



Georgette Chen (China 1906 –
Singapore 1993)
Self-Portrait
Oil on Canvas
22.5 x 17.5 cm
1946
Collection of the Singapore Art
Museum

Frida Kahlo
*Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace
and Hummingbird*
Oil on Canvas
1940
Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, Austin, Texas,
USA

Done by:
Lynn (27)
Cheryl (3)
3C



Describe



- She uses minimum lines to differentiate the features of her face, barely using different shades of colours. She also uses harmonious colours like hues of pink, beige and brown, which really goes well together and makes her complexion look smooth.



Analyse



- In this self portrait, she uses a simple background in order to emphasise on the details like the curly fringe above the subject's ear and the neat starched Chinese collar of her dress. She portrays herself as a disciplined person and is always on guard. Her eyes are shown as sharp and piercing, reflecting her strong and determined personality.



Interpret



- The intention of this art piece is probably to give the message that Chen was a lady with sophistication, class and steely determination even though times after WW2 (1946) was a period of hardship for everyone.
- I find that this picture is successful in making me feel that the subject matter (AKA the Artist) is a very refined, elegant woman that outshines others in the same room as her. She gives off this vibe that one can't help but just respect her. Her eyes, seemingly cool and calculative, easily engages you and you can't simply look away.



Interpret



- Artist is trying to say , that even though under hard times, one can still be worthy of respect (Refined look). I agree that Chen, while creating this portrait, mainly just included her life's principals into the subject , hence the likeness. To sum it all up, I have reason to think that Chen is trying to tell the viewers that one can still garner respect and seem sophisticated no matter how hard the times , and what one's identity is, and that it doesn't matter if one is of higher class or not.
- Note that Subject's body is not shown, I believe it is intentional to not allow one to judge the type of clothing , thus they cannot judge the class.



Interpret



Why does the Artwork look as such?

- The drawing only shows the head to neck , and not the body. Artist wants to convey the message 'Eyes are the window to one's soul' and that only the inside of someone matters, not outside. Chen also wants to say that respect should be gained because of one's character, and not their class. This is why Artist did not show the subject's clothing, so one wouldn't be able to tell her class.



Evaluate



- This artwork is effective in showing the viewers on how strong and mature Georgette is. Despite facing the Second Sino-Japanese Invasion, the death of her husband two years before the making of this portrait and the World War Two, she has remained as an iron-willed woman and refused to be swayed.
- It is interesting in a way that it shows her as a different woman compared to the rest. When faced with problems similar to hers, women would usually try to run away. However, she stands out as she has faced them bravely and still keeps her head high, earning the respect of many.



Describe



- Frida Kahlo was born on July 6, 1907, in a suburb of Mexico City. When she was six years old she contracted polio which left her with a deformed right foot. Her original ambition was to be a doctor but a streetcar accident in 1925 left her disabled. It was after this accident that Kahlo began to paint in order to relieve the boredom during her recovery.



Analyse



- In this portrait, Frida has painted herself with a frontal pose in order to emphasise on herself. She seems to have a neutral face, even though the picture implies that she has already gone through a lot of hardships and difficulties. This could mean that even though she met lots of obstacles in her life, she masked it over instead of openly revealing her feelings.
- The leaves surrounding her seems to go very well with the animals at her shoulders. It also casts a very forlorn atmosphere, a bit claustrophobic too. This could mean that she is feeling very suffocated in her life, and that she thinks she was born with bad luck.

Interpret



- In this painting, Frida paints herself in a frontal pose to enhance the immediacy of her presence. She wears Christ's crown of thorns as a necklace, presenting herself as a Christian martyr. The thorns digging into her neck are a symbol of the pain she still feels over her divorce from her husband, Diego.
- Hanging from the thorny necklace is a dead hummingbird with outstretched wings. In Mexican folk tradition, dead hummingbirds were used as charms to bring luck into their love life.
- Over her left shoulder is a black cat, a symbol of bad luck and death. It looks ready to pounce on the hummingbird. This could mean that her life had several problems regarding love.
- Over her right is her pet monkey. In the Earlier Middle Ages, monkeys were a symbol of the devil to Christians.
- Around her hair, the butterflies represent resurrection.

Evaluate



- The artwork is effective in telling me the struggles yet bravado of the artist, from the sharp thorns, and cool stoicness of Kahlo.
- The artwork is very attractive to look at , from the colours that fit nicely with each other like a puzzle , to the detailed pencil/paintbrush strokes of both foreground and background .
- The artwork is interesting as it made me, the art critic, interested in finding out some of the events (example- Her affair with Leon Trotsky) that may cause Kahlo to create this portrait. I also enjoyed deciphering this art piece to the very end, as it not only furthers my knowledge, but also gives my a sense of achievement. Hence, I find the portrait both interesting *and* enjoyable .



Similarities



- Both of the artworks are on 2 people who have not been swayed despite the difficulties they faced.
- Kahlo suffered from polio as a child, and then suffered even more after her streetcar accident, where she had a broken spinal column, a broken collarbone, broken ribs and much more. Just because of that, she had to give up on her ambition of being a doctor. She had also witnessed the Mexican Revolution.
- Chen, on the other hand, had to face the World War and the Sino-Japanese War.
- Both of the women had to overcome several of life's obstacles, but yet both have remained strong.
- As seen from the cool and stoic look in Chen's eyes, which didn't reveal any pain and/or hardships she is going through (Post- WW2). Likewise for Kahlo , despite the 'thorns' and 'hummingbirds' in her life , she didn't give out any hints that she is in pain .

Differences



- HOWEVER, Chen is being tough because it is part of her personality. Based on my research, the portrait is drawn with her principles in mind . In the portrait, I think Chen firmly believes that one can be strong even though the odds are against her. It is different in Kahlo's case.
- According to the portrait, Kahlo is struggling to keep her mask from falling as the 'thorns' became a bigger threat. She kept her emotions because she didn't think that anyone can help, and that she is alone. From my point of view, the artist is also feebly holding on to her mask even though it is going to fall anyway.