

When Amrita Shergill met Frida Kahlo*

I am the Amrita of Mexico, Frieda says, smoothing down the pleats of her crimson dress. She leans forward and touches Amrita's cheeks. You are pale my dear. Let me warm your blood with a shot of tequila and ice. And so they begin. Lying on a beach side-by-side, holding hands. The sea waves at night are birdsong. The waves peck at their feet. Above them, the stars are a thousand peeping toms. Their hours are few for when morning comes they will dissolve -a fistful of ether and ash. But for now there is a whole landscape of memory to traverse. A calendar of names to stone and abuse. The men who built them and tore them down. The children who forgot to wake up inside their womb. Their bodies that betrayed them again and again. Breasts and bone, the liver, the heart sliced like fruit for the world to feast

We had fun and we had pain Amrita says. How many locks did we break, how many maiden aunts did we hoodwink, slipping away in the thick of storm, pulling out our paintbrush like a sword. There were no winners only casualties in this war. Frida presses her thumb against Amrita's mouth. Hush no regrets my friend. We were born women but we were not born slaves. You and I were meant to pull down walls.

Love has undone us both. Look at the scars we carry. Let us consider them gifts. They brought us our art. They fall asleep. And just beyond the rim of dark the baying of dogs begins.

**Amrita Sher-Gil was a Hungarian-Indian painter. She has been called "one of the greatest avant-garde women artists of the early 20th century" and a "pioneer" in modern Indian art. 1913-1941*

Frida Kahlo was a Mexican painter known for her many portraits, self-portraits, and works inspired by the nature and artefacts of Mexico. 1907-1954