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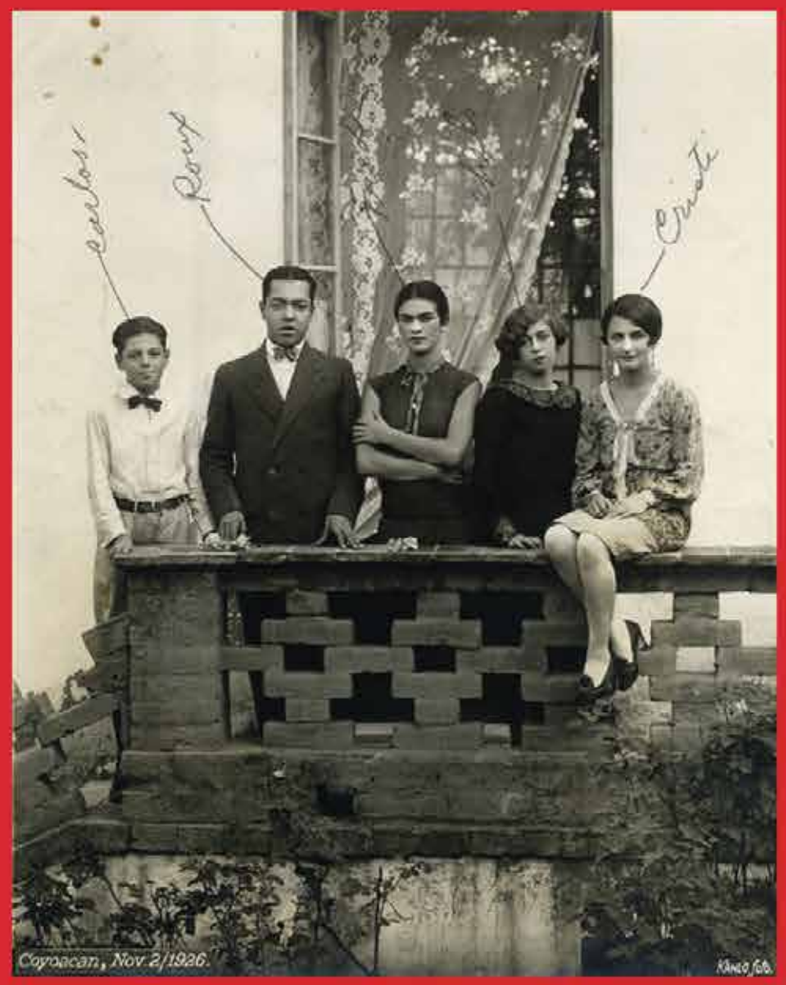
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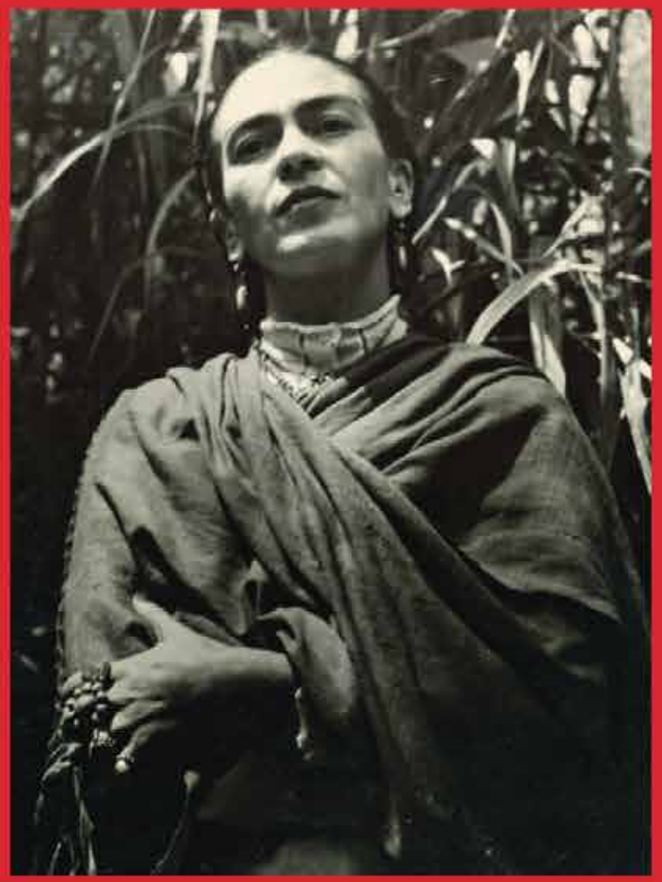

FRIDA KAHLO

TIMELESS

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Timeless,* organized by the Cleve Carney Museum of Art and the McAninch Arts Center at the College of DuPage, curated by Justin Witte, and presented at the Cleve Carney Museum of Art June 5, 2021–September 6, 2021.

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FRIDA KAHLO

Works on loan from the Dolores Olmedo Museum

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We are pleased to partner with the Cleve Carney Museum of Art and the McAninch Arts Center at the College of DuPage as the presenting sponsor of *Frida Kahlo: Timeless*, which will be the most comprehensive presentation of Kahlo's work displayed in the Chicago area in over 40 years. The 26-piece collection, on loan from the Museo Dolores Olmedo, features an array of oil paintings and works on paper spanning the life of Kahlo. Visitors to these institutions will have an exceptional way to experience the creativity of one of the world's most renowned artists of the 20th century.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition would not have been possible if not for the efforts and support of our partners, staff, and community. First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Carlos Philips Olmedo, and Adriana Jaramillo for providing us with the opportunity to exhibit Frida Kahlo's works. The Peterson Family—Alan, Milly, Mark and Marcie Peterson—whose commitment to the College of DuPage and our community has made this possible.

We extend the deepest gratitude to our sponsors: Bank of America, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Enjoy Illinois, Ball Horticultural, DuPage Foundation, Wight & Company, Nicor Gas, Illinois Arts Council, Rotary, Goya Foods, Legat Architects, and Delta/ Aeromexico.

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We also want to acknowledge the work and support of our Host Committee Donors: Mr. and Mrs. David R. Andalcio, John A. Attard, Jacqueline S. Camacho-Ruiz, Dr. and Mrs. Brian W. Caputo, Dr. and Mrs. Mark Curtis-Chavez, Mr. and Mrs. Earl E. Dowling, Jr., Ms. Sarah J. Koten, Karen and Gene Kuhn, Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Lamb, Diana L. Martinez, Representative Deanne M. Mazzochi, Dr. and Mrs. Harold D. McAninch, Michael and Margaret McCoy, Sherman Neal, Judith May O'Dell, Dorothy I. O'Reilly, Anthony Padgett, Mr. and Mrs. Mark A. Peterson, Kelly and Roland Raffel, William C. and Mary Ellen Schumann, Annette and Frank Shoemaker, Carlos Tortolero, Dr. Donald G. Westlake, and Kathleen C. Yosko.

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We would also like to highlight the work of the staff who have worked so hard to produce this exhibition: Project Coordinator, Molly Junokas; Associate Curator, Marcela Andrade Serment; Registrar, Therese Peskowits; Conservator, Daniela Leonard; Preparator, James Lambrix; McAninch Art Center Staff: Paula Cebula, Julie Elges, Jon Gantt, Jim Gosling, Joe Hopper, Ben Johnson, Kat Kazmierski, Ellen McGowan, Michael Moon, Elias Morales, Tom Murray, Rob Nardini, Fisher Parsons, Mandy Rakow, Roland Raffel, Janey Sarther, Kari Schoettle, Elise Wash, and Sabrina Zeidler.

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And this would not be possible without the support of the College of DuPage Board of Trustees, President Dr. Brian Caputo, The College of DuPage Foundation Board and Executive Director Karen Kuhn. Special thanks to the College of DuPage Department of Institutional Advancement and Walter Johnson, Janie Oldfield, Ellen Farrow, Kristy Martis, Marcia Frank and the grants office and Barb Abromitis. Deepest thanks to COD operations team Bruce Schmiedl, Don Inman, Dave Ditchfield, Chief Joseph Mullin, Lt. Kent Munsterman, Deputy Chief James Nehls, Robert Murr, Thomas Brady, Ellen Roberts, Phil Gieschen, Lily Kailin, Charlie Philbrick, Scott Brady, Dave Virgilio, Judy Zeh, Maki Jursinic, Michelle Olson Rzeminski, Maria Danan, Debbie Wendling Brian Clement, Amy Hull, Monica Chowaniec, Judy Coates, and Eric Schultz. Gracias to faculty member Bonnie Loder for Spanish translations.

Finally, we would like to thank Celia Stahr for her essay, Michael Savona and Renata Graw for their work in designing the catalog and consulting with the exhibition, and Grafiche Veneziane Soc. Coop. for their help in printing.

Diana Martinez, Director of the McAninch Arts Center and Executive Director of *Frida Kahlo: Timeless*

Justin Witte, Director and Curator of the Cleve Carney Museum of Art, and Curator of *Frida Kahlo: Timeless*

President's Foreward

On behalf of College of DuPage I would like to welcome you to *Frida Kahlo: Timeless*. At the college, we are committed to providing world class cultural experiences and education to our students and the diverse members of our community. This unprecedented exhibition is an example of that commitment.

Frida Kahlo was a dedicated teacher who encouraged her students to take on ambitious projects, often encouraging them to work on murals or other commissions. Even when Kahlo's poor health prevented her from traveling to the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, where she was a professor, she continued to teach her students from her home. Like Kahlo, the staff and faculty at the College of DuPage are committed to improving the lives and works of their students. It is fitting that Kahlo's work and her story will now be contributing to those efforts.

Frida Kahlo overcame numerous obstacles in her life. At College of DuPage we know that each student has their own path to success. It is our goal to provide students with the guidance, encouragement and support so that they, like Kahlo, can overcome whatever stands in their way as they travel their own paths to success.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our partners, staff, and supporters who have helped to make this exhibition possible. This event is truly an example of what our college and community are capable of when we work together toward a common goal.

Brian W. Caputo, Ph.D., C.P.A.
President
College of DuPage

!Bienvenidos! and Welcome to Frida Kahlo: Timeless

Photo courtesy of College of DuPage

In November of 2017, when I met Alan Peterson, a longtime supporter of the McAninch Arts Center, for lunch, we could not have predicted that the next four years would allow us to focus all of our thoughts and energy would be transfixed by one woman. At that lunch, Alan presented the idea of bringing the art of Frida Kahlo from the Olmedo Museum in Mexico to the McAninch Arts Center at the College of DuPage, to, as he said, "Put the MAC on the map."

From that day forward, the ideas never stopped. The opportunities and possibilities grew from that lunch table, blossoming through the town and into the county, the city of Chicago, and the state of Illinois. Partners, sponsors, elected officials, colleagues, and artists stepped forward to collaborate, their enthusiasm growing exponentially. The goal was to make this show far more than an exhibition by leveraging the unique resource that only an Arts Center within a Community College could offer. We wanted to use our creative team, the College faculty, and our partner organizations to make the art accessible to all people, and create an educational and artistic experience that celebrates the Mexican heritage, culture, music, and art that Frida Kahlo cherished.

Kahlo's dynamic and magnetic personality attracted unique people who wanted to contribute time, talent, and expertise. This enabled us to offer unique experiences spotlighting the many facets of her life, including art, history, fashion, cuisine, politics, physical disability, animals, music, feminism, and horticulture. These generous and dedicated people gave their talents and passion to breathe the heart and soul into this exhibition and the events leading up to it. *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* is the result of a years-long collaboration and the hundreds of people who have joined us on this journey.

This has all stemmed from the trust and friendship of two men, Alan Peterson and Carlos Phillips Olmedo of the Olmedo Museum; without them, none of this would have been possible. Alan said the success in his life came from building bridges and connections. These two incredible men from different ends of our shared continent have inspired us to build bridges of friendship and collaborations beyond our wildest dreams.

I do not know how one properly thanks hundreds of people who have given their time, talent, and resources for making *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* a historic and beautiful experience. Saying, "Thank you," does not seem to be enough. I am forever grateful that we all now have the privilege of being connected to something greater than any one of us could have done alone.

On behalf of the entire MAC staff, we hope you enjoy the exhibition and experience the same joy we have received from the rich Mexican culture infused into all that is Frida Kahlo.

Diana Martinez
Director of the McAninch Arts Center
College of DuPage

Dolores Olmedo, History of a Collection

Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico

Celebrated Mexican art collector and spearhead of the twentieth century, Dolores Olmedo is a woman whose talent and perception led her into the sensibility, idiosyncrasy and magic of the private worlds of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, certainly the two most exceptional icons of Mexican art. Her devotion and generosity toward these artists, as well as others, became an obsession. She was determined to provide a legacy for the people of Mexico, and to take the country's art a step further, into the realm of the world's cultural heritage.

María de los Dolores Olmedo y Patiño Suárez was born in the district of Tacubaya, once an independent town within Mexico City, on December 14, 1908, during the prelude to the Mexican Revolution. As a young woman she studied law, though she inevitably gravitated toward art with a degree in art history from the prestigious San Carlos Academy. And art was her destiny, confirmed when, in 1928, she met Diego Rivera while he painted his murals on the walls of the Secretariat of Public Education. Olmedo joyfully recalls the day she met Rivera. She and her mother arrived at the offices of Public Education one day and Rivera, among giant preliminary sketches, was perched on scaffolding, his concentration absolutely focused; yet she somehow caught his eye and he asked for permission to paint Dolores. This brief, apparently casual, though highly significant encounter, left a profound impression on Dolores Olmedo, who was fully aware of Rivera's importance in the art world and the impact of his credo on fellow artists.

In addition to her connections to some of the most prominent cultural and political figures of her time, Olmedo had an incredible head for business. With her ingratiating personality, a talent for numbers, and the intuition for putting projects together, Olmedo came to exert a remarkable impact on the construction industry. Together with her once competitor Heriberto Pagelson, she established Industria Cerámica Armada. The company not only grew into an industrial empire, but became a giant of enormous relevance in the construction industry. In its early stages, under Olmedo's and Pagelson's leadership, the firm, Compañía Inmobiliaria y Constructora, S.A. (CICSA), sold building materials to the country's major construction companies, and even directly to an avid government, which was rebuilding after the long years of the Revolution.

Much later, after Frida Kahlo's death in 1954 and the fervent years of the rediscovery of a national identity in Mexican motifs, Dolores Olmedo was once again to encounter Diego Rivera. This time the two remained close friends for the remainder of Rivera's life. In 1955, but under his concerned guidance, Olmedo began collecting in earnest. Her collection included work by Rivera, an astonishing selection of Pre-Columbian pieces, and a number of signature pieces by Frida Kahlo, including *The Broken Column*, *Henry Ford Hospital*, *Self-Portrait with Small Monkey*, *A Few Small Nips*, and *My Nanny and I*.

By the time of Rivera's death in November of 1957, Olmedo had acquired 50 of the artist's most valued works. As critics frequently comment,[1] Olmedo's blind trust in Rivera was in no way the vision of an experienced collector, but rather the loyalty of a trusted friend prepared to take risks. Their friendship was a pact of trust, to such an extent that before his death, Rivera asked Olmedo to assume responsibility for the Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera-Anahuacalli museums. In addition to her commitment as a collector, Olmedo fulfilled her promise to Rivera, making sure these museums would operate for a minimum of 50 years with her complete supervision and, in many cases, with her private resources.

She was equally devoted to the future and destiny of Mexico's cultural heritage, by supporting the legal status of the country's archaeological patrimony, and ensuring private collectors preserve the works in their possession by registering this provisional ownership with the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).

Olmedo's talent for business and finance, her keen eye for collecting, and her determination to increase Mexico's cultural patrimony finally led her to the most exalted of all her aspirations: the construction of the museum now known as the Museo Dolores Olmedo. In 1962, she acquired what were, in effect, the ruins of the sixteenth century hacienda, La Noria, in the ancient Xochimilco district on the outskirts of Mexico City. Olmedo meticulously restored the property to use as her personal residence, with the idea of leaving it as a legacy, bequeathed through a Trust for the enjoyment of the people of Mexico, just as Diego Rivera had done with his Anahuacalli and the Blue House. Thus, on September 17, 1994, Olmedo opened the doors of the Museo Dolores Olmedo, which today is considered a world-class cultural institution and the root of all knowledge concerning the works, not only of Diego Rivera, but also of Frida Kahlo and Angelina Beloff. It encompasses the astonishing 148 works by Diego Rivera, 26 works by Frida Kahlo, 800 archeological pieces from a variety of Mesoamerican cultures and popular art, revealing the remarkable diversity of the countless ancient peoples of Mexico.

Dolores Olmedo died on Saturday, June 27, 2002, at the age of 93. She is remembered for her contribution to the arts and to culture in the full extension of the term. She fulfilled every ambition, satisfied every wish, and lived life to the fullest. As a benefactress, she accomplished as much as any Medici. Thanks to her tireless efforts, which in fact served as her greatest delight, she helped Mexican art conspire against the caprice of time by perpetuating the work of a supreme artist.

Carlos Phillips Olmedo
Translation, Carol Miller

1 Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera. "Dolores Olmedo: coleccionismo y generosidad" in *Museo Dolores Olmedo. op. cit.*

Alan & Milly Peterson

Frida Kahlo: Timeless celebrates Frida Kahlo and the legacies of Glen Ellyn's own Alan and Milly Peterson whose vision was to build bridges to the community in all that they did.

This exhibition represents Alan's dream to connect DuPage County and beyond with a common understanding of culture and community. The catalyst of community building is through the work of Frida Kahlo and the definitive collection of her work housed at the Museo Dolores Olmedo outside Mexico City.

More than 40 years ago, neighbors in a Vail, Colorado homeowners association struck up a friendship. Ever the bridge-builder, Alan observed that this association was divided between home owners of Mexican and American descent. He set out to build community and diminish the cultural divide by hosting dinners for all owners. As a result, a friendship for the ages developed between the Petersons and condo neighbor Carlos Phillips, son of Dolores Olmedo and director of the Museo Dolores Olmedo.

In 2017, Alan approached Carlos, his wife Lupe, and the Phillips family about potentially exhibiting this national treasure in the Petersons' home town of Glen Ellyn at the College of DuPage, a public community college the Petersons had been advocates of since its inception in 1967. The Phillips answered with a resounding "yes," and Alan's vision began to take shape.

The McAninch Arts Center and Cleve Carney Museum of Art at the College of DuPage are honored to host this important collection of Frida Kahlo's work and recognize the significance of the opportunity provided by the Peterson Family. This one-of-a-kind exhibition will provide scholars, students, and citizens worldwide the ability to celebrate the rich culture this body of work and fascinating artist provides.

Alan and Milly Peterson passed away in 2020, within a few months of each other, but not before both knew that their vision was destined to be realized through their son Mark and daughter-in-law Marcie Peterson. Mark and Marcie have carried forth the family's philanthropic legacy in so many ways. They are both deeply invested in the exhibition as a vehicle to build a bridge of understanding for all who come to experience *Frida Kahlo: Timeless*.

Photo courtesy of the Peterson family

Timeless

Justin Witte

In 1938, the surrealist poet and writer André Breton traveled to Mexico on a lecture tour and was a guest at Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's San Angel Home and Studio. It was during this stay that he encountered Kahlo's work, describing it as having "blossomed forth [. . .] into pure surreality." Breton likely recognized not only the high quality of the work, but also saw in it the opportunity to bolster the surrealist movement, of which he was one of the principal founders. In fact, it was largely Breton who bestowed Kahlo with the title of "surrealist"—a label her work continues to be saddled with today. While Kahlo's brief alignment with the surrealist movement provided her with certain opportunities, she eventually separated herself from it. Breton's adoption of Kahlo's work into surrealism is just one example of how different artists, writers, and curators have used the artist's work over the last century in service of their movement, cause, or for their personal profit.

In 2018, the organizers of this exhibition and I began to consider Frida Kahlo's life and legacy as a lens through which to examine our own times and interests. Our exhibition, originally titled *Frida Kahlo 2020*, was meant to highlight her undeniable relevance and the ways in which her political activism, use of fashion, national pride, disability, and non-binary sexuality all seemed to align with the conversations percolating in American culture as we prepared for the exhibition. In fact, beginning in 2018 several exhibitions of Kahlo's works also focused on how the artist used her clothing and personal effects to craft her appearance. These exhibitions followed earlier shows such as *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit* in 2015, which centered on Kahlo's relationship with her husband Diego Rivera. Because Kahlo's work deals with universal themes of identity, it has found relevance time and time again, no matter how many years have passed since her death. This is perhaps why it continues to speak to audiences even as the times and culture shift. In our planning for *Frida Kahlo 2020*, we understood that this universality allowed the lens through which Kahlo's work is viewed to always shift with the time, yet we were not prepared for how much our reality was also about to change.

Three months prior to the opening of *Frida Kahlo 2020*, our museum, art center and college, like many institutions in the country, were forced to close as we dealt with the growing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. It became very clear that our exhibition could not proceed as originally scheduled. With the help of our partners at the Olmedo Museum, we were thankfully able to move the exhibition to the summer of 2021, but recognized that our culture had changed. Home-bound and isolated, we were not sure of the extent of the change. There was no way of foretelling just how history-making and culture-shaking the months ahead would be with social protests and unrest, an unprecedented U.S. presidential election, and an ever escalating health crisis that began to play out and affect us all. The Cleve Carney Museum of Art and McAninch Art Center staff were juggling remote working and their children's virtual learning, and the uncertainty of a pandemic. We saw business partners in our community struggle and close, friends and coworkers fall ill, and the once seemingly solid map of the future unravel. Everything was changing; we were all simultaneously a part of what was happening and outside observers watching from our quar-antined offices, bedrooms, and kitchen tables. Even today, nearly a year into this crisis, I am writing this from home having only interacted with my coworkers in person a handful of times since our decision to postpone the exhibition and close the museum.

And still there was Frida Kahlo. When popular tastes shifted away from André Breton's surrealism, it was due to a world that was rapidly changing. There was a global depression coupled with the rise of fascism, which was careening society toward a second world war. The gap between the wealthy and the working classes had created a dangerously wide chasm, and there was a strong sense that art—and society itself—should be working to imagine a new reality. Public murals and documentary photography replaced easel paintings and portraits. Art changed as artists were attempting to meet the challenges presented in this tumultuous era. As a witness to recent history, I can—perhaps truly for the first time—understand the feeling of

the seismic shift that Kahlo and other artists in Mexico and in the world felt during the tumultuous times in which they live.

While one consequence of these changes pulled interest away from most surrealist work, the popularity of Kahlo's work persisted and grew. The powerful authenticity of her voice shone through in her self portraits of the 1940s. It was this authenticity that continued to attract collectors and gallerists to Kahlo's work. Perhaps during the massive political and cultural shifts of post revolutionary Mexico, Kahlo's story of perseverance distinguished her work from that of her larger-than-life husband, Diego Rivera. Whatever the initial interest, the persistence and growth of her popularity and renown highlighted her authentic vision. In moments of uncertainty and challenge, hers was a voice that acknowledged the looming unknowns, present in a culture experiencing radical change.

Now as *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* opens, we are in a completely different world than the one we left a year ago, but Kahlo's work is as relevant as ever. How better to relate to the boredom, anguish, and weight of being stuck in bed for a year than having just spent a year sequestered in our own homes? How better to relate to the stress and anxiety caused by the frailty of health than having lived through a year in which disease has changed how we live, interact, and work? How better to appreciate Frida Kahlo's accomplishments in remaking herself again and again as we all are working to remake ourselves? While 2020 was a year in which we all experienced some of what Kahlo did in her lifetime, it is not a year uniquely aligned with her life or work. In fact, while we continue to project Kahlo's life and work on our times it is important to remember that she did not care to have her work speak about anything but her own life, her own times, and her own experiences. She was focused on being true to herself. Today we are still drawn to Kahlo not because she offers us new insights about our path through our current moment but because she presents us with and symbolizes strength and support as we move forward. To connect with a story such as Kahlo's is to connect with a story of resilience, perseverance, and tenacity. So it makes sense that while our world has changed, the strength we get from Frida Kahlo does not. That strength, like her work, is timeless.

In this catalogue we included essays by author Celia Starr and *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* Associate Curator Marcela Andrade Serment that highlight two different turbulent periods of Kahlo's life. One of these periods addresses the Mexican Revolution and its lasting impact on Kahlo, her work, and the world around her. The other period focuses on Kahlo's formative years in the United States from 1930–1934, a time in which she created several of the paintings on display in our galleries. As we all come together in this new moment of transformation it is important to understand how periods of change shaped and informed Frida Kahlo and her work.

Finally, I would like to comment on the extraordinary nature of this exhibition happening in the museum of a community college. It is genuinely remarkable that an exhibition such as this will be held in the intimate galleries of our museum, but I believe it is in line with who Frida Kahlo was as a person and activist. Our college, art program and galleries serve the important role of providing information, knowledge, and opportunity to students who may not be able to find it elsewhere. We serve students starting new and those starting again. Our campus is roughly the same distance from Chicago as Kahlo's Casa Azul is to the center of Mexico City. It is filled with eager, talented, and driven students from a wide variety of backgrounds. I believe the teacher in Kahlo would love to be able to speak directly with those students through her paintings hung in a museum meant for them. From an early age, Frida Kahlo wanted to be at the center of where things were happening and surrounded herself with the most inquisitive and exciting minds of her time. I can think of no location she would be more thrilled with than ours.

Frida Kahlo:
The Birth of an Innovative Artist

Celia Stahr

Frida Kahlo is known for her emotionally raw self-portraits. She's the bold artist who doesn't spare viewers any niceties. She gets right to the point. The works of art hanging in *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* attest to the power of Kahlo's unique creative vision. But how did she possess the confidence in her early-to-mid twenties to translate such daring images like *Henry Ford Hospital*, which depicts a woman in the throes of a miscarriage, into art? While it's difficult to completely comprehend all the steps that artists take before finding their own voices, Kahlo's first major breakthroughs came when she left home for the first time and lived in the United States from 1930–1933.

Imagine how challenging it must have been for Kahlo to live in a foreign country at the beginning of the Great Depression just as she was discovering her identity. Separated from friends and family, Kahlo was living in the artistic world of her husband Diego Rivera, one of the most powerful artists of the 20th century, but the three years they spent in San Francisco, Detroit, and New York were pivotal for her. This extended stay in the United States turned into a journey of self-discovery that gave birth to the mature Frida; and three significant paintings in *Frida Kahlo: Timeless* reveal the artist's growing confidence and creative innovation.

San Francisco: Portrait of Eva Frederick

San Francisco was Kahlo's first stop in the United States. It was early November of 1930, a little more than a year since the stock market crash, and the atmosphere in the "City of the World,"[1] as she called it, was a bit tense. The economic depression had deepened the fractures in society, along both class and racial lines, which left an indelible mark on the budding artist. In Mexico, she had been creating portraits of the indigenous, working class, and women—Mexicans who, though marginalized prior to the revolution (1910–1920), were now celebrated. In San Francisco, Kahlo expanded upon her use of a 19th-century Mexican style of portraiture, especially that of José María Estrada, by depicting the friends and acquaintances she made in this new place.

Portrait of Eva Frederick, 1931

Kahlo invited Eva Frederick, a woman who had previously modeled for Rivera[2] and was a mutual acquaintance of local photographer Imogen Cunningham, into her studio and had her sit on an equipal, a rustic leather back chair, typically crafted in Mexico. The equipal reminded Kahlo of home, and in the drawing, it is the only obvious indicator of place. A long chain necklace that rests on Frederick's naked body subtly evokes associations with Mexico. The design of the necklace, with one chain around the neck linked by a round medallion of a face in profile to a second, dangling loop of chain, is similar to the style of necklace worn by the Zapotec women of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca. The women of this area wore gold chains and necklaces decorated with gold coins, as they were the ones who controlled finance and trade in the marketplace. This had personal significance for Kahlo, as her mother, who was from Oaxaca, controlled the finances in the family household.

Kahlo, like many children of the Mexican revolution, was drawn to the women of Tehuantepec. They were viewed as powerful, beautiful, and elegant. By placing the necklace on Frederick, Kahlo amplifies her model's striking good looks. In this nude drawing, Frederick's body language recalls the modest Venus pose used in Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, a work Kahlo knew quite well. Botticelli's standing Venus places one hand over her pubic area with the other over her breasts. In Kahlo's version, a seated Frederick covers her pubic area but not her breasts, as if to convey both modesty and an ease with her body. The faraway look in Frederick's eyes also echoes Botticelli's Venus. With these similarities, Kahlo hints that Frederick is a Black Venus, a beautiful Afro-Mexican woman.

This is significant given the racist stereotypes of the period that often depicted people of African descent as hyper-sexual. In Mexico, such hyper-sexualized stereotypes were reinforced by Mexican education minister José Vasconcelos's assessment that Black people were of an "uglier stock" and possessed an "irreparable decadence . . . for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust."[3]

Some modern artists working in the Cubist and Primitivist styles emphasized these attributes of the ugly and the sexual in their work. Pablo Picasso's *The Women of Avignon* (1907) foregrounds a brothel scene with five nude female prostitutes whose abstracted faces and bodies are rendered in different ways. Two don African-looking masks from Gabon. They are presented as frightening creatures with angular, unrealistic body parts and contorted postures. Paul Gauguin, the 19th-century French painter, became famous for his images of nude or partially nude Tahitian women lounging out in nature as if they are peaceful "primitives." Kahlo rejected the Cubist and Primitivist styles. Instead, her drawing of Eva Frederick is more aligned with modern images of African Americans created by the artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

Modern art, according to Howard University philosophy professor Alain Locke, could play a key role in redefining what it meant to be a modern African American. The March 1925 special issue of *Survey Graphic* entitled *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*, featured Locke's essay, "Enter the New Negro." For Locke, the "Old Negro" was a stock figure perpetuated as historical fiction, whereas the "New Negro" possessed a "new psychology," one that involved "positive self-respect and self-reliance," exuding a sense of "race pride."[4] A multitude of artistic media and styles of art came to define the "New Negro." Painted portraits by African American artists such as Laura Wheeler Waring (*Portrait of Anna Washington Derry*, 1927) and William H. Johnson (*Girl in a Green Dress* [Bertha Brooks White], 1931) placed their subjects in an interior space defined only by a blank wall and used a painterly style of brushwork to foreground their subjects' thoughtful and dignified facial expressions.

Kahlo too created a painting of Eva Frederick that is set in an interior space defined by a wall behind her, highlighting Frederick's large, attentive eyes. In *Portrait of Eva Frederick* (1931), Frederick is clothed, and she is seen from the chest up. She wears a green shirt with black lace-like sleeves and one strand of emerald-colored beads around her neck. Her brown eyes are strong as she looks directly out, as if listening, her mind active.

Above Frederick is a decorative green banner, a "banderole," that is inscribed in red cursive letters with "Portrait of Eva Frederick, who was born in New York, painted by Frieda Kahlo."[5] This tradition of using an inscription was popularized in Mexican colonial-style portraits. The information often provided the person's name and lineage, reaffirming an upper-class status. When the sitter was mestizo/a, the information written on the painting legitimized the person, since during the colonial era, those born of mixed race parentage could be considered illegitimate. Kahlo borrows this tradition that affirmed racial hierarchies, but uses it in a new context. Her portrait provides an African American woman with an identity, something missing in the dehumanized images found in modern art and popular culture.

New York, Eva Frederick's place of birth, her twenties-style bobbed hairstyle with tendrils framing her face, and her ultra-thin Greta Garbo style eyebrows all connect her to modern cities, but without reducing her to the stereotype of the scantily clad dancer or singer. But Frida complicates the portrait by showing the outlines of Eva's breasts and her nipples. As a bisexual woman, Frida admired the female body, stating, "Breasts are aesthetic. When women's breasts are beautiful, I like them very much."[6]

Kahlo did not understand what it felt like to be a Black woman in the United States or Mexico, but because of her physical disabilities due to polio at age six and a near-fatal bus

accident at age 18, she understood what it felt like to be an outsider. And she understood how race pigeonholed people. Skin color determined how people were perceived, with lighter skin automatically creating the impression of intelligence, beauty, and sophistication. On the other hand, lighter-skinned African American women and mestizas bore the marks of a violent history—rape in the United States, "sleeping with the enemy" in Mexico (as seen in the historical account of the indigenous woman called La Malinche who translated for Cortés and became his mistress).[7]

Just as Frida was trying to find a new way to depict a Black woman, she was also trying to refine her own persona as the wife of a famous artist. In post-revolutionary Mexico, the concept of *Mexicanidad*, a reevaluation of what it meant to be Mexican, was central to a new national identity and it was intrinsic to Kahlo's developing identity as a woman and artist. She was beginning to use her experiences as a woman straddling two cultures and apply what she had learned and observed to her art.

First Major Breakthrough: Portrait of Luther Burbank

In San Francisco, Kahlo's independent spirit was championed by her fellow female artists Lucile Blanch, who lived downstairs in the 716 Montgomery Street building, where she and Rivera stayed, and Pele deLappe, a young art student at the California School of Fine Arts, known today as the San Francisco Art Institute. They would gather together in Blanch's studio and create drawings, either separately or together. Sometimes, they would pass around a piece of paper with all three contributing to a composite drawing. Other times, they would choose a theme like maternity and each would draw their own versions. Whatever they drew, it had a "witty, wicked touch,"[8] deLappe said. For Kahlo, this meant including blood, saying in English: "Let's draw the bloodiest thing we can think of."[9] These nights of creative experimentation led to one of Kahlo's first major breakthroughs.

Portrait of Luther Burbank, 1931

The sensitive approach to the cross-cultural style of portraiture seen in *Portrait of Eva Frederick* began to morph into a radically different style with *Portrait of Luther Burbank* (1931), depicting a well-known horticulturist who became famous for his hybrid fruits, vegetables, flowers, and trees. Burbank's work clearly inspired Kahlo to deviate from her style and create the man as a hybrid: part human, part tree. Gone are the obvious symbols of Mexican colonial era paintings: the blank back wall and the banner with an inscription. Now, modern Mexican and ancient Aztec notions of the interconnectedness of life and death inform this innovative painting. And, she has incorporated blood.

Kahlo and Rivera visited Luther Burbank's home in Santa Rosa, California, approximately 55 miles north of San Francisco. The famed botanist and horticulturist had been dead for four years, but his widow Elizabeth still lived there, and she was happy to entertain visitors and discuss her husband's legacy.

Burbank was not a typical horticulturist. Self-taught, he gained prominence by creating over 800 varieties of hybrid fruits, flowers, vegetables, trees, and other plants. He had been inspired by Charles Darwin's theories and applied them to his work, writing, "Nature selected by a law the survival of the fittest; that is, inherent fitness—the fitness of the plant to stand up under a new or changed environment."[10] The scientific world was intrigued. Scientists wanted to know what Burbank was doing to produce these new and heartier varieties, but his methods were a bit mysterious, as he wrote them out in a cryptic language that only he understood. It frustrated his

fellow scientists, who wanted to recreate Burbank's experiments and his groundbreaking cross-pollination approach that had helped transform agriculture.

Burbank's perspective on hybridity made him a radical. He eventually came to see his theories of plants as applicable to humans. He stressed the importance of combining heredities "so that we get variations—powers and characteristics and capabilities and possibilities that could not come to us from one straight and undeviating line of ancestry."[11] He also stressed the significance of environment, especially when it came to personality traits. Burbank likened the relationship between environment and heredity to a building: heredity provides the foundation, the shape of the edifice, and its position in the ground, but "environment is the architect of the structure."[12] This turned out to be a controversial perspective in the United States, as many prized the so-called superior gene pool of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic races.

The loudest and most powerful voices to articulate this point of view came from the eugenics movement. The supporters of this movement wanted to ensure that these so-called superior races did not become infected with inferior genes. In the United States, the idea that genes and heredity determined personality traits also took hold with the American Eugenics Society forming in 1921. The Society promoted these ideas and lobbied for laws allowing doctors to sterilize men and women deemed unfit for reproduction, such as the mentally ill and those with developmental disabilities. Ultimately, their lobbying led to legislation being adopted in more than 30 states, giving doctors the legal right to sterilize men and women without their permission. Forced sterilization was one means to prevent so-called cross contamination; restricting immigration was another, evidenced by the 1924 Immigration Act.

Burbank was not one to erect walls that separate people according to race and ethnicity. He had a different philosophy, one that came through in a quote from his eulogy given by Judge Ben Lindsey: "I love everybody. I love everything! I love humanity—I love flowers—I love children—I love my dog—I am a lover of the man Jesus—I am a lover of all things that help."[13] He knew every living thing was intimately connected and that humans needed to work together to honor the laws of nature.

His connection to the earth was so strong that he requested to be buried under his huge double-trunked cedar of Lebanon tree in the yard. He said he wanted to "feel that his strength was flowing into the strength of a tree. He wanted his memorial to be a living one."[14] Back in her studio, Kahlo turned her identification with Burbank into an otherworldly painting where the horticulturist stands tall as a hybrid. From the knees down, he has sprouted a tree trunk that ends with many roots growing into the skeletal remains of his body lying underground. From the thighs up, he looks like the genial Luther Burbank seen in photographs wearing a suit while holding a plant.

Kahlo's inventive take is a testament to her brilliant mind and the way in which she was able to draw upon a plethora of information, images, experiences, feelings, and previous art to create her own visual expression. It is easy to see how Burbank's ideas about hybridity would have appealed to Kahlo, who was a mestiza, a person of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, part German on her father's side and part Spanish and P'urhépecha Indian on her mother's side. While living in San Francisco, she too was a transplant. Like the philodendron that Burbank holds with its roots dangling in the air, Kahlo wasn't putting down permanent roots. Frida Kahlo, the mestiza living in a foreign environment, found in Luther Burbank a subject that could express some of the complexities of race and ethnicity within a landscape setting, a place that often symbolized what is natural. In Kahlo's painting what is natural consists of hybridity.

Detroit: Henry Ford Hospital

Fifteen months after the paint had dried on Kahlo's first major breakthrough with *Portrait of Luther Burbank*, the artist plunged even deeper into the unknown wells of creativity. A new location, Detroit, and a traumatic prolonged miscarriage had induced a repeat of coming face-to-face with "la pelona" (the bald woman of death) when she was severely injured in the bus accident at age 18. After hemorrhaging for days, Kahlo, in Henry Ford Hospital, finally expelled her thirteen-week-old fetus. While recovering in the hospital, she made a drawing of herself seated in a chair wearing a hospital cap. The trauma she had just undergone is evident in her wide-eyed blank stare. Another wide-open eye is seen on her hospital gown at chest level under her right shoulder. This eye looks out with what appears to be a slight flash of light. It is reminiscent of a third eye, an image that can be found in Hindu and Buddhist art to convey spiritual perception beyond ordinary sight. Perhaps Kahlo includes a third eye to symbolize a new level of artistic sight that she had gained. The next day after Kahlo made this self-portrait, she attempted to bring these two external and internal realities together in another drawing. With straight lines, she created a bed, placing it at a slight angle. She then drew her nude body supine on a rigid mattress with her legs bent at the knees and tucked. For her face, Kahlo rendered a blank, emotionally detached stare.

Henry Ford Hospital, 1932

The stark reality of Kahlo's nude body in a hard bed is softened by five fantastical, undulating strings surrounding her, all with symbolic objects attached at the ends. Floating in the air above her bed, a snail reveals the slowness of the miscarriage; an anatomical drawing of a pelvis seen from the side conveys the sight of Kahlo's past injuries and her womb. Propped up on the ground below the bed are: the skeletal remains of a pelvis, indicating that Kahlo's pelvic region has decayed or isn't functioning properly; an orchid Rivera had given her, its sexual overtones conveyed through its resemblance to a woman's labia; and an autoclave for sterilizing instruments, emphasizing the cold environment of the hospital. These stringed objects add an otherworldly look to this otherwise somber drawing. It's possible Kahlo was adding a dream-like, surrealist touch, but it seems more likely she was giving visual expression to a hallucinatory experience she had while in the hospital, one that eroded the clear distinction between dream and reality.[15]

Once Kahlo left the hospital, she found her way back to painting. Given her spine and leg pain, she wanted to design a special easel made from aluminum that could move to the height she desired, allowing her to sit if necessary. After having an easel built for her needs and purchasing some sheets of metal, Kahlo placed a 12 3/16" × 15 13/16" piece of metal on it and applied an undercoating of lead-based paint. When the undercoat dried, she began to sketch on the painted surface, beginning with the objects at the top and moving down to the objects at the bottom, ultimately recreating the fantastical drawing she'd made of her miscarriage. Then, picking up her immaculately clean sable paint brushes, Kahlo made minute, careful brushstrokes, moving from the left corner to the right, to produce *Henry Ford Hospital (Flying Bed)*.

Kahlo painted her naked reclining body at the edge of a white mattress sitting on a steel bed frame. Then, she positioned the bed at a diagonal and slightly tilted the perspective, making it

look as if her child-sized body could roll off the mattress. She emphasized her swollen abdomen, the blood-stained sheet, and the gigantic tear falling from her left eye to make clear that the fetus hovering above her body had died.

Kahlo attached the baby's umbilicus to a red string along with the five other symbolic objects she had used in the original drawing. Now, there are three objects that float above her bed, with the eye drawn to her child in the center, while the other three are firmly planted on the dirt floor. While Frida is attached to these six objects through her grasp of the red strings, there's nothing comforting about *Henry Ford Hospital*. Kahlo is alone with the symbols of her pain in a desolate industrial landscape. She looks vulnerable. Her small, naked body and tear-stained face are a far cry from the voluptuous reclining female nude of Westen art, with her come-hither eyes. Well versed in the history of Western art, Kahlo understood she was stepping into the unknown. She wanted to make visible the physical and emotional pain women undergo when they lose a child in utero and the otherworldly experience of it, something that the secondary title, *Flying Bed*, spotlights.

A bleeding nude woman in a hospital bed was incomprehensible as high art subject matter at the time. This became clear six years after Kahlo created *Henry Ford Hospital* when it was shown publicly for the first time in her one-person exhibition at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York. A reviewer for the *New York Times* failed to see the painting's radical nature, dismissing it as "more obstetrical than aesthetic."[16] Even though the Levy Gallery specialized in surrealist art, there was no precedent for Henry Ford Hospital in the Western art canon. Instead, Kahlo was inspired by both the bold imagery found in ancient Aztec art and the Mexican Catholic tradition of retablos with their emphasis on suffering.

While the image of a reclining female in a bloodied bed was foreign to a U.S. art audience, it wasn't completely foreign to Mexicans whose culture had absorbed the potent visual languages of Aztec and Catholic imagery and mythology. Blood, for example, is central to Aztec philosophy: it is the lifeline that feeds the gods who keep the universe in motion. For the Aztecs, everything centered on maintaining this precarious balance between life and death, and this spawned the practice of human sacrifice, the well-known ritual of cutting out a person's heart and offering it to a pantheon of deities.

Building on the visual culture of the past, Kahlo mastered a modern visual language that was purely her own, making pain, loss, isolation, vulnerability, and the precarious interplay of life and death the focus. Her direct approach creates an immediacy that is felt upon first viewing the small, bloodied nude body at the center of the work. Kahlo isn't merely creating an image for its shock appeal. Rather, an immediate visceral response cracks open this private world, beckoning us to probe further. And this second look reveals the simultaneous references to Catholicism. Viewers, particularly those steeped in the Catholic imagery of the crucified Christ, would have recognized that Kahlo was referencing this image of suffering, as well as the style of Catholic retablo miracle paintings, which depict a life-threatening event and a holy being, such as Mary or the Christ, who has intervened to halt death. These miracle paintings lined the walls of Catholic churches or were hung near a home altar as a way to express gratitude for being spared from death. Kahlo pays homage to retablos in *Henry Ford Hospital* through the small size of the artwork, the metal on which she paints the image, and the folk art style she uses, such as the lack of linear perspective. Though she no longer practiced Catholicism, Kahlo saw in retablos a social statement about class, as they were a popular art form made by local artisans who sold them in outdoor markets for very little money. Similarly, Kahlo wanted her art to appeal to the ordinary people of Mexico, many of whom were familiar with retablos.

Kahlo transforms the strictly religious function of retablos by leaving out Mary and the Christ in *Henry Ford Hospital*. These holy intercessors have been replaced by a procession of Ford's famous River Rouge factory buildings that stretch across the horizon line where the sky and earth meet, as if to imply that in the industrial center of the United States, factories are the new religion. With a brilliant mind capable of dissecting complex philosophical arguments, Kahlo questioned some of the faithful's technological tenets, something that is obvious in the way she juxtaposes her bleeding body with the barren landscape of so-called American industrial progress even Ford's mighty River Rouge factory, which had made some of the fastest cars with their breakthrough lightweight V-8 engines, couldn't provide a physically painless, quick, mechanical solution for miscarriages.

In the 1930s, before the use of antibiotics, doctors simply sent women to the hospital to bleed. Most women survived miscarriages, but those who died did so "from contracting an infection"[17] while in the hospital. Kahlo was lucky to leave the hospital in relatively good physical health. Nevertheless, a mixture of feelings swirled inside of her, leaving her depressed and agitated. Her jumble of emotions would have made it even more difficult to process her feelings after the miscarriage, especially when it was the norm to ignore the emotional gravity of losing a child in utero. What seems clear is that the profound and disturbing nature of the entire experience, including time spent in the hospital, unleashed a torrent of creative energy, as Kahlo not only made a painting and drawings about her miscarriage, but lithographic prints as well. Kahlo's miscarriage was her second traumatic death/rebirth. If the bus accident at age eighteen had given Kahlo time, the first ingredient an artist needs to create, then this second major trauma of her life bestowed upon her the second ingredient a great artist needs–*a fearless spirit that isn't afraid to chart the unknown*.

Conclusion

While Frida Kahlo probably possessed the ingredients needed to create innovative art before she arrived in the United States, the country's economic, political, and social turmoil, combined with her own emotional and physical turmoil created a combustible creative energy that dissolved any fears that may have prevented the young artist from finding her artistic voice. As writer Albert Camus observed: "What gives value to travel is fear. It is the fact that, at a certain moment, when we are so far from our own country . . . we are seized by a vague fear, and an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. This is the most obvious benefit of travel. At that moment we are feverish but also porous, so that the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depths of our being."[18]

Kahlo was literally feverish for days while suffering a miscarriage in Henry Ford Hospital. Away from her home and family in Mexico, her feelings of fear were magnified, but once her fever had broken and the bleeding had ceased, Kahlo was porous, open to the unknown, and she began creating works of art in a completely new way. She had gone from painting a modern portrait of an African American woman, Eva Frederick, utilizing a Mexican colonial style of painting, to a fantastical style with her portrait of Luther Burbank, allowing him to express her ideas about hybridity, blood, and the life/death continuum, to a more personal style and subject with *Henry Ford Hospital*, making her raw emotions visible. After this, Kahlo could not return to the cocoon of comfort and safety. It was too late. She had been exposed. In turn, she exposed herself. And, it was unlike anything seen in the Western art canon: a woman bleeding in bed due to a miscarriage. At the age of twenty-five, Kahlo had found her artistic voice.

1 Diego Rivera with Gladys March, *My Art, My Life* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960), 174.
2 Salomon Grimberg, *Frida Kahlo: Song of Herself* (London: Merrell, 2008), 75.
3 José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana* [*The Cosmic Race: The Mission of the Iberoamerican People*] (Mexico City: Espasa Calpe, 1948), 47-51.
4 Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *Survey Graphic*, March 1925. Locke also edited an anthology entitled *The New Negro* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925).
5 In this early period, Frida spelled her first name with an "e," but around 1935, she dropped the German "e" and began to spell it: Frida, which corresponds to her birth certificate (Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón).
6 Grimberg, *Song of Herself*, 103.
7 Octavio Paz discusses the complexity of La Malinche and her relationship with Cortés in the essay "The Sons of La Malinche," *Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 21. Chicana scholars have reinterpreted La Malinche as the ancestral mother who is powerful. See Cristina Herrera's *Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script* (New York: Cambria Press, 2014).
8 deLappe, Pele: *A Passionate Journey Through Art and the Red Press* (Petaluma, CA: Central A&M, 1997), 9.
9 deLappe, *A Passionate Journey*, 9.
10 Luther Burbank and Wilbur Hall, *The Harvest of the Years* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 48.
11 Burbank and Hall, *The Harvest of the Years*, 44.
12 Burbank and Hall, *The Harvest of the Years*, 1.
13 "Kahlo, Rivera, and Burbank," Luther Burbank Home and Gardens Archive.
14 "Kahlo, Rivera, and Burbank," Luther Burbank Home and Gardens Archive.
15 For a fuller discussion of this topic, refer to Celia Stahr, *Frida in America: The Creative Awakening of a Great Artist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2020), 205-206.
16 Howard Devree, *New York Times* review, November 16, 1938.
17 Sven Nielsen and Seth Granberg, "The Expectant Management of Miscarriage," in Thomas H. Bourne, ed., *Handbook of Early Pregnancy Care* (Andover: Thomas Publishing Services, 2006), 39.
18 Albert Camus, *The Notebooks: 1935-1951*, translated into English by Philip Thody and Justin O'Brien (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1998). Quote in my essay taken from David Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2017), 234-235.

Frida Kahlo's Mexico and The Reshaping of a Nation Through Art, 1910-1940

Marcela Andrade Serment

In the wake of its revolution, Mexico began the arduous process of rebuilding as a nation. The demise of Porfirio Díaz[1] signified the end of a thirty-year dictatorship and allowed the country to establish a new identity rooted in its own traditions and diverse culture. Government officials, intellectuals, reformers, and artists who sought to reinterpret centuries of colonial rule and the turbulent struggle for power that ensued were at the forefront of this period of great change. In their efforts to establish a new identity and a more equitable society, Mexican art and politics merged. The country became a mecca for artists and intellectuals, as well as for those living abroad, being drawn to its rich cultural heritage and the prospect of reshaping the nation in the aftermath of its revolution. It is this radical world in which artist Frida Kahlo grew up and immersed herself, that she made manifest in many of her paintings.

Soldiers standing on top of railroad cars, of S.P.deM. train, during the Mexican revolution, ca. 1911-1914. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-92840.

Porfirio Diaz, ca. 1911. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62 100275.

The Mexican Revolution

During his years in office, Porfirio Díaz was able to establish some semblance of peace and stability in the country. New haciendas (or large landed estates) and international corporations settled into different regions of Mexico, seizing land that belonged to citizens and forcing many of them to become laborers. Díaz's regime did little to support the causes of small farmers, miners, and indigenous people. His route to modernization facilitated growing social injustice. Weary of the government's abuse of power, the people of Mexico managed to unseat General Díaz following a call to arms by Francisco I. Madero in 1910. Within a year, Díaz resigned from office, but the revolution continued, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people as different factions tried to fill the power vacuum. The revolution ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Constitution of 1917; however, the path toward democracy and a more stable country was not easy. Uprisings were still taking place throughout the country as the people of Mexico called for the expulsion of foreign investors, haciendas to be seized, and the land to be redistributed.[2] It was not until Álvaro Obregón came into office in 1920 that things began to settle in Mexico and reform was possible.

José Vasconcelos and The Muralists

At the helm of the educational and cultural rebirth in Mexico during Obregón's presidency was his minister of public education, José Vasconcelos. During his appointment to this post (1921–1924), Vasconcelos oversaw the construction of hundreds of schools as well as new playgrounds, swimming pools, and libraries. Most notably, Vasconcelos launched a public art program that enlisted the help of artists to create murals in public spaces in an effort to help educate the people of Mexico, many of whom were unable to read, and simultaneously uplift and inspire them. Through his "art for all" program, murals appeared in and outside of churches, schools, hospitals, theaters, libraries, and government buildings.

Among the artists that Vasconcelos employed to help him carry out his vision were Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. These three artists, later known as

"Los Tres Grandes" (The Three Greats [or The Big Three]), would go on to become key figures of the Mexican muralism movement and to garner the country international recognition for their work. The work of the muralists focused on politics, revolutionary victories and heroes, and the history of pre-Columbian cultures. Most notably, it celebrated the country's natural splendor and regional diversity in terms of its native people and traditions. Through their work, the Big Three also helped spread socialist ideas, including critique of the government and capitalist system, even if it was in direct conflict with their patrons' requests.

Artist Involvement in Politics and Unions

At the same time that Vasconcelos and the muralists sought to transform Mexican society through their collaborations, a new hope was initiated by Mexico's Communist Party. Popular with artists and intellectuals, the party grew in numbers in the 1920s. For artist members such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo, and Tina Modotti, communism represented an end to the injustices of Porfirio Díaz's legacy and upheld the principles of the revolution. They sought to contribute to the restructuring of modern Mexico and the formation of the nation's new identity through their artwork. Further, they believed that Mexican society could be transformed and freed from bourgeois capitalists through culture.[3]

In December 1922, the artist members of Mexico's Communist Party and other cultural leaders established the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors to obtain better working conditions and higher pay. With greater support, including the participation of female and transnational artists, the union made it possible for the group to share their views on politics and art at a national level.[4] During its existence, the union also established the publication *El Machete* to help further disseminate their ideas and art to the masses. *El Machete* eventually became the official newspaper of Mexico's Communist Party, which understood the value of its artist members in spreading the party's messages through written and visual work. However, by the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the Mexican government adopted a more conservative attitude toward its leftist groups, suppressing the majority of the activities of the party and its artist members, including publication of *El Machete*.

Frida Kahlo, ca. 1943. Facsimile reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Through their social consciousness and political viewpoints, women seized employment opportunities and leadership roles created in intellectual and artistic settings during post-revolutionary Mexico.[5] In addition to their political influence and artistic contributions within groups such as Mexico's Communist Party, the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors, and the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists,[6] many female artists became influential educators and cultural leaders. Frida Kahlo, for example, taught painting at La Esmeralda National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking, and partook in larger cultural programs such as the Seminar for Mexican Culture.

Additional Artist Circles

During the 1930s, the reach and support of Mexican art was internationally pervasive. Universities, museums, art collectors, companies, and cultural organizations in the United States hired Mexican muralists to paint compositions at their respective institutions, facilities, or homes. When not working abroad, muralists also received requests from foreign artists who wanted to study under their tutelage. Diego Rivera was the most famous and celebrated of the muralists, and sought after by painters, photographers such Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Tina Modotti,

and even writers Katherine Anne Porter and Hart Crane. In fact, by this point in time, Rivera was already wed to Frida Kahlo, and it was common for the couple to host gatherings at their home with the most influential cultural and political figures, both domestic and foreign. Mexico was a mecca for creatives and quickly became the epicenter of the new art scene. Foreign artists and intellectuals were drawn to its revolutionary ideals, the resurgence of pre-Columbian cultures through archeological digs, and opportunities to study the country's rich regional diversity. Other foreigners fled to Mexico to seek political asylum or to escape the turbulence of their own countries.[7]

Painting in the Palace of Cortés, Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1930. Facsimile reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Beyond contributions from the muralists and the participation of foreign artists, Mexico's thriving art scene was bolstered by artist circles such as the Stridentists and The Contemporaries. One of the artistic movements that developed concurrently with Mexican muralism was stridentism. The Stridentists' multidisciplinary art practice was experimental and often manifested itself in the form of interventions or performances. In this manner they redefined what "revolutionary art" looked like and how it could be experienced within the cultural milieu of the period. The group separated by 1927, feeling that their work was done, and they had achieved their primary purpose of proposing an alternative "revolutionary art." The second group or artistic movement that emerged in post-revolutionary Mexico was named The Contemporaries, after a literary magazine. This group of artists was concerned with generating debate regarding the relationship between the public and the private, the collective and the individual, and the national and the cosmopolitan in Mexican artistic culture.[8]

Yet other artists of this time, such as Frida Kahlo, Rufino Tamayo, and María Izquierdo, preferred the intimacy and individualistic qualities of easel painting. Despite their aesthetic differences and competing ideas on what "revolutionary art" should be, the greatest source of inspiration for most of the artists of this period came from Mexico itself. Their work stood in stark contrast to European "high art," embracing Mexican folk art, pre-Columbian art, and the vestiges of Mexico's colonial past as the basis for modern Mexican art.

Conclusion

By 1940, and after eight different presidents,[9] the revolutionary zeal that had mobilized so many to contribute to the transformation of modern Mexico began to fade. Nevertheless, the era of the Mexican revolution and its aftermath paved the way for new national idols, among them artists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo, Rufino Tamayo, Lola Álvarez Bravo, María Izquierdo, and many more. Through their artwork and collaborations, they were able to disseminate culture and politics to the people of Mexico, and demonstrated their dedication to reshaping Mexico's future. Mexican artists created a modern art that encompassed both local aesthetic trends and international ideas as it remained deeply rooted in the history, traditions, iconography, and institutions of Mexico.[10] Thus Frida Kahlo's work exists against the backdrop of a turbulent and ever-changing culture, society, and Mexican identity characteristic of the era in which she lived. Reflected in her work is her commitment to not only individual expression, but also her views on politics, gender, religion and social class—all steeped in symbolism derived from Mexico's history and diverse cultures.

MEXICO AND THE RESHAPING OF A NATION THROUGH ART

1 José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) was president of Mexico for seven terms (1877-80, 1884-1911). His extended stay in office is often referred to as the *Porfiriato*. Díaz was able to obtain political power and national wealth through support from Mexico's elite, the military, and the Catholic Church. During this period, international investors were able to make immense wealth from mining, railways, and other industries in the country while the vast majority of the Mexican people suffered. As part of the country's industrial and cultural growth under Díaz, institutes, libraries, scientific societies and cultural associations were also created.

2 MacKinley Helm, *Mexican Painters: Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Other Artists of the Social Realist School* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 14.

3 Stephanie J. Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 50.

4 Ibid, 31.

5 Ibid, 55.

6 Artists and Mexican Communist Party members Leopoldo Méndez, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Pablo O'Higgins, Luis Arenal, among others, established the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists in 1934. The League was closely affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party and was established in support of the working class against the elite and capitalist government. Similarly to the activities of the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors, its multidisciplinary artist members used their visual and written work to disseminate their political views and ideals to the people of Mexico.

7 During the first half of the twentieth century, Russia and Spain also experienced civil wars, this was followed by World War II and the financial crisis brought about by the Great Depression.

8 Matthew Affron et al., *Pinta la Revolución: Arte Moderno Mexicano 1910-1950*, ed. Matthew Affron, Mark A. Castro, Dafne Cruz Porchini, and Renato González Mello (Mexico City, MX: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 2016), 5-6.

9 Mexican presidents between 1917 and 1940: Venustiano Carranza (1917–20), Adolfo de la Huerta (1920), Álvaro Obregón (1920–24), Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–28), Emilio Portes Gil (1928–30), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932–34), and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40).

10 Matthew Affron et al., *Pinta la Revolución: Arte Moderno Mexicano 1910-1950*, ed. Matthew Affron, Mark A. Castro, Dafne Cruz Porchini, and Renato González Mello (Mexico City, MX: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 2016), 8.

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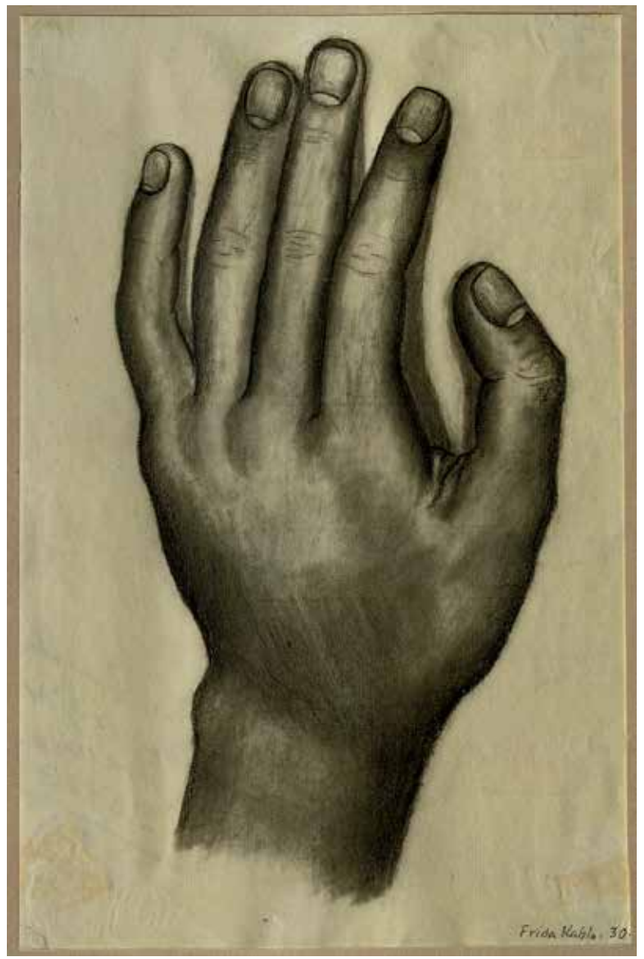
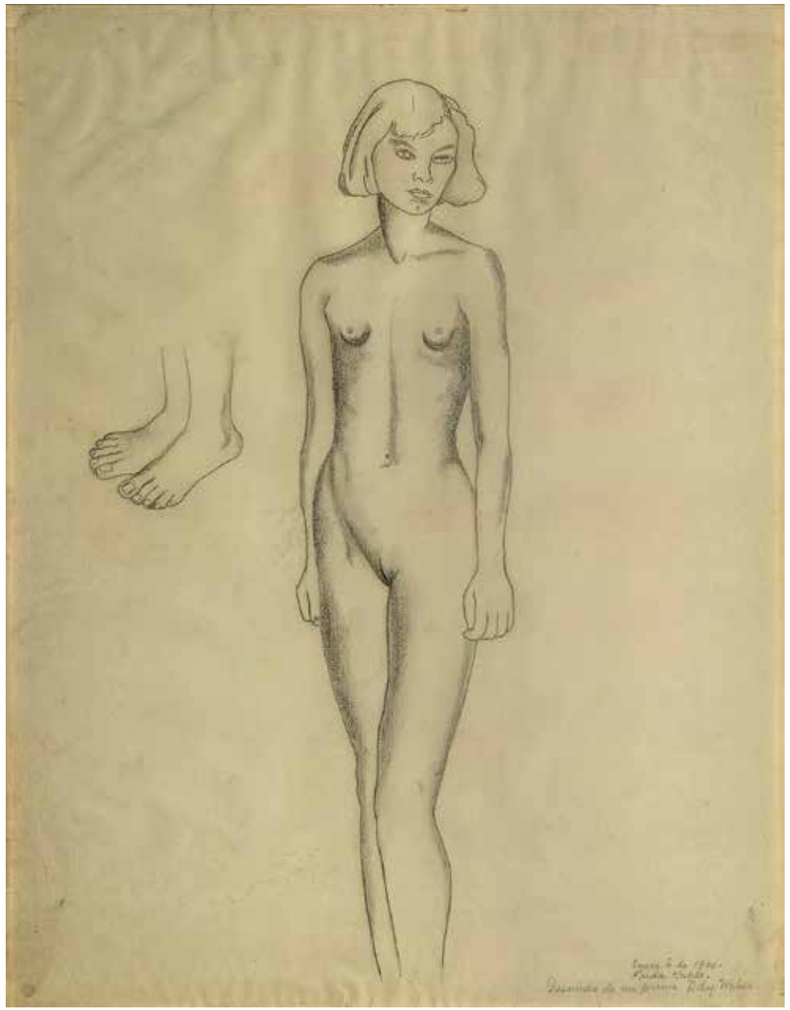
FRIDA KAHLO

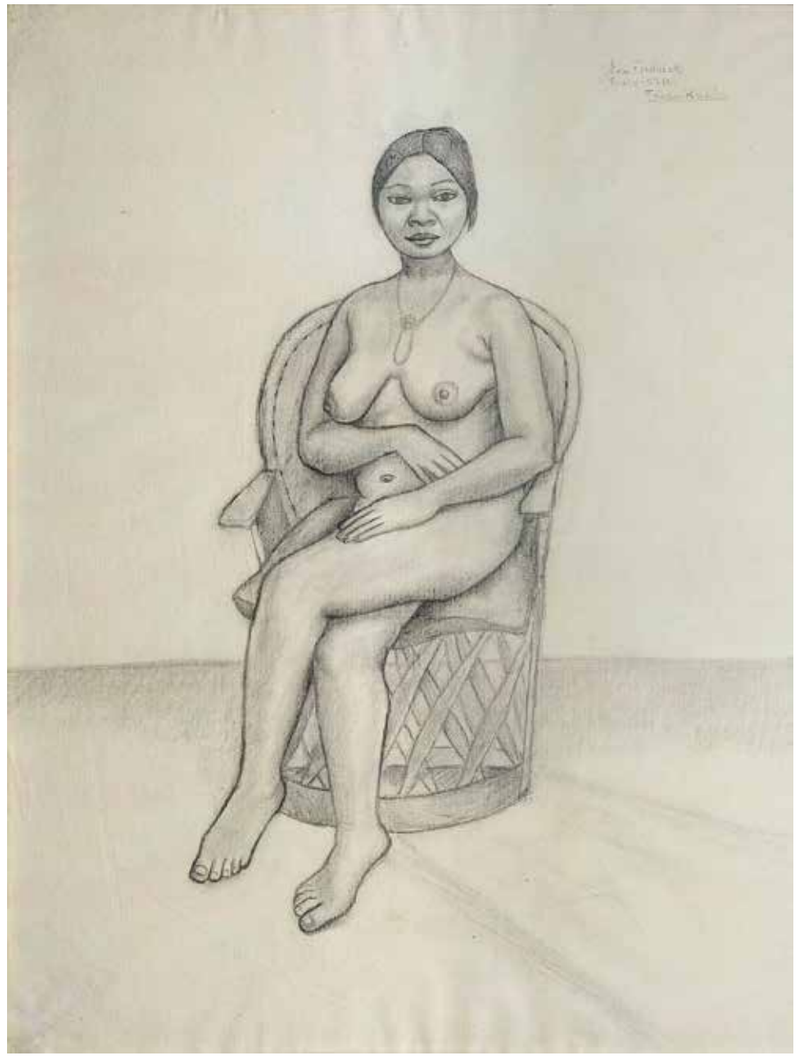
Works on loan from the Dolores Olmedo Museum



The Hand (La mano), 1930



Nude of Ady Weber (My Cousin) (Desnudo de Ady Weber [Mi prima]), 1930



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Portrait of Lady Cristina Hastings (Retrato de Lady Hastings), 1931

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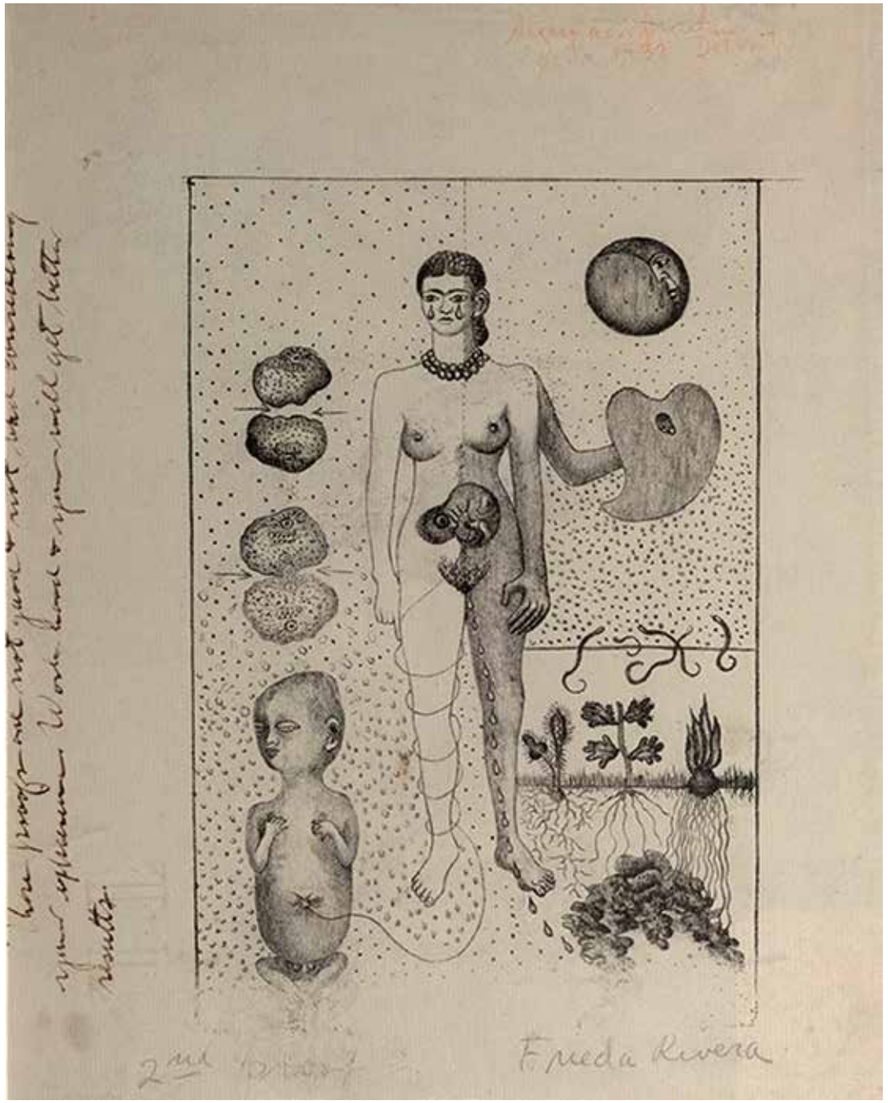
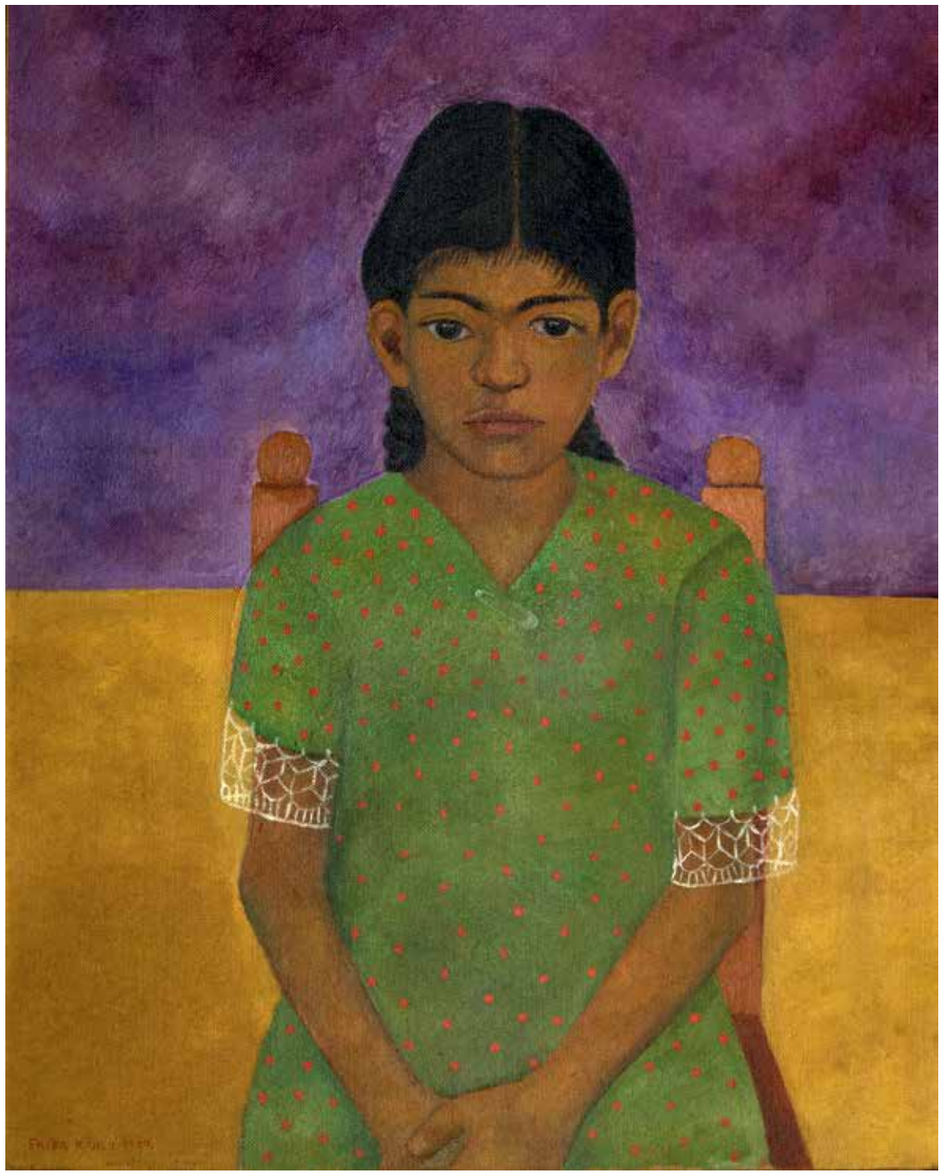


Untitled (Frida and the Miscarriage) (Sin título [Frida y el aborto)], 1932

Fantasy (Fantasía), 1944

Portrait of Alicia Galant (Retrato de Alicia Galant), 1927



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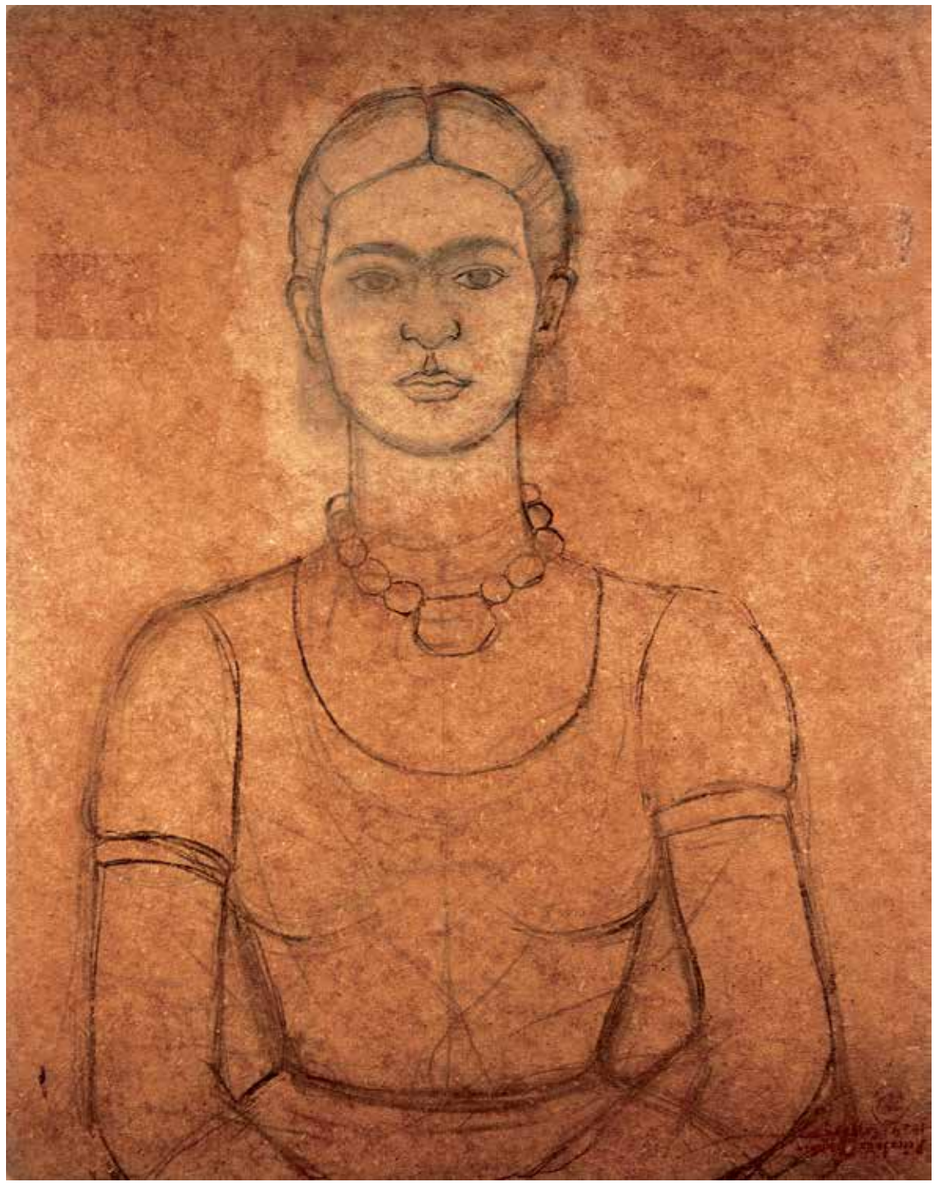
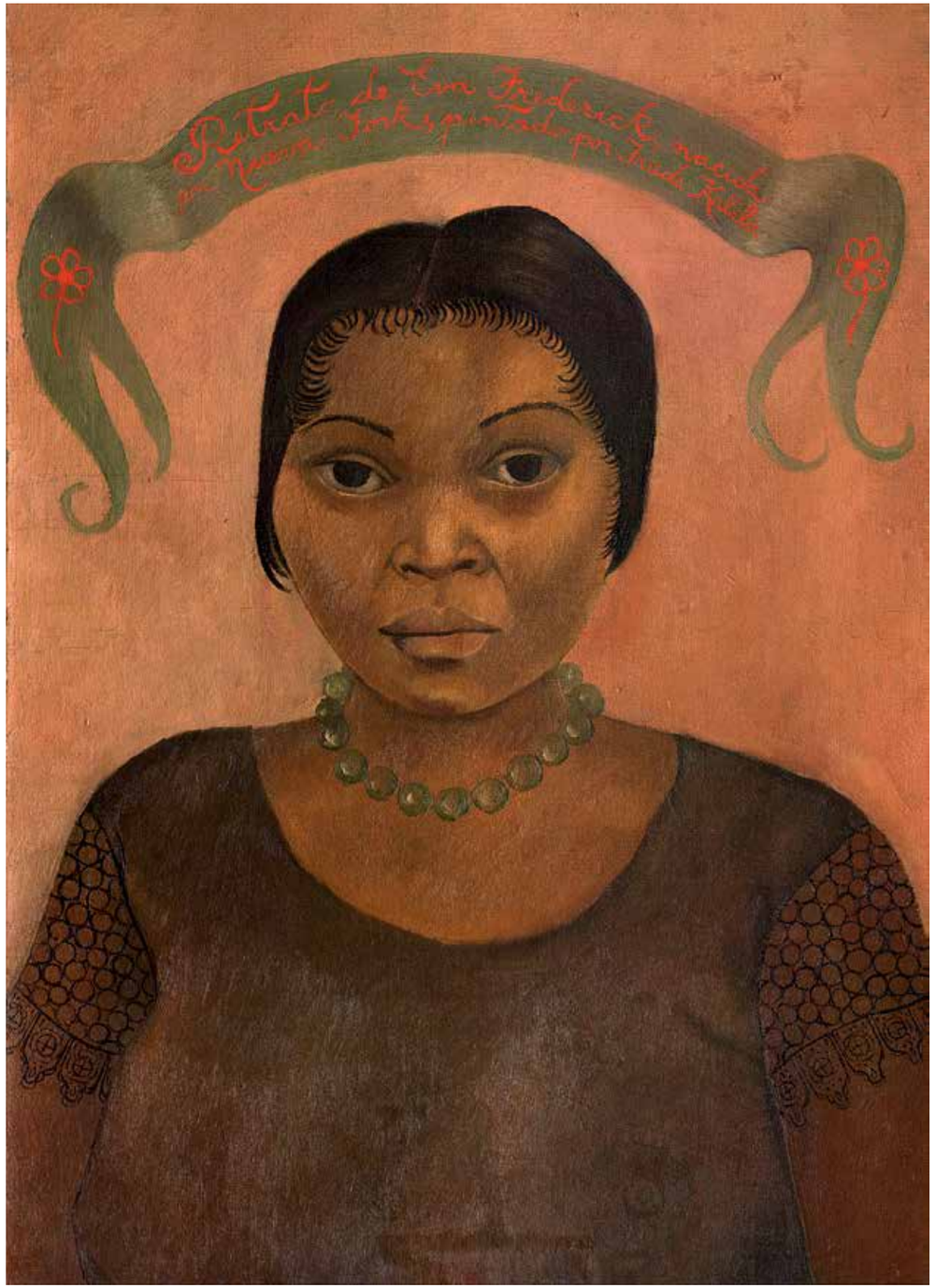


Sketch for Self-Portrait with Airplane (Boceto para autorretrato con aeroplano), 1929



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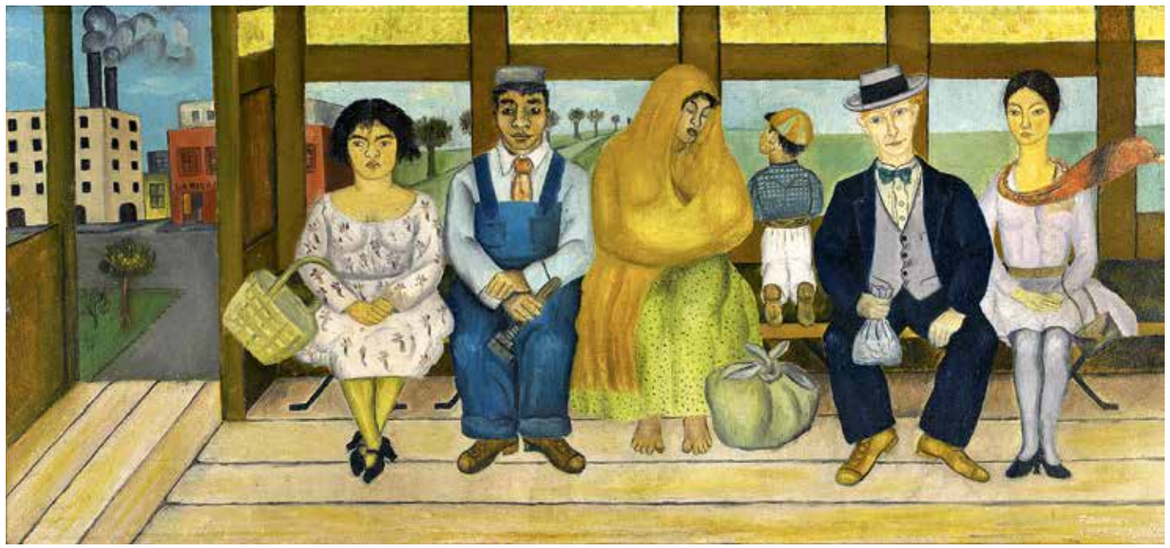

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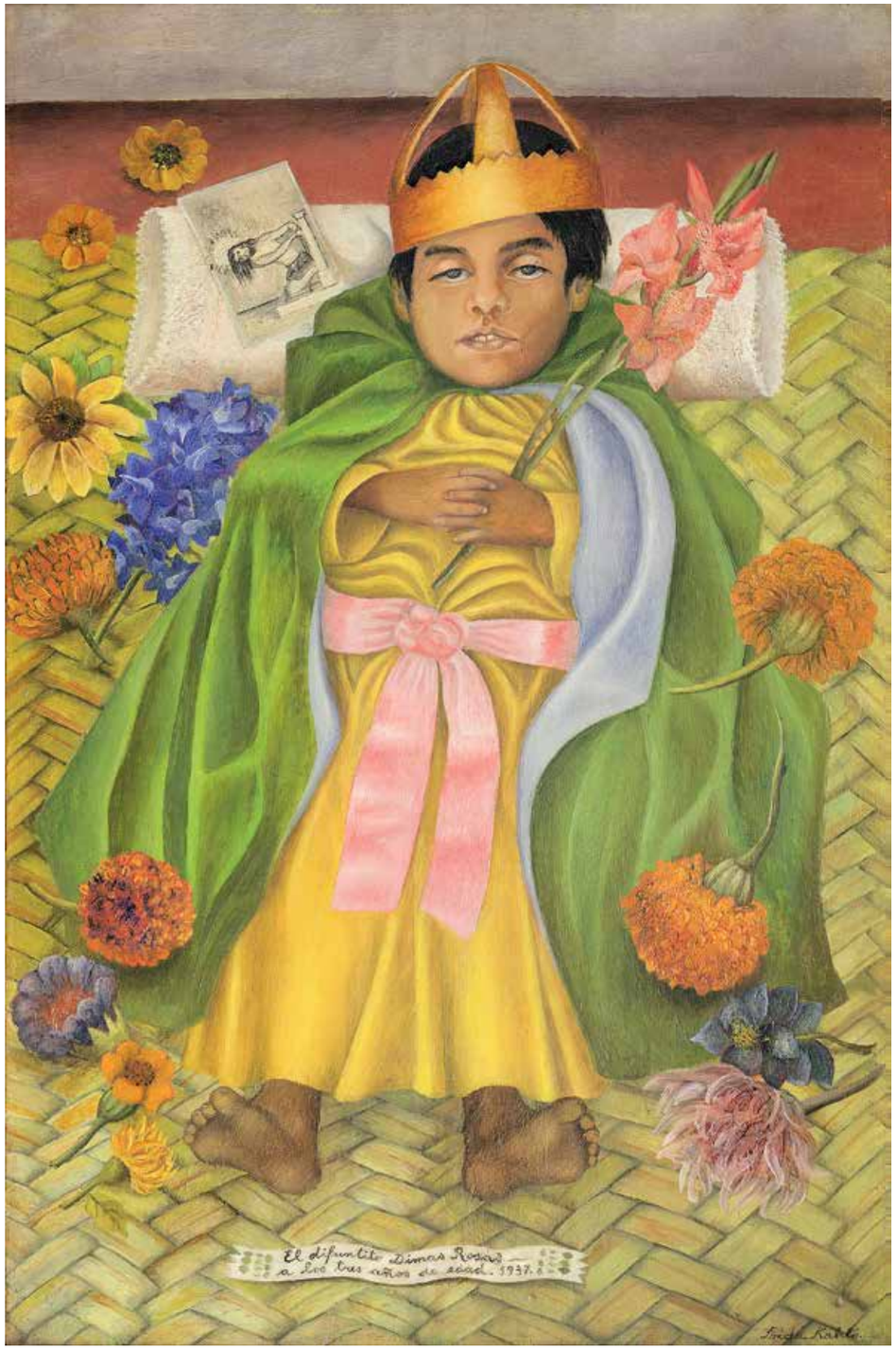

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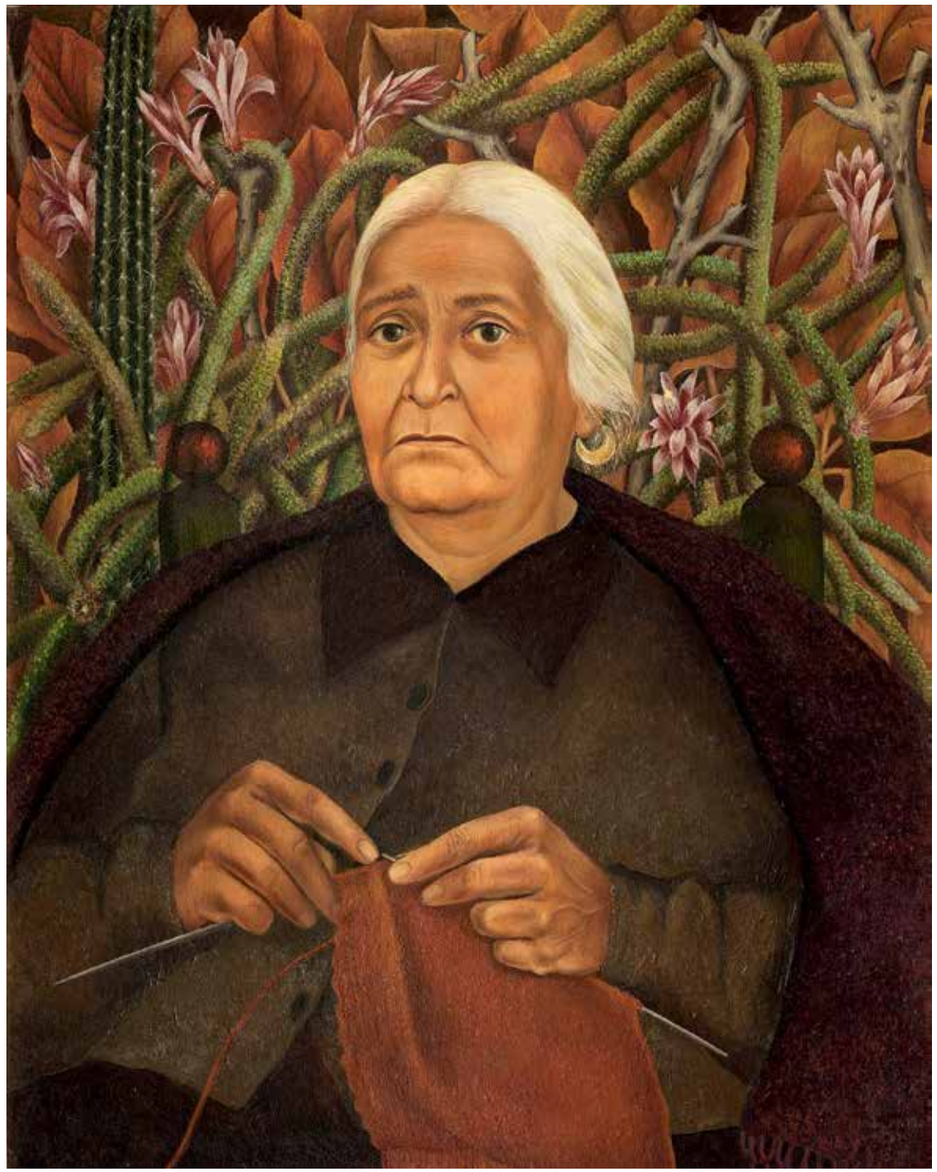
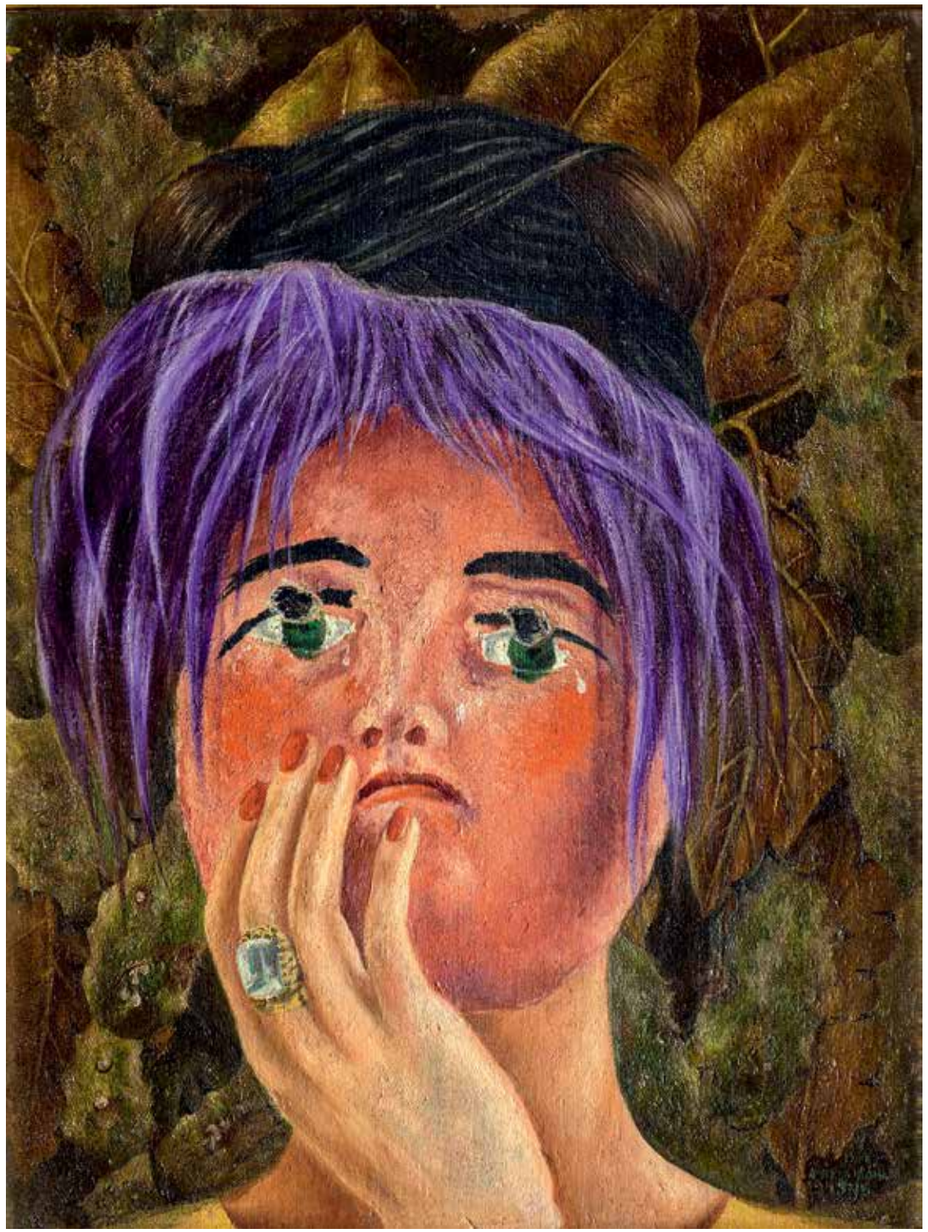


Portrait of Doña Rosita Morillo (Retrato de Doña Rosita Morillo), 1944

Portrait of the Engineer Eduardo Morillo Safa (Retrato del Ingeniero Eduardo Morillo Safa), 1944



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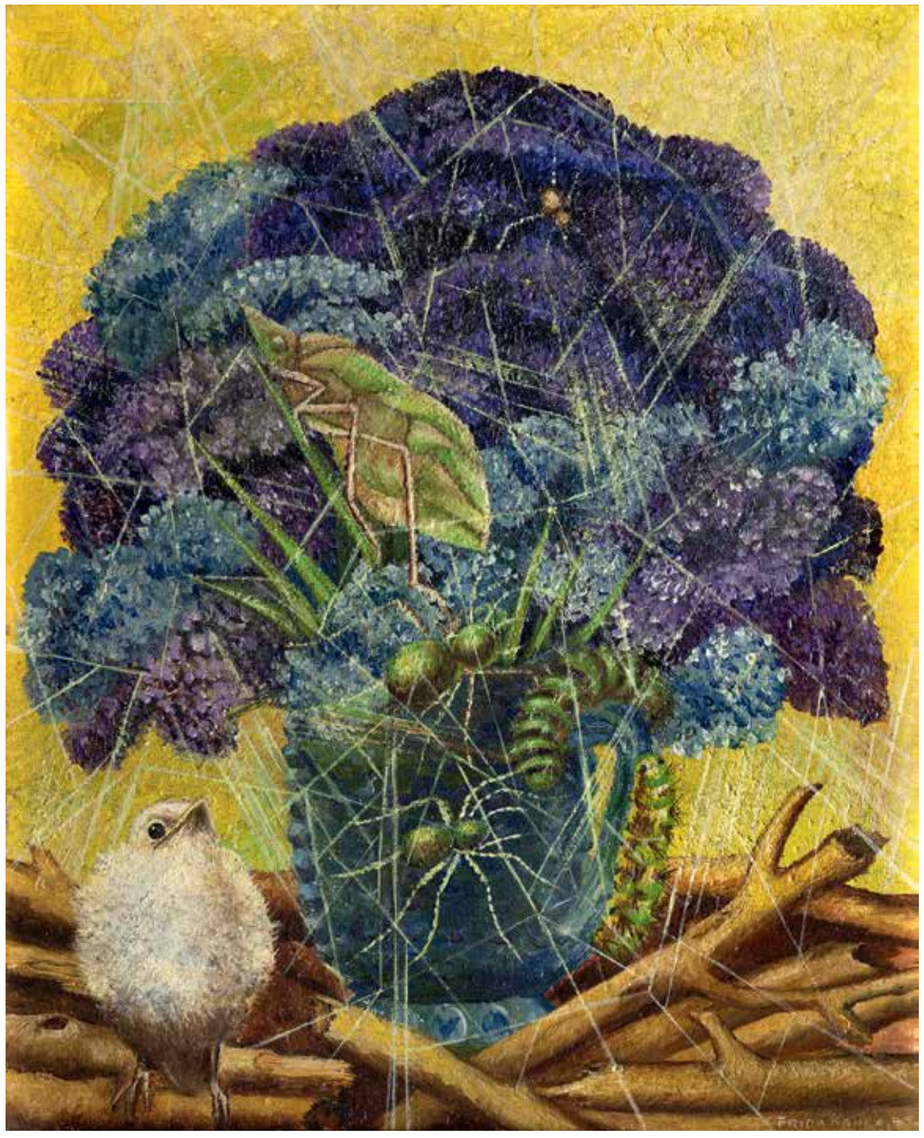
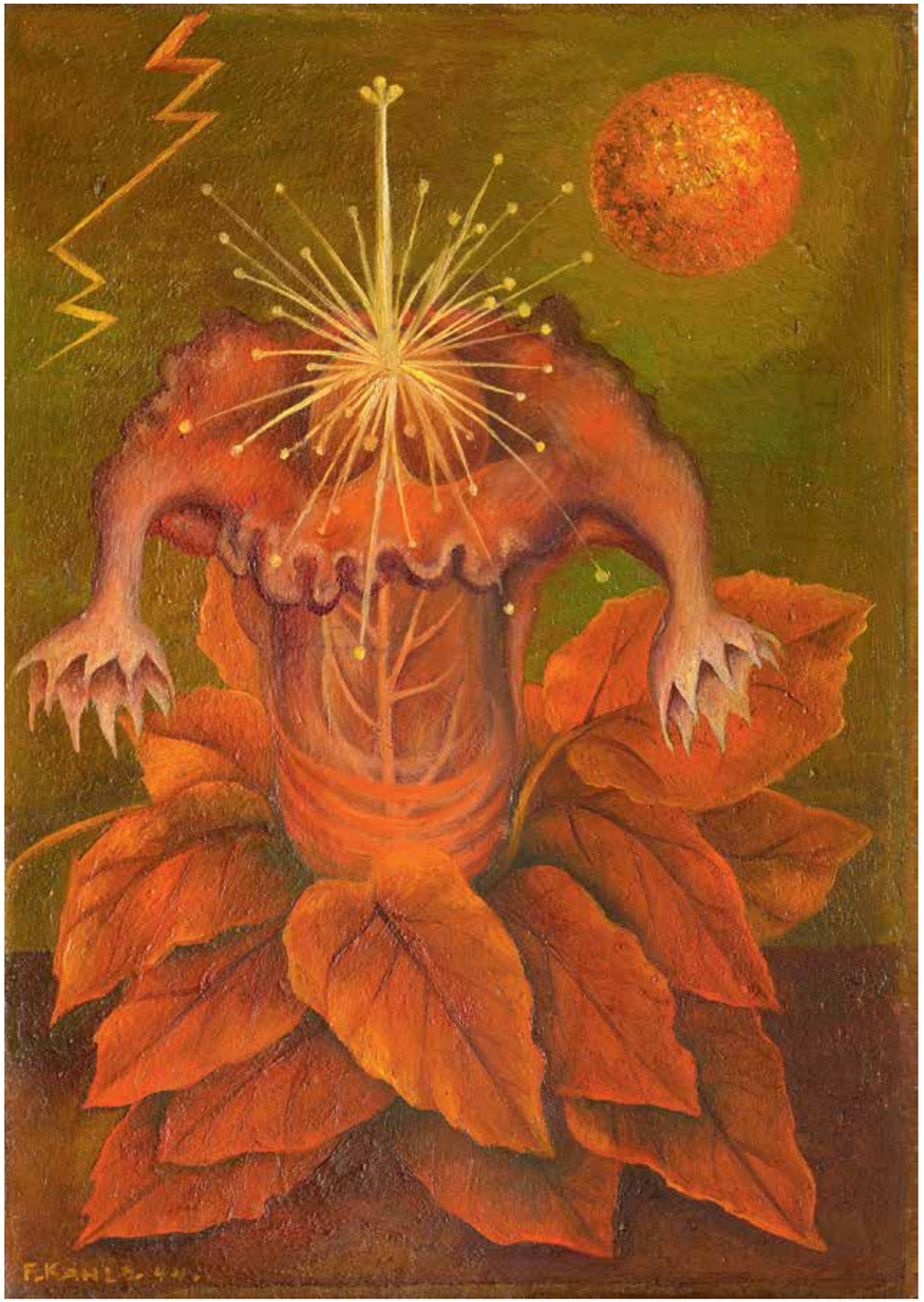


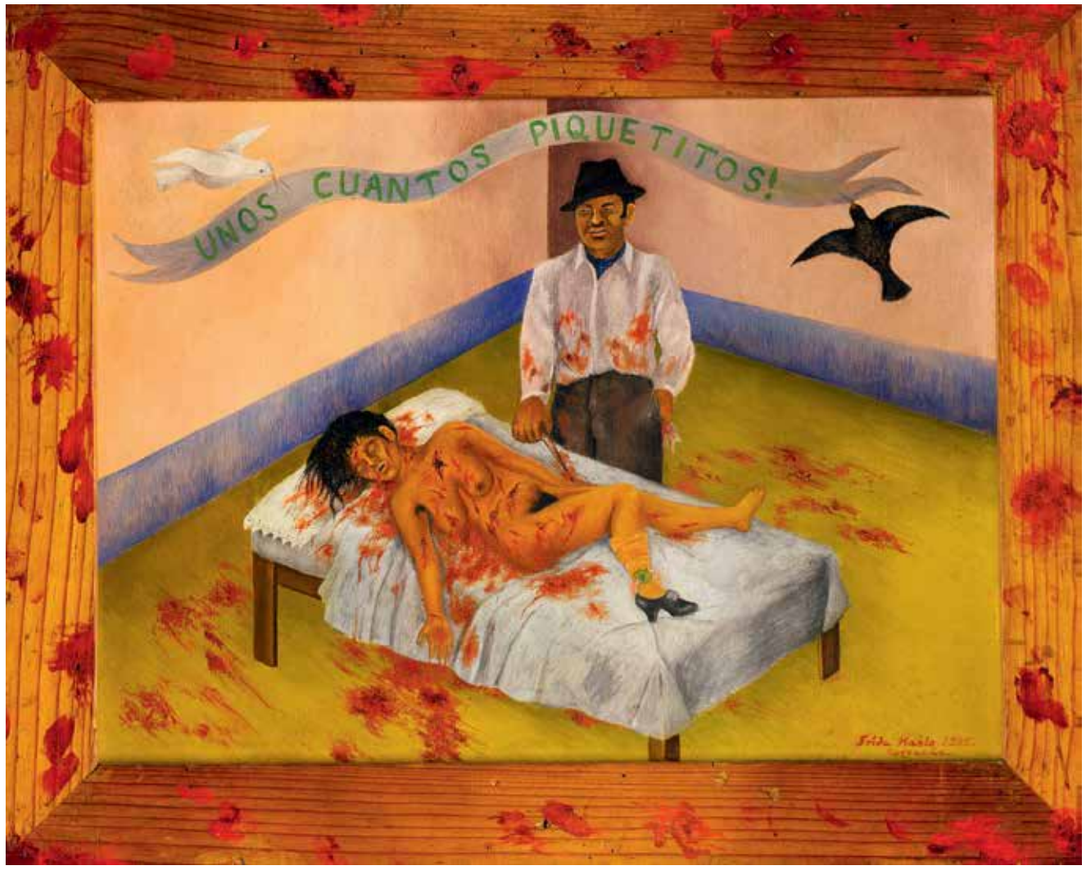
The Chick (El pollito), 1945

The Circle (El círculo), 1954



Flower of Life (La flor de la vida), 1944

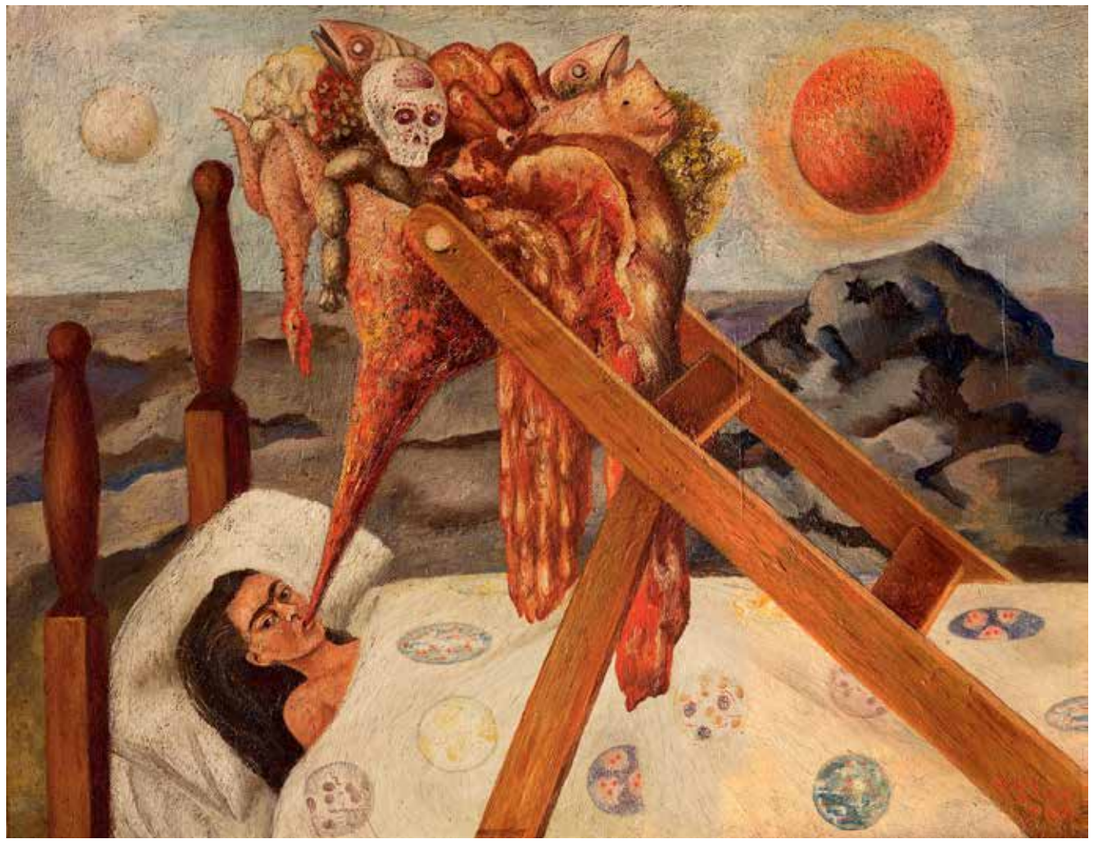
Henry Ford Hospital (Hospital Henry Ford), 1932



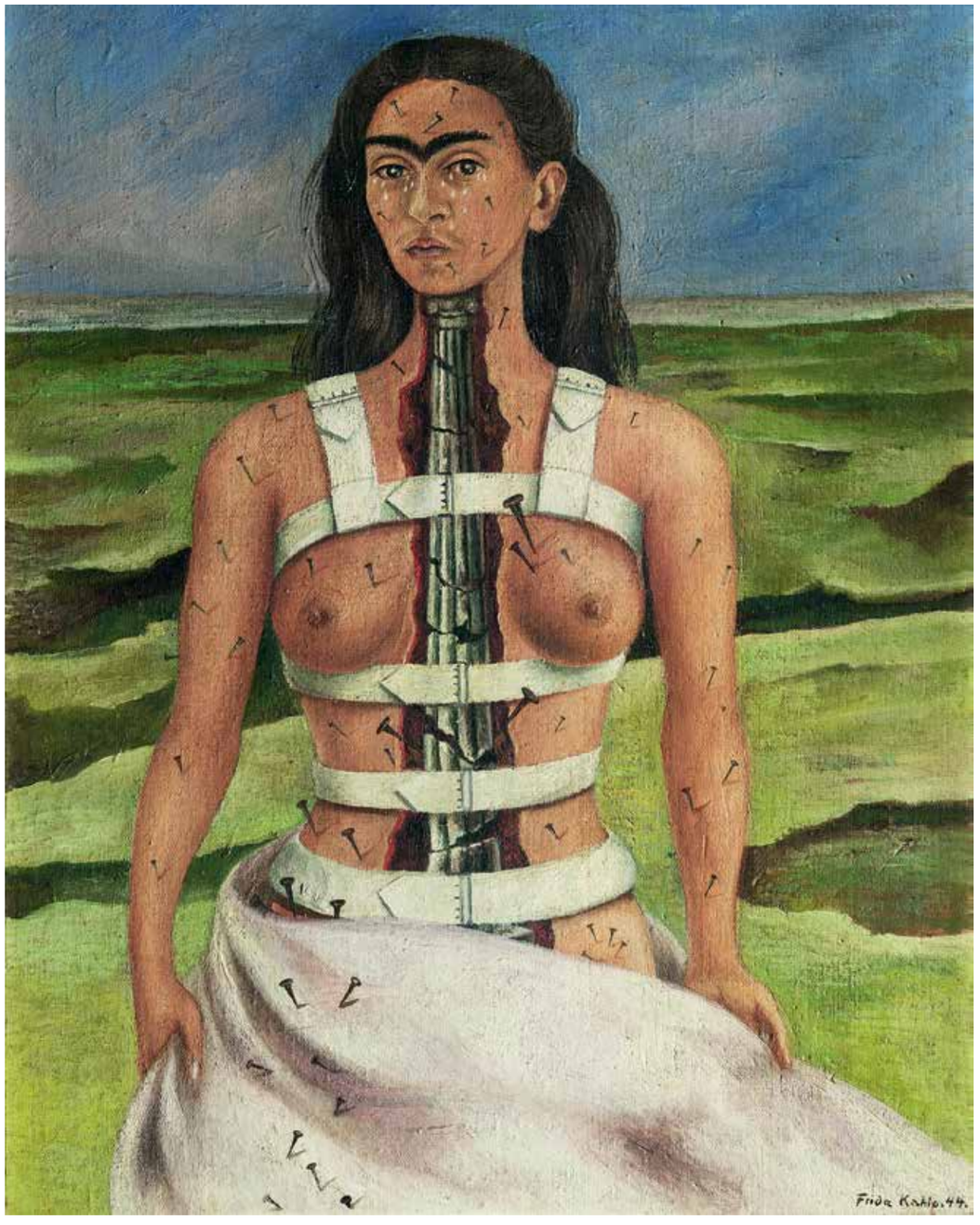
A Few Small Nips (Unos cuantos piquetitos), 1935

Untitled (Heart, Cactus, Fetus) (Sin título [corazón, cactus y feto]), n.d.

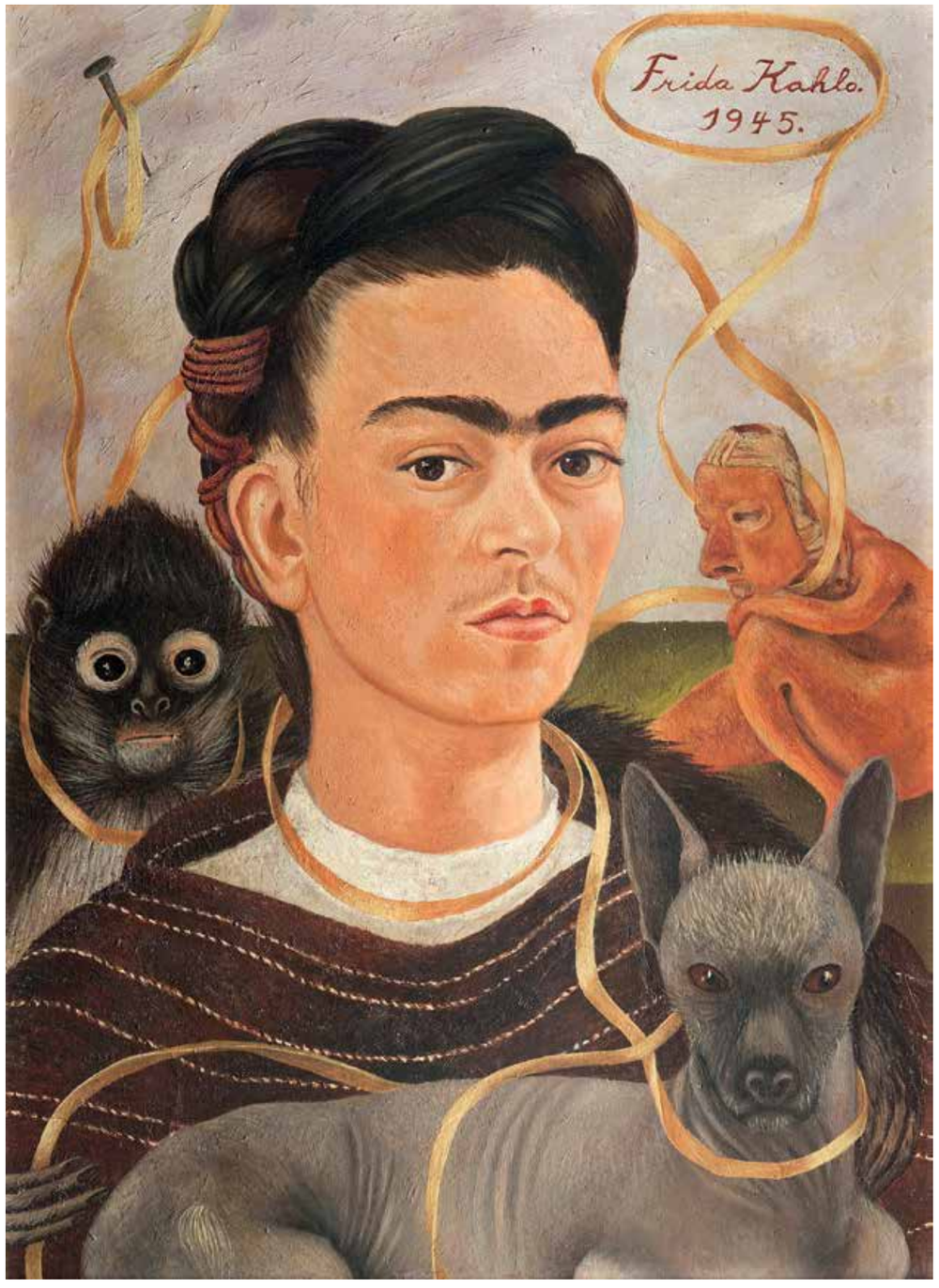
My Nurse and I (Mi nana y yo), 1937



Without Hope (Sin esperanza), 1945



The Broken Column (La columna rota), 1944



Self Portrait with Small Monkey (Autorretrato con changuito), 1945

List of Works

***The Hand (La mano)*, 1930**
Pencil on paper
9 × 6 in.
In this drawing titled *The Hand*, Kahlo is focused on rendering a realistic representation of her left hand. Depicted without the jewelry she loved to wear, Kahlo created this drawing during a period of convalescence in which she engaged in a common and necessary practice of becoming her own model.

***Nude of Ady Weber (My Cousin) (Desnudo de Ady Weber [Mi prima])*, 1930**
Pencil and charcoal on paper
24.5 × 19 in.
This portrait of the artist's young cousin Ady Weber depicts the subject standing, her feet drawn separate from the rest of the body and floating next to her chest. It is unclear if there was any reason for this decision since Frida Kahlo could well have drawn the body in proportion to the size of the sheet of paper used without causing her any problem.

***Nude of Eva Frederick (Desnudo de Eva Frederick)*, 1931**
Pencil and charcoal on paper
24 × 19 in.
This is another work by Frida Kahlo featuring the model Eva Frederick.

***Portrait of Lady Cristina Hastings (Retrato de Lady Hastings),* 1931**
Color pencil on paper
19 × 12 in.
This work, an exquisite pencil drawing, captures the aristocratic sophistication of Lady Cristina Hastings. Born in Milan and educated in Oxford, Lady Cristina was the wife of Lord John Hastings, who traveled to San Francisco as an unpaid assistant to Diego Rivera to work on a mural project in the Stock Exchange building. Frida Kahlo was intrigued by the personality of Lady Cristina, whom she saw as someone who oscillated between moods of boredom, explosive anger, and humor.

***Portrait in Red Cap (Autorretrato con boina roja)*, 1932**
Color pencil on paper
12 × 9 in.
During her time at the National Preparatory School, Frida Kahlo belonged to a group of students nicknamed "Los Cachuchas" because of the caps they wore. This singular group included nine members who were very bright, connected to social and political issues, and known for their mischievous antics. They met in different places to exchange books—including ones in foreign languages such as English and German—or to discuss politics. They also held academic competitions, recited poetry, and performed theatrical plays, beyond their scholarly obligations. In the drawing we see Kahlo depicted wearing the namesake hat of the group.

***Untitled (Frida and the Miscarriage) (Sin título [Frida y el aborto])*, 1932**
Lithograph on paper
12.5 × 9.5 in.
There is no evidence that Frida Kahlo ever titled this work, but *El Aborto (The Miscarriage)* and Frida y el aborto *(Frida and The Miscarriage)* are often used to reference this piece. Created after her miscarriage in Detroit, this lithograph depicts Kahlo naked with her unborn child visible in her stomach. The right side, which shows the artist holding a painting palette, is darker and overseen by a weeping moon. Blood flows down from Kahlo and nourishes the ground below her. On the left, there are splitting cells and a large fetus floats on the bottom corner of the page, connected to Frida by what appears to be an umbilical cord. In this lithograph, the world of motherhood seems separate from Kahlo's professional career as an artist. The loss of her child and the pain it caused is further emphasized by the darker side of the image. Kahlo did not produce many prints in her lifetime, but it was Diego Rivera who encouraged her to work on this lithograph in the period following her miscarriage. While the process served to help battle her depression at that moment, she quickly returned to the easel.

***Fantasy (Fantasía)*, 1944**
Color pencil on paper
9.5 × 6 in.
Created for her patron Eduardo Morillo Safa, this drawing was made when Kahlo was in the hospital. It seems to reflect a moment of idleness, as the patient contemplatively observes a clock that marks the slowness of time, which for Kahlo sometimes meant agony.

The cracked landscape culminates in two mountain-like breasts alongside a face whose features show a trace of pain. The eye-clock weeps a rain that floods the earth, while the veined leg above offers a clue to the origin of Kahlo's discomfort at the moment: her right leg, which was causing her great physical pain.

While Kahlo did not identify as a surrealist, rejecting the label, she was aware of the stream of conscious drawing exercises

popular among this group of artists and employed them at different points in her drawings. Kahlo made the following commentary on this drawing: "Surrealism is the magical surprise of finding a lion in the closet where you wanted to get a shirt."

***Portrait of Alicia Galant (Retrato de Alicia Galant)*, 1927**
Oil on canvas
42.5 × 87 in.
Frida Kahlo began to paint after her accident in 1925, and she often relied on friends and neighbors to sit as models for her work. This was the case for the somberly hued portrait of her friend Alicia Galant. The rather large painting demonstrates Kahlo's early influence by Renaissance artists such as Bronzino and Sandro Boticelli, as well as the popular modern painter Amedeo Modigliani. While she painted other pieces prior to this portrait, Kahlo inscribed "My first work of art, Frida Kahlo 1927" on the back of the canvas, perhaps indicating that she viewed it as her first accomplished work

***Portrait of Virginia (La niña Virginia)*, 1929**
Oil on masonite
31 × 24 in.
Painted shortly after Frida Kahlo married Diego Rivera, this painting illustrates the influence her famous husband had on her developing style. Rivera was a proponent of depicting ordinary people in his paintings and most likely encouraged Kahlo to do the same as she began painting several portraits of girls from her neighborhood. The colors in this painting are distinctly brighter compared to her previous works, visibly influenced by Mexican popular art. This painting also shows signs of Kahlo's developing style. Here we see the subject staring confidently out at the viewer in a pose not unlike those seen in many of Kahlo's later self-portraits. The care taken to depict the dress and lace sleeves also hint at the detail and intricacy that would come to define much of Kahlo's work.

Verso Drawing
***Sketch for Self-Portrait with Airplane (Boceto para autorretrato con aeroplano),* 1929**
Charcoal on masonite
This drawing on the back of the painting *Portrait of Virginia*, suggests Frida Kahlo started a self-portrait, but then chose to abandon it and reuse the canvas for her painting. The drawing provides insight into how Kahlo prepared her paintings.

***Portrait of Eva Frederick (Retrato de Eva Frederick)*, 1931**
Oil on canvas
18 × 24 in.
Not much is known about the subject of this painting, other than she was a New Yorker who modeled for Frida Kahlo while the artist was in San Francisco. It is evident from Kahlo's depiction of Frederick that she was fond of her subject. Such fondness is made visible in the extra care Kahlo took to render the curls framing Frederick's face and the delicate lacework on her sleeves. Floating across the top of the painting is a banner reading: "Picture of Eva Frederick, born in New York, painted by Frieda Kahlo." Kahlo used the traditional German spelling of her name until later in the 1930s, when she switched to "Frida" as a gesture of opposition to the rise of German fascism.

***The Bus (El camión),* 1929**
Oil on canvas
10 × 22 in.
This painting is often interpreted as the scene of the bus Frida Kahlo was riding on moments before the accident that changed her life at the age of 18. In *The Bus*, Kahlo depicts several people sitting beside each other on the bench of a bus: a housewife holding a shopping bag, a laborer in overalls, an indigenous woman nursing an infant, a small child, a middle-class man holding a sack of money, and a young woman (with a striking resemblance to the artist). Outside the bus window a cluster of buildings can be seen with one establishment named "La Risa," or laughter. This was an ironic choice, considering the calamity to follow, and it is perhaps an example of Kahlo's dark sense of humor. This painting, which is a departure from the artist's work made just two years prior, is executed in a simplified style with bright colors influenced by Mexican folk and popular art. The painting also offers a glimpse into the everyday life of people living in Mexico City shortly after the Mexican Revolution. Such a scene and the style in which it was rendered echo the work of the muralist movement that was well underway when Kahlo created this painting. The muralists were known for their large public works that celebrated the culture, people, and history of Mexico.

***Portrait of Luther Burbank (Retrato de Luther Burbank)*, 1931**
Oil on masonite
34 × 24 in.
Painted in San Francisco, *Portrait of Luther Burbank* is an homage to renowned horticulturist Luther Burbank. Famous for his work in the development of hybrid fruits, Frida Kahlo depicted Burbank as a hybrid himself. Shown holding an uprooted plant, Burbank has legs that have transformed into the trunk of a tree whose deep roots are being fed by his own deceased body. This presentation of the subject as a living being and as a body decaying represents a recurring theme for Kahlo. The cyclical relationship between life and death reflects the artist's research and interest in pre-Colombian views that emphasize the balance between the living and the dead, the celestial and the terrestrial. Further, this piece is one of the first by Kahlo that integrates the human form with plants, which becomes a key aspect of her later work.

***The Deceased Dimas Rosas (El difuntito Dimas Rosas)*, 1937**
Oil on masonite
19 × 12 in.
This painting, once titled "Dressed Up for Paradise," follows a tradition of postmortem portraiture in Mexico. Frida Kahlo had an interest in this tradition, particularly as it applied to children. This may have stemmed from her own difficulties having children and the miscarriages she experienced. Unlike traditional postmortem portraits that display the subject horizontal to the viewer (as if the viewer were looking over the edge of a casket), Frida Kahlo depicted the child in a foot first perspective that highlights his bare feet, which forces the viewer to look into the child's eyes and notice the blood dripping from his mouth. On the pillow next to the child's head is a reproduction of Christ's flagellation suggesting the faith of his family. The child rests on a straw mat, or *petate*, in which he will be rolled up and buried. The *petate* has been used since the time of the Aztecs. Newborn babies were placed in this straw mat after birth, and those who passed on were rolled in it before burial. For this reason, it was often viewed as a symbol of the convergence of life and death. Despite the child's ornate garments, the painting does little to hide the blunt reality of death.

***Portrait of Doña Rosita Morillo (Retrato de Doña Rosita Morillo)*, 1944**
Oil on masonite
30 × 24 in.
Painted with a tremendous amount of care and realism, this portrait reveals the affection and reverence Frida Kahlo had for the matriarch of the Morillo family and mother of the artist's friend and collector, Eduardo Morillo Safa. Containing an intimacy and sincerity that usually only exists in Kahlo's self-portraits, the impressive Doña Rosita Morillo is meticulously and beautifully captured here. In her delicately rendered hands, she holds two knitting needles and the beginnings of a textile. A thread that leaves the bottom of the picture plane gives the visual suggestion of a connection to the viewer and Kahlo herself. The background resembles a throne, which Kahlo exquisitely created from plants and cacti. Usually, this type of lush backdrop is seen in Kahlo's self-portraits, while her commissioned works feature less detail. It is clear that this portrait and its subject were very special to Kahlo.

***Portrait of the Engineer Eduardo Morillo Safa (Retrato del Ingeniero Eduardo Morillo Safa)*, 1944**
Oil on masonite
15.5 × 11.5 in.
Eduardo Morillo Safa was Frida Kahlo's dear friend and her chief patron, commissioning numerous works by the artist. He was a successful man, working as an agronomist, head of the Department of Agriculture and Public Works in Mexico City, and the Mexican Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Venezuela, and Panama. Morillo Safa commissioned Kahlo to paint portraits of his wife Alicia, his children Lupita, Mariana, and Eduardo and of his mother Doña Rosita Morillo. Over the years, he amassed a collection of 30 works by Kahlo. After his death in 1954, the collection was offered to Diego Rivera; unable to afford it, Rivera advised Dolores Olmedo to purchase the works.

***The Mask (of Madness) (La máscara [de la locura])*, 1945**
Oil on canvas
5.7 × 12 in.
In this self-portrait, Frida Kahlo paints herself holding a mask in front of her face. While her features are hidden, Kahlo's presence is revealed through her hand, her hair seen above the purple fibers of the mask, and by the roughly cut holes just above the mask's painted eyes.

Masks have been used in Mexico for theatrical and ceremonial purposes for thousands of years. In this image we can interpret the mask as part of a theatrical representation of Kahlo appearing as someone other than herself. The weeping mask perhaps alludes to the duality in which the artist lived. As a public figure, Kahlo prided herself in her near-perfect appearance and ability to mask her pain and physical limitations, often referring to herself as a "Gran Ocultora" or "Great Concealer." However, it is in her painting where she abandons her protective armor, making the anguished expression of the mask a symbol for the restrictions of illness, with the stronger Kahlo disguised and inaccessible.

Either way, the painting possesses a sense of a split, and dissolution of the true self. It may be as the title suggests, a portrait of madness.

The Chick (El pollito), 1945
Oil on masonite
10.7 × 8.7 in.
In *The Chick*, a round white chick is perched in front of a bouquet of lilacs that is covered with a spider's web and threatened by other insects, including caterpillars (which were considered symbols of death) and spiders. While not much writing exists about this piece, some believe the chick represents the fragile Frida Kahlo, and others say it is her husband Diego Rivera.

***The Circle (El círculo)*, 1954**
Oil on metal
6 in. in diameter
The Circle is a painting that is as much about Frida Kahlo's physical deterioration as is *The Broken Column*, although executed in an entirely different style. In this small circular painting, which was created by scraping away paint with a palette knife, Kahlo depicted herself nude and headless, kneeling in a chaotic landscape. The unfinished and rough quality points to Kahlo's physical and mental state late in life. Painted during the final year of her life, this work does not bear any of the hallmark features of her style. The intricacy and detail of her earlier work is absent, left behind is a painting that is more a remnant of brute physical actions. At the time Kahlo made this work she was suffering as a result of various surgeries and was using painkillers and alcohol to help mask the pain.

***Flower of Life (La flor de la vida)*, 1944**
Oil on masonite
11 × 8 in.
Flower of Life is one of several paintings by Frida Kahlo that uses flowers and plant life to represent fertility. In this painting, she transforms a flower into a clear representation of male and female reproductive organs. This painting avoids easy categorization and abandons the traditional rules of still life painting. Instead, Kahlo presents hybrid forms that merge human reproduction with the fecundity of plants. The depiction of human reproductive organs is matched by the symbolism of the lightning bolt and sun that occupy the upper corners of the work, representing the sun and rain that are needed for plant growth. While Kahlo struggled to have children throughout her life, fertility was a subject she repeatedly returned to and celebrated.

***Henry Ford Hospital (Hospital Henry Ford)*, 1932**
Oil on metal
12 × 15 in.
This painting deals directly with Frida Kahlo's miscarriage in Detroit. Painted on tin, in the style of a *retablo* or ex-voto, and using a faux-naive style, this work depicts an experience that may have been difficult to view if rendered in the realistic manner in which Kahlo was capable. Even with the distance created by the use of a simplified figure and inaccurate perspective, this remains an incredibly powerful image. Kahlo is represented nude, weeping and hemorrhaging on the sheets of a hospital bed. Floating around her bed and connected to her with vein-like red ribbons are six objects representing the feelings she experienced during the miscarriage: a male fetus, an orchid that resembles a uterus, a snail meant to represent the slow pace of the miscarriage, a medical model of a female torso used to illustrate anatomy, an autoclave (a machine used to sterilize medical instruments and that Kahlo invented the look of to explain the mechanical feeling of her treatment), and a pelvis bone.

Retablos are small devotional paintings while ex-votos are typically commissioned to give thanks for or to request miracles from various saints in the Catholic church. In *Henry Ford Hospital*, Kahlo adopts the style, scale, and material of these paintings, but does not depict a miracle. Instead, the painting represents a moment of deep physical and emotional pain without a plea for help or intervention. The content of this work is also markedly different in that artists of this period, especially women, rarely depicted scenes such as these. For that reason alone, this is an exceptionally innovative painting. It is a direct and candid expression of miscarriage; an experience shared by millions of women but to this day rarely discussed.

***A Few Small Nips (Unos cuantos piquetitos)*, 1935**
Oil on metal
15 × 19 in.
This painting has its origins in a sensational newspaper story that Frida Kahlo read of a drunken man who murdered his girlfriend by stabbing her multiple times. When brought before a judge, the man exclaimed, "But I only gave her a few small nips!" The painting was one of only two created by Kahlo in 1934, a period of loss and heartache provoked by Diego Rivera's affair with her sister Cristina. In this newspaper story, Kahlo perhaps found a metaphor for the repeated transgressions against her by her famous husband and was expressing that pain through the sardonic representation of this horrendous crime.

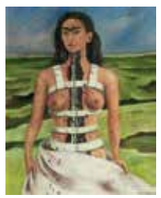
Like much of Kahlo's work, *A Few Small Nips* directly addresses subject matter considered taboo or inappropriate. While rendered in a sardonic manner, this painting confronts the viewer with the reality of violence against women that permeated culture in Mexico in the early 20th century.

***Untitled (Heart, Cactus, Fetus) (Sin título [corazón, cactus y feto])*, n.d.**
Oil on parchment
6 × 4 in.
Similar to *Flower of Life*, fertility is the central theme of this work, explored through three closely related elements in the painting: a cactus whose large leaves resemble human legs; a floating embryo connected to a cactus form by an umbilical cord; and a bleeding heart that appears to be fertilizing and giving life to the earth. In the sky, a black cloud presages the uncertain future of the fetus. The landscape here, like in *The Broken Column*, is bleak, desolate, and bare.

***My Nurse and I (Mi nana y yo)*, 1937**
Oil on metal
12 × 14 in.
Included in her 1938 New York exhibition at Julien Levy Gallery, *My Nurse and I* was considered to be one of Frida Kahlo's best works. The painting shows the artist as a baby being fed by a wet nurse. Kahlo's infant body is depicted with her adult head while the identity of the nurse is hidden behind a pre-Columbian mask. The imagery of the artist nursing from the anonymous figure can be interpreted as Kahlo drawing strength and nourishment from the history of Mexico itself. One of the nurse's breasts also shows an intricate pattern of milk glands made visible as if in a medical drawing. The same pattern is reflected in the structure of the large white leaf in the background. Milk is shown falling from the sky, nurturing the rich flora, which in turn is being consumed by a praying mantis on the left and a butterfly on the right. The raining milk is perhaps a metaphor for how the history and indigenous cultures of Mexico also nurture the landscape of the country itself.

As a baby, Kahlo was not able to nurse from her mother once her sister Cristina was born; instead she was looked after by an indigenous wet nurse. For this reason, the painting can also be viewed as a representation of the bond the artist had with her nurse, as well as emblematic of Kahlo's connection with her indigenous ancestry.

***Without Hope (Sin esperanza)*, 1945**
Oil on canvas on masonite
11 × 14 in.
Without Hope is a painting that deals directly with Frida Kahlo's medical treatments. It was created following a period of recovery when Kahlo had to be force-fed every two hours. The painting is often interpreted as a visual representation of the disgust the experience created in her. In the painting, the funnel used to feed Kahlo is held up by an easel, similar to the one her mother had made for her following her bus accident. By using the symbol of an easel, the painting can also be interpreted as representing Kahlo expelling rotting meats back onto a canvas, reflecting how the artist's work became her means for expressing feelings of pain and suffering.



***The Broken Column (La columna rota)*, 1944**
Oil on masonite
16 × 12 in.
By the mid 1940s, Frida Kahlo's health was steadily deteriorating, and she was forced to wear a series of orthotic braces. These back braces were painfully awkward and uncomfortable. In *The Broken Column*, we see Kahlo standing centrally and looking directly at the viewer, her chest exposed and the center of her torso removed to reveal a shattered and crumbling column on top of which her head precariously rests. Kahlo's skin is pierced with nails, signifying the pain the artist was experiencing, also evidenced by the tears rolling down her face. The background of this work is noteworthy as well. Similar to *Without Hope*, Kahlo appears in front of a bleak and barren landscape, devoid of any life forms. Despite all of this, the artist's expression remains stoic and determined, unwilling to give in to the failure of her body or the pain that this creates.

***Self Portrait with Small Monkey (Autorretrato con changuito)*, 1945**
Oil on masonite
22 × 16 in.
In *Self Portrait with Small Monkey*, a yellow ribbon weaves throughout the composition encircling the artist, her beloved pet monkey, her dog Señor Xolotl, a pre-Columbian statue, and her signature. The ribbon is tied to a nail that appears to be protruding from the surface of the canvas, fooling the eye and reminding the viewer of the flatness of the work. Kahlo's dog is a xoloitzcuintli, a breed that dates back to the Aztecs and is believed to be a guide in the afterlife. The monkey also had significant symbolism in Pre-Columbian society, representing fertility, dancing and the arts. The sculpture in the background depicts a squatting man in a pensive stance and is based on an artifact from Diego Rivera's collection originating from the state of Nayarit in Western Mexico. Kahlo appears goddess-like in the center of these three figures that are connected to her and each other by the yellow ribbon, suggesting that it is in this space that all of these forces converge.

Image Credits

DUST JACKET, FRONT

Frida Kahlo on White Bench, New York, (2nd Edition), 1939. Photo by Nickolas Muray © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives

CLOTH COVER, FRONT

The Broken Column (La columna rota), 1944 (see painting description)

PHOTO ESSAY, FRONT

Frida by the pyramid at the Blue House, with "Diego on my Mind", 1943. Photo by Florence Arquin. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo, 1926. Photo: Guillermo Kahlo. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Diego and Frida in the Blue House, ca. 1950. Photo by Florence Arquin. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida at two years old, 1909. Photo by Guillermo Kahlo. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida and Diego on the terrace of La Casa Azul, ca. 1945. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo at age four, 1913. Photo by Guillermo Kahlo. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo at the Art Institute of Detroit, Michigan, 1932. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo (Senora Diego Rivera) standing next to an agave plant, during a photo shoot for Vogue magazine, "Senoras of Mexico". Photo by Toni Frissell, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-F9-01-3707-25, no. 3.

Emmy Lou Packard, Frida Kahlo and Emmy Lou Packard, Coyoacan, Mexico, 1941. Photo by Emmy Lou Packard, Platinum Print © Emmy Lou Packard. Courtesy of Throckmorton Fine Art.

Lupe Marín and Frida Kahlo, ca. 1945. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo arriving in New York, 1938. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Carlos Veraza, Alfonso Rouaix, Frida Kahlo, Consuelo Navarro and Cristina Kahlo, at the Blue House, November 2, 1926. Photo by Guillermo Kahlo. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Rufino Tamayo, Adalgisa Nery, Frida Kahlo, Lourival Fontes and Olga Tamayo, ca. 1945. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo, ca. 1950. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

PHOTO ESSAY, BACK

Frida and Diego on their fourth wedding anniversary, 1933. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Photograph of Frida Kahlo in Coyoacan, Mexico, 1941. Photo by Emmy Lou Packard. Emmy Lou Packard Papers, 1900-1990. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Diego, Frida & Monkey. Photo by Wallace Marly/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Film director and producer Arcady Boytler, Frida and Cristina Kahlo, ca. 1945. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo Holding Her Pet Monkey. Courtesy of Bettmann Archive/Getty Images.

Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, Manuel Sandoval Vallarta and Enrique de la Moray at the delivery of the National Prize for Arts and Sciences, at the National Palace, September 11, 1946. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Diego Rivera at the Anahuacalli, ca. 1945. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo painting. Photo by Bettmann Archive/Getty Images.

Frida, 1929. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Museum Dolores Olmedo, Mexico.

Photo by Nickolas Muray. Photo courtesy Olmedo Museum © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives.

Artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Photo by Bettmann Archive/Getty Images.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, at the Burbank house, Santa Rosa, California, 1931. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo in the courtyard of the blue house with Concha Michel, ca. 1950. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo at her house in Coyoacán, 1949. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Nickolas Muray and Frida Kahlo, at the Blue House. Coyoacán, Mexico City, 1939. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo after an Operation, 1946. Photo by Antonio Kahlo © Frida Kahlo Museum.

Mexican artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera with a dog, Mexico City, 1952. Photo by Marcel Sternberger/Courtesy Stephan Loewentheil/Getty Images.

Frida in her study, ca. 1949. Photo by Antonio Kahlo. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida in front of the sketch of the central panel of the Pan—American Unity mural, in the Auditorium of San Francisco City Collage, California, 1940. Photo by Wittlock. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida in the courtyard of her house in Coyoacán with one of her spider monkeys, 1943. Photo by Florence Arquin. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

CLOTH COVER, BACK

Frida Kahlo. Photo by Bettmann Archive/ Getty Images.

DUST JACKET, BACK

Frida Kahlo in the company of several women, among them Emma Hurtado, Cristina Kahlo and Aurora Reyes during the opening of her exhibition at the Gallery of Contemporary Art on April 13, 1953. Facsimile Reproduction by Gabriel Figueroa. Photo courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico.

Frida Kahlo: Life and Exhibitions

Life of Frida Kahlo
Exhibitions of Frida Kahlo

1907
Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón is born on July 6, 1907 at the Blue House, in Coyoacán, Mexico. She was the third of four children to Matilde Calderón y González, a Catholic mestiza of Indigenous and Spanish descent from Oaxaca, Mexico, and Guillermo (Wilhelm) Kahlo, a German immigrant.

1910
Start of the Mexican Revolution. In solidarity with the revolution Kahlo claims 1910 as her birth year.

1913
Kahlo contracts polio and is bedridden for nearly a year. The illness affects her right leg and foot for life.

1922
At the age of 15, Kahlo is one of 35 female students admitted to the prestigious National Preparatory School, a state-run post-secondary school in Mexico City with a student body of approximately two-thousand.

1925
On September 17, 1925, at the age of 18, a bus Kahlo is riding on is struck by a tram. She suffers extensive spinal and pelvic fractures, broken ribs, and a broken foot.

Begins painting during her recovery

1926
Completes her first self-portrait

1928
Kahlo befriends the photographer and activist Tina Modotti, who introduces her to Diego Rivera.

Rivera includes Kahlo in his mural Ballad of the Revolution at the Ministry of Public Education, depicting her as a revolutionary comrade distributing weapons.

Kahlo joins the Mexican Communist Party.

1929
On August 21, 1929, Kahlo and Rivera marry. Kahlo was 22 years old when she married Rivera who was 42. Kahlo becomes Rivera's third wife.

The Communist Party expels Rivera for accepting anti-communist commissions. Kahlo resigns in protest.

1930
A pelvic abnormality resulting from the accident causes Kahlo to have a failed pregnancy.

Kahlo and Rivera travel to San Francisco in November of 1930. This trip is Kahlo's first time away from home.

1931
While still in San Francisco, Kahlo is hospitalized for acute tendonitis in her right leg.

Kahlo starts her affair with photographer Nickolas Muray, which will last for nearly a decade.

Upon their return from San Francisco, Kahlo and Rivera hire Mexican Architect Juan O'Gorman to design two linked houses and studios in the San Angel district of Mexico City.

In November 1931, Kahlo's painting Frieda and Diego Rivera is included in the Sixth Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists, the first public presentation of her work.

In November, Kahlo and Rivera move to New York at the invitation of Frances Flynn Payne, artistic consultant for the Rockefeller family, for a solo exhibition for Rivera at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which opened on December 22, 1931.

***Sixth Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists*, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, CA.**

1932
In April, Kahlo and Rivera travel to Detroit. Rivera was commissioned to paint a mural for the Detroit Institute of Arts by the Ford Motor Company.

Kahlo becomes pregnant for the second time, but has a miscarriage and is hospitalized.

Returns to Mexico to see her ill mother who dies on the 15th of September. Kahlo returns to Detroit in October.

1933
Kahlo and Rivera travel to New York in March 1933; however, things do not end well with the project Rivera undertook at the Rockefeller Center. He was commissioned by Nelson A. Rockefeller, but Rivera's inclusion of Vladimir Lenin in the mural gets him fired.

By December of 1933, Kahlo and Rivera return to Mexico and settle into their home in San Angel.

1934
In 1934, Kahlo's health deteriorates, and she suffers her third failed pregnancy. She also undergoes an operation for appendicitis and another on her right foot.

The Rockefeller Center mural is destroyed in February 1934, but Rivera is invited to recreate the piece at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

1935
The couple separates and Kahlo cuts off her hair after she discovers that Rivera is having an affair with her sister Cristina.

Following her separation from Rivera, Kahlo moves into an apartment on Avenida Insurgentes in Mexico City.

Kahlo and Rivera agree to reconcile but lead "independent lives," and she moves back to the San Angel house.

1936
Kahlo has third operation for on her right foot.

1937
Kahlo and Rivera host Leon and Natalia Trotsky at the Blue House in Coyoacán. Trotsky and his wife live here for a short time as Leon is found innocent of all charges by the John Dewey (American philosopher and educator) international commission that evaluated the accusations raised against him in Moscow.

Kahlo has a brief romance with Leon Trotsky. Four of Kahlo's paintings are included in a group exhibition at the Galería de Arte at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. American art dealer Julien Levy attends the exhibition and offers Kahlo a show in his Manhattan gallery.

Group exhibition, Galería de Arte del Departamento de Acción Social, Mexico City, MX. Organized by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

1938
In January, Kahlo has another operation on her foot.

In April, André Breton and his wife Jacqueline Lamba, travel from Paris to Mexico to meet Leon Trotsky and stay with the Riveras. Breton offers Kahlo a show in Paris, labeling her a Surrealist (a label that Kahlo later rejects).

Rivera, Breton, and Trotsky published "Toward an Independent Revolutionary Art" in the Partisan Review.

Rivera arranges for actor and art collector Edward G. Robinson to purchase four paintings by Kahlo, this is her first major sale ($200 a piece).

Kahlo travels to New York in October without Rivera for her first solo exhibition. The exhibition is presented at the Julien Levy Gallery from November 1-15, 1938.

(solo)
***Frida Kahlo (Frida Rivera)*, Julien Levy Gallery, New York, NY. Organized by Andre Breton.**

1939
Early in the year Trotsky and his wife move out of the Blue House following personal and political disagreements with Rivera.

Kahlo travels to France in January and stays with the Bretons in Paris.

Marcel Duchamp helps arrange the exhibition Breton promised Kahlo, since upon her arrival to Paris nothing had been arranged. Kahlo's work (17 pieces) is exhibited in a group show in Paris at Galerie Renou et Colle titled Mexique. This show resulted in the Musee du Louvre, Paris, acquiring Kahlo's self-portrait The Frame (1938), the first work in its collection by a twentieth-century Mexican artist.

Kahlo travels to New York in March of 1939 to end her affair with Muray. She returns to Mexico before the end of April.

By the summer Kahlo and Rivera separate, divorcing on November 6. She cuts off her hair a second time.

Kahlo suffers a fungal infection on her right hand, which keeps her from painting.

***Mexique*, Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris, France.**

1940
The Two Fridas and her now-lost The Wounded Table are included in the International Exhibition of Surrealism (Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo), organized by Breton on January 17, at the Galería de Arte Mexicano in Mexico City.

Kahlo's work is included in the exhibitions Contemporary Mexican Painting and Graphic Art in the Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco and Two Fridas is shown in Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Trotsky is assassinated by Ramon Mercader on August 20th; Kahlo is detained and questioned as a suspect. Rivera had fled to San Francisco a year prior, fearing affiliation with an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Trotsky.

Kahlo travels to San Francisco in September to see her doctor Dr. Eloesser. His tests reveal a severe kidney infection, anemia, and exhaustion. He recommends that she join Rivera in San Francisco.

Kahlo and Rivera reconcile and decide to remarry on December 8, 1940 in San Francisco. Kahlo returns to Mexico before the end of the year.

***Exposición internacional del surrealismo / International Exhibition of Surrealism*, Galeria de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City, Mexico.**

***Contemporary Mexican Painting and Graphic Art*, Golden Gate International Exposition, Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA.**

***Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.**

1941
Rivera returns to Mexico from San Francisco and moves into the Blue House with Kahlo and his assistant Emmy Lou Packard.

Kahlo's father died in April, which exacerbates her poor health.

Kahlo is included in the show Modern Mexican Painters at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

(1941–1942)
***Modern Mexican Painters*, Institute of Modern Art, Boston, MA. Traveled to Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington D.C., DC; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA.**

1942
Kahlo is appointed teacher at the academy La Esmeralda, a new art school of the Ministry of Public Education.

Self-Portrait with Braid is included in 20th Century Portraits at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and enters the museum's collection. Her work is also included in First Papers of Surrealism sponsored by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies in New York.

1953
(solo)
***Primicias para un homenaje a Frida Kahlo*, Galeria de Arte Contemporáneo, México City, Mexico. Organized by Lola Alvarez Bravo.**

1954
On July 13, 1954, Kahlo died at the age of 47 at the Blue House. The circumstances surrounding the cause of her death are unclear, but is officially reported as "pulmonary embolism." Kahlo was cremated and her ashes are stored at the Blue House, where she was born.


1929
1933