

Comparative Study

In this case study, I will analyze and compare three pieces, each by different artists. One piece from Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, and two from Dutch artist, Vincent Van Gogh. I will analyze the comparisons of the Elements of Art, such as line, balance, value, color and texture. I will also focus on analyzing on the formalities of the Principles of Art such as balance, emphasis, and movement. I will contrast their works by focusing on time period, personal backgrounds, and creative purpose as to why their works were created in the first place. I frequently reference these two artists while creating my own works, relating to the themes of self identity, acceptance and racial pride. These specific themes and techniques will be compared and analyzed throughout this study and will be seen in future artworks of mine, as well.

by Natalia Ramirez Vang

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Van Gogh

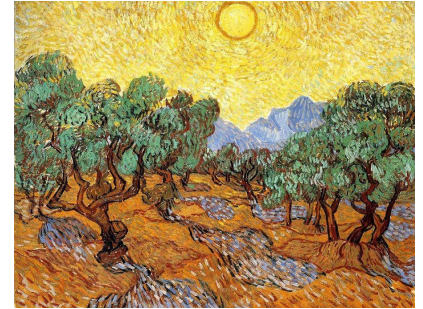
Post-Impressionism continued from the late 19th century to the early 20th century extending the era of Impressionism while neglecting the natural components, contributing to the realistic looks by exploring new techniques with color and line. These lines are used to create more geometric shapes and express rather unnatural forms. Post-Impressionists often created their works around their personal beliefs and expression, quite often even landscapes and still works, especially from Van Gogh.

Vincent Van Gogh was exposed to certain artists in which inspired him to change his styles of painting completely. Beginning his original works at the age of 27, Van Gogh used darker colors and more realistic figures often as portraits of others. It wasn't until his exposure to certain artists such as Pissarro, Gauguin, Bernard and Monet that he began his use of bright colors and short brushstrokes.

"Instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I see before me, I make more arbitrary use of color to express myself more forcefully."



"The Potato Eaters" by Van Gogh (1885)

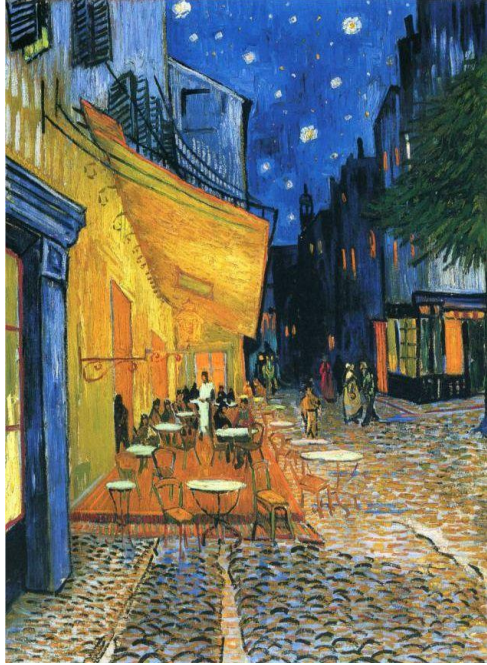


"Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sun" by Van Gogh (1889)



"The Bedroom" by Van Gogh (1889)

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Van Gogh



“Cafe Terrace at Night”
By Van Gogh (1888)

Vincent Van Gogh has a heavy use of small, thin brushstrokes throughout most of his paintings. They became so commonly seen that it is a technique used to identify the painting as a Van Gogh. Depending on what components of the painting are covered with the more obvious brushstrokes, they can contribute to elements such as **movement** or **texture**. The use of fine and accurate **lines** are rarely seen amongst a Van Gogh painting, especially those of his self portraits and landscapes. His use of **color** may be exaggerated in multiple paintings to make the scene look more appealing than what it does in real life, or possibly to physically create his perspective on the world, such as the wide variety of color in *Starry Night*.

When not using the technique of many brushstrokes, Van Gogh often liked to work with light and **shading**. This can be best seen with *Cafe Terrace at Night*, where emphasis is seen in the sitting area with the overhead lights on the people on the terrace. However, as the painting focuses on the father side of the street, the **hues** of the painting suddenly get darker as a way of showing **depth** and **form**.



“Starry Night” by Van Gogh (1889)

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Van Gogh

The position of his head in this piece gives it a sense of **movement** as the viewers are focused upon his face first and eventually focusing on the bandage for a better look at his injury.

Movement is also shown as the smoke is portrayed in circular brushstrokes rather than straight, and is seen thinning out as it rises. Also, the position of his body is slightly shifted towards the left, creating a wider space on the right side of the painting. However, the smoke lifting from the pipe takes up that **negative space** creating a **balanced** effect.



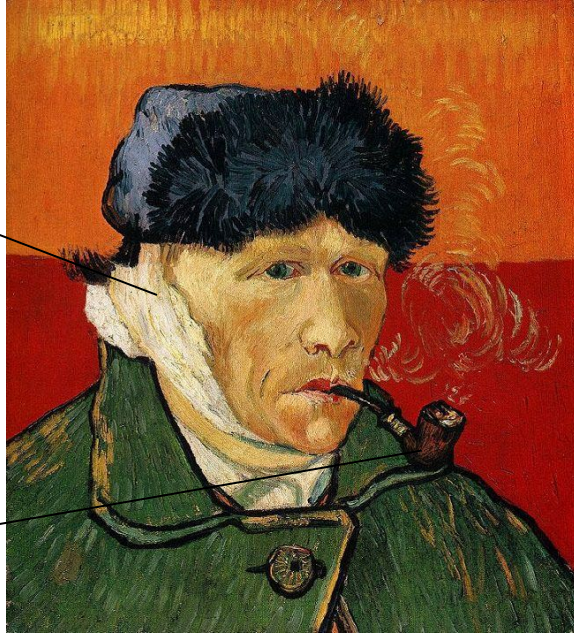
“Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe” by Vincent Van Gogh (1889)

Van Gogh’s use of **line** in the many individual brushstrokes are especially exaggerated in the fur of his hat. They are also not aligned or formed into one specific direction as his way of expressing **texture** and **form** of the soft fur. Van Gogh’s use of **color** also has an effect on the texture created as a lighter blue is used to shade towards the center of the fur while black is used towards the outer strands. This may be due to a change in lighting from one spot to another, or the literal thinning of the hat. This gives the effect of the painting not only looking flat but it also gives the viewers a sense of realism and naturalism.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

This painting was created shortly after the mutilation of Van Gogh's ear which is noticeable by the bandage around his head. The position in which his head is turned for the painting gives the viewers a better look at his injury on his right ear. By doing this, Van Gogh exhibits his acceptance of his injury. The look on his face as well sets the mood for calmness rather than wincing from the pain of the injury or any sense of panic.

The sense of his calmness and casualness is also portrayed by the smoking of a pipe on the opposite side of the painting. This indicates that he has now accepted the events and effects of his injury and is in the process of moving on.



“Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe” by Vincent Van Gogh (1889)

The purpose for Van Gogh's injury was reported to have been for various reasons, however each version of the story maintains one common conflict; mental illness. By calmly displaying his own consequences for his actions potentially caused by his own poor health, it could be interpreted as displaying his acceptance for his mental state. The severity of his outlook on his mental state is not reflected in this piece as he exhibits no sense of fear or concern, but during that specific time frame if his life, he had had enough experience with his poor mental health to recognize the negative symptoms that indicated his coming to the conclusion of his mental illness. That acceptance of coming to the conclusion is displayed in this piece through his willingness to portray its effects on him.

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Van Gogh

The **movement** that can be seen in the background is similar to that of “Starry Night” with the use of the curvy individual lines and brushstrokes, and the use of multiple colors. This style of **line** is also used within the jacket, but not as exaggerated.

The lines used on his face, however, are straight and blended for a more realistic approach. The shading is still blue, but the **color** of orange and red used against the background hues of cooler colors creates a sense of dramatic **contrast** and catches the viewer’s attention onto his face.



“Self-Portrait” by Van Gogh (1889)

The bright oranges of his face are further **contrasted** because of the similarities of the **colors** used with the background and the jacket. By painting a large area of the piece the same colors as the background,, the attention of the viewer is locked on the face as it is the only thing that stands out in color.

The same technique of individual brushstrokes for movement in the background add **texture** to his hair. They can be seen specifically on the right side of his head indicating that the source of light is on the right. The brushstrokes add a sense of texture to his hair with the lighting creating an image of his hair strands.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

This painting was one of the last paintings Van Gogh would complete only months before his death. The background of the piece can be described as busy, hectic and uneasy with the many colors and wavy lines varying in direction, some spiraling. This may be a reflection of Van Gogh's unstable mentality at the time as he created this piece after being in a mental institution.

Focusing on his face in this piece, it can be noticed that his eyebrows curve downward, and his lack of smoking a pipe such as in the previous painting allows the viewers to see his uninterrupted expressions and mood. His downwards curved eyebrows and mouth give his face a feeling of concern and seriousness,



“Self-Portrait” by Van Gogh (1889)

all while maintaining his control. This may be a representation of the effect that his mental illness has on his overall mood. It can be seen as taking a toll on him and allowing his mind to be set to a negative, more serious and anxious tone.

Compared to his many other self portraits, the face portrayed on this one is much more serious. It can be inferred that during this time of his life he was more troubled than any other. The standing of this painting in the timeline of his life takes place after the incident of his mutilated ear, indicating one of the lowest points of his life. Considering his death took place in 1890, this may have been his last created self portrait, implying that his life ended on a negative note.

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Kahlo



“Self Portrait as a Tehuana” by Kahlo, 1943

Of course, Frida Kahlo was greatly inspired by Mexican culture. It’s designs and clothing always made an appearance in her works one way or another. In “Self Portrait as a Tehuana”, she is shown wearing a Tehuana dress, a traditional gala dress from ancient Mexico.

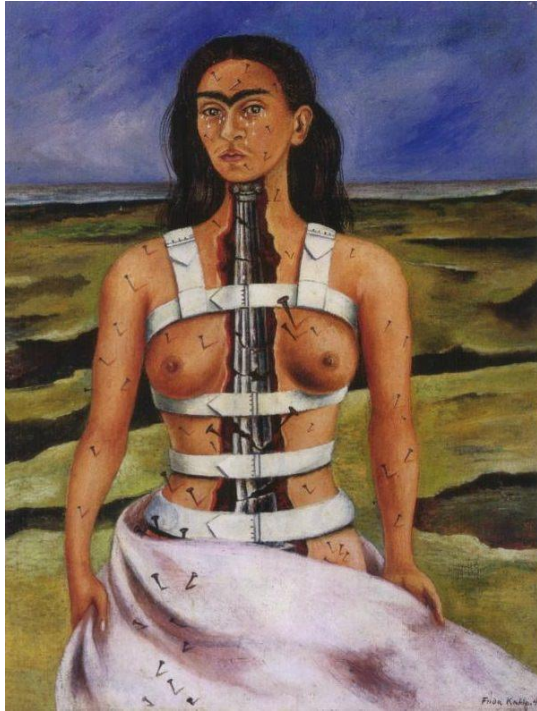
Her Mexican roots are also displayed in a painting depicting the border of Mexico and the US, with her calmly holding a Mexican flag amidst her busy surroundings.

Frida Kahlo clearly takes pride in her Mexican heritage and displays it with strength and beauty throughout many of her paintings. In others full body portraits, she is often seen wearing traditional Mexican *rebozos*.



“Self Portrait Along the Border Line of Mexico and the United States” by Kahlo, 1932

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Kahlo



“The Broken Column” by
Frida Kahlo, 1944

Aside from portraying her heavy carried pride in her paintings, Frida was also very politically active. She stood for women’s rights and often displayed the pains and struggles that women face through her Surrealist paintings. Although self portraits, these paintings represent all of women, exaggerated physically to represent their emotional states. Her goal was for her viewers to have an ability to easily understand the hardships that women face through a visual representation. Although these paintings were made to value women, these paintings were aimed to catch the attention of both men and women to share her concern and appreciation with. At a time in which artists flourished and gained popularity, Frida took the role of representing women on the artist world, which was very critical during those times of male supremacy.

In “The Broken Column” specifically, Frida displays herself as suffering from pain as she paints nails piercing into her from all over her body. Her physical injuries are obvious, with a cut throughout the middle of her body. She is painted nude, to represent her exploitation and vulnerability. The column seems to be holding her up, although it can be seen on the verge of crumbling and breaking down. Tears are seen on her face, depicting her emotional feelings for her physical exposure and pain.

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo was a Surrealist painter exaggerating her images to represent her emotions and hardships while painting them realistically. She studied the physical elements of the animals and landscapes she painted and used clean and precise brushstrokes to recreate them. This included capturing their shadows, texture, proportional sizes, and their natural movements. Technique wise, Frida paints her works by making them look as realistic as possible, rather than manipulating their appearances with opposing colors or techniques. These realistic



“The Wounded Deer” by Frida Kahlo, 1946

techniques are shown in all of her paintings with or without animals and landscapes, as well. Her realistic shading and color choices are best exemplified through her self portraits, where the depth of her face and neck are easily seen and distinguished. Depending on the angle in which she is facing, certain areas of her face appear darker or more toned than the other, and the cylinder structure of her neck can be seen due to her use of shading and form.

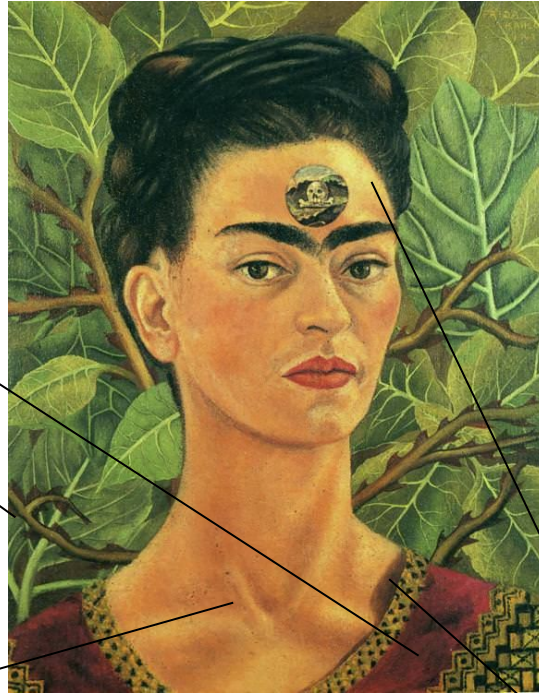


“Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird” by Frida Kahlo, 1940

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Frida Kahlo

No short and individual brushstrokes are seen throughout the painting as it is well blended, adding a sense of realism through her use of **texture**. This can be seen in the blending of her shirt and in the thorns of the leaves.

The shading, while adding texture to her shirt and thorns, adds a sense of **value** and **form** to both her skin and the leaves. With the leaves, it gives the visual effect of them folding inwards from the stem. Even her bones are seen through the darker areas of her skin through shading near her neck and collarbones.



“Thinking about Death” by Frida Kahlo (1943)

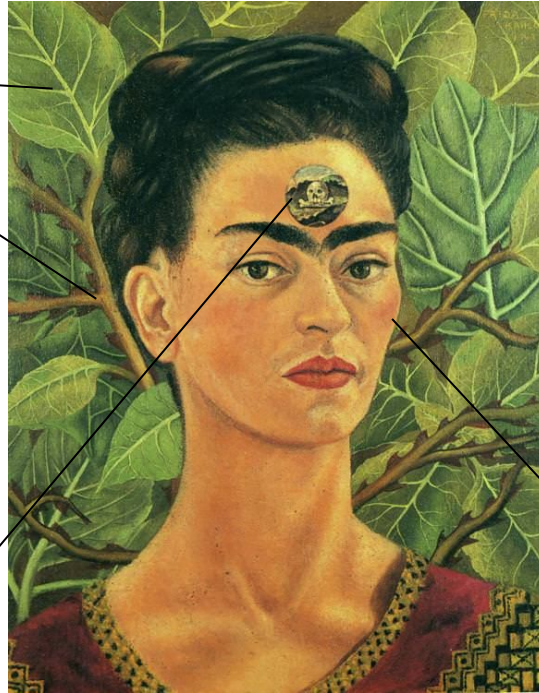
Instead of creating only her portrait with an empty background, Frida utilizes the **space** by filling in each inch with a busy setting of leaves and plants. This adds depth to this piece as she seems rather close to her busy backdrop, possibly to keep the leaves larger to not attract too much attention to them, as they would if they were farther away and smaller in size.

A sense of **value** is added to this piece through its use of color to create light and shading. As seen on the right side of her forehead, the source of light seems to be placed on the right side of the piece. This is also shown in the highlights of her hair and the shadows cast by her shirt.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

The surrounding plants that make up the entire background of this painting are meant to represent life, health and prosperity. The thorns, however, may resemble the hardships in life and the often bad times. With the complications and misfortunes that Frida had to endure throughout the entirety of her life, it can be inferred that she represents those personal hardships through the thorns of the leaves.

Considering her past injuries and health conditions, death was constantly on her mind and seen as inevitable. Her thoughts are represented by the image in the middle of her forehead; a skull and crossbones with a barren background.



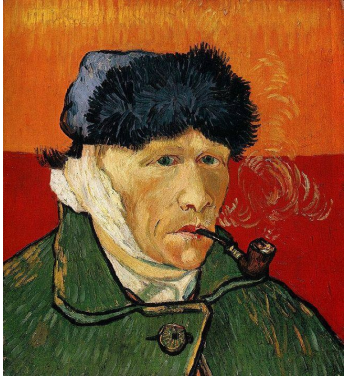
“Thinking about Death” by Frida Kahlo (1943)

The thought does not portray her specifically or portray any kind of specific catastrophic event causing death, indicating that death is a general concept applicable to everyone. It may also suggest the loss of individuality and identity once someone dies.

This painting may have also been inspired by her poor health status during that time, in which she was ill and bedridden.

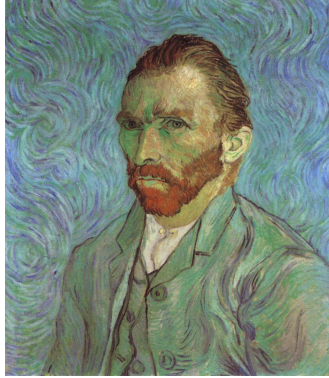
Her face cannot be described as panicked or scared, although it expresses a neutral and calming mood. This is also a crucial detail Frida included as it communicates her acceptance of death rather than fearing it and trying to avoid it.

Comparing Meaning Between Artists



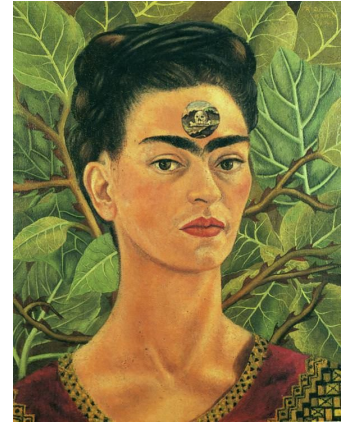
Vincent van Gogh

- Includes the unreal component through his technique and brushstrokes
- Depicts the aftermath of his actions made because of poor mental health, physical effects



Both

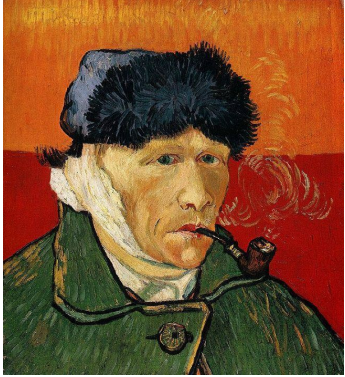
- Express a sense of mental illness or instability, Man vs Self
- Express the effects that their poor mental health has on them
- Man vs Self
- Include unrealistic ways of conveying their image
- Created after traumatic events from an all time low point in their lives
- The heavier weighted topic is depicted through the seriousness in their faces
- Background knowledge is needed to understand the purpose of the creation of these pieces



Frida Kahlo

- Includes the unreal component through the concept of an image on her forehead
- Depicts the effect of her poor mental health not physically but mentally through her thoughts

Comparing Artistic Styles Between Artists



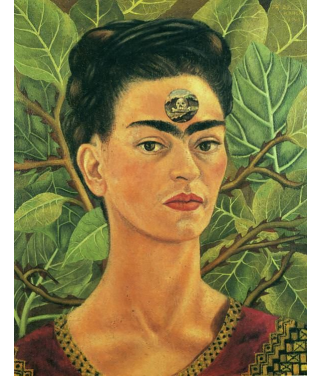
Vincent van Gogh

- Visible short and single brushstrokes creating patterns in different directions
- Unrealistic with the visible brushstrokes
- His portrait is the main focus with an almost plain background
- Displays his struggles in a more subtle, almost unnoticeable way



Both

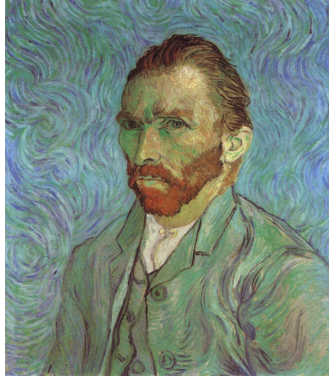
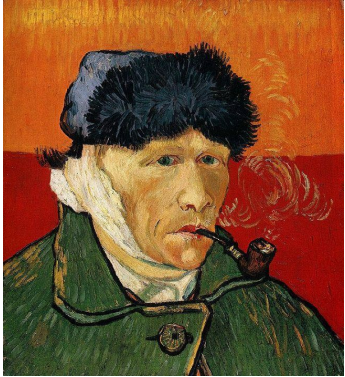
- Show significant interest in the side profile for self portraits while staring directly at the viewer
- Include much detail in the shadings of the face with different skin tones and reds
- Lighting always coming from the sides, never the front, below or above the portrait
- Pay specific attention to the texture and lighting in the hair and hat; highlighting strands and putting perspective into the lighting
- Incorporate a level of subtle symbolism in each piece (pipe, hectic background, leaves)



Frida Kahlo

- Smooth brushstrokes in which no individual ones can be seen
- Smooth and clear image, realistic
- Portrait is not the only focus as objects are placed in the background
- Displays her struggles in a more literal and upfront way

Comparing Use of Color Between Artists

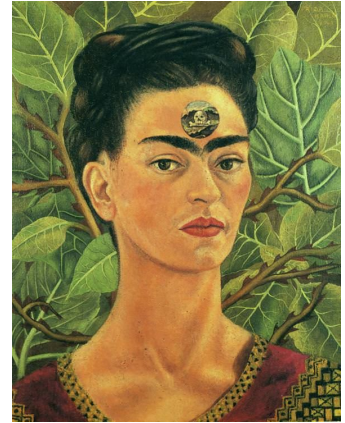


Vincent van Gogh

- Focus on the use of primary colors heavily throughout the two paintings
- Tendency to use bright, vibrant colors
- Backgrounds are mainly made up of solid colors with a slight pattern to them

Both

- Incorporate the colors of the background into the colors on the body and/or clothes
- Allow the choice of color influence the mood of the portrait
- Use color in the background as a form of contrast with their bodies
- Lighting is reflected in the backgrounds with some lighter areas as well as the bodies
- Have heavy uses of varying shades for the skin to seem realistic
- Shades and techniques used add texture to the pieces in the bodies and clothes



Frida Kahlo

- Focuses on the heavy use of secondary and tertiary colors
- Tendency to use soft and calm colors
- Background is made up of varying shades and colors to create actual realistic objects

Personal vs Van Gogh's Art

Similarities in All Pieces

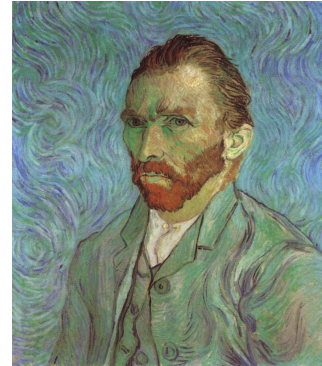
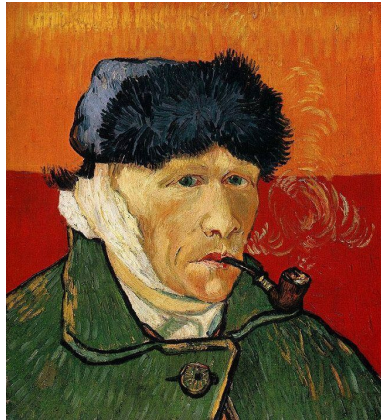
- Intricate backgrounds, inclusion of detailed lines and geometric factors
- Use of darker colors in the outlines of shapes and bodies
- Use color to convey a specific mood
- Express the theme of self acceptance and identity
- Body placement is shifted to one side
- Only the head and upper body is visible
- Display a sense of seriousness in the face due to lack of expression or smiling



“Myself” by Natalia Ramirez Vang, 2019



“In My Own Skin” by Natalia Ramirez Vang, 2019



Differences in All Pieces

- Little detail in both outlining and shading the facial features and structures in my pieces
- A stronger sense of concern, seriousness or upsetness in Van Gogh's pieces
- The theme of self comfort and acceptance in my pieces, inner issues and mental illness in Van Gogh's pieces
- Same techniques used in both the backgrounds and the clothing in Van Gogh's pieces

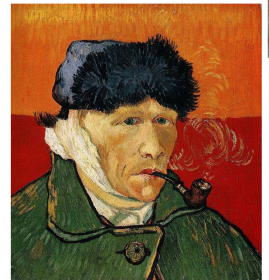
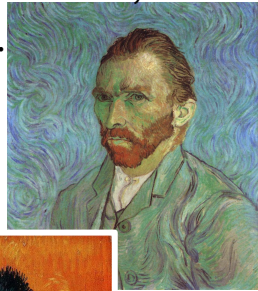
Meaning, Symbolism & Background Emphasis



The portraits from both my work and Van Gogh's work express the concept and theme of self acceptance and identity. All four works of art are meant to convey a certain feeling of acceptance for something different that contributes to the identity of someone, and include the most important factors when meeting someone and understanding their identity; the head, face, and personality. In "Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe" Van Gogh is displaying his newly mutilated ear, something that now makes up his physical identity, while calmly smoking a pipe to express acceptance for a consequence of his mental illness, a piece of his inner identity. In "Self-Portrait" by Van Gogh, he is posing in front of a hectic background also symbolizing his mental illness, while seeming more upset to contribute to the **mood**, as a message of being unhappy with what surrounds him, but

having the ability to convey it as being a part of who he is and his overall identity.

This is also shown in his use of **color** by using the same colors in the hectic background to make up his clothes as who he is, and not something separate. In my own pieces "Myself" and "In My Own Skin, I communicate acceptance for myself and my identity by also incorporating very busy backgrounds, symbolizing not the business of my own mind, but of life and events that happen around me. Identity is conveyed in Van Gogh's pieces through the physical appearance of him and the components that create his mind and personality. I conveyed both aspects by including my face in one piece without color, and excluding my face with many colors in the other piece.



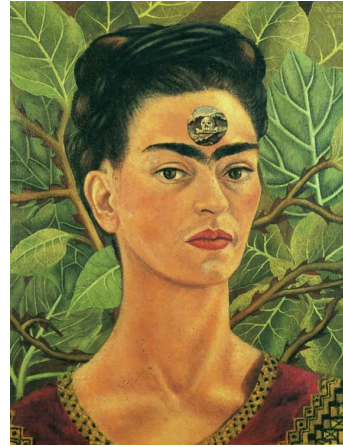
Personal vs Frida Kahlo's Art

Similarities in All Pieces

- The face on each is altered, none resembling a realistic face
- Expresses a current and certain state of mind, deeper thought
- Intricate backgrounds, including designs, patterns and varying colors
- Only head and upper body is visible
- Express a theme of self acceptance and identity



“Digital Collage.” NATALIA RAMIREZ VANG,
<https://nataliaramirezvang.weebly.com/digital-collage.html>.



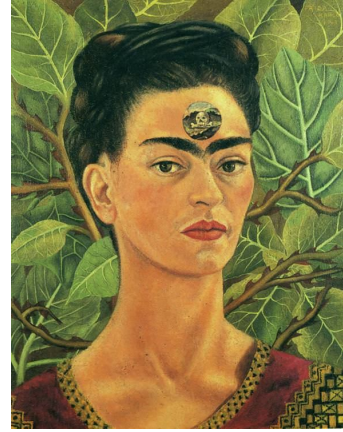
Differences in All Pieces

- Face is not shown in either of my pieces
- A sense of comfort and ease is expressed in my pieces, Frida's expresses discomfort and mental illness
- Frida's style takes a realistic approach to her technique of shading and texture
- Frida's piece is more focused on her close up portrait, not much room left for background or clothes

Meaning, Symbolism, and Self Portrait Emphasis



In terms of **balance**, Frida's "Thinking About Death" is strategically placed in the foreground of her piece to immediately catch the attention of the viewers. The background is compiled of more subtle and muted **values** compared to the brighter **colors** of her skin, while the vines create a sense of **movement** to bring the attention back to her body by originating from behind her and reaching out to almost all ends of the image. The state of her inner identity is communicated through the symbolism of her mentality, a skull and crossbones representing her mental illness. The calmness expressed on her face and her display of her mentality in the first place is a form of accepting her conflicts and expressing them through a more literal and upfront approach. My pieces, however, although similar in theme and symbolism, are more subtle in displaying the subject and express a healthy form of self acceptance and a positive outlook on my identity.



In my piece "Optimist" I use a symbol of my hometown to symbolize the negatively known things about the city and how it surrounds me. My versions of altering the face are covering with the flowers and not including a face at all, to symbolize my positive mindset. I am heavily reliant on my use of **color** to express **mood** rather than my face or use of symbolism, it is the way that I communicate my inner identity. As well as in my piece "Myself", where I also rely on those aspects of color to reflect my inner identity, while having no facial expression, such as Frida. My pieces and Frida's use these different ways of expressing our acceptance for our inner identities by altering our outside and physical identities, communicating how we would physically appear if both our mental and physical identities reflected each other.

Connection of All Three Artists

Van Gogh, Frida and I all share the same interest of representing our most personal feelings, good and bad, through the creation of self portraits, creating a clear connection that the subject is meant to reflect an inner and mental personality through its corresponding outer and physical selves. In many pieces that artists make, they incorporate their personal beliefs and morals through personal experiences. Self portraits, themselves, are the representation of the effects of those experiences on the person. These are directly communicated through the alterations of their use of **line**, **color** and **forms** for their faces and bodies. All of these pieces could have communicated their meanings through techniques that did not include any person or human like, but each artist chose to do so to tie these feelings to a specific person, making it incredibly personal and almost wrong to tie them to anyone else. In creating these upfront and personal ideas, the viewers get insight to this artist's identity. Identity, taking its many forms through cultural, ethnical, physical, or more, was expressed in these pieces through expression of mental identity. When negative, as many of these pieces are, they carry a Man vs Self theme. While the others have, too, reached that point in their history, they focus on the positive aftermath of the overcoming. No matter the final product, each piece has recognized the issues of Man vs Self and its effects on one's mentality and inner identity.

