• **Frida** (Julia Taymor 2002): based on the bio by Hayden Herrera

• **Characters**: Frida (Salma Hayak); Cristina (Mia Maestro); Alex (boyfriend); Diego Rivera (Alfred Molina); Lupe (ex wife of Diego); Matilde & Guillermo (Mom & Dad); Dr. Farrill; Tina Modotti (Ashley Judd); Siqueiros (Antonio Banderas); Leon and Natalia Trotsky; Nelson Rockefeller (Edward Norton)

• **Historical Info**: Frida died at 47; Frida attends her 1953 Mexican show but dies shortly after in 1954; Rivera dies in 1957 (he was 21 years her senior); Kahlo had pain before the trolley accident: she had polio as a child; the trolley accident resulted in 35 or so operations

• **Reviews**:  
  ➢ Early in their marriage, Frida Kahlo tells Diego Rivera she expects him to be "not faithful, but loyal." She holds herself to the same standard. Sexual faithfulness is a bourgeois ideal that they reject as Marxist bohemians who disdain the conventional. But passionate jealousy is not unknown to them, and both have a double standard, permitting themselves freedoms they would deny the other. During the course of "Frida," Kahlo has affairs with Leon Trotsky and Josephine Baker (not a shabby dance card), and yet rages at Diego for his infidelities. (Roger Ebert)

  ➢ [...] Julie Taymor's movie version of Kahlo's life, *Frida*, makes the artist seem more like a human being and less like a craft-fair novelty than she has in years. Like Kahlo herself, the picture is imperious and colorful; the opening sequence shows us the courtyard outside of Kahlo's home, a clatter of sun-warmed royal blues, marigold oranges and brick reds, a place where monkeys and fawn-colored dogs scamper like living decorations. It doesn't seem like a real-life courtyard, but like one imagined by an artist, its colors intensified a few notches beyond reality. It seems to be a trick on Taymor's part to plant us inside Kahlo's mind, to start us out by making us see what she sees in precisely the same way she sees it, and it's an effective one. Instead of lengthening the distance between us ordinary schmoes and the exalted artist, Taymor foreshortens it. It's a clever bit of Marxist artistry. [...] Molina plays Rivera as a rotund, sexy bear -- though you can't quite put your finger on why, you understand exactly why he'd have no trouble scoring babes. But his untethered sexuality exists as something apart from his devotion to Frida; especially as Molina plays him, it's easy to understand Frida's love for him -- this is anything but a study in victimology. (Stephanie Zacharek, Salon.com)

  ➢ It's defiant about Kahlo's looks, her politics, her bisexual promiscuity - all those aspects that might alienate more conservative audiences. *Frida* has proven surprisingly controversial among critics, perhaps because its subject and director make it, in a way, a cultural event. But I can't agree with the much-repeated judgment that it's a by-the-numbers bio. Whatever its flaws, *Frida* is a movie that seizes you up, catches fire and dances. (Michael Wilmington, Chicago Tribune)

  ➢ One of the things I like least about being a film critic is saying not-too-nice things about projects that represent a lifetime's passion for one of the involved parties. Sadly, such is the case with Julie Taymor's *Frida*, a motion picture that has been a longtime obsession for producer/star Salma Hayek. In bringing the bio-pic of artist Frida Kahlo to the screen, Hayek had to overcome numerous obstacles, including Madonna and Jennifer Lopez (both of whom wanted to play the role), limited funds that didn't allow her to hire a ghost re-writer (her boyfriend, Edward Norton, did it for free), and conflict with the men holding the purse strings at Miramax Films. The good news is that the movie was eventually made. The bad news is that maybe it shouldn't have been. (James Berardinelli)
Questions:

1. How is Kahlo’s gender and sexuality foregrounded in the film? In what ways does it explain her relationship with Rivera?

2. The standard formula for artist and subject is painter/photographer (male) + muse (female). In what ways is this formula complicated by *Frida*? In what scenes?

3. Streeter posits that the posture women take in relationship to the camera indicates the gender hierarchy. How might we use Streeter to analyze Kahlo’s work?

4. *Frida* was panned by many critics, some of whom argued that the film focused too much on her relationship with Rivera and too much on her status as victim. Do you agree with these assessments? Why or why not?

5. Does the film represent female characters the way that women are typically represented in cinema (according to Lehman and Luhr)?

6. Do you consider *Frida* to be an example of a "woman’s film," according to the criteria set forth by Bechdel? Why or why not?

7. Drawing on Giannetti, explain the film’s ideological perspective.