

FILE

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WORD COUNT 4432

STUDENT ID 1915446

CHARACTER COUNT 28059

Coexistent Perspectives

ADCD7001

2. De/constructing the huamn: self, identity and other

Feminism in the field of art: A case study by women artists

Frida Kahlo and Paula Rego



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Illustrations

Figure 1: Frida kahlo, 1931, *Frida and Diego Rivera*, [image] Available at:

<https://www.fridakahlo.org/images/paintings/frida-and-diego-rivera.jpg>

Figure 2: Frida kahlo, 1939, *The two Frida*, [image] Available at:

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Abstract

The second wave of feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s re-stimulated women's aching nerves, and women artists began to reflect on their own status in art history. They carefully examine their own status in society, and a heart-born gender consciousness slowly begins to awaken and find its own worth in gender differences, so women begin to emerge as independent individuals. Feminist art illuminates women's lived experiences and political differences in hopes of unconventionally bringing about positive change in the world. Under the influence of this developmental situation, many artists start with themselves, live and reflect on their own experience through a unique perspective, and explore women's unique artistic existence from the form of artistic expression.

This paper analyzes and compares the cases of the artists Frida Khalo and Paula Rego, with a focus on analyzing the life experience of the two artists, the style of painting, the emergence of the style of painting and the embodiment of feminism in their works. The two artists broke with many traditional social customs and reflected the characteristics of women through unique painting styles. Her creative inspiration comes from her own experience and emotional expression. By emphasizing the female consciousness in the works of two female painters, reinterpreting the female perspective in female art and promoting the unique charm of female painting. Finally, through researching the artistic creations of Frida Khalo and Paula Rego, this article summarizes the artistic spirit and value of the two artists and conveys the way women see the world, particularly the concern for women that is of great relevance to other artistic currents Both the creation and the later artists have an important inspirational and reference value.

Keywords: feminism, women's art, Frida Kahlo, Paula Rego

1.1 Background of the research topic

After the Western feminist movement spurred the development of art in the 1970s, feminist scholars began to largely adopt theories and research from a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, psychoanalysis, political science, sociology, and social gender studies. Since the 1980s, They began to cross disciplinary boundaries, deeply study more cutting-edge cultural theories, such as feminism, deconstruction, poststructuralism, etc., and began to study the works and theories of female artists who were once neglected, and now there are a large number of research works on the life of female artists and their creation theory. *Why Are There No Great Women Artists?* by Nochlin, *Women in Art* by Marios Buchan, *Women Painters of the World* by Walter Sbarlow, Munsterberg's *History of Women Artists*, etc.

The painting of women has attracted the attention of many people due to its uniqueness and femininity. With the development of painting, the concept of female painting has gradually evolved from painting of a single female creator or painting about women to painting expressing female consciousness. It takes real life and women's attitudes as a starting point and integrates women's real experiences into its own creation. They pay attention to themselves and interpret the world from a perspective unique to men and women, integrate personal experience, inner world and emotional experience into their creations, gradually determine their own unique painting style, and create a new era for creating painting art new field adds a new landscape to the world of painting. Although the art of female painting has evolved slightly in modern times, it is still in its infancy and there is still a long and arduous road to go.

1.2The purpose and significance of the research topic

In 2002, a film called "*Frida*" directed by the famous American director Julie Taymor appeared in public. This film has attracted a lot of attention since its release. The veil of cultural mysteries intrigues us and allows us to understand the legendary life of Frida Kahlo. Through the inspiration and guidance of this film, there is a desire for more research and discovery to understand Frida's legendary life experiences and the female minds conveyed in her work.

In 1988, the work "*The cadet and his sister*" brought Paula Rego onto the international art stage. In 1989 Paula Rego was nominated for the Turner Prize, in 1990 chief artist of the British National Gallery, later by the Queen of England as the "British Lady" and named the most influential in the world by the British Times. She is one of the 200 best artists in the world and their works have won the highest price at auction many times. Although Paula Rego is a living artist her art cannot be judged but her art has been recognized by the art world and her art is worth studying and contemplating.

Therefore, this article analyzes and compares two female painters, Frida Kahlo and Paula Rego, to find their similarities and differences. Observe and analyze the feminist symbolic language, unique aesthetic taste and psychology and ingenious artistic techniques and expressions of the two artists' sexual existence, expound on female consciousness, read the female perspective in women's art, promote the unique charm of women's painting art, and systematically summarize and analyze the display of "female consciousness" in painting, so as to increase people's cognition of "female consciousness" in artistic practice and theory. This will have special significance for the growth and development of women's painting art in the future.

2. An Overview of Feminism and Feminist Art

2.1 Feminist concept

Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity, understanding gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex and sexuality through social theory and political activism. Historically, feminism has evolved from a critical examination of gender inequities to a more nuanced focus on the social and representational structures of gender and sexuality.[1]

2.2 Feminist art

Feminist art represents a meeting point between feminism and art. Before the start of the feminist art movement, some works of art focused on sexual experience. In the 1970s, feminist art was gradually understood by more people. In the 1980s, art critic Lucy R. Lippard said that feminist art should not be seen as a style or movement, but as a value system and way of life. In "Why There Are No Great Women Artists," Linda Nochlin writes: "The fault is not with our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty interior spaces, but our institutions and our education." [2] Due to the historical role of women as carers, most women are not able to pursue art. Therefore, many women are not satisfied with this unfair social environment, and more and more women are rising up to express their dissatisfaction. The feminist art movement represents a field where activism and art thrive together.

2.2.1 Development of the feminist art movement

Feminist art illuminates the social and political differences that women experience in their lives. [3] With the development of society and politics, it has different characteristics in different periods. The 1960s saw the emergence of the seeds needed for the growth of the feminist art movement. Before this world, most women were the subjects of art, not the artists themselves. In the past, women's bodies were considered objects of desire for male pleasure. To gain recognition, women artists seek to “desexualize” and transform the art world, inspiring artists and activists to create works that reflect reality. They are aware that neither art history nor museums should focus solely on male artists, so women are becoming increasingly involved in art theory and practice.

In the 1970s, feminist art continued to challenge women's place in the social hierarchy with the aim of achieving a state of balance between men and women. Feminist artists problematize the objectification of women in the media. Female artists turned to Hollywood films, commercials, and television shows for inspiration, often recreating existing stereotypes in new and subversive ways. The 1960s and 1970s were a stellar era in which women began to celebrate new forms of freedom. More women entered the labor market, savings were legalized, decisions to fight for equal pay, civil rights, and the legalization of abortion were reflected in works of art.

In the 80s, feminist art was not static, it was an ever-changing project. "Is itself related to the life process of women's struggle, which itself is constantly being shaped and reshaped". It is not a platform but a "dynamic and self-critical response".[4] The feminist spark of the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for the activist and identity art of the 1980s. In fact, the importance of feminist art developed so rapidly that Lucy R. Lippard curated an exhibition in which “all

the participants presented works that belonged to the 'panorama' of 'art for social change', albeit in a weakened sense of 'feminism' at all Importance of a single political message or a single work of art. This openness is a key factor in feminist future creative societal development, as political and cultural intervention.” [5] As society has evolved, feminist art has gradually penetrated into different fields, and its influence on society has gradually increased.

2.2.2 The impact of the feminist art movement on society

Kiki Smith describes the significant influence of the feminist art movement on the art world of the time: “I would say that without the feminist movement I would not exist; the vast amount of art we take for granted would not exist; many of the subjects that were included would not exist. The feminist movement has exponentially expanded what art is, how we see it, and who is considered included in the art-making chapter. I think it has brought about massive, far-reaching changes. You don't want there to be a cultural notion that a certain gender embodies creativity. All people - and all aspects of gender and sexuality and how people define themselves - are inherently creative. In contrast to many other models of liberation, it is against the interest of an entire culture to use them as a model for feminism, because they liberate not just women, but everyone.” [6] Art is a form of media used to convey a message; this is their platform. Feminist art supports this claim, as such art begins to challenge previous notions of women's roles. [7] The message of gender equality in feminist art resonated with audiences, reinterpreting the female perspective in female art and promoting women's unique charms. And it has paid more attention to women, which has had a positive impact on the emergence of other artistic currents.

3.Frida Kahlo's feminist artistic spirit

3.1Influencing factors of Frida kahlo's artistic style

The themes of artworks have been constantly explored, and suffering and pain is one of the themes that represent the perfection of art. Painful works of art are often endowed with the discovery and exploration of the author's destiny, which is expressed in the description of the transience of nature, ethnic disputes, religious contradictions, rebellion against the societal status quo and the hope for the elimination of pain. But expressing pain is not the sole purpose of artistic creation, but to convey faith and positive meaning in its own right. In Frida Kahlo's career as a painter, this experience represents an important source of her creativity. She calmly faces her own pain and self-deprecatingly reveals her loneliness and perseverance, her faith and her enthusiasm.

3.1.1Effects of car accident experience

Frida Kahlo was born in Mexico in 1907. Childhood Frida Kahlo, like other children growing up in the 20th century, was trapped in a turbulent society where the outside world was strong but the inside did, and she lived through the turbulent years of the Mexican Revolution ignorantly. However, fate would not let her go, when she was due to hunt and play, she was diagnosed with polio, causing her to suffer from a life-threatening leg disease that required her to wear multiple layers of socks to hide severely atrophied legs in the future. But fate never really cared for her. When she was 18 years old, a sudden car accident broke her into pieces. Her abdomen was pierced into her body by the steel handrail of the bus, and it came out from her vagina, cutting

her legs one after another. The uterus and pelvis, and three of her vertebrae were broken, her thin and disabled right foot and leg were fractured, and her ankle was dislocated and deformed. This accident almost killed her.[8] After this point, Frida Kahlo began to pave her painting career with the boundless torture of the soul, expressing the pain she experienced through self-portraits.

3.1.2Influence of emotional factors

If physical suffering was torture for the flesh, the emotional pain associated with their lives was torture for the soul. 42-year-old muralist Diego Rivera attended the school where Frida Kahlo studied mural painting. Frida Kahlo fell in love with this knowledgeable and humorous man and could not tear himself away, while Diego Rivera was attracted to this enthusiasm and passion beautiful girl La and Frida Kahlo celebrated a wedding.(Figure1)From Frida's paintings we can see why they are called "the combination of elephant and pigeon" by others - mainly because Rivera is fat and big, and Frida is petite and thin. But Diego Rivera in marriage is amorous, he repeatedly betrays, severely stabs Frida Kahlo, who has a strong possessiveness, causing her unimaginable pain and mental pain. Therefore, Frida Kahlo also used more and more presumptuous extramarital affairs to lash out at her husband's betrayal, and Frida gave love every minute in exchange for love, and in this love again and again, she was able to affirm her charm and absorb the courage to survive. She calmly depicts her own pain and emotional trauma, revealing her loneliness and perseverance, doubt and belief with one self-portrait after another, interpreting the most incomprehensible life experiences.



Figure 1: Frida and Diego Rivera, 1931

3.1.3 Influence of Mexican traditional culture

Frida Kahlo's national feelings and national culture are deeply rooted in her mind. Mexico has very strong cultural roots including rich ancient Mayan culture, Toltec culture and Aztec culture. So far, Tewana has preserved cultural traditions rich in regional and ethnic characteristics, such as B. the matrilineal social structure, rich costumes and unique ritual dances. Frida Kahlo on the left in the work 'The Two Fridas' is wearing a high-necked Victorian European dress, while Frida on the right is still wearing Mexican Tewana costumes. Frida's heart is bare and connected by blood vessels, and clasped hands echoed. (Figure 2) Tewana's costumes are highly artistic and are considered to be America's most elegant costumes. They are also an important narrative element in Frida Kahlo's works and have a highly symbolic meaning.



Figure 2 : The two Fridas,1939

3.2 The female spiritual connotation in Frida Kahlo's work

3.2.1 The embodiment of maternal nature in the works

In the traditional view of reproduction, males are considered an important factor in the reproduction of offspring. As a feminist advocate, Frida Kahlo challenged tradition from women's perspective because this type of work is profound because she had three real-life experiences of miscarriage. Diego Rivera praised her "Ford Hospital" works "female endurance, loyalty, reality, stoicism and pain, never before has a woman been able to express the poetry of extreme pain like Frida Kahlo. This Henry Ford Hospital painting (Figure 3) faithfully depicts her heart after a miscarriage. In the picture, the woman is lying on a large bed in an open field, with a pool of blood on the white sheet beneath her body, contrasting with the bed and emphasizes the woman's loneliness and helplessness. A giant embryo-like baby hangs over the bed,

and a red thread connects the mother's and baby's legs. Also, there are five other elements drawn by the red thread, surrounding the woman and the bed respectively, flowers, the pelvis, the model of the pregnant woman's abdomen and the cold medical tools, etc., these elements full of metaphors and symbols tell by her despair after her desire to be a mother was shattered, suggesting that abortion has done great harm to a woman's body and mind. All of these elements permeate Frida Kahlo's concept of female reproduction. She believes that women are the greatest victims of reproduction. During the reproductive process, women will experience untold pain. This work not only expresses itself, but also praises the divinity and greatness of woman.



Figure 3: Henry Ford Hospital ,1932

3.2.2 The embodiment of women's equality in the works

Her work A Few Small Nips (Figure 4), in the painting - a naked woman lying on the bed, a man standing by with a bayonet, staring coldly and unmoved, as

if he would stab the woman again any second . The woman's blood was on the blue-grey bed sheet, on the floor, on the man's clothes and even outside the picture, on the frame, Frida drew blood on it. It was very noticeable. What a pain and a hysterical expression. The source of this painting came about shortly after Rivera had an ambivalent relationship with Frida's sister. Frida accused and discharged herself with artistic means. This portrait is the expression of her true feelings. Gain the power to survive. One of the brightest painters of Mexican feminist activity at the end of the 20th century, Frida painted a large number of paintings with female subjects, and most of these female subjects are classified as her own "portraits". Through her own paintings, she discusses women's values and artistic views, and her apparent self-confidence expresses women's care and awareness of themselves, which has become important evidence for our exploration and discussion of women's artworks.

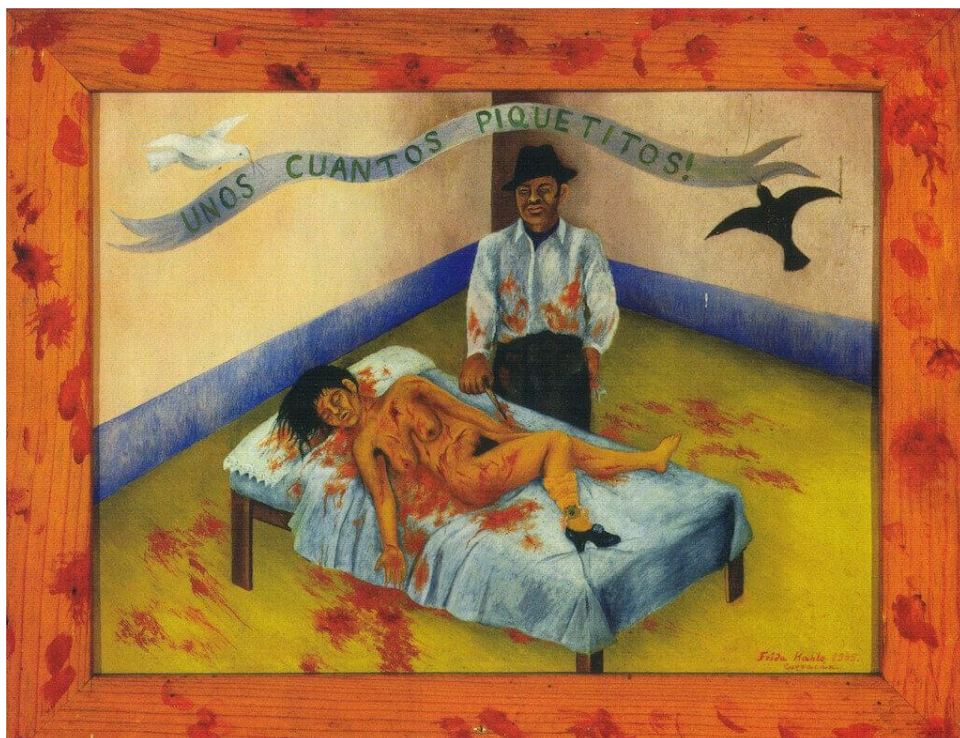


Figure 4: A few small Nips, 1935

4. The presentation of feminism in the works of Paula Rego

4.1 Paula Rego's upbringing

Paula Rego said at the age of 80: "Painting is not a profession, it is an inspiration." [10] An artist's life experience influences his work to a certain extent. Artists love art and life. As a child, Paula Rego often listened to her grandmother telling her myths or fables, she liked the strange animals in the stories, sometimes she also heard some incidents about the murder of revolutionaries by the dictatorship government. She also enjoys painting: at the age of nine she painted a picture of her grandmother sewing, which realistically depicted the old lady's myopia and graceful movements, and Paula Rego's quick observation of art prompted her mother to take up painting.

In 1966, Paula Rego's favorite father died, then it turned out that her husband suffered from arteriosclerosis. Psychologically, the artist could not accept this double blow. Stress and depression made her suffer from mania. In 1974 Paula Rego suffered from a serious mental illness and was unable to create art. After two years of psychotherapy and with the encouragement of her husband Victor, Paula Rego found painting again to express her feelings. Two years later she and her husband settled in London and started a new life and artistic work. The British art environment provided nourishment for Paula Rego's artistic growth and the artist found her own direction. Her famous works were all created in Britain. Paula Rego's childhood memories and adult memories have a strong influence on her creation, and the relationship between men, women and children is dramatized in her series of narrative works.[11] Paula Rego's large-scale and straightforward narrative technique conveys women's views on the world, allowing the audience to re-examine the group of women from her works, and enhances the public's attention to women.

4.2 Paula Rego's metaphorical form of painting

We are no strangers to metaphors: The British rhetorician Richards once said that metaphors have always existed in our daily conversations. Lakoff and Johnson believed that metaphors are the foundation of the human conceptual system, and metaphors are ubiquitous in our daily communication and thinking. Metaphors exist in our lives as a common phenomenon, just like our drinking, eating, breathing, and other behaviors. [12] Metaphor is the basis of human cognition and thinking, that is, metaphor is an implicit way of imagining, comparing one thing with another, and expressing the state of reality in an implicit mode of expression. In painting, this means that the artist visualizes the abstract concept through the image to improve the interpretability of the painting.

4.2.1 Visual Metaphors in Painting

This type of visual metaphor by Paula Rego is not uncommon in works, for example Snow White swallows the poisoned apple (figure 5), although this painting was created by the artist based on a fairy tale, the artist is by no means a simple interpretation of the Story. The beautiful appearance of Snow White has disappeared in the works of Paula Rego: the artist depicts a woman with thick limbs, dark skin and an old face. This contrast creates a dramatic pictorial plot. The inverted body of Snow White after eating the poisoned apple shows her painful condition and at the same time makes the picture become a diagonal composition, which enhances the dynamism of the picture and forms a strong visual shock of the picture, which is a metaphor for the character's body and the inner pain and struggle. The artist's reinterpretation of the story is a metaphor for the aesthetic qualities of his images and his feminist complex.



Figure 5: Snow White swallows the poisoned Apple, 1995

4.2.2 Metaphors of Space in Painting

As a contemporary artist, Paula Rego also has this metaphor of the stage-like spatial atmosphere in her works. Using the artist series Possession I-VII(Figure 6) as an example, the artist created a total of six works in the form of self-portraits that show the lying figures in different states. His work depicts a woman with her arms crossed on an old sofa. We cannot see her facial expression, but we can sense the lonely and depressed inner world of the character through the spatial atmosphere in the picture. Paula Rego depicts a person's inner monologue through characters and dilapidated sofas. The horizontal lines in the image composition and the staging of props and characters, colors, light and shadow form the image into a one-man show. The stage shape creates one Self-space, a metaphor for a woman's private world. There are both visual metaphors and spatial metaphors in La Rego's works, and metaphor has become one of Paula Rego's most important expressive techniques.[13] Paola Rego's artistic innovation does not lie in the innovation

of painting materials, but in the innovation of concept and conception. She has created a metaphorical stage in her work to express her grotesque aesthetic consciousness and feminist thoughts, as well as her concern for society and humanity.



Figure 6: Possession I-VII, 2004

4.3 Unique feminist perspective in Paula Rego's work

4.3.1 Provocation to the traditional patriarchal family

In a culture dominated by patriarchy, women are greatly hindered from becoming the main body of works, and women will be disturbed by male discourse and male-dominated traditional ideas. But in Paula Rego's works, feminist consciousness is strongly expressed, and the subject of female characters and male characters have a close relationship. Paula Rego usually uses the absence of men to highlight women's consciousness, desires and feelings, thereby expressing the appeal of a female subject, portraying men as dead fathers, and the strategy of subverting male images hides the anti-patriarchy in women's works consciousness.[14] The work "Family" (Figure 7) from 1988 is one of Paula Rego's famous masterpieces. The appearance of windows makes the picture form a closed space, and the appearance of shadows visually increases the feeling of discomfort in this

space. In this enclosed space, the artist depicts two violent women who are pushing a middle-aged man in a suit to the bed and roughly stripping him of his clothes, obscuring the man's expression to reveal a helpless look. The eyes of the characters in the picture add to the drama of the picture, and the non-linear gaze position reveals the characters' inner feelings and gives the viewer ample room for imagination. These works mostly revolve around family relationships, fathers and children are her usual subjects, she uses the absence of fathers and their uncharacteristic behavior to emphasize the issue of women, to expose the fact that women are strong and men are weak in the family and to subvert traditional family system It is a metaphor for unethical sex in the family.



Figure 7: The family, 1988

4.3.2 Critique of women's rights in society

Frida Kahlo described miscarriage in "Henry Ford Hospital" in 1932. Everything in the picture has metaphors. Frida expressed her self-feeling of miscarriage due to physical reasons in a surreal way. The picture Presents an

atmosphere of sadness and pain. However, Paula Rego's thematic description of abortion is exactly the opposite, she makes us see a woman's choice and decision is to terminate the pregnancy. In a 2001 interview Paula Rego described why she did the series, "The abortion series generated out of my anger, it was unbelievable, women abortion was considered a crime, it reminded me of my In the past, I have not tolerated accusations of this kind of behavior."In the work "Untitled No.1" (Figure 8)

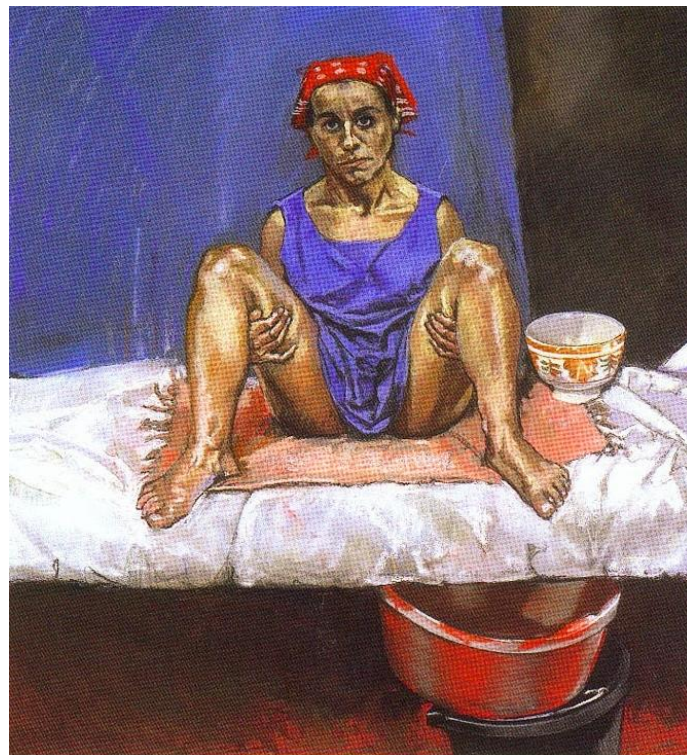


Figure 8:Untitled No.1,1998

In 1998, the most eye-catching thing in the picture is the eyes of the characters. The woman hugs her spread legs tightly with both hands, sitting on the vermilion blanket, staring at the His eyes reveal a firm gaze, which makes the viewers feel inexplicably shocked and touched. The woman's outline is clear, her limbs are strong, and her sitting posture forms a stable triangle with her head, which increases the sense of strength and stability of the picture. The plastic basin and black bucket placed under the bed are obviously tools used by a woman who has just experienced a miscarriage. The depiction of props

such as the bowl placed next to the woman is simple in terms of composition and color.[15] Paula Rego used the woman's eyes to metaphorize the fortitude and firmness of women against abortion. Opposing and criticizing the restrictions on women's abortion rights in society at that time, Paula Rego was not a pure feminist artist, she was also a politician, trying to challenge the status quo and overthrow the existing ones. Just as in the 1960s, "the individual is politics" put forward in art history, Paula Rego expresses women's rights in her own way, expresses her satire on social reality, and reveals family, social or individual rights.

5.Conclusion

In the current era of political, economic and cultural globalization and integration, the diversity of art is undisputed. Many artists have created various possibilities through the way of artistic creation, different from the real world, and undoubtedly this way of expression is diverse. Kahlo's creations are almost all self-portraits, and they all have a strong personal style that makes Frida Kahlo's self-portraits so special that they stand in the tide of art, allowing people a new perspective and emotional interpretation that she carries to draw herself, with her very distinctive painting technique, her body bears too many pains, all of which are reflected in her self-portraits. She carries out a concise analysis of herself, capturing in images love, confusion, illness, childlessness and her unwavering love for her husband. Frida Kahlo's self-portraits are like diaries that record women's painful experiences, but the content of themselves -knowledge that this self-portrait shows cannot be expressed and communicated with words. Although Frida Kahlo's work is not new from today's perspective in terms of materials and forms, her work nonetheless influences many contemporary people with her strong individual style.

As a contemporary artist, Paula Rego did not throw herself into similarly trendy art such as performance art or media art, but insisted on traditional easel painting. However, Paula Rego's art is not only a legacy of tradition, her artistic aesthetics and artistic spirit are what contemporary art has. She addresses the world of women from a female perspective and challenges the traditional patriarchal system, using dramatic plots and grotesque imagery as metaphors for her concern for society, power and humanity. Paula Rego's art is like a mixture, she has integrated all reality and imagination into her works, which greatly inspired later artists.[16] In the trend of contemporary art, it stands like a strange flower, erecting a metaphorical stage, allowing for the dramatic reproduction of society, power and human nature on the stage of art. When choosing the subject of painting, use the art culture you are and have been familiar with as a perspective and the artistic appeal it offers to perceive some things that are unique to the time, whether they are good or bad What we see painted on paper ourselves is the most real feeling.

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