relatives. The funnel is so large that it has to be supported by a wooden frame, similar to the easel that Kahlo used when painting in bed.

Kahlo's face looks thin, and her bare shoulders and loose hair (which she typically wore in braids atop her head) make her look younger and more vulnerable than usual. Tears can be seen falling from her eyes, which look pleadingly at the viewer. The reverse side of the painting is inscribed with the words, "Not the least hope remains to me... Everything moves in time with what the belly contains." Even the pattern on Kahlo's bed cover is suggestive, with its circular patterns resembling cells as seen through a microscope. The painting encompasses the universe from the solar system to the microscopic. Kahlo's diary suggests her interest in Alfonso Toro's *La Familia Carvajal*, a book about the persecution of Jews during the Inquisition in sixteenth-century Mexico.⁷² It includes scenes of people undergoing water torture by funnel. Her work is a grotesque take on the "horn of plenty," which it