

# Broken Dreams of Motherhood: Frida's Pictures of Pain

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The ivory carving presented in last month's issue reminded us both of *Henry Ford Hospital*, painted by Frida Kahlo in 1932. We hope that the connection between these pieces, created for such different reasons, will stimulate some reflection.

Frida was born outside Mexico City in 1907. In a short life riddled with physical and emotional pain, she survived childhood polio and later, when she was a pre-medical student, a devastating tram car accident. (She said she had two major accidents in her life: the first was being hit by a tram and the second, marrying Diego Rivera.)

This small painting (16" × 12") reflects one facet of her struggles: a history of recurrent pregnancy loss. It was painted while her husband Diego Rivera was working on a series of murals for industrialist Edsel Ford in Detroit.

The elements of the painting reflect her reality—the snail symbolizing the agonizing slowness of her struggle to bear children.

Her fertility problems may have been secondary to both polycystic ovary syndrome and Asherman's syndrome. She was slim but somewhat hirsute. Although it is a matter of conjecture, her uterus may have been damaged by both infection and direct trauma, following abortions and a penetrating abdominal injury at the time of the crash. Whatever the underlying pathologies of her life, Frida's paintings stand out as representations of a woman's struggle with chronic pain as well as infertility.

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