

to paint murals for the Detroit Institute of the Arts. The subject is Kahlo's yearning for her homeland during her stay in what she referred to "Gringolandia."

If we examine the contrast Kahlo draws between Mexico and the United States, we begin to understand her purpose. Frida stands between a pre-Columbian temple that reminds us of Mexico's ancient, indigenous heritage, and a U.S. factory, which is depicted through smoke-belching chimney stacks labeled "Ford." In fact, the sun, moon, and lightning bolt on the Mexican side suggest the power of nature, while the smoke on the U.S. side portrays industrial waste and pollution. Along the bottom of the painting, there are native plants in bloom in Mexico, while in the United States, three alien-looking machines with black electric cords appear to be growing from the ground. The rich earth tones of plant life contrast sharply with the gray tones used to depict the mechanical environment of the factories.

So if Kahlo's purpose is to contrast a culture more attuned to natural forces with an industrialized and dehumanized one, who is her audience? This is not an easy question, but we might speculate that the central figure holding a Mexican flag is reminding her North American neighbors — and hosts — that theirs is not the only, nor necessarily the superior, society. We might even say that, to achieve her purpose, Kahlo idealizes her own more traditional, agrarian culture while she exaggerates the factories that dominate the U.S. landscape.

ACTIVITY

***Covered Wagons Heading West*, a painting by artist Newell Convers Wyeth (1882–1945) depicts American pioneers heading west during the mid-nineteenth century, possibly on the Oregon Trail. Analyze the rhetorical situation in this painting, making sure to pay close attention to the relationship between the artist, the context, the likely audience, and the purpose of the work.**



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