

# Frida Kahlo and the Symbolism in Her Art

By Emre Kagitci

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Frida Kahlo, who lived during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century changed art history. She put her own dreams into her work. She had many ups and downs in her life as she had a bus accident and also many love affairs that she expressed in an open manner. She used Christian symbolism merging with her own dreams that she described as her reality.

After periods of depression and miscarriages in her life she gave herself to pets around her. She liked to use animals as models in her artworks. Her paintings are domesticated by monkeys, hummingbirds, dogs, and cats. One of her self-portraits depicts her with three spider monkeys. 1. \_\_\_\_\_. On the contrary, Mexican mythology suggests monkeys are symbols of lust.



Symbolism in art: Frida Kahlo, *Self Portrait with Monkeys*, 1943, private collection. Wikipedia.

Frida Kahlo's most significant self-portrait was *Self- Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*. According to some art historians, Kahlo wanted to show that she had been resurrected and had started a new life with this painting. As a symbol of this idea, the hummingbird was placed in her necklace. 2. \_\_\_\_\_. However, the audience may notice the black cat – known as a symbol of bad luck –

taking its place behind the right shoulder of Kahlo. Different interpretations say that the hummingbird pendant refers to Huitzilopochtli. It is the Aztec god of war and may refer to the pain Kahlo suffered all her life internally.



Symbolism in art: Frida Kahlo, *Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA.

Other important symbols of the painting were butterflies and the thorn necklace. Butterflies symbolize resurrection and it may refer to her rebirth in life after the accident. 3. \_\_\_\_\_.



Matthias Grünewald, *Christ on Cross*, 1470-1528, panel from the *Tauberbischofsheim Altarpiece*, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany. Wikimedia Commons.

In addition to these symbols, Kahlo created a painting that both uses Christianity and animal symbolism in one subject matter. 4. \_\_\_\_\_. The artist portrayed herself in this painting. However, there is a much more important detail

in this artwork – the deer wounded by the arrows reminds us of Andrea Mantegna's depiction of Saint Sebastian from 1480. It may also be a reference to crucifixion and resurrection.



Symbolism in art: Frida Kahlo, *The Wounded Deer*, 1946, private collection of Carolyn Harb. Wikimedia Commons.



Andrea Mantegna, *St. Sebastian*, 1457-1459, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Kahlo's strong character can be seen not only in her intriguing paintings, which are directly linked to her life but also in her famous colorful clothing. Read our article "Looking For Fashion Inspiration? Check Out Frida Kahlo's Clothing".

Available at <<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/frida-kahlo-symbolism/>>

Complete the text with the sentences.

|          |                                                                                                                                              |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> | Furthermore, the thorn necklace she wears may be the symbol of Jesus' crown of thorns, which he bore while being dragged to his crucifixion. |
| <b>B</b> | The animals became protective and tender symbols to Kahlo.                                                                                   |
| <b>C</b> | The hummingbird symbolizes hope and good luck in Mexican culture.                                                                            |
| <b>D</b> | Painting <i>The Little Deer</i> , 1946 made by Frida Kahlo depicts her as a deer with a human face.                                          |

Mark **T** for true and **F** for false.

- A. In Mexican mythology, monkeys are symbols of fear.
- B. The painting *Self- Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* represents Frida's new life.
- C. The god Huitzilopochtli might refer to Frida's joyful life.
- D. There was religious influence in some of her paintings.

Match the words with their synonyms/meanings.

**Depict**

Desire, Craving

**Lust**

Hurt, harmed

**Character**

Resurrection, revival

**Rebirth**

Represent

**Wounded**

Personality