
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kai Coggin: “Trying On Your Eyebrows (for Frida Kahlo)”

Kai Coggin · Wednesday, January 13th, 2021

Trying On Your Eyebrows (*for Frida Kahlo*)

I didn't expect
the effect it would have
on me,
darkening my meager brow-line,
my skinny ridges,
thickening each with coarse
and insensitive strokes at first,
forming a straight bridge across
the fattened islands now thoroughfare
of mascara-simulated blackened hair.

Straight across
was just not right,
just not you,
the mirror
and my memory of your face
demanded a redo.

I scrubbed it off,
began again,
sacred stepping into character,
artist to artist,
I wanted to paint you
onto me,
Frida—
vibrant chaos,
mystical and untouchable,
I wanted to touch what I could of you,
stepped back and studied your eyes,
your lips— their pouty fullness
that comes from being broken
and put back together with colors,
with lines,
this time I would get it right.

A shot of whiskey.
Salud! and *Viva la Revolución!*
of painting me into you.

Trying on your eyebrows
this second time,
I painted your depth onto my face,
studied the curvature and arcs
of where your brows meet and how they start,
a valley between two fervent black hills,
dark but lighter still and lighter still,
a point that bends toward your nose,
shading and fading,
yes, there.

I whip up the dark curtain of my hair
and don a crown of bright roses.
I start to feel you coming through,
my spine cracks like a cage opening,
I paint my lips bright crimson,
the blood of life and disaster in your name,
self-portrait you across my mouth
which has already mastered the art
of not smiling in photos,
the darkness and depth of your eyes
stare back at me as I refine and refine,
painstakingly shade and sketch each line of brow
between my temples,
this holy act of becoming
the artist and the art.

It is shocking to see such power and beauty,
strength and defiance reflecting back in the glass.

Frida, you could have easily shaved this land bridge,
this connection of two midnight caterpillars
wooly atop your eyes,
but you didn't,
there must've been something you liked
about the androgyny of it all,
the paradox of your undeniable beauty
challenging society's definition of femininity,
the masculine brows and soul-scathing stare.

How many hours did you peer into mirrors
with paintbrush fingers
painting your reality in what critics called surrealism,
but really was just you,
your face,

alone in this solitary place
with no one to answer but your own eyes,
cast-wrapped solid and unbreakable again,
cast away as cripple in the story of your own life,
you went deeper within yourself than most would ever dare,
and only through painting your thick black beautiful eyebrows
did I see the true mystery and intrigue you arouse,
Mexican Mona Lisa,
follow me across every room,
undo me with your heavily-weighted stare.

Frida— captivating sorceress of dreams,
bedridden captive with your mind in the multiverse,
lover, fighter, and lover again,
my brushstrokes are homage your fiery heart,
vines and leaves sprout from my mouth
budding flowers I pluck
to lay at your holy brow-line,
a bridge to beauty
I never crossed before tonight.

Photo credit: David Yerby

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