

NATIONAL MODERNISMS I

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**MEXICAN MURALISM**

# Questions to explore

- ▶ What is the goal of art?
- ▶ To what extent is art supposed to be autonomous and separated from everyday life?
- ▶ Does art that communicates a certain political message cross the line from art to propaganda, or is there a hazier area between the two?
- ▶ What does public art accomplish? If muralism is monumental and public, how do you think it functions differently than small, private works of art that are made for consumption by the art market and institutions like museums?

# What is Mexican Muralism?

Government funded form of public art- specifically large scale wall paintings on public buildings- in the wake of the Mexican Revolution



Secretariat of Education in Mexico City



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

- ▶ 1910 to 1920: civil war in Mexico as citizens revolt against dictator Porfirio Diaz
- ▶ Believed that land should be in the hands of the laborers who worked it
- ▶ Demand for agrarian reform, universal public education, health care and civil liberties



A group of rebel women and girls wearing traditional dress practice their shooting skills for the Mexican Revolution in 1911.





## ART OF THE REVOLUTION

- ▶ Iconography featuring atypical, non-European heroes
- ▶ Aztec warriors, peasants fighting in the Revolution, common laborers

**Mexicanidad:** movement reviving the indigenous religion, philosophy and traditions of ancient Mexico among the Mexican people.

Diego Rivera

*Agrarian Leader Zapata*

1931



“In this environment where everything was moving and changing, the role of the artist was not so much to engage in laboratory experimentation, but rather to collect the scraps from this ever-changing social, political, and industrial world in order to build something that made sense.” – Mexican scholar Renato González Mello



David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Dates in Mexican History or the Right for Culture*, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), 1952-56



# Key characteristics

- ▶ Way to spread visual messages to the illiterate population, which created a new sense of inclusion and community.
- ▶ Often the messages promoted pride in cultural and national identity, Mexico's historical traditions or political propaganda.
- ▶ Bypassed more traditional forms of advertising and pamphlet printing.
- ▶ Although the early Mexican murals were inclined toward the favouring of socialism, they would evolve over time to portray these like the industrial revolution, the progress of technology and capitalism (were influenced by current events)
- ▶ Mexican muralist was an influential predecessor of today's public art. It sought to liberate the art market from its elitism and make art accessible to everyone.

# Los Tres Grandes (The Three Greats)



David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera





Diego Rivera, *Creation*, the Bolívar Auditorium of the National Preparatory School in Mexico City, 1922-23



**Fresco:** A technique of painting rapidly in watercolour on wet plaster directly onto a wall, so that the colours penetrate the plaster and become fixed as the plaster dries







Diego Rivera  
The History of Mexico  
National Palace, Mexico  
1935

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/latin-america-modernism/mexican/a/the-history-of-mexico-diego-riveras-murals-at-the-national-palace>











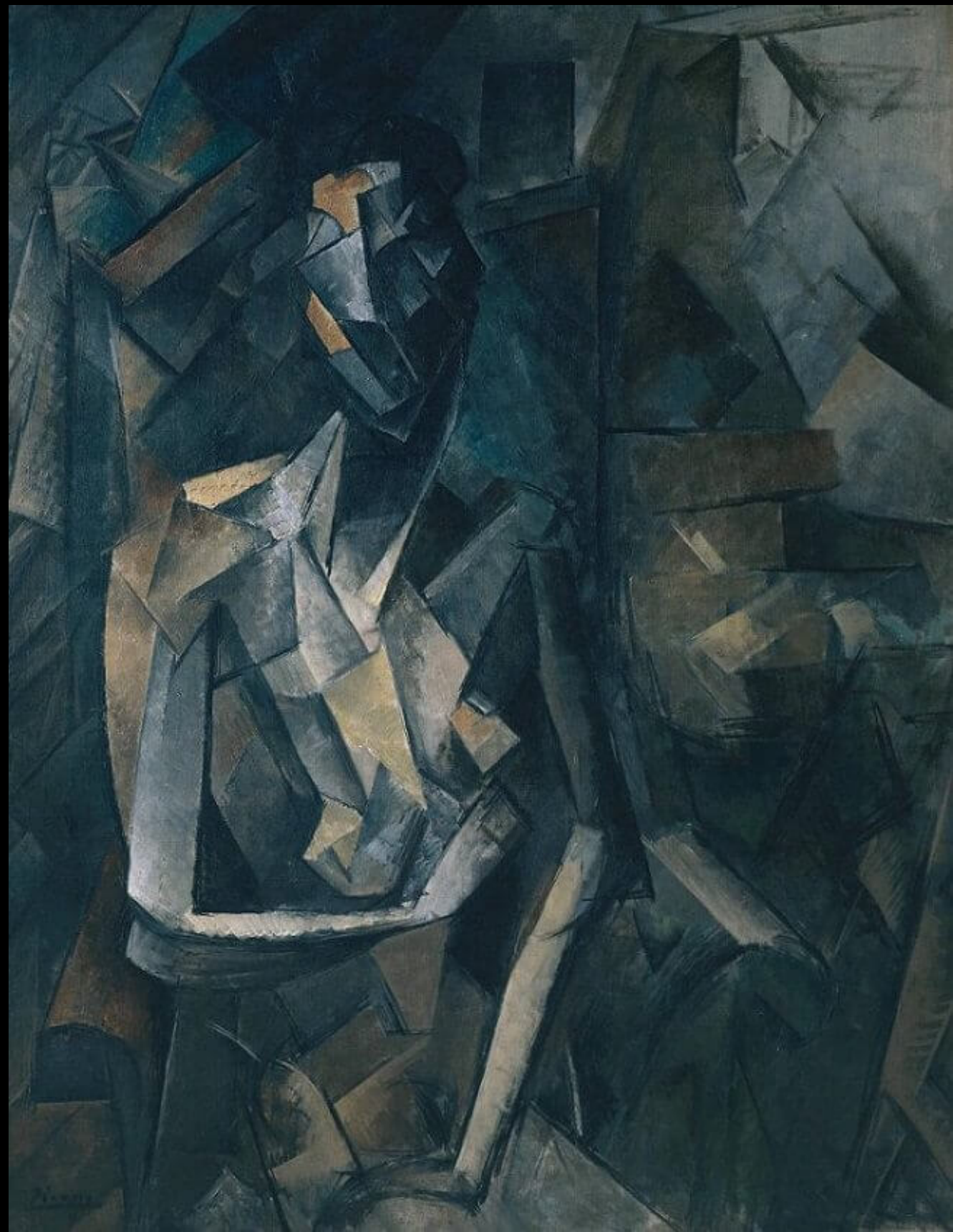


José Clemente Orozco, *The Trench*, 1926





José Clemente Orozco, *The Trench*, 1926



Picasso, *Seated Nude*, 1909





José Clemente Orozco, *Prometheus*, 1930





Photograph at Pomona College, California





David Alfaro Siqueiros, Collective Suicide. 1936





David Alfaro Siqueiros

SME mural

1939





David Alfaro Siqueiros

SME mural

1939







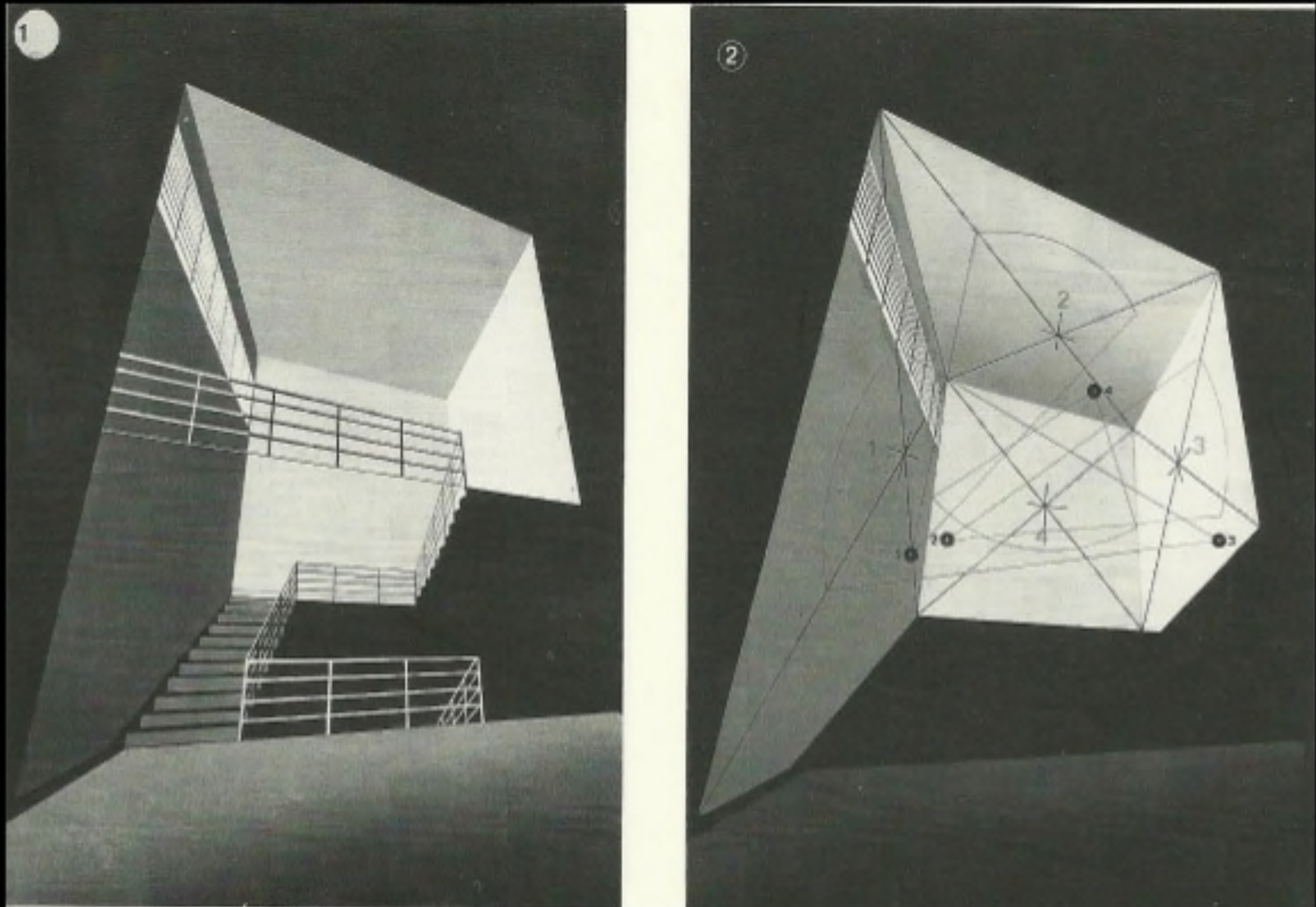
David Alfaro Siqueiros

SME mural

1939

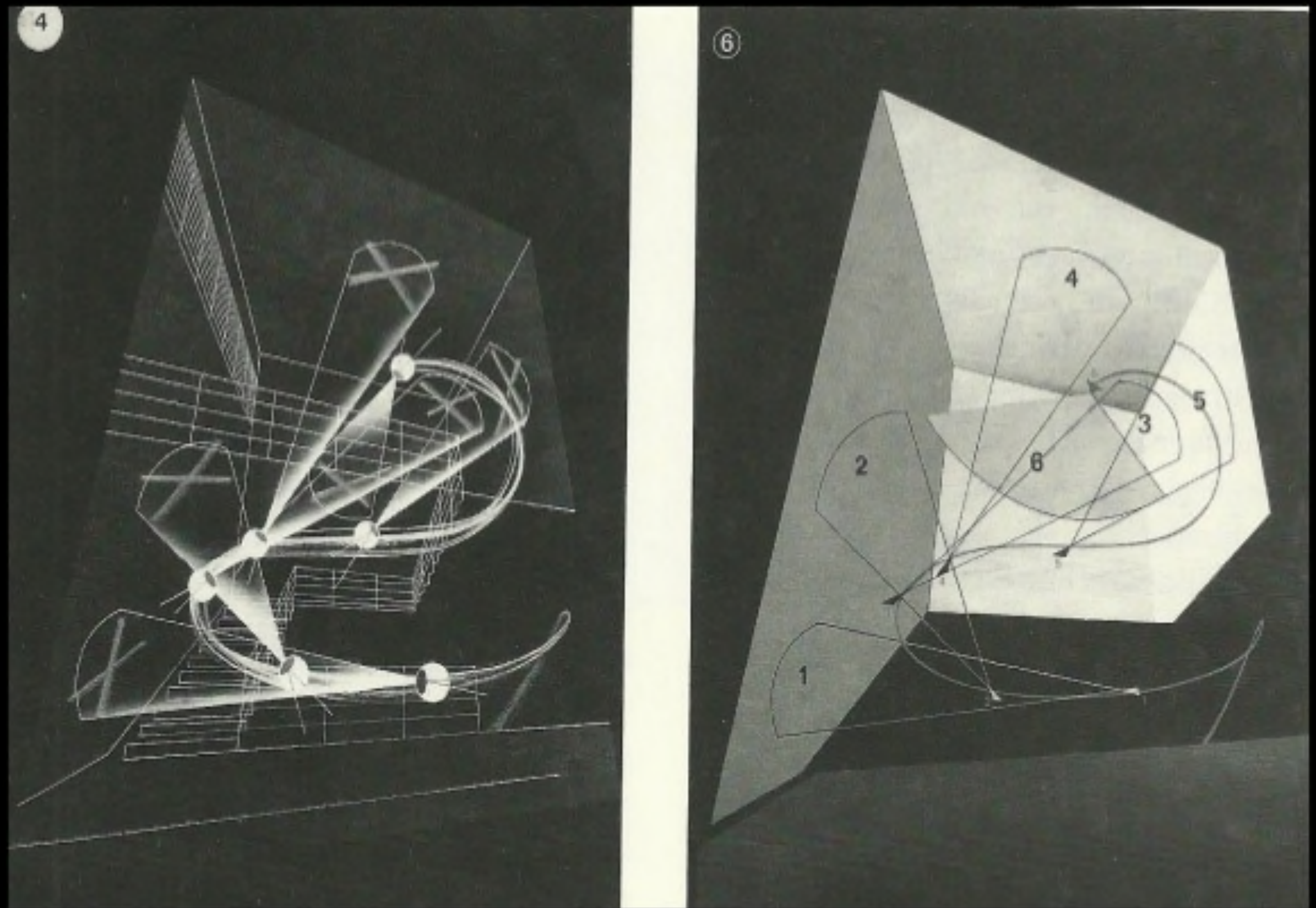


Siqueiros referred to this compositional technique as "polyangular perspective" : using multiple viewpoints in a three dimensional space



*Portrait of the Bourgeoisie (perspective diagram of stairwell), 1939-40.*





*Portrait of the Bourgeoisie* (perspective diagram of stairwell), 1939-40.





## Modernism beyond the Los Tres Grandes

Maria Izquierdo

*Self Portrait*

1940





Maria Izquierdo  
*Sorrowful Fridays*  
 1944-45



Maria Izquierdo  
*Our Lady of Sorrows*  
 1943



# The works of Frida Kahlo



Frida Kahlo, *Me and My Parrots*, 1941  
Banco de México



Frida Kahlo, *Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940.



# Cultural ambivalence and ancestral heritage

*indigenismo*: the ideology that upheld the Indian as an important marker of national identity

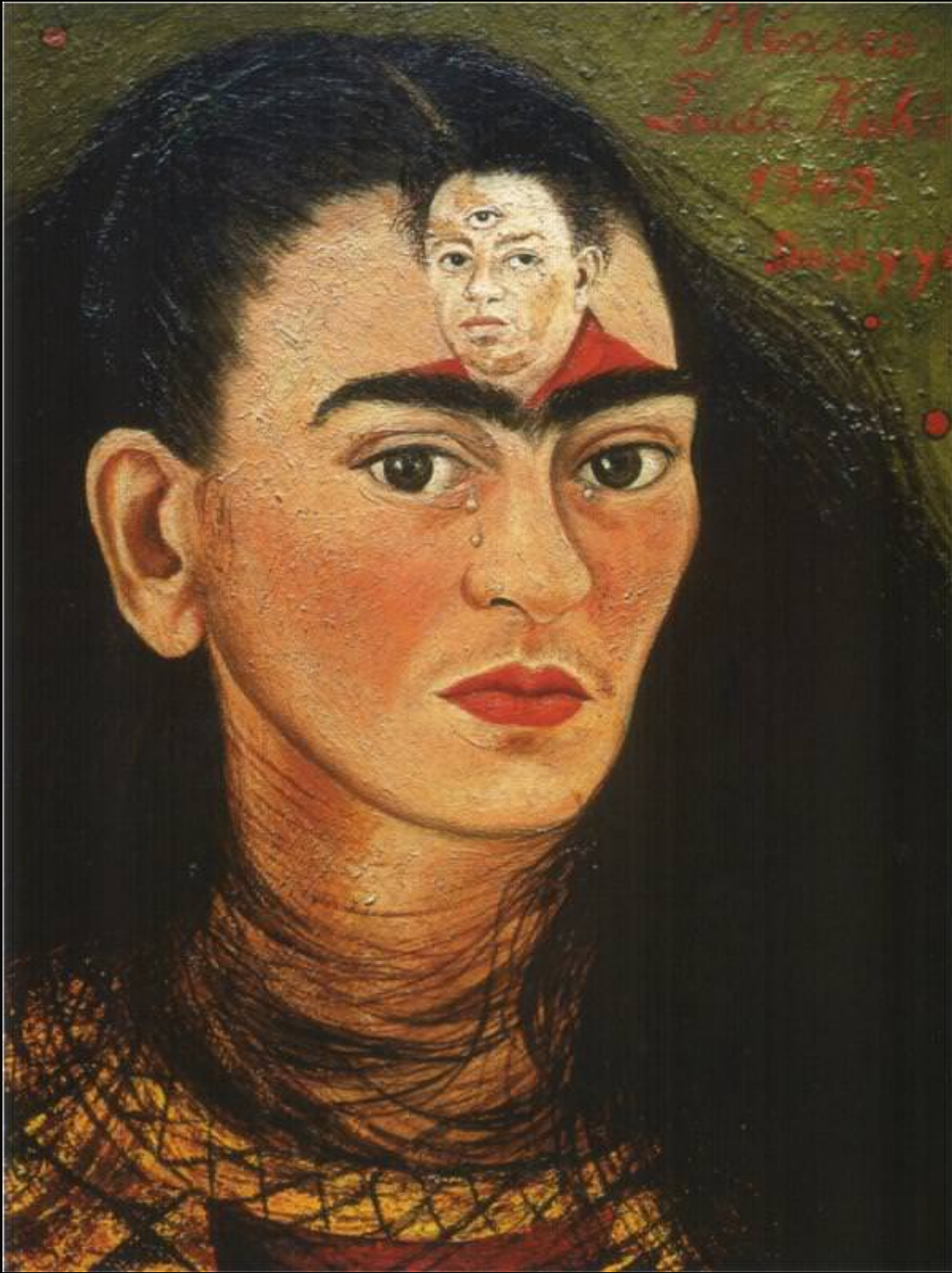
*mestizaje*: the racial mixing that occurred as a result of the colonization of the Spanish-speaking Americas



Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*, 1936, oil and tempera on zinc, 30.7 x 34.5 cm  
(Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City)



# Kahlo and Rivera



Frida Kahlo, *Diego and I*, 1949, oil on canvas



Frida Kahlo, *Frida and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas



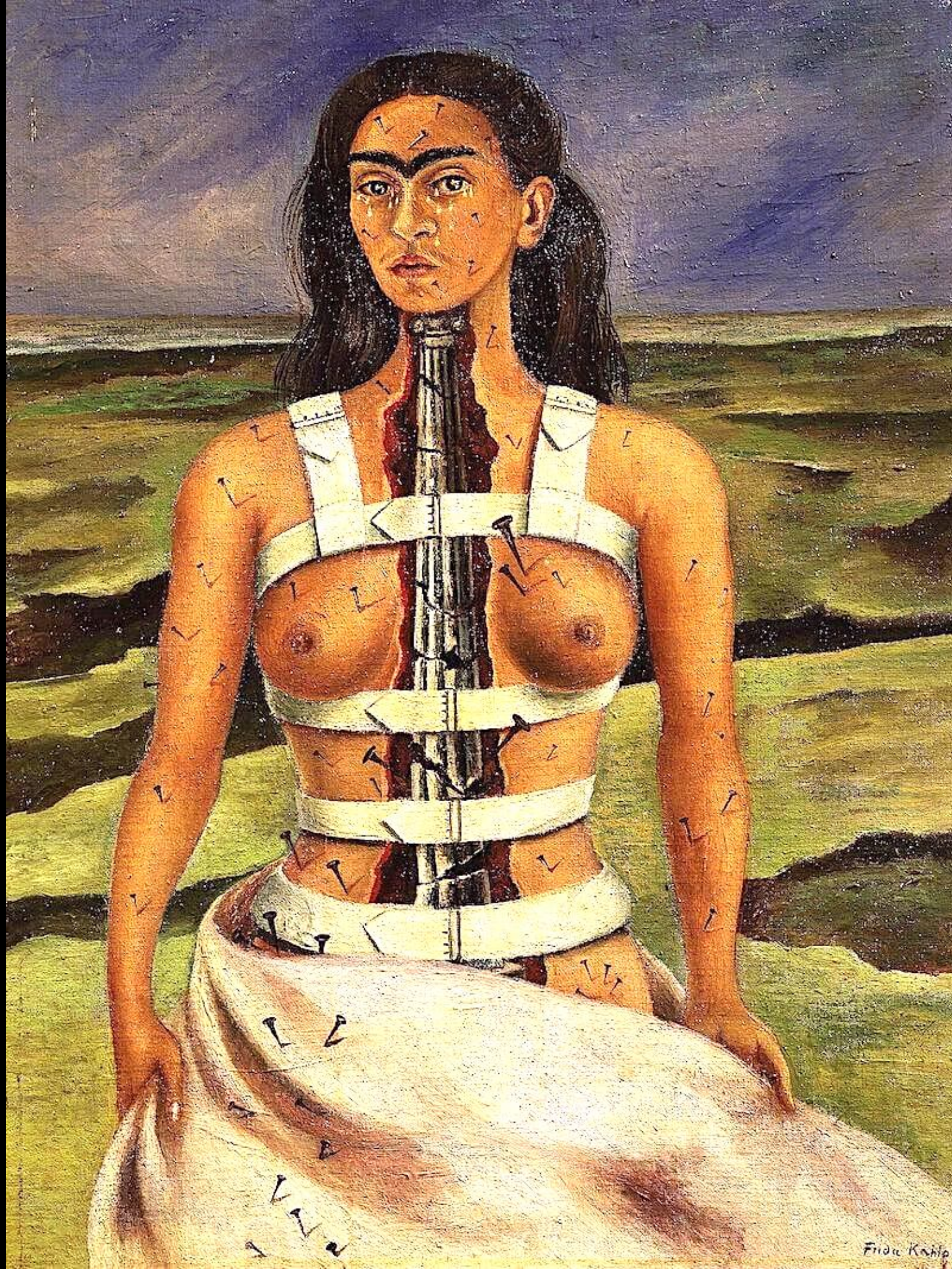


## Gender Identity

Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, oil on canvas, 40 x 27.9 cm (Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City)



## Pain and Suffering



Frida Kahlo, *Broken Column*, 1944



# Kahlo and Mexican Surrealism

"They thought I was a Surrealist but I wasn't, I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality." -Frida Kahlo



Frida Kahlo,  
*Wounded Deer*,  
1940





- ▶ Three “key words”
- ▶ Three visual observations about her work
- ▶ Three questions that you have about her practice

Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, 1939