



VIVA LA VIDA

Frida **KAHLO** *•* *Diego* **RIVERA**
• *Mexican Modernism*

MEXICAN MASTERPIECES FROM THE JACQUES & NATASHA GELMAN COLLECTION

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✕ *and Mexican Modernism*

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Mexican Masterpieces from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection

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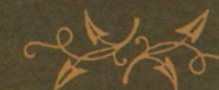


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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Eight days before her death in 1954, Frida Kahlo completed her last painting: an unassuming still life comprising seven slices of watermelon. It might appear to be an inauspicious work with which to end such a turbulent and brilliant artistic career, but for one detail: the inscription on the foremost piece of watermelon. Carved into the pink flesh of the fruit are the words, 'Viva La Vida'—Long Live Life—a statement which brings to an affirmative, heroic conclusion a life of much suffering, disappointment and sadness.

In fact, beneath their unsettled and often unsettling surfaces, Kahlo's paintings—of which we are privileged to present 12 masterworks in this exhibition—bear within them an immense belief in the life force. Like those of her husband, Diego Rivera, and so many of the other Mexican painters of the modern era, the works are permeated with the vitality and colour of 20th Century Mexico, a country undergoing radical social and cultural change.

Certainly there are parallels to be drawn between Mexico and our own country, which has struggled in recent decades with notions of national identity and bi-culturalism. Both nations have had to come to terms with their complex histories and forge a viable future for all their citizens.

The City Gallery, Wellington, is particularly pleased to be presenting *Viva La Vida* in the same year that we open a major exhibition of New Zealand art inspired by a crucial part of our own history: the story of the prophets Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi at Parihaka, Taranaki. Just as the artworks in *Viva La Vida* are shaped and animated by the forces of history, the Parihaka exhibition will be a rich and dramatic account of a country's past. Both exhibitions draw deeply on their various cultural inheritances and involve artists of colonial and indigenous descent. Just as pre-Columbian culture permeates Mexican art, the Parihaka exhibition will attest to the ongoing vitality of Maori spiritual and artistic traditions.

Alongside the famous works of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, *Viva La Vida* is a show remarkable for some of its lesser known figures. As many of the artists aren't household names, viewers will be surprised and enlightened by these works. These are heady works, full of love and torment, hope and despair. In the words of the Mexican poet Marco Antonio Montes de Oca:

*Ladies and gentlemen, stones and birds,
it is the beauty of life that leaves us so poor,
the beauty of life
that slowly sends us mad.*



It is this kind of warm-blooded engagement with life itself which makes these paintings and photographs so intoxicating and moving. *Viva La Vida* is a fitting exhibition with which to begin the new millennium. The paintings say much about the 20th century, but they also point to the future. In so doing, they assert the pre-eminence of the poetic and the imaginative aspects of human life.

Bringing the Gelman Collection to Wellington could not have been undertaken without the generous assistance of a large number of individuals and organisations. We are deeply grateful to Robert Littman and his associate, Magda Carranza, of The Vergel Foundation New York, for their enormous support and facilitation of all aspects of this ambitious project.

We wish to acknowledge The Vergel Foundation, New York; The Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes; the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes; and Banco de Mexico who have contributed importantly to the showing of this significant collection in New Zealand.

I particularly wish to acknowledge and thank Richard Nottage, former Chief Executive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Heather McGaskey, painting conservator; New Zealand Ambassador to Mexico Bronwen Chang and Peter Chang and the staff of the New Zealand Embassy in Mexico; both the former and current Mexican Ambassadors to New Zealand, their Excellencies José Caballero and Jorge Alvarez; Gillian and Roderick Deane; Lucy Alcock, Ministry of Cultural Affairs; Dave Pudney, Airryde International; and Sheryl Lowe, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington, for their hospitality and invaluable support during my visit to Mexico and over the months of negotiations between Mexico and New Zealand.

We are grateful for the crucial financial support and enthusiasm of the principal sponsors, Telecom New Zealand, Ernst & Young and Russell McVeagh, whose partnership with the City Gallery Wellington has made this exhibition possible. We are delighted to continue our ongoing sponsor partnership with Saatchi and Saatchi for creative advertising design, promoting the exhibition in New Zealand. And we acknowledge the major funding support of the Wellington City Council through the Wellington Museums Trust.

We are pleased to acknowledge the role of the New Zealand Government which has indemnified the exhibition and negotiated, with the personal support of former Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, the waiver of a non-refundable bond, thus making it possible for New Zealanders to enjoy these Mexican masterpieces.

We offer our deepest thanks to the many contributing sponsors, including *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post*; The Chartwell Trust and collector and patron, Rob Gardiner; Totally Wellington; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand Festival 2000.

We thank them for their generous support of this enterprise.

Paula Savage, DIRECTOR

SPONSORS' FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure Telecom New Zealand, Ernst & Young, and Russell McVeagh support the City Gallery's initiative to bring to Wellington *Viva la Vida—Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism: Mexican Masterpieces from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection*.

It is becoming increasingly rare for precious cultural icons such as these works to be allowed to leave Mexico. As principal sponsors of *Viva la Vida*, we have helped ensure New Zealanders have an opportunity to experience at first hand the power of great international works of art, including major paintings by revered artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

Vision, imagination and excellence are qualities embodied in the work of Kahlo, Rivera, and the other artists in *Viva la Vida*. These are qualities that we strive for in our different fields of expertise. Through our ongoing relationship with the City Gallery Wellington, we are able to present such inspiring and challenging artworks to the community at large.

In recent years, exhibitions of this stature have cemented Wellington's position as a focus for arts and culture in this country. *Viva la Vida* is the latest in a series of acclaimed and highly significant international exhibitions to be presented by the City Gallery, in partnership with its sponsors. In 1998, *The Exhibition of the Century* attracted 85,000 people from throughout New Zealand and overseas. We are certain that *Viva la Vida* will generate similar interest. One of the major highlights of the New Zealand Festival 2000, the City Gallery Wellington is the exhibition's sole destination in Australasia.

We believe the 85 artworks in *Viva la Vida*, (along with the accompanying exhibition of photographs, *Diego y Frida, Amores y Desamores*), will be a revelation for art lovers and first-time gallery visitors alike, from both sides of the Tasman. As principal sponsors of *Viva la Vida*, it is our considerable pleasure to present this exciting cultural event, which is a landmark both for the capital city and for New Zealand.

THERESA GATTUNG

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TELECOM NEW ZEALAND

JUSTIN SMITH

CHAIRMAN OF THE
WELLINGTON PARTNERSHIP
RUSSELL McVEAGH

JOHN JUDGE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
ERNST & YOUNG

CURATOR'S PREFACE

Natasha Gelman died peacefully the morning of the 4th of May, 1998 in her house in Cuernavaca where on that morning she, as on every morning, would have seen the peak of Popocatepetl from her bedroom window and faced, on the wall in front of her, a selection of self-portraits by Frida Kahlo.

During the 15 years of my life in Mexico, my friendship with both Natasha and her husband Jacques was a determining factor in my cultural transition. After Jacques's death in 1986, Natasha and I increasingly shared time together, as I lived only an hour away in Mexico City. During my last visit with her, the weekend before she died, we went for lunch at her favourite restaurant, a converted 17th century manor house whose façade hides a tropical paradise with luscious gardens and wandering troops of white peacocks and yellow tufted herons. Natasha asked for her usual table adjacent to the entrance where she could succinctly analyze and comment on the manner and character of clients entering and leaving. That perceptiveness and direct observation pretty much sums up the actual way the Gelmans collected: without hesitation and without regard to the opinions of others—and always on target.

Natasha and Jacques Gelman acquired the canvases of Frida Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, when there were only a handful of collectors in Mexico. And when the Gelmans became enthusiastic about an artist's work, they reinforced their convictions (as well as the artist's financial well-being) by buying in-depth the work of those so favoured. It just so happened these artists came to be the most famous of their generation.

Natasha's great beauty was documented by the portraits her adoring husband commissioned from these same artists. One could fill a whole gallery just with these portraits. Her last portrait, painted by the Spanish artist Rafael Gidoncha, demonstrates, half a century later, that she had not lost any of her brilliance, charm or vitality.

Natasha Gelman had a very clear idea and mission of what was needed to complete and strengthen the collection housed in Mexico and New York on Jacques's death. Not only did she use her *connaissance* to complete what works she felt were needed in the collection of School of Paris painting and sculpture which went to The Metropolitan Museum of Art on her death, but she concentrated an equal amount of energy in keeping her Mexican collection up to date. This collection was placed throughout the rooms of her house in Cuernavaca.

One can take, for example, the late addition to the collection of an important oil by Francisco Toledo as well as the work of even more contemporary artists such as Adolfo Riestra, Sergio Hernandez, Elena Climent and Paula Santiago.

This collection is still a work in progress, as it was for Natasha and Jacques Gelman during their lifetimes. In the year since her death, ten new works have been added both by contemporary and modern Mexican painters, and the collection will continue to grow as both Jacques and Natasha would have wished, encouraging and supporting the Mexican artists of succeeding generations.

Robert R. Littman, EXHIBITION CURATOR

JACQUES AND NATASHA GELMAN- THE ART OF COLLECTING

There are two types of private collectors—those who own the collection and those who are, as it were, possessed by the collection. Jacques and Natasha Gelman belong to the latter group.

The Gelmans' collection began with their marriage in 1941. Jacques died in 1986, but the collection continued to develop. It was as if Natasha had taken on board Picasso's statement after the death of Matisse: 'Now I will have to work for both of us.' Natasha Gelman died on 4 May 1998.

The Gelman Collection is the result of an intimate collaboration of more than 40 years. 'Intimate' describes the collection in one way, but doesn't tell the whole story. Jacques and Natasha conceived their collection like the child that was denied them. It was their main passion. They worked as one on its development.

Jacques Gelman had been attracted by the cinema since his youth in the Soviet Union, and is known for his association from 1941 with the Mexican comic actor Mario Moreno—'Cantinflas'. However, I never heard him talk about his fast-paced and no doubt entertaining life, shuttling between Mexico, Acapulco and Hollywood.

Of the collection, however, he spoke continuously. One theme repeated itself in conversations: to which museum could he entrust the collection? The question of selling and dispersing the collection never arose. From the start, the Gelmans had decided that it would be donated to a museum that would make the best use of the collection and would be a secure home for it. Jacques believed that the collector was not the owner of the work but was instead its guardian, a simple link in the human chain which allows the work to survive the long odyssey from the studio to the museum. For the painters, all the glory to come; for the collector, merely the present and its preoccupations.

One of these preoccupations seems to contradict this humble attitude. The Gelmans insisted that the collection be preserved in one piece; not only by being housed permanently in one museum, but so it could be experienced as a whole instead of being dispersed around different galleries, free to be affected by the changing whims of curators.

This wish answered less to the desire to see their names emblazoned on the front of galleries, than to their conviction that any collection worthy of the name is in itself a creative act, of which the collector is author.

History is the criterion which determines the choices and ways of displaying art in today's museums. The characteristic of the museum collection that follows this criterion is to appear logical, coherent and irrefutable. But this approach tends to emphasise consensual, not to say hackneyed, classification rather than direct experience of the work.

Seen in this light, the private collection is the indispensable counterpart to the museum collection. It is not enough for the collector to know and to be able to understand: he must also feel, not only grasp, but grab, take chances. In short, the collectors' ultimate criterion must be an act of passionate and inexplicable commitment. The Gelmans have never given the reasons for their choices.

The weaknesses which are a problem in museum collections are, on the contrary, breathing spaces, signs of life in private collections. Greatness and error, making a personal stance, the almost infallible taste and its occasional lulls are obvious in the Gelman collection, and make the visitors feel literally at home in it.

We should speak here about the *collections*, in plural. There are in fact several collections, or indeed many aspects of the Gelman collection, which correspond to the changing circumstances of their lives, divided between Eastern Europe where they were born, and Mexico, which received them.

The international part of the collection, and above all the European work, has been sent, according to the wishes of the Gelmans, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, thereby constituting the most important donation of 20th Century artworks that the New York museum has ever received.

The Gelmans' exceptional collection of European work has for a long time cast a shadow over the section of their collection devoted to Mexico. Even more than for pre-Columbian art, the Gelmans had a passion for contemporary painting. Their desire for risk, their attachment to life, is revealed within the

EVEN MORE THAN FOR PRE-COLUMBIAN ART, THE GELMANS HAD A PASSION FOR CONTEMPORARY PAINTING. THEIR DESIRE FOR RISK, THEIR ATTACHMENT TO LIFE, IS REVEALED WITHIN THE COLLECTION

collection—not only by acquiring works from famous artists, or from other artists still unknown at the time, but also through their portrait commissions, which allowed artists to measure themselves against that splendid subject, the beautiful Natasha Gelman.

Today, this collection of 20th Century Mexican painting has in its turn become famous. It is not surprising that the Gelmans have felt at home in an area which might well have seemed strange to them. This is because, for all its insistence on specifically Mexican themes and colour schemes, modern art in Mexico stood on an equal footing with Paris and New York. For Surrealism, in fact, Mexico proved to be another capital. The influence of Siqueiros on Jackson Pollock is well known—as is the admiration of Antonin Artaud for María Izquierdo and the welcome received by Tamayo in the milieu of post-war Paris.

Out of this context and of these bonds has grown the vibrant panorama created by Jacques and Natasha Gelman now on view in New Zealand. Eventually a suitable Mexican institution will provide a final resting place for their collection. ❧

Pierre Schneider



David Alfaro Siqueiros Portrait of Mrs. Natasha Gelman 1950



Rafael Cidoncha Portrait of Mrs. Natasha Gelman 1996

FRIDA DIEGO

Likened on their wedding day to 'an elephant and a dove', Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were as dramatically different as artists as they were physically. Like polar opposites, they embodied, respectively, the public and the private aspect of the Mexican imagination.

While Rivera was painting massive murals depicting the heroic struggle of Mexican society to forge its own future, Kahlo was staring into a mirror, descending into the depths of her own being.

Rivera's mission was, in his own words, to 'reproduce the pure basic images of my land. I wanted my painting to reflect the social life of Mexico as I saw it, and through my vision of the truth to show the masses the outline of the future.' By way of contrast, Kahlo single-mindedly explored the female condition in a series of self-portraits which revealed the tragedy of her medical history as well as affirming her Mexican identity. She was also, as Rivera stated, 'the first woman in the history of art to treat, with absolute and uncompromising honesty, one might even say with impassive cruelty, those general and specific themes which exclusively affect women.'

Born in Coyoacán, Mexico, on 6 July 1907, Frida Kahlo at the age of 18 was involved in a road accident which would affect the rest of her life. The bus she was travelling on was hit by a tram and she was impaled on a piece of metal—'the arms of the seat went through me like a sword into a bull', she recalled. Kahlo was plucked barely alive from the wreckage and

rushed to hospital. With her sister at her bedside and her family grief-stricken, Kahlo lay on her back in a plaster cast: her spinal column broken in three places, and with a fractured pelvis and numerous broken bones. Kahlo's injuries left her unable to have children and were the cause of health problems

throughout her life. Bedridden for some months, she abandoned plans of becoming a doctor—her intention since childhood—and began painting: 'My mother asked a carpenter to make me an easel, if that's what you call the special apparatus which could be fixed on to my bed, because the plaster cast didn't allow me to sit up. And so I started on my first picture...'

It was three years after her accident that she met Diego Rivera.

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato on 8 December 1886 and studied at the Academy of San Carlos before travelling to Spain. He spent 14 years in Europe, where he mixed with the Cubists (whose influence is evident in the 1915 painting *The Last Hour*) and studied Western painting, attending in particular to Puvis de Chavannes and the Symbolists. In 1921, in the wake of the Mexican Civil War, he returned home and became the central figure in the mural movement. Turning his back on early

experimental works such as *The Last Hour*, Rivera produced an epic series of murals during the 1920s and 30s—a period which is generally considered the apex of his career. An ardent Communist, Rivera travelled to the Soviet Union in 1927. It was during the following year, while he was painting murals in the Ministry of Public Education, that an admiring young woman seeking the elder artist's opinion of her work approached him. Kahlo was 21 years old at the time she met the 41-year-old Rivera. She became his third wife on 21 August 1929.

On their first meeting, Rivera immediately recognised the power of Kahlo's paintings: 'They communicated a vital sensuality, complemented by a merciless yet sensitive power of observation. It was obvious to me that this girl was an authentic artist.'

As well as sharing political convictions—both were members of the Communist Party—Kahlo and Rivera had many artistic interests in common. Both were inspired by the primitivism of Rousseau and Gauguin, and, most importantly, by Mexican folk art and pre-Hispanic culture. Key figures in the Mexican Cultural Renaissance of the 1930s, Kahlo and Rivera were acutely aware of the significance of their historical moment. Although adopting some of the contemporary modernist art conventions, both were concerned with pictorialising such enduring themes as birth and death, fertility and barrenness. While their individual styles were radically different, both were captivated by painting's potential to explore the human condition.

During the 1930s, the couple travelled the world, spending four years in the United States, where Rivera worked on murals in San Francisco, Detroit and New York. During this time Kahlo had to have her first pregnancy terminated on account of a 'pelvic malformation'. A personally devastating series of miscarriages followed. Kahlo's health, which was at best precarious, worsened and, following an operation in 1934, she had several toes amputated. Her *Self-Portrait with Necklace*, of the previous year, is an oasis of calm during what was a harrowing time in the artist's life. Serious strains were emerging in the couple's marriage, with Rivera having embarked upon an affair with Frida's younger sister, Cristina. Kahlo wrote to her doctor: 'It has left me in a state of such unhappiness and discouragement that I do not know what I am going to do.'

By the following year she had moved into an apartment on her own and regained her composure sufficiently to embark upon an affair with the sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Kahlo and Rivera later resurrected their marriage, and Kahlo forgave her sister who subsequently became, with her two sons, an integral part of the unorthodox Rivera-Kahlo family. Rivera's *Landscape with Cactus* (1931) is not only a surreal depiction of sexual relations, it can also be read as a visual metaphor of the artist's complex family-life.

In 1938 Kahlo and Rivera travelled to Michoacán with the exiled Russian Leon Trotsky (with whom Kahlo, famously, had an affair) and the leader of the French surrealists, André Breton, who immediately claimed Kahlo as a 'surrealist' despite her claiming to have no knowledge of the movement. Breton wrote of her work: 'The power of inspiration here is nourished by the strange ecstasies of puberty and the mysteries of generation... she displays them proudly with a



Ernesto Reyes, *Frida and Diego on the day of their wedding*, at the Reyes Studio in Coyoacán, Mexico City, 21 August 1929.

mixture of candor and insolence.' He believed that, more than that of any other artist, Kahlo's art was quintessentially Mexican. 'The art of Frida Kahlo,' he concluded, 'is a ribbon around a bomb.'

It was rare for Kahlo's work to be given this degree of recognition at a time when Rivera's art, at least in the public mind, was considered indisputably the greatest of any living Mexican. (Tellingly, Kahlo's first solo exhibition in Mexico wasn't held until 1953—the year before her death.)

Divorced in 1939, Kahlo and Rivera remarried the following year, having reached an arrangement, at Kahlo's behest, to share living expenses but cease sexual relations. While this arrangement did little to alleviate the jealousy and torment Kahlo felt, the marriage lasted—despite numerous infidelities from both parties—until her death fifteen years later.

In 1943 Kahlo's work was exhibited in group shows in Mexico, Philadelphia and New York. Her paintings of that year (four of which are included in *Viva La Vida*) attest to her maturity and growing eloquence as a painter. *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana* (*Diego on my Mind*) and *Self-Portrait with Monkeys* are tough-minded revisions of the passive female subjects of Western art history. Kahlo portrays herself as the master of her environment, both subject and object of the painting—the centre of her own universe. Yet the paintings have their dark side: anxiety and vulnerability persist. Although Kahlo's companions in *Self-Portrait with Monkeys* are traditional symbols of fertility and maternal protection, the painting can also be read as a study in childlessness and longing. *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana* (*Diego on my Mind*) is a remarkable exploration of both entrapment and

fertility, of devotion and its dark cousin obsession. While Kahlo's paintings refer to her life incessantly, it is their capacity to reach beyond their immediate circumstances that gives them power—a quality Rivera recognised in a 1943 essay:

Instead of miracles, the theme of her painting is the permanent miracle—life. Life that is always in flux, always changing and always the same in its movement through the veins and through the universe. A single life that contains the elements of all life.

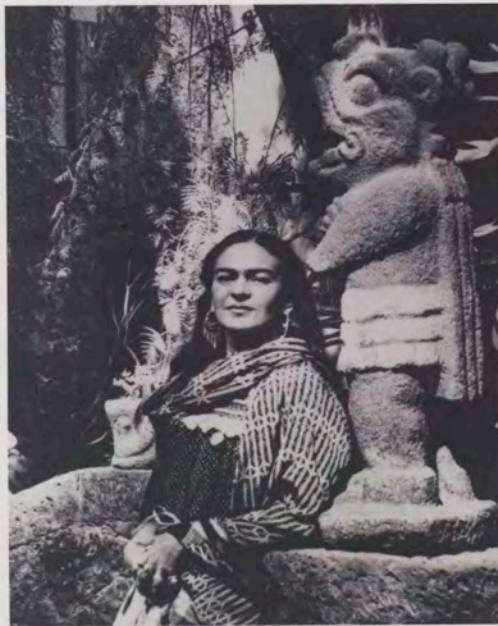
And if one tries to grasp its basis, one encounters abysmal depths, vertiginous heights, and an endlessly branching web that extends through the centuries, full of the light and shadows of life.

Kahlo's *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana* (*Diego on My Mind*) resonates with the symbol of the 'branching web' suggested here by Rivera—only we find Kahlo has placed the husband/painter spider-like at the centre of the web. She often painted Rivera, either in symbolic settings or in a comparatively conventional manner, as is the case with the earlier *Portrait of Diego Rivera* (1937).

In 1943 Rivera produced some of his most sumptuous reveries, among them such lavishly constructed works as *Sunflowers*, *Calla Lily Vendor* and *Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman* (whom Kahlo also painted that year). These works were painted during a hiatus in the midst of what

was another busy decade of mural commissions for the ever-prolific and much celebrated Rivera.

The confidence and vitality of Kahlo's paintings during the 1940s contrasted with her worsening health, depression and weight loss. By the end of that decade she was desperately unwell and undergoing spinal surgery. In the midst of such calamitous circumstances, she painted *The Love*



Guillermo Zamora, *Frida Kahlo in the grounds of her home*. c.1953, Coyoacán, Mexico.

'THE POWER OF INSPIRATION HERE IS NOURISHED BY THE STRANGE ECSTASIES OF PUBERTY AND THE MYSTERIES OF GENERATION... SHE DISPLAYS THEM PROUDLY WITH A MIXTURE OF CANDOR AND INSOLENCE.' ANDRÉ BRETON

Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), *Diego, Me and Señor Xólotl* (1949). Here she imagines herself as the mother figure in a Pietà-like composition, cradling Diego. The two figures are in turn embraced by the arms of the earth and, at the foot of the painting, the arms of the universe. This painting explores Kahlo's relationship with Rivera in terms of archetypal oppositions: night and day, sun and moon, conscious and unconscious, male and female, yin and yang.

During her final years, Kahlo—confined to a wheelchair but still painting vigorously—renewed her commitment to the communist movement: 'I must fight with all my strength so that the few positive things that my health allows me to do will help the revolution—the only real reason to live.' Surprisingly, Mexico's great painter of the inner life reiterated her commitment to the social movement long associated with her partner, Rivera. The paintings, however, maintained their intensity and inner focus.

Of the ongoing health problems for which she was often heavily medicated, Kahlo wrote:

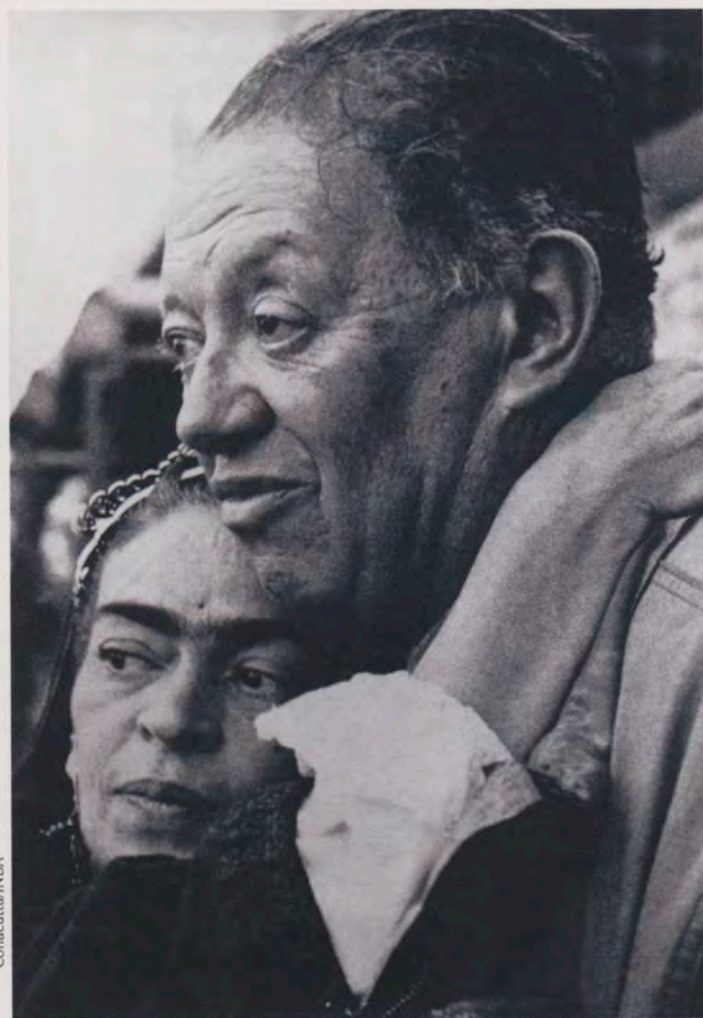
I have been sick for a year, from 1950 to 1951. Seven operations on my spinal column. Dr. Farill saved me. He gave me back my joy in living. I am still in a wheelchair and I don't know if I will walk again soon. I have on this cast... I feel only weariness and, of course, a lot of times, desperation. A desperation that no words can describe. Nevertheless I want to live. I have started to paint...

For her exhibition at the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo in April 1953, Kahlo's bed was carried into the gallery so the bed-ridden artist could be in attendance. In the midst of this gloomy scenario, Rivera observed: 'It is not tragedy that rules Frida's work... The darkness of her pain is just a velvet background for the marvellous light of her physical strength, her delicate sensibility, her bright intelligence, and her invincible strength as she struggles to live and show her fellow humans how to resist hostile forces and come out triumphant...'

That same year, gangrene developed in Kahlo's right foot and her leg was amputated from below the knee. The psychological and physical trauma of this



Juan Guzman, *Frida Kahlo working in bed*. 1952, Mexico City.



Unknown photographer, *Frida and Diego at the Blue House*. 1954, Coyoacán, Mexico City.

surpassed any of her earlier sufferings. She wrote: 'It's been like centuries of torture and at moments I almost lost my mind. I keep wanting to commit suicide. Diego is the one that holds me back, for I am so vain that I believe he needs me. He has told me so and I believe it...'

Her last public appearance was in July 1954. Wheelchair-bound and weak from her confinement to bed, Kahlo was taken by Rivera and friends to a rally protesting against the United States intervention in Guatemala. Her appearance on this occasion was celebrated by Raquel Tibol: 'She is a bundle of pain, aware of her premature aging, yet she came out to express her disagreement with imperialism and its

'IT IS NOT TRAGEDY THAT RULES FRIDA'S WORK... THE DARKNESS OF HER PAIN IS JUST A VELVET BACKGROUND FOR THE MARVELLOUS LIGHT OF HER PHYSICAL STRENGTH, HER DELICATE SENSIBILITY, HER BRIGHT INTELLIGENCE, AND HER INVINCIBLE STRENGTH AS SHE STRUGGLES TO LIVE AND SHOW HER FELLOW HUMANS HOW TO RESIST HOSTILE FORCES AND COME OUT TRIUMPHANT...'

servants, instead of staying home to cry for her personal misfortunes.'

Only days later on 13 July, Frida Kahlo contracted pneumonia and died, aged 47. Although a 'pulmonary embolism' was the official cause of death, suicide was not discounted as a possibility. Rivera was, according to friends, like a 'soul cut in two... he became an old man in a few hours, pale and ugly.' Rivera's own health deteriorated and the following year he underwent medical treatment in the Soviet Union. He died on 24 November 1957. Rivera's wishes that his ashes be mingled with those of Kahlo were ignored and he was buried in the National Rotunda of Illustrious Men.

While overshadowed by her husband during her lifetime, Frida Kahlo's reputation has subsequently grown to eclipse even that of Rivera. If their art represents different poles of the Mexican psyche, it also has to be acknowledged that the two artists were integral to one another, responding to and nurturing each other's work. Kahlo described Rivera as 'an architect in his paintings, in his thinking process, and in his passionate desire to build a functional, solid and harmonious society... He fights at every moment to overcome mankind's fear and stupidity.' In turn, Rivera celebrated Kahlo's commitment and virtuosity, describing her as 'the only example in the history of art of an artist who tore open her chest and heart to reveal the biological truth of her feelings'.

Gregory O'Brien

THE CACTUS & THE LILY

Until the 1920s the quintessential Mexican plant, the cactus, was virtually nowhere to be seen in the history of western art. 'Cacti did not arrive in time to form part of the symbolic and allegorical system laboriously built up and inhabited by Western culture for centuries,' wrote Angel Gonzalez. 'Half-alive and half-dead, with that inorganic, mineral appearance that they share with shells, cacti induce a meditation on death that makes it less inevitable or imminent than the traditional view of vegetables grown in plots.'

IN MEXICAN ART, THE FLOWER AND THE CACTUS ARE BOTH POTENT EMBLEMS OF NATURE, REFLECTING ITS SURFACES AND ITS HIDDEN DEPTHS, ITS EXUBERANCE AND ITS MYSTERY.

Two very different approaches to the subject are manifest in Roberto Montenegro's *Dawn* (1950), with its cacti standing sentinel in a classic Western setting, and Diego Rivera's *Landscape with Cactus* (1931), which is one of the best known paintings of cacti. Rivera's treatment of the group of plants—with their parodic sexual characteristics and gestures—is almost operatic. Cacti are frequently used as symbols of fertility and fecundity—a significance Rivera makes good use of (as did, incidentally, New Zealander Rita Angus in her *Portrait (Betty Curnow)* of 1942). The harsh beauty and protective aspect of cacti are highlighted in Kahlo's *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me, and Señor Xólotl*, where the plants surround the central figures. Inversely, this could also be seen as an image of entrapment.

Visually reminiscent of such inventions as barbed wire coils, the hand-grenade and the light-bulb, the cactus had, by the 1930s, not surprisingly become a symbol of modernity. 'The cactus is hard, clean, all structure, as if designed by Le Corbusier or Gropius,' a contemporary critic noted.

The cactus takes its place in the profusion of plants that permeate much 20th Century Mexican painting. Frida Kahlo's paintings, notably, are almost encyclopaedic in their referencing of different flowers and plants—an approach to the subject continued in the contemporary works of Elena Climent.

The lily is a prominent motif in Rivera's *Calla Lily Vendor* and *Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman*, both of 1943. In the Catholic tradition, the lily equates with purity and innocence, but its erotic associations go back to Middle Eastern traditions and the Greeks (who believed the flower was formed from the milk of the goddess Hera). As well as symbolising prosperity, the lily can be a portent of death. Rivera was aware of all these significances and the figures in *Calla Lily Vendor* seem to be venerating the flowers as much as arranging them. A comparable image of youth and teeming life, Rivera's *Sunflowers* (1943), also acknowledges darker human instincts.

In Mexican art, the flower and the cactus are both potent emblems of nature, reflecting its surfaces and hidden depths, its exuberance and its mystery.

Gregory O'Brien



Roberto Montenegro *Dawn* 1950

ART & REVOLUTION: Los Tres Grandes

'We proclaim that at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people.'

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

The Mexican mural movement, spawned by revolution and social change, was ideologically underpinned by a deliberate re-discovery of Mexico's Indian roots. The muralists mined pre-conquest indigenous art traditions for their restorative power, to rekindle a sense of national cultural identity.

The three great hero-figures of the Mexican mural movement, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, were the standard bearers of the post-revolutionary renaissance. Their legacy—monumental public murals imbued with the passionate language of revolutionary Marxism; their utopian vision—to commit their art to the transformation of society and to affirm the socialist, anti-colonial reforms that were shaping the face of modern Mexico; their audience—the urban workers and rural peasants in whose name the revolution had been fought. The muralists were united in a common desire to forge a new pictorial language which would be accessible to the masses.

The artists organized themselves under messianic manifestos appealing for collective action in the

reshaping of modern society. As Siqueiros wrote in the 1922 'Declaration of Social, Political, and Aesthetic Principles':

The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors directs itself to the native races humiliated for centuries; to the soldiers made into hangmen by their officers; to the workers and peasants scourged by the rich; and to the intellectuals who do not flatter the bourgeoisie... Art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction which it is today, but should aim to become a fighting educative art for all.

THEIR LEGACY—MONUMENTAL PUBLIC MURALS IMBUED WITH THE PASSIONATE LANGUAGE OF REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM; THEIR UTOPIAN VISION—TO COMMIT THEIR ART TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY AND TO AFFIRM THE SOCIALIST, ANTI-COLONIAL REFORMS THAT WERE SHAPING THE FACE OF MODERN MEXICO

The 1910 revolution, one of the great social upheavals of the 20th century, toppled President Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship and ignited a decade of civil war in which two million Mexicans died. The period immediately

following the conflict was one of national re-building and coming to terms with the past. Under President Álvaro Obregón, who was elected in 1920, the Mexican people hoped to forge a new national culture from the ashes of that brutal power struggle.

José Vasconcelos, Obregón's education minister, evangelically championed policies to restore Mexico's vanished cultural grandeur. He spearheaded

ambitious literacy campaigns and was a committed champion of the arts. Mexican artists, writers and intellectuals were enlisted to 'create a new civilization out of the core of its being.' One of his ambitions was a government-supported revival of mural painting. He commissioned great panoramas from young artists to instruct the poorest Mexicans about themselves and their country.

Centuries earlier, the Inca and Aztec civilizations had produced great sculptures, frescoes, ceramics and illuminated manuscripts which had been destroyed or buried when the Spanish vice-royalties razed these empires. Against this tide of cultural and religious oppression, pre-Columbian art forms survived in different forms: they were integrated into the religious rituals of Catholicism and kept alive in a flourishing folk art tradition and in the socially-conscious popular illustrations of José Guadalupe Posada and other engravers.

In the early 20th Century this folk art tradition began to merge with the academic art scene—a milieu which, up until that time, had remained ardently European-styled, upper-class and aloof from the popular culture. The joining of imported and indigenous traditions created a unique melding of energies and influences which provided the momentum for Mexican painting in the first half of the 20th Century and, indeed, remains a potent force to the present day.

The post-revolutionary muralists, writers and intellectuals turned inwards and explored the depths of the Mexican psyche, drawing inspiration from the cultures that had shaped their country. Mexican history was their subject matter; their monumental compositions were dominated by scenes of the Conquest, the Revolution, and post-revolutionary reforms. Fusing the innovations of European modernism with the indigenous traditions of their pre-Columbian past and native folk art, the muralists created a new formal language which brought the Mexican Cultural Renaissance to international attention.

✦ DIEGO RIVERA

The most famous of 'Los Tres Grandes,' Diego Rivera, returned to Mexico in 1921 after 14 years' apprenticeship in Europe. Working during that time almost exclusively in the cubist idiom, he was well-known in avant-garde circles and had become friends with Picasso, Modigliani, Dérain, Gris and Severini.

By the time he was considering returning to Mexico, however, he had abandoned Cubism and developed a more figurative style. Vasconcelos encouraged him to return home and devote his artistic talent to his country. With Mexican government sponsorship he travelled en route to Italy to study the lost art of fresco. Standing awestruck in front of the extraordinary paintings of Giotto, the first great master of fresco, and the works of Piero della Francesca and Sandro Botticelli, he came to an understanding of their techniques and how frescoes could be integrated within existing architecture.

Soon after his return, Rivera accompanied Vasconcelos on a journey to Yucatán to view pre-conquest archaeological sites. These alerted Rivera to the true artistic heritage of Mexico—an awareness which was further strengthened when he took up a study grant to Tehuantepec.

In 1923 Rivera embarked upon a mural commission for the walls of the new Ministry of Public Education building. This gigantic, immensely complex series of compositions—128 panels on three floors, covering



Diego Rivera Calla Lily Vendor 1943

17 000 square feet—took him over four years to complete. These murals marked the emergence of his fully mature style and established him as the leader of the new school of Mexican muralists. These works radiate 'mexicanismo': a distillation of the essence of the Mexican people and their landscape with its distinctive colour and light. The murals are a visual ballad of Mexico, resembling the traditional *corrido*, a narrative in song.

Alongside the murals, Rivera's easel paintings are also emblematic, timeless and humanistic, with a profound understanding of, and respect for, the human condition. His subjects are at once individuals and archetypes. Rivera infused his work with the tumultuous life force of Mexico, creating a theatre in which dramas of the human spirit are played out.

In Rivera's art, urban workers and rural peasants march together towards a utopian future under the red flag of Communism. A committed Marxist, Rivera was frequently on bad terms with the Communist Party, from which he was expelled for many years (and finally re-admitted shortly before his death). He was instrumental in obtaining asylum in Mexico for the exiled Leon Trotsky, who lived as his guest in his wife Frida Kahlo's 'Blue House' in Coyoacán. Rivera sided with Trotsky in the ideological struggle with Stalinism until the two men quarrelled and fell out.

The impact and influence of the Mexican mural movement registered in the United States, where Rivera accepted a number of important commissions during the early 1930s. These included the highly controversial unfinished fresco for the Rockefeller Centre, New York, which was destroyed, under orders of patron Nelson Rockefeller, when Rivera refused to delete an unapproved heroic portrait of Lenin which he had included. (This mural was later re-constituted in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.)

JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO AND DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros are grouped with Rivera as the great triumvirate of muralists, despite the distinctive styles and political ideologies which significantly differentiated their work.

A sceptic from the outset, Orozco drew caricatures for partisan newspapers during the civil war before accepting the commission from Vasconcelos to work alongside Rivera on the National Preparatory School murals. As well as drawing on popular art traditions,

Orozco's vision was shaped by the art he had studied during a European tour. He was particularly impressed by the work of Cézanne and Gauguin—as well as by Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes and El Greco's paintings.

A witness to the terror and destruction of the revolution, he was a vociferous critic of institutions and ideologies, using his masterfully gestural and expressionistic compositions to alert the public to both the dangers as well as the potentialities of the future. Throughout his life, he remained opposed to dogma and authoritarianism—whether from the Left or Right. As Andrew Bullen writes, Orozco 'painted works that expressed his commitment to the downtrodden and his hope for the

transformation of their conditions... he never aligned himself with any political movement. His paintings are works of visionary humanism.'

Orozco's art flourished during the period of Vasconcelos's appointment, when he was allowed complete artistic freedom. Of Vasconcelos, he said: 'Where else would you find another director of public education of such vision and daring? Where, except in Mexico, could the artist have painted government buildings without the interference of contractor or art committee? Where else would the artist have been permitted to fight it out with the public—and may the best man win!'



José Clemente Orozco Painting 1942

Working on important mural commissions in both Mexico and the United States (where he lived from 1927 until 1934), Orozco explored the tragic and violent dimensions of human experience, producing a Danté-esque vision of contemporary society that transcended Mexico and its history.

'The highest, the most logical, the purest and strongest form of painting is the mural,' Orozco wrote. 'It is, too, the most disinterested form, for it cannot be made a matter of private gain; it cannot be hidden away for the benefit of a privileged few... It is for ALL.'

The artist's idealism and passionate belief in art are reflected in his deeply wrought *Self-Portrait* (1932). While he renounced easel painting, he continued to produce figure-studies and portraits throughout his career.

Rebelling against a tendency to idealise the Mexican revolution and its aftermath, Orozco's paintings are frank, at times even gruesome, rebuttals aimed at a society which, as one critic noted, 'had greater desires to idealise itself than to see itself clearly.'

David Alfaro Siqueiros, the third member of the triumvirate, a controversial iconoclast and ideologue, was the most politically active of the muralists. His paintings and the dramatic events of his life are legendary.

After five years in the revolutionary army of Venustiano Carranza, Siqueiros was awarded a grant to visit Europe in 1919, where he studied the frescoes of Giotto, Michelangelo and Masaccio in Italy, and was influenced by the work of the Italian Futurists Marinetti and Severini. He returned to Mexico in 1922 to participate in the mural programme. A veteran of many battles fought in the Mexican and Spanish civil wars, Siqueiros also played an active role as a union organizer. His fierce commitment to radical ideologies led to frequent periods of imprisonment and exile. After leading a squad of armed Communists in an unsuccessful attempt to

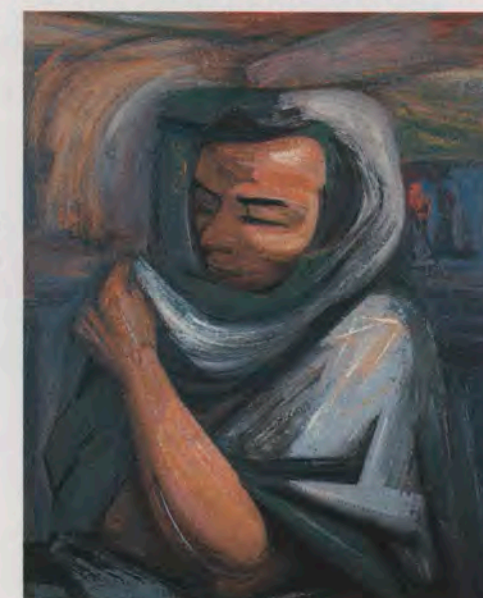
assassinate Trotsky in 1940, he was arrested and imprisoned, to be eventually released on condition he left the country. Siqueiros later claimed it was the most honourable act of his life.

In his murals he experimented with a range of unconventional techniques and industrial materials, including a spray gun, lacquer and automobile paints. Exiled in the United States during the 1930s, he began using pyroxylin and developed a 'dripping' technique as a way of heightening the impact of a painting, accentuating texture and movement.

In 1936 he conducted an experimental workshop in New York, where one of his students was the young Jackson Pollock. It was through Siqueiros's influence that the American painter became interested in the potential of non-traditional materials and such innovative techniques as the pouring of paint directly on to canvas. Siqueiros believed that the artist could only address the modern age by using the newest materials and technologies and adopting radical approaches to art.

Born out of social and political upheaval, the mural movement was an artistic achievement of universal dimensions. A high-spirited generation of artists

gave their country its singular modern art movement; an art that addressed the human condition but was also quintessentially Mexican. Seventy years after the heyday of the movement, the murals continue to generate international attention and interest. In a manner comparable with the European avant-garde, the productions of 'Los Tres Grandes' led to a rethinking of the role of art and the artist in modern life. Perhaps more than any other art produced during the 20th Century, the Mexican murals are public-spirited and political: the central component of an orchestrated plan to reshape and improve the whole of society.



David Alfaro Siqueiros Woman with Rebozo 1949

Paula Savage

THE MEXICAN DREAM, A SURREALIST TRADITION

'I believe that in the world of painting a picture is a window onto the human imagination.'

MARÍA IZQUIERDO

In the 1930s and 40s, when some of the 'founding fathers' of the European surrealist movement arrived in Mexico, they were surprised at what they discovered there. For Max Ernst, Antonin Artaud and André Breton, it was as if surrealism had not only beaten them to the New World, it had been practised there for hundreds of years.

Like European surrealism, Mexican folk art had its roots in the irrational and often visionary aspects of the human mind and soul. The traditional artforms—which frequently pictorialized dreams, nightmares, superstitions and the spectral presence of Death—were to provide a source of renewal, not only for native-born Mexican painters throughout the 20th Century, but for many artists visiting the country.

Founded by Breton in 1924, the Surrealist Movement in Europe was a reactionary force, a protest at the inhumanity of the modern, rational world. Breton wrote that 'scientific knowledge of nature can be worthwhile only on condition that contact with nature via poetic and, dare I say, mythic routes be re-established'. Such 'contact with nature' was, in effect, what the Mexican artists already had in place. While Western culture had to look outside itself for renewal,

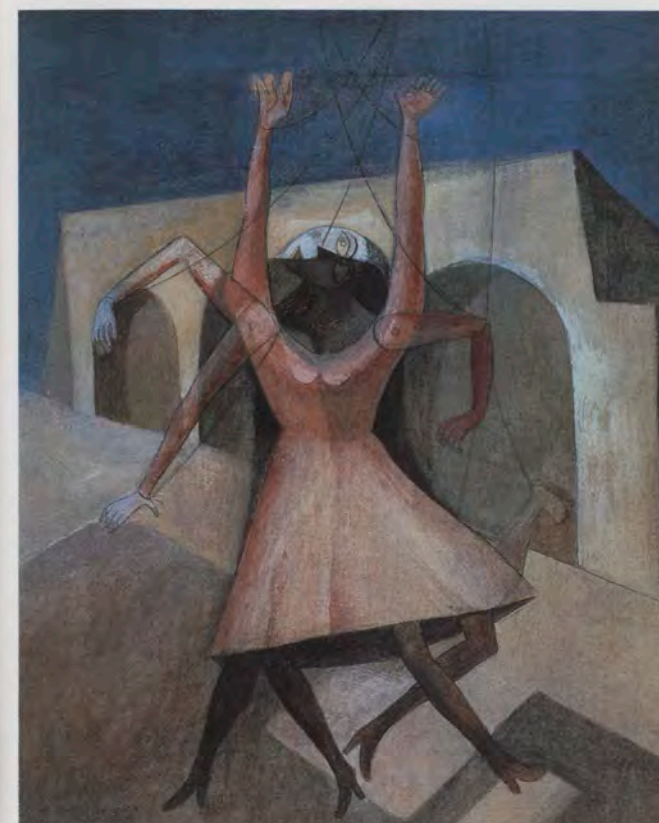
the Mexican surrealist artists had access to a thousand-year-old cultural tradition which regarded the visual environment as a heraldic, emblematic place with a direct connection to the human spirit.

In fact Breton considered Mexico, with its cacti-and skeleton-strewn landscapes, to be the surrealist country par excellence—a place exuding a sense of the ancient and the irrational. As Paz wrote in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: 'In the Valley of Mexico man feels himself suspended between heaven and earth, and he oscillates between contrary powers and forces, and petrified eyes, and devouring mouths. Reality—that is, the world that surrounds us—exists

by itself here, has a life of its own, and was not invented by man as it was in the United States.'

In contrast to the prevailing pessimism of their European counterparts, the world-view of the Mexican 'surrealists' tends towards the ambivalent, and at times can be joyously affirmative of its real and imagined worlds—as in the works of Juan Soriano (born 1920), Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991) and Gunther Gerzso (born 1915). The high-key surrealism of the Mexican painters can be seen as a visual correlative to the peculiarly Latin American form of

'REALITY—THAT IS, THE WORLD THAT SURROUNDS US—EXISTS BY ITSELF HERE, HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN, AND WAS NOT INVENTED BY MAN AS IT WAS IN THE UNITED STATES.' OCTAVIO PAZ
ON MEXICO, FROM THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE



Carlos Orozco Romero *Protest* 1939

'magic realism' epitomised by the novels of Columbian Gabriel García Márquez, who has spent much of his life in Mexico City.

The first major surrealist exhibition in Mexico was organised by André Breton in 1940 and featured work from Mexico as well as Europe. Included in the show was work by Frida Kahlo, whom the Frenchman had met two years earlier and considered the very embodiment of the female Surrealist (a label she rejected). While the Surrealists in Europe took a generally antagonistic attitude to tradition, the surrealist-inclined painters in Mexico drew deeply on the imaginative potentials of their spiritual and cultural heritage. Hence the mystical, yet at the same time sensual, explorations of Kahlo, María Izquierdo (1902-1955), Carlos Orozco Romero (1896-1984) and the gloriously anachronistic English-born writer/painter Leonora Carrington (born 1917), who settled in Mexico in 1942 and remained there for nearly half a century.

Despite her animosity towards Catholicism, Kahlo based many of her self-portraits on devotional

pictures of the Virgin Mary. (Kahlo also equated her sufferings and sorrows with those of the Virgin—as in *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me and Señor Xólotl* (1949), which is a revision of the Pietà, with Diego as baby-like Christ.) The clear rendering and allegorical flavour of paintings by Kahlo and Izquierdo derive from the proto-surrealist retablos, or popular images of miracles which were

**'MAN, IMAGE-LADEN TREE,
WORDS THAT ARE FLOWERS, THAT ARE FRUIT,
THAT ARE DEEDS.'** OCTAVIO PAZ

used for religious contemplation. However the relationship between the modern works and their sources is far from straightforward. Antonin Artaud recognised in Izquierdo's paintings 'the amalgamated side of the present Mexican civilisation, a sort of pagan Catholicism, which behind the Latin cross of Christ, is making an effort to find the cross with arms like those of the geometric palaces of Uxmal, Mitla, Palenque, and Copán'.

At the same time as the muralists were celebrating the public good and recording the progressive march of Mexican culture, the 'surrealists' were often discovering anxieties as well as sources of renewal in their cultural heritage. While the murals were often civic-minded, celebrating collective action and the contribution of the workers, images by Agustín Lazo (1900-1971) such as *Execution* (c. 1930-32) were examining the power of humanity and its organisations to annihilate itself. In a similarly dark vein, Kahlo confronts the capacity of emotion to destroy the orderliness of life. The paintings of Kahlo and Lazo are studies in both personal and social disintegration; archetypal scenarios awaiting Freudian or Jungian analysis.

In the Mexican tradition, the convenient distinctions European culture has drawn between issues as fundamental as life and death are transgressed. Not only are such taboos broken, they are incorporated into the national culture—as is indeed the case with the annual, ritualistic Day of the Dead (an event which impressed not only the European surrealists, but visiting writers such as Malcolm Lowry and Graham Greene).

Of the Mexican attitude to death, Octavio Paz wrote:

For the New Yorker, Parisian or Londoner, death is a word never pronounced, as it burns the lips. In turn, the Mexican often visits with it, caresses it, sleeps with it and throws parties for it; it is one of his favourite toys, and his most permanent lover.

If Mexican art renders death as part of everyday life, it also renders everyday life as part of the mythical and cosmic order. Orozco Romero, Izquierdo, Kahlo and others render the sensuality as well as the matter-of-factness of earthly existence using a heightened language of form and symbol. These explorations of the subconscious are a necessary counterpoint to the public art of the Mexican muralists who were inspired by Marxism, with its inherent rationalism and materialistic interpretation of human history. That said, the muralists Siquieros and Orozco often sought to depict archetypal, mythical realities, transcending the social realist impulse at the centre of Mexican muralism. Indeed muralism, like all Mexican cultural manifestations, is perplexing and full of such contradictions.

Alongside the gritty, epic accounts of Mexican contemporary life, the surrealist tradition acknowledged more subjective, intimate realities. Notable among these are the sensual reveries of Rivera in his portrait of Natasha Gelman, the

unsettling still lifes of Juan Soriano and, most dream-like of all, the mystical compositions of Leonora Carrington. André Breton considered Carrington, when they first met during the 1930s, the very embodiment of the *femme-enfant*, the 'marvellously magnetic conductor' and 'the only one capable of retrieving that age of wildness'. (The surrealist ideal of the *femme-enfant* has a ghostly embodiment elsewhere in Viva La Vida: in Carlos Orozco Romero's *Entrance to Infinity*.) Like Kahlo, however, Carrington was never content to play the role of surrealist muse. Through her long life she has continued to explore alchemy, Eastern spirituality

and her own—as Marina Warner puts it—'fierce and personal brand of feminist idealism'. The mood of her paintings echoes that of Carrington's 1945 story 'The Sisters':

The twilight is enchanted, bewitched. Let's stay out awhile. The garden is drenched with magic. Heaven knows what marvellous chimera will come out of those purple shadows. ☼

Gregory O'Brien



Juan Soriano Still life with Brain Coral 1944

'MEXICANISMO' THE ART OF THE PEOPLE

In their desire to articulate a truly Mexican identity—or 'Mexicanismo'—in their works, the artists of the Cultural Renaissance looked to the indigenous popular culture and folk art traditions of Mexico. In the centuries-old art of the people, they found a rich and colourful narrative tradition to tell the stories of the new Mexico.

A primary source of inspiration for the Mexican Modernists were retablos, or religious pictures painted on tin. Made by local journeyman artists, these devotional pictures adorned churches throughout Mexico. Each image depicted some peril which its subject had personally survived—an illness, for example, or a traffic accident or a tempestuous sea journey—thanks to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin or a favourite saint. Commissioned by their subjects following the traumatic incident, the images were not so much painted in entreaty to the Divine but as an account of what had actually happened: they functioned, as Frida Kahlo's biographer Hayden Herrera notes, as a thank-you note or 'visual receipt' of the satisfactory transaction between the saint and the subject of the picture.

In their conflation of the spiritual and the earthly in a single image, from a European point of view the retablos appear to form part of an indigenous surrealist tradition. At first glance they might equate with Salvador Dali's definition of European surrealist artworks as 'hand-painted dream objects'. However, in a country where miraculous events happened daily and surrealist visions were common—a place of ancient pyramids, sugar skeletons, and statues that wept blood—and where sudden death was a constant presence in the midst of life (by means of fatal illnesses, lawlessness or revolutionary activity), the retablo images were not so much dream-images as depictions of the extraordinary nature of reality. Dating from colonial times, and coloured by the physical passions of the Spanish religious impulse, these votive images continue to be produced in Mexico to this day.

Among the Mexican Modernists, the influence of popular religious art can be seen in particular in the work of Frida Kahlo and María Izquierdo. Like the anonymous artists of the retablos, the 'visionary realist' painters Izquierdo and Kahlo frequently determined scale from a psychological rather than a scientific standpoint. European laws of perspective don't operate in traditional Mexican iconography, where pictorial elements are manipulated to enhance the drama or to underline the moral of the story. The Modernists borrowed many conventions from the retablos, including painting explanatory texts on ribbons or banderoles within the painting; portraying the most significant characters on a larger scale than the other protagonists; and flattening foreground and background into a single plane. Diego Rivera commented that Kahlo's use of the retablos, which he described as the 'pure product of popular art', had made her painting 'the most forceful and the most Mexican of the present day.'

IN THEIR DESIRE TO ARTICULATE A
TRULY MEXICAN IDENTITY—OR 'MEXICANISMO'—
IN THEIR WORKS, THE ARTISTS OF THE
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The secular counterpart of the retablos was caricature, another important tradition in the history of popular Mexican art. Like religious art, caricature (or cartooning) dealt with a specific situation drawn from everyday life, exaggerated and distorted to tell the story in a direct, forceful style. In a population with low literacy, caricature helped to spread news about significant happenings and personalities: it also provided the people with an opportunity to comment satirically on fast-moving political events.

The most significant caricaturist was the engraver José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), who worked in a publishing house in Mexico City from 1887 until his death. Posada illustrated loose-leaf popular songs

and ballads (corridos) with satirical caricatures of political and revolutionary subjects. His characteristic images depict animated skeletons and grotesque monsters, exploring the popular preoccupation with death. In their synthesis of colonial Spanish imagination with traditions from Mexico's ancient indigenous civilisations, Posada's images were a strong influence on the Mexican Modernist artists; many of whom, including Kahlo and Rivera, were of mixed European and Indian (or mestizo) descent and were in search of a means of expression true to their origins.

The great Modernist muralist José Clemente Orozco was exposed to Posada's work as a youth, passing his print workshop daily on his way to college. As a young man, Orozco likewise became a caricaturist, commenting sardonically on a wide range of social issues for the revolutionary newspaper *La Vanguardia*. Orozco's first significant series, *Mexico in Revolution* (1916), owes something to Posada's graphic drawing style, as well as to his concern for contemporary social issues and the portrayal of the grotesque



Carlos Orozco Romero *Dancers* (undated)

and terrifying in daily life. Orozco's work links the social realism of the traditional caricature with the progressive socialist programme of the large-scale murals.

FOR ARTISTS IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICO, AS FOR THEIR MODERNIST FOREBEARS, THE CENTURIES-OLD ART OF THE PEOPLE PROVIDES BOTH A MEANS OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION AND A SENSE OF AUTHENTICITY, OF SPEAKING WITH A DISTINCTLY MEXICAN VOICE.

A further source for the mural painters (including 'Los Tres Grandes' Orozco, Siquieros and Rivera), were the wall paintings of the pulquerias, or pulque shops. These establishments were the Mexican equivalent of American saloon bars. They commonly featured paintings that either depicted the symbol which gave the pulqueria its name (such as a sun or a tiger or a rose), or featured a caricature or comic scene. Like the retablos, the pulqueria paintings are flat and stylised, their vitality stemming from a striking sense of design. They are thought to have been a formative source for the idiosyncratic flattened style of the Parisian primitive artist Henri Rousseau, who served with the French army in Mexico during the 1870s. While few of these wall paintings are still in existence (they have been whitewashed over or have crumbled away), they were

still common in the 1930s at the flowering of the Mexican Cultural Renaissance.

The artists of the Mexican Cultural Renaissance immersed themselves in a study of the indigenous arts of their country. Diego Rivera established a major private collection of thousands of archaeological artefacts: Frida Kahlo collected indigenous Mexican arts and crafts, including tin retablo paintings, papier-mache tableaux, masks and pottery. Kahlo commonly wore Mexican costume, which appears in many of her self-portraits, as an expression of her national identity and of her identification as an indigenous Mexican. (So too did María Izquierdo.) In *Self-Portrait as a Tehuana* (*Diego on my Mind*) of 1943, Kahlo wears a Tehuana headdress from the traditionally-matriarchal region of south-west Mexico, which frames her anxious face amid starched white lace and organic vine-like tendrils; elsewhere she pictures herself wearing pre-Columbian jade jewellery and embroidered clothing with floor-length skirts. Referring both to her work and to her individual style, Rivera described his wife as 'the personification of all national glory.'

The folk art traditions of Mexico persist to this day, and continue to influence the work of contemporary Mexican artists. Paula Santiago (born 1969), for example, has used traditional female Mexican costume as the starting point for her sculptural works; Cisco Jiménez (born 1969) paints secular versions of tin retablos; while Adolfo Riestra (1944-1989) looks to the stylised organic forms of pre-Columbian art for his sculpture. For artists in contemporary Mexico, as for their Modernist forebears, the centuries-old art of the people provides both a means of direct communication and a sense of authenticity, of speaking with a distinctly Mexican voice.

Lara Strongman



GEOMETRY & TRANSFIGURATION

'A MENTAL CONSTELLATION IS SUDDENLY BORN-TO SERVE A NEW WORLD VIEW, A NEW CONCEPT OF PAINTING...' (LUÍS CARDOZA Y ARAGÓN ON CARLOS MÉRIDA)

Critical of the overtly nationalistic approach of the Muralists, Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991) believed that their preoccupation with producing 'art that was Mexican led them to fall into the picturesque and be careless of the really plastic problems'. Against the simplicity and complacency he saw creeping into the Muralist Movement, Tamayo proposed an internationalist aesthetic of 'metaphors, geometry and transfiguration'. Consciously reconciling the ancient with the future, he synthesised elements of Mexico's pre-Hispanic past with the international modernism he had studied during trips abroad in the 1920s and 30s.

His emphasis on 'plastic problems' was shared by the notable critic and painter Carlos Mérida (1893-1984) and Gunter Gerzso (born 1915). Like Tamayo they reacted not only against the nationalism and story-telling emphasis of the Muralists but also the 'visionary realism' (to use Paz's phrase) of Kahlo and Izquierdo.

Celebrated as the 'creator of pure forms of colour', Carlos Mérida was of Zapotec Indian descent. Having served his apprenticeship on various of Rivera's projects in the 1920s, Mérida created a number of abstract murals from the 1950s onwards, by which time he had become an advocate for an art free of any social purpose. Works such as *Variation on an Old Theme* (1960) explore the formal patterning and emblematic quality of the arts and crafts Mérida would have known since childhood, while avoiding folkloric elements. Eschewing narrative (an accustomed ingredient in so much Mexican art), his works are a rigorous investigation into form and line, influenced by synthetic cubism and architecture. Using a uniquely Mexican technique called 'tablero pulido', Mérida created smooth-surfaced works, laying flat,



Cisco Jiménez *Hey! What a Screwed Up Country* 1994

unmodulated areas of colour beside each other on a solid support, then applying clear varnish.

Born in Mexico of Hungarian and German parentage, Gunter Gerzso spent four years in Switzerland living with an uncle who was an art historian and dealer, during which time he met Paul Klee. He later returned to Mexico, where he designed film sets (often working for Jacques Gelman) and mixed with the exiled surrealist artists, under whose influence he began painting dream-like pictures.

By the 1960s Gerzso's paintings were dominated by blocks or drapes of colour, rich in formal references to architecture—ancient and modern—as well as to the decorative arts. Like Klee's work, Gerzso's flattened compositions are seldom completely abstract: his *Portrait of Mr Jacques Gelman* (1957) playfully introduces elements of the subject's face and personality.

'Gerzso's work,' writes James Oles, 'seems to unite many of the most important forces that have shaped Mexican art in the twentieth century: the tension between representation and abstraction... the



Carlos Mérida *Festival of the Birds* 1959

specificity of the portrait and the permanence of myth.' Like Siqueiros a generation earlier, Gerzso was an innovative technician, using an X-acto knife to scratch and scrape paint from his hardboard surfaces to achieve unorthodox textures and a geometrical quality more akin to sculpture than painting.

Gerzso's works are usually placed in the tradition of Latin American Constructivism alongside those of the foremost proponent of that style, the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García. Typical of much Mexican art, the architectural symmetries of the paintings are animated by heightened, tropical colour schemes to achieve the kind of ripeness and effervescence described by the poet Carlos Pellicer:

*In the city, among mechanical forces,
there is a faint smell of vitreous custard-apple.
It is the seed-pod of the tropics
that smells of blue sky on early morning flesh...*

The melding of abstraction and figuration embodied by the work of Tamayo, Mérida and Gerzso has been advanced more recently by Mexico's foremost living artist, Francisco Toledo (born 1940), a painter who, like Tamayo and Mérida, is part-Indian.

Tellingly, abstraction per se hasn't become a dominant mode in contemporary Mexican art. This eschewal of the purely abstract in recent decades may well be indicative of the distance Mexican artists feel they have to maintain from the colonising power of North American culture and its most influential painterly style, Abstract Expressionism. Much recent work is characterised by a return to a symbolically charged 'magic realism', which is often fragmented and strewn with popular culture imagery. Perhaps it runs against the national character for the Mexican artist to confine the making of art to purely formal concerns. The voices in the street remain more persuasive than the measured tones of the academy or the silence of the museum. ■

Gregory O'Brien



OF STONE, AIR & BIRDS

Contemporary Mexican art is remarkable for its capacity to draw on its own traditions—ancient as well as recent—while remaining open to global culture.

The skeleton of a dog lifted its hind leg and peed against the skeleton of a rock. In the house opposite a skeleton vet and his skeleton nurse were examining the skeleton of a cat. The cat had witnessed a river rushing down the main street and was therefore in a state of shock. But the river was only a collection of fish-bones. Through the bones the wind threaded fragments of cars, and refrigerators, and the filaments from numerous light-bulbs. But you had no time to consider such details. Even at mid-day the skeleton of night was moving through the village. ('Mexico', Richard von Sturmer, 1991)

The age-old skeleton of Mexican art finds itself walking the streets of its accustomed villages and cities wearing the flesh and clothing of the contemporary world. As in Richard von Sturmer's 'Mexico', the wind and water that flow through this landscape—as well as through the weather-blasted skeletons of earlier civilisations—are part of an environment that now also includes cars, light-bulbs and appliances.

Contemporary Mexican art is remarkable for its capacity to draw on its own traditions—ancient as well as recent—while remaining open to global culture. This effervescent mix of past and present, local and imported, may explain in part the anarchic

energy which continues to shape Mexican art right up to the present day. 'Mexican painting has demonstrated remarkable continuity, fusing folk and pre-Columbian elements to create a unique and instantly recognizable flavour', notes Edward Lucie-Smith.

The pre-Hispanic past remains as pervasive as ever in Mexican visual culture. The Cuban painter Ana

Mendieta has commented that 'plugging into Mexico [is] like going back to the source, being able to get some magic just by being there'. This 'source' is an abiding presence in the works of Francisco Toledo, Cisco Jiménez, Sergio

Hernandez and, indeed, throughout the contemporary work in *Viva La Vida*.

From its inherently post-modern, post-colonial position, Mexican art deals both seriously and lightly with its traditions—witness Elena Climent's revision of folk art traditions (by way of Kahlo) and the way Germán Venegas's wood reliefs navigate a route back, via German Expressionism, to ancient Aztec sources. Notably, in the present era, Mexican artists are just as likely to be influenced by Picasso and Mapplethorpe as they are by Kahlo and Rivera.

CERTAINLY MEXICAN ART DURING THE 20TH CENTURY HAS BEEN SHAPED BY AN PASSIONATE ATTACHMENT TO BOTH REALITY AND THE IMAGINATION.

Certainly Mexican art during the 20th Century has been shaped by a passionate attachment to both reality and the imagination. This has given rise to the kind of 'magic realism' which Salman Rushdie believes could only emerge from a developing, 'half-made' society in which 'the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called "North", where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on.'

Considered by many the foremost living Mexican artist, Francisco Toledo draws on the rich Indian tradition of Oaxaca, his birthplace, out of which he assembles figurative materials as well as palimpsest-like scripts and patterns. His paintings and ceramics explore the decorative traditions and the narratives of Mayan culture.

**FROM ITS INHERENTLY POST-MODERN,
POST-COLONIAL POSITION, MEXICAN ART
DEALS BOTH SERIOUSLY AND LIGHTLY
WITH ITS TRADITIONS**

Paula Santiago, like Frida Kahlo before her, is captivated by the human body and its cycles of birth and ageing. She uses such materials as hair, blood and rice paper to create dream-like garments. Suspended in glass cases like specimens or relics, these 'garments' are transparent, accentuating the

absence of the body inside. As Edward J. Sullivan writes: 'The articulation of the body in the work of many artists (especially women) in Latin America today is an important element in contemporary expression.' As well as

questioning traditional perceptions of women, the works of Santiago open up the possibility of a new female identity—one removed from past representations and models.

Born in 1957, Gerardo Suter's art is also part of Santiago's 'discourse of the corporeal'. His photographs are intensely physical, ritualistic embodiments of pre-Columbian culture (a history

Elena Climent Still Life with Brush 1995



alluded to rather differently in Adolfo Riestra's *Pink Torso* of 1988).

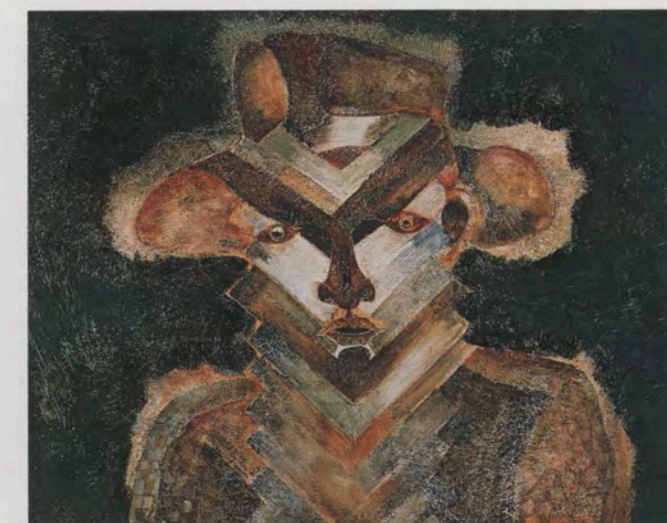
Like Suter's, Miguel Calderón's (born 1971) photographs are radically different from those of

**'PURITY IS A MYTH' WROTE HELIO OITICICA—
A STATEMENT WHICH RINGS TRUE OF MUCH
LATIN AMERICAN ART. A CRUCIAL IMPURITY—
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IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN ART IS ITS
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such earlier 20th Century Mexican photographers as Manuel Alvarez Bravo and Agustín Casasola, who were famous for their poetic, often dramatic, interpretations of national history. Calderón's works are ironic, humorous and deliberately artificial. He includes himself in many images—for example *Artificial History* #1 (1995)—questioning notions of machismo and subverting the tradition of self-portraiture which is at the heart of *Viva La Vida*.

Similarly, the painter-sculptor Cisco Jiménez exploits the imagery and gaudy effects of tourism and commercialism. However, his blackly humorous accounts of the national psyche are also a lively continuation of folk art traditions. Undermining religious and cultural significances, *Hairy Olmec* (1994) is at once a traditional doll, a pseudo-museum exhibit and a Dadaist construction.

The still lifes of Chicago-based Elena Climent (born 1955) strike a more intimate note. Harking back to the compositions of Kahlo and Soriano, her emblematic small works are lavish in colour and rich in human history, drawing on North American as well as Mexican influences. Like their distant relatives, the great Mexican murals, these miniatures teem with life and references to a culture that finds itself forever in flux. These are works which reflect upon time, relationships and the regenerative power of society. They are also, like the works of Rivera and Tamayo, immensely sensual celebrations of human interaction. Octavio Paz observes that Mexicans 'both ancient and modern, believe in communion and



Francisco Toledo Self-Portrait with Hat 1987

fiestas: there is no health without contact. Tlazolteotl, the Aztec goddess of filth and fecundity, of earthly and human moods, was also the goddess of steam baths, sexual love and confession. And we have not changed very much, for Catholicism is also communion.'

Between Jiménez's earthy reflections on Mexican identity and Climent's pearl-like distillations, we realise the diversity of approaches in the country's art. We also acknowledge the breadth, as well as the persistence, of the Mexican figurative tradition.

'Purity is a myth' wrote Helio Oiticica—a statement which rings true of much Latin American art. A crucial impurity—or, to put it another way, ingredient—in contemporary Mexican art is its constant realignment of observed and imagined worlds. All the contemporary artists in *Viva La Vida*, in their different ways, explore the paradox which is the essence of magic realism: that reality is inherently magical and that magic is real. These most recent outpourings of the soul, mind and hand are, like the great artworks of the past, formed—as Octavio Paz writes—'out of stone and air and birds'.

Gregory O'Brien



MEXICAN ART AND CULTURE: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

1325

- ~ The foundation of Mexico. The city of Tenochtitlán, capital of the Aztec empire, is established on the site of what is today Mexico City.

1502-1520

- ~ Reign of the ninth Aztec king, Montezuma II. Era of the Aztec's greatest glory—a huge state apparatus is set up and the military subjugates other regions as far south as Central America.

1517

- ~ Spanish expeditions explore coast along the Gulf of Mexico.

1519

- ~ First Spanish settlement in Mexico founded by Hernan Cortés.
- ~ Spaniards arrive in Tenochtitlán and are received peacefully by Montezuma II who, a few days later, is taken prisoner by Cortés's forces.

1520

- ~ While the Spanish leader, Cortés, is absent from Tenochtitlán, a religious festival turns into a massacre. Spaniards trying to escape are captured and killed.

1521

- ~ The Siege of Tenochtitlán by the avenging Spanish forces lasts 75 days. Finally the city falls.

1566

- ~ Uprising of Martin Cortés, rebelling against the Spanish Crown's control over the colony.

1571

- ~ Foundation of the Tribunal del Santo Oficio.

1810-1821

- ~ The War for Independence.
- ~ On 24 August 1821, 'New Spain' is declared separate from 'Old Spain', although the status of the Mexican nation is not immediately recognised by Spain.

1846-1848

- ~ War against the United States ends in the Treaty of Guadalupe, which grants the USA the territories of Texas, New Mexico and California.

1852

- ~ Birth of the engraver José Guadalupe Posada.

1857-1861

- ~ The War of Reform, a civil war between conservatives and liberals.

1876-1910

- ~ Porfirio Díaz is president of Mexico during a period of economic prosperity, with much foreign investment and exploitation of mineral resources. However, his dictatorial control polarises the country, leading, eventually, to the Mexican Revolution.

1883

- ~ Birth of José Clemente Orozco

1886

- ~ Birth of Diego Rivera

1896

- ~ Birth of David Alfaro Siqueiros

1899

- ~ Birth of Rufino Tamayo

1906

- ~ Rivera awarded grant to study in Europe.

1907

- ~ Birth of Frida Kahlo.
- ~ Discovery of pre-Hispanic murals in Teotihuacán.

1910

- ~ Rivera returns from Europe.
- ~ Centennial of national independence marked by extensive public cultural programmes.

1910-1920

- ~ Civil War erupts after President Porfirio Díaz is toppled. The following year, Emiliano Zapata leads a revolution seeking land rights and liberty for all Mexicans. (He is assassinated in 1919). Two million lives are lost.

1911

- ~ Diego Rivera returns to Paris (where he will remain until 1920). There he meets with other Mexican artists, Ángel Zárraga and Roberto Montenegro.
- ~ Zárraga's work is celebrated in Paris.

1913

- ~ Rivera exhibits at the Salon d'Automne, Paris.
- ~ Death of the engraver José Guadalupe Posada, who has been a role model for Rivera.

1915

- ~ Rivera exhibits in Madrid.
- ~ Orozco and Siqueiros work as cartoonists for the newspaper *La Vanguardia*.

1917

- ~ The Mexican Constitution proclaims land rights for all citizens, free lay education, basic working conditions, freedom of speech, and prohibits the Catholic Church from running schools, owning land and engaging in politics.
- ~ Orozco visits the United States, but suffers the ignominy of having his paintings confiscated at the border, after officials deemed them 'indecent'.
- ~ Venustiano Carranza is elected the new constitutional president.

1919

- ~ Writing in the newspaper, *El Universal*, Siqueiros and Rivera propose a Mexican School of Painting.

1920

- ~ End of Civil War. Presidential elections held after the provisional president persuades Pancho Villa to lay down arms.
- ~ Álvaro Obregón elected President for the period 1920-24.
- ~ Orozco returns to Mexico City and participates in the *Acción & Arte* (Action and Art) exhibition.

1921

- ~ Exhibition by Roberto Montenegro, who is considered the first muralist.
- ~ Rufino Tamayo becomes head of the ethnography department, National Museum of Anthropology.
- ~ José Vasconcelos is appointed secretary of the new Ministry of Public Education.
- ~ Establishment of the Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters and Sculptors Union (members include Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and Mérida).

1923

- ~ Major mural project for the National Preparatory School involves Siqueiros, Orozco and others.
- ~ Rivera works on murals for the Ministry of Public Education.

1924

- ~ Vasconcelos resigns as Minister of Education. After the national mural programme is cancelled, Rivera is the only muralist permitted to keep working.

1925

- ~ Siqueiros ceases painting for five years to commit himself to direct political action.

1926

- ~ Major rift between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. A number of bishops are deported, having demonstrated against the 1917 Constitution.
- ~ Tamayo exhibits in New York.

1927-1935

- ~ Orozco lives in the United States.

1928

- ~ Diego Rivera meets Frida Kahlo.

1930

- ~ Mexican School of Painting is formed (members include Tamayo and Maria Izquierdo). A major exhibition of Mexican art (including work by Rivera, Orozco and Covarrubias) tours the United States.

1931

- ~ Filming of *Que Viva México* by Sergei Eisenstein.

1932

- ~ Tamayo becomes head of the Plastic Arts Department, Ministry of Public Education.
- ~ Retrospective of Rivera's work at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. After completing three murals in Los Angeles, Siqueiros is deported from the United States.

1933

- ~ Rivera's contract to complete a mural at New York's Rockefeller Centre is nullified when he includes Lenin in the painting. The mural is destroyed.

1935

- ~ Siqueiros establishes an experimental painting workshop in New York, where one of his students is Jackson Pollock.

1936

- ~ Orozco paints murals for the University of Guadalajara (and, the following year, for the Government Palace of Guadalajara).
- ~ Tamayo moves to New York, where he will remain for 18 years.
- ~ The Mexican Government backs the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War (the following year, Siqueiros fights in Spain, rising to the rank of colonel).

1937

- ~ After prompting by Rivera, the Mexican government grants asylum to Leon Trotsky.

1938

- ~ Andre Breton visits Mexico.
- ~ Frida Kahlo's paintings shown at the Julian Levy Gallery, New York.

1939

- ~ The Fascists assume power in Spain, leading to mass emigration of Republicans, many of whom find their way to Mexico.
- ~ Kahlo exhibits in Paris.
- ~ Marc Chagall visits Mexico.
- ~ Leonora Carrington arrives in Mexico.
- ~ Publication of Graham Greene's book based on his trips to Mexico, *The Lawless Roads*.

1940

- ~ Leon Trotsky is killed in Mexico City by a Stalinist assassin.
- ~ International Exhibit of Surrealism—including works by Kahlo, Rivera, Montenegro, Izquierdo, Mérida, Picasso, Klee, Ernst and Miró—at the Gallery of Mexican Art, Mexico City.
- ~ Orozco paints mural in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- ~ *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition shown in New York. The implicit aim of this exhibition is to encourage North American artists to follow the Mexican example and forge an original American style.
- ~ Through the mediation of Marcel Duchamp, Frida Kahlo exhibits at the Galerie Pierre Colle in Paris.
- ~ Birth of Francisco Toledo.

1942

- ~ Mexico enters World War Two on the side of the Allies, following the sinking of two Mexican oil tankers by German submarines in the Caribbean.

1943

- ~ Kahlo appointed professor of painting at the 'Escuela de Pintura y Escultura', Mexico City.

1944

- ~ Siqueiros returns to Mexico to establish the 'Realism Centre' at the Museum of Modern Art.

1945

- ~ Rivera produces murals for the Palace of Fine Arts. Siqueiros publishes *No hay mas ruta que la nuestra* (There is no other route but ours).

1947

- ~ Orozco retrospective at the Palace of Fine Arts.
- ~ Publication of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*.

1948

- ~ Orozco paints murals in Guadalajara's government palace and in Chapultepec Castle.

1949

- ~ Death of José Clemente Orozco.

- ~ Tamayo moves to Paris, where he will remain for a decade.

1950

- ~ Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and Tamayo featured at the Venice Biennial.
- ~ Siqueiros produces murals for the National Palace of Fine Arts.
- ~ Publication of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz.

1953

- ~ Frida Kahlo exhibition at the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City.
- ~ Tamayo featured in Sao Paulo Biennial.

1954

- ~ Death of Frida Kahlo

1955

- ~ Rivera gifts the house in Coyoacán, Kahlo's birthplace, to the Mexican people, with the intention of creating a Frida Kahlo Museum.

1957

- ~ Death of Diego Rivera

1958

- ~ Carlos Fuentes publishes *La Region mas Transparente* (The Most Transparent Region).

1960

- ~ Siqueiros is jailed after participating in political demonstrations and denouncing Mexican government policies. (He will serve nearly half of his eight year sentence before being granted clemency.)

1960-1965

- ~ Francisco Toledo lives in Paris before returning to Mexico.

1967

- ~ Siqueiros awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union.

1974

- ~ Death of David Alfaro Siqueiros

1983

- ~ Publication of Frida Kahlo biography by Hayden Herrera begins the contemporary recognition of Kahlo as a 20th Century icon.

1988

- ~ Major touring exhibition, *Images of Mexico*, realized by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany.

1991

- ~ Death of Rufino Tamayo.

1992

- ~ A major exhibition, *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1993

- ~ *The Blue House, The World of Frida Kahlo*, exhibition realized by Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany.



Diego Rivera *The Last Hour* 1915 Oil on canvas 920 x 730 mm



Diego Rivera *Landscape with Cactus* 1931 Oil on canvas 1255 x 1500 mm



Diego Rivera *Modesta* 1937 Oil on canvas 800 x 590 mm



Diego Rivera Self-Portrait 1941 Oil on canvas 700 x 420 mm



Diego Rivera Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1943 Oil on canvas 1150 x 1530 mm



Diego Rivera *Calla Lily Vendor* 1943 Oil on masonite 1500 x 1200 mm



Diego Rivera *Sunflowers* 1943 Oil on wood 900 x 1300 mm



Diego Rivera *The Healer* 1943 Gouache on paper 470 x 610 mm



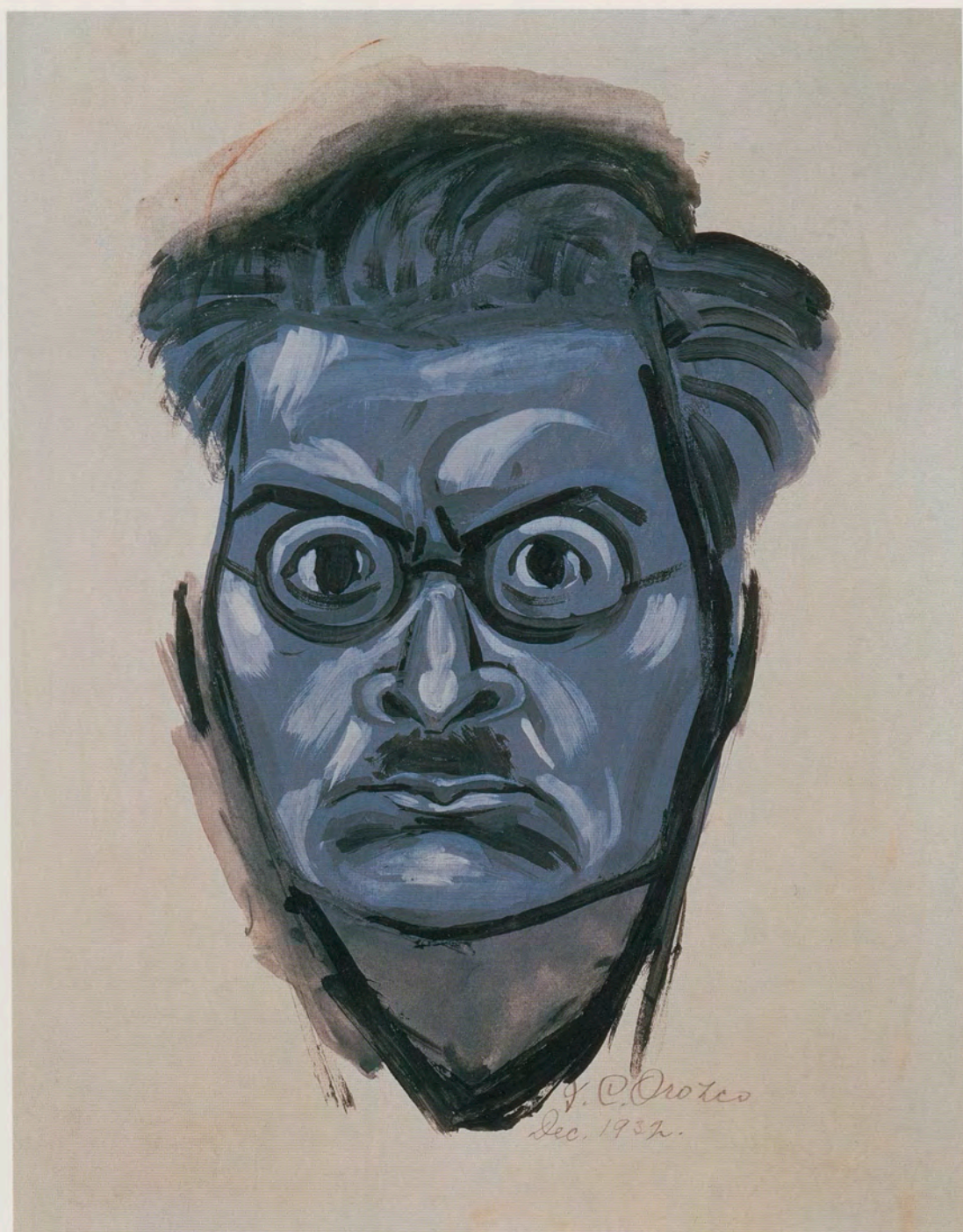
Miguel Covarrubias *Portrait of Diego Rivera* undated (c.1920s) Ink and watercolour on paper 290 x 210 mm



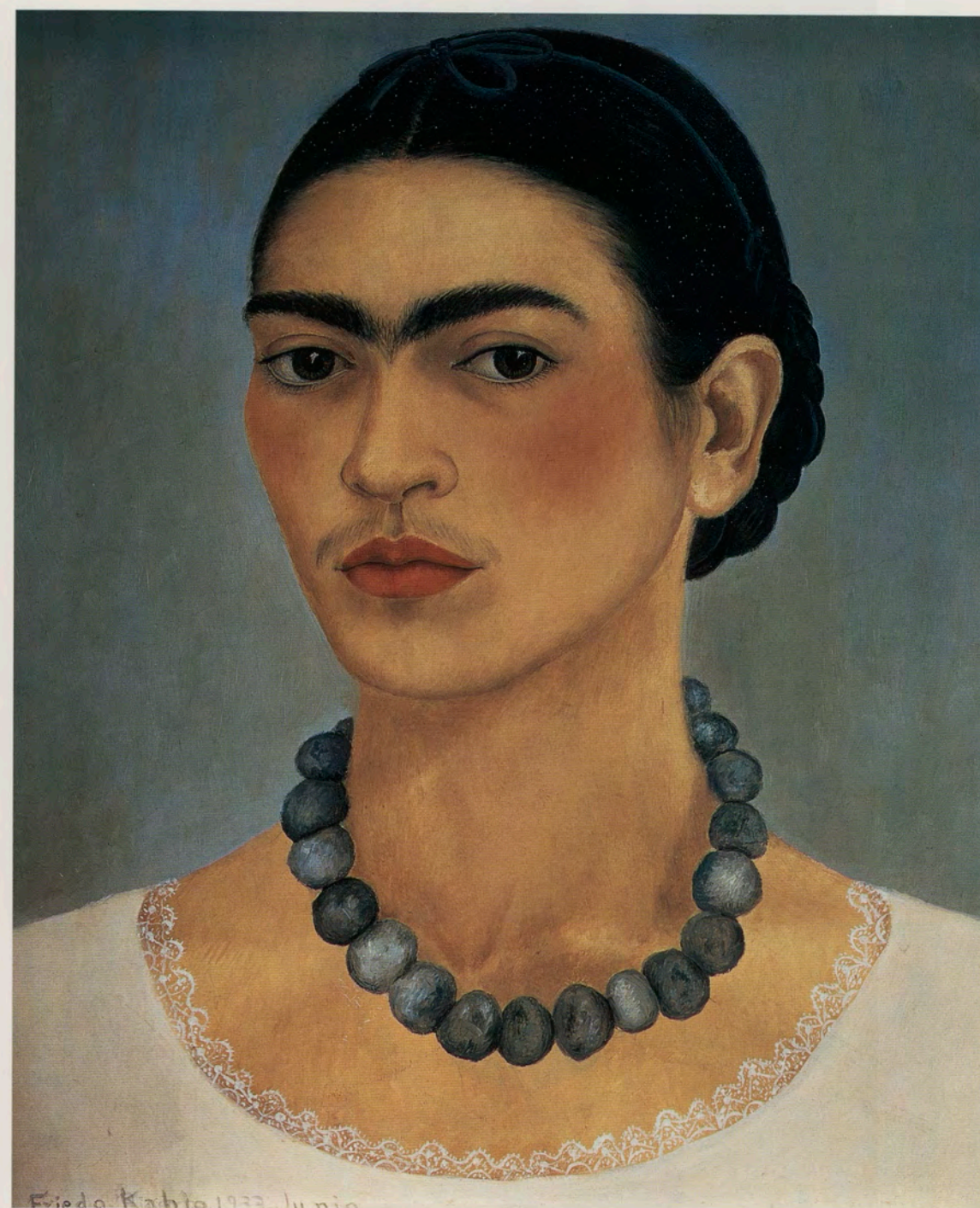
David Alfaro Siqueiros *Siqueiros by Siqueiros* [Taxco 3] 1930 Oil on canvas 990 x 790 mm



David Alfaro Siqueiros *Head of a Woman* 1939 Oil on canvas 545 x 430 mm



José Clemente Orozco *Self-Portrait* December, 1932 Watercolour and gouache on paper 370 x 300 mm



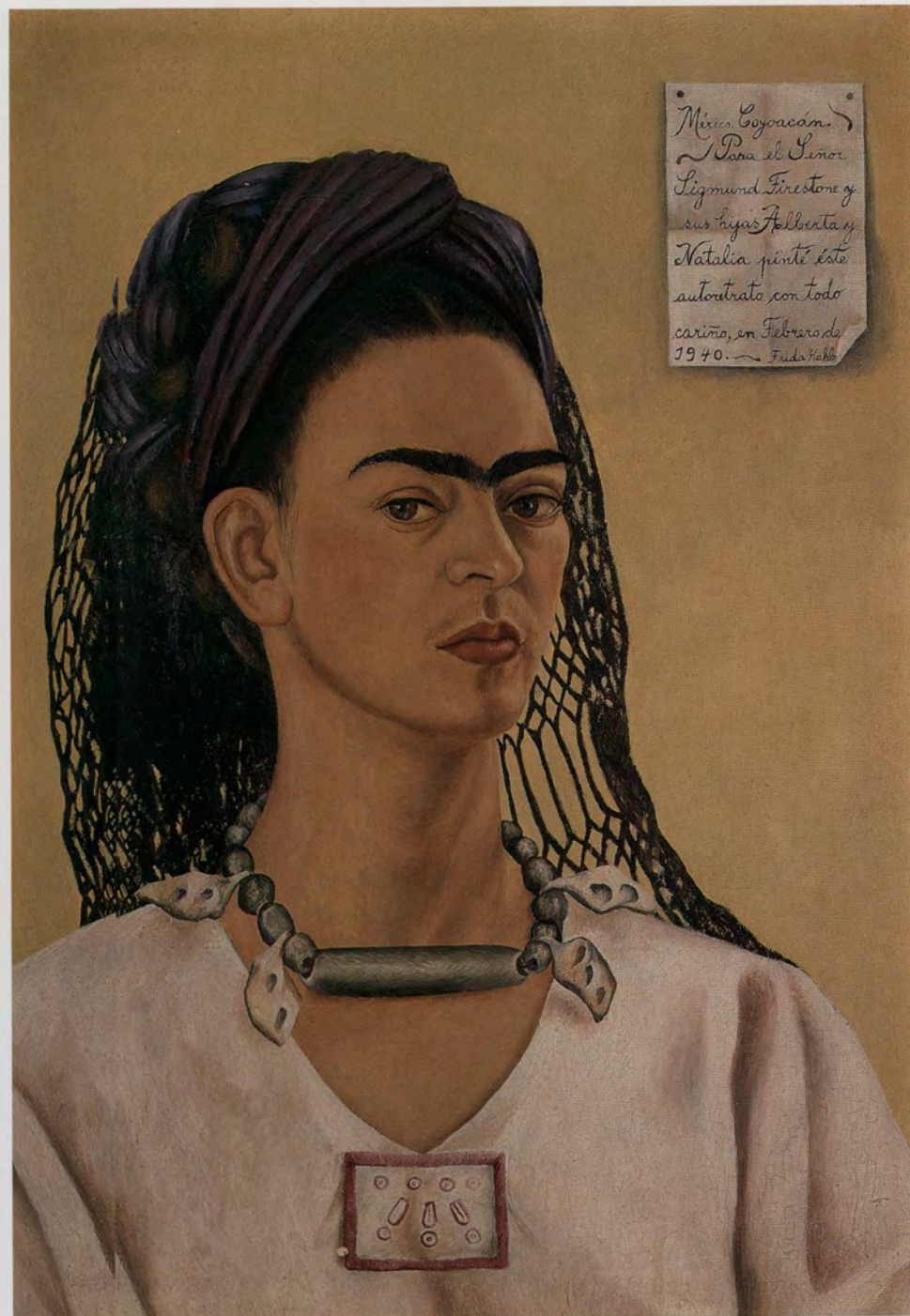
Frida Kahlo *Self-Portrait with Necklace* 1933 Oil on metal 350 x 290 mm



Frida Kahlo *Self-Portrait with Bed* 1937 Oil on metal 400 x 300 mm

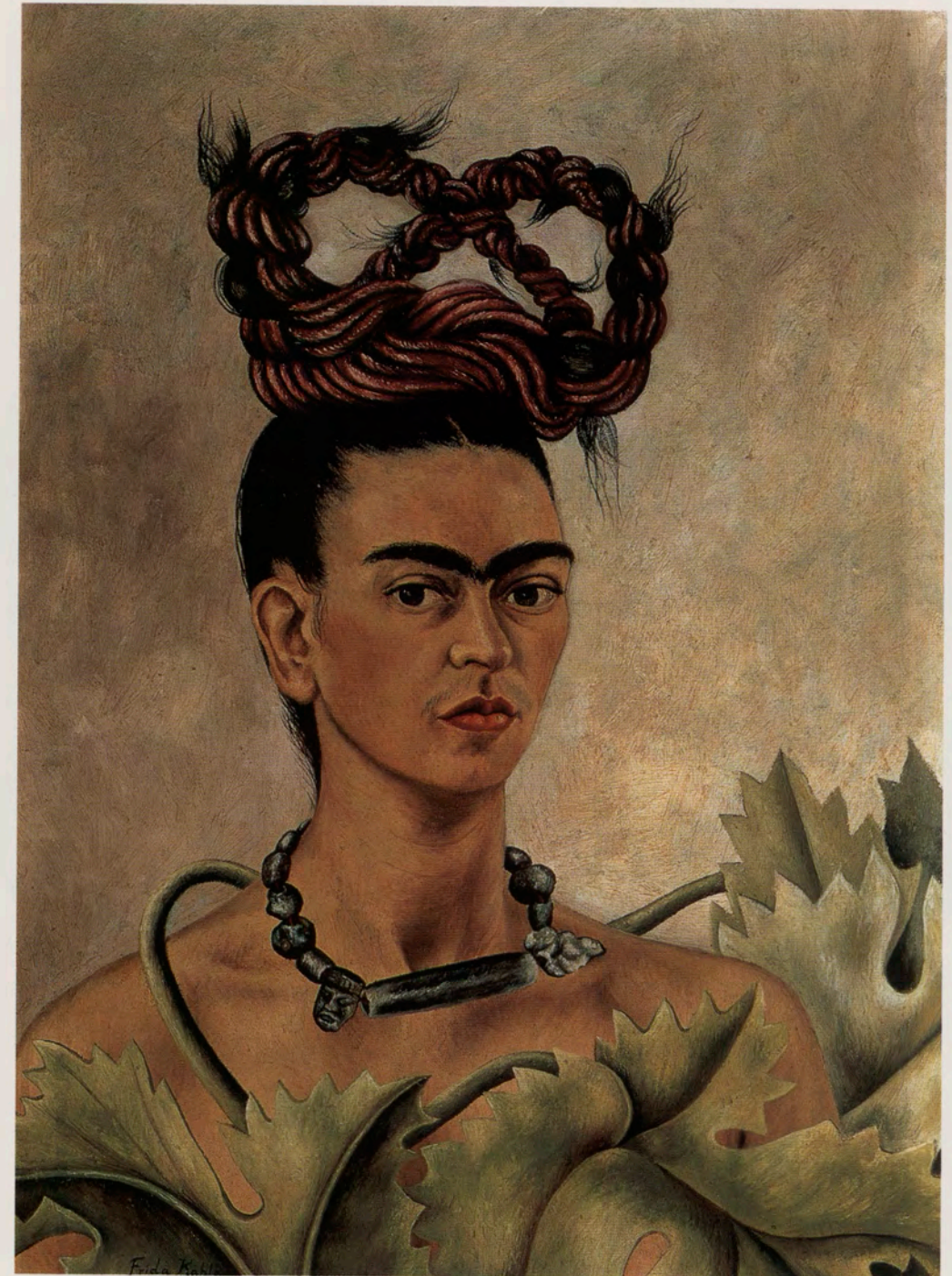


Frida Kahlo *Portrait of Diego Rivera* 1937 Oil on masonite 530 x 390 mm

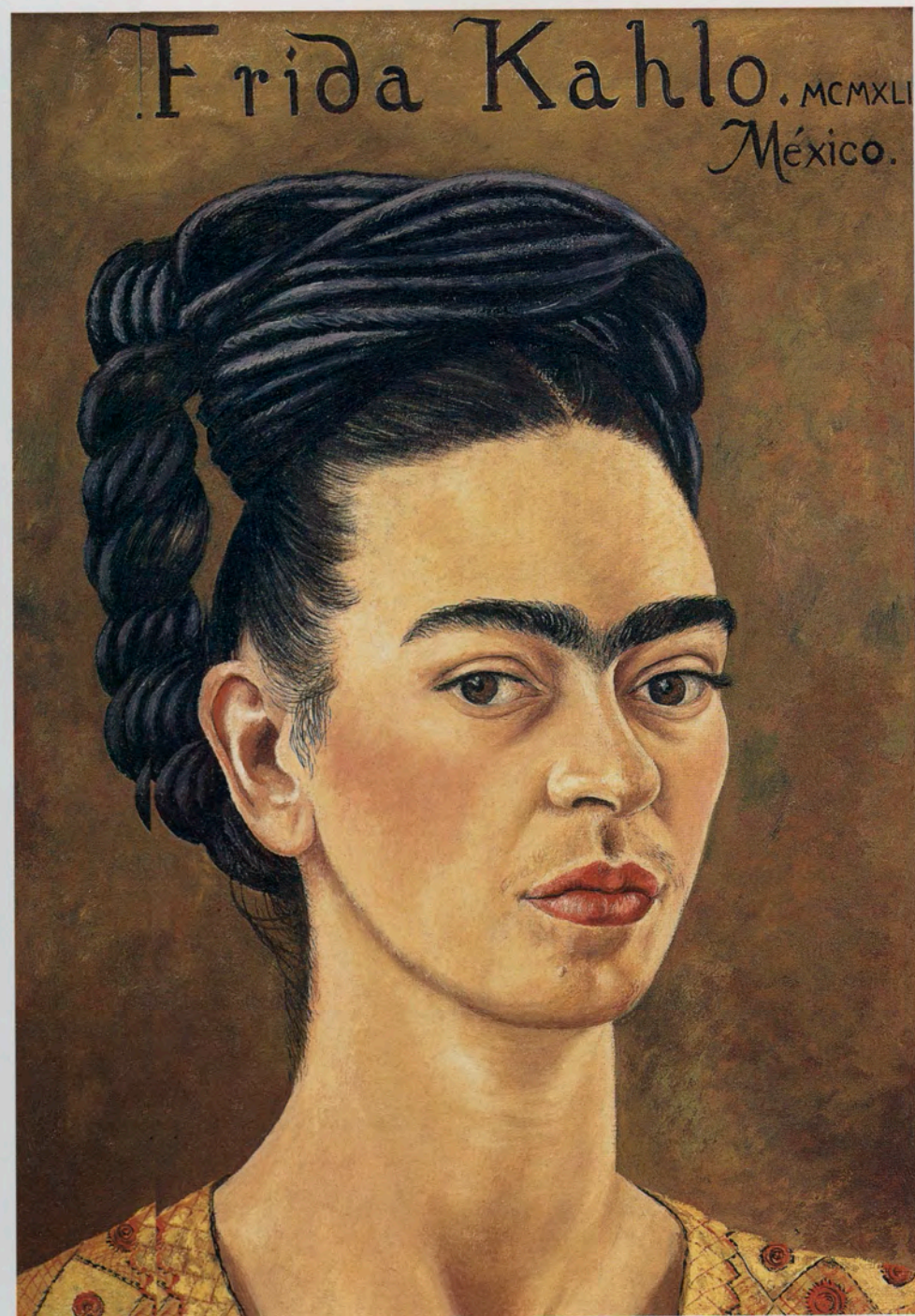


México, Coahuila.
Para el Señor
Sigmund Firestone y
sus hijas Alberta y
Natalia pintó este
autorretrato con todo
carino, en Febrero de
1940. — Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo Self-Portrait 1940 Oil on masonite 610 x 432 mm



Frida Kahlo Self-Portrait with Braid 1941 Oil on canvas 510 x 385 mm



Frida Kahlo Self-Portrait with Red and Gold Dress 1941 Oil on canvas 390 x 275 mm



Frida Kahlo Still Life with Hummingbird 1941 Oil on metal 645 mm diameter



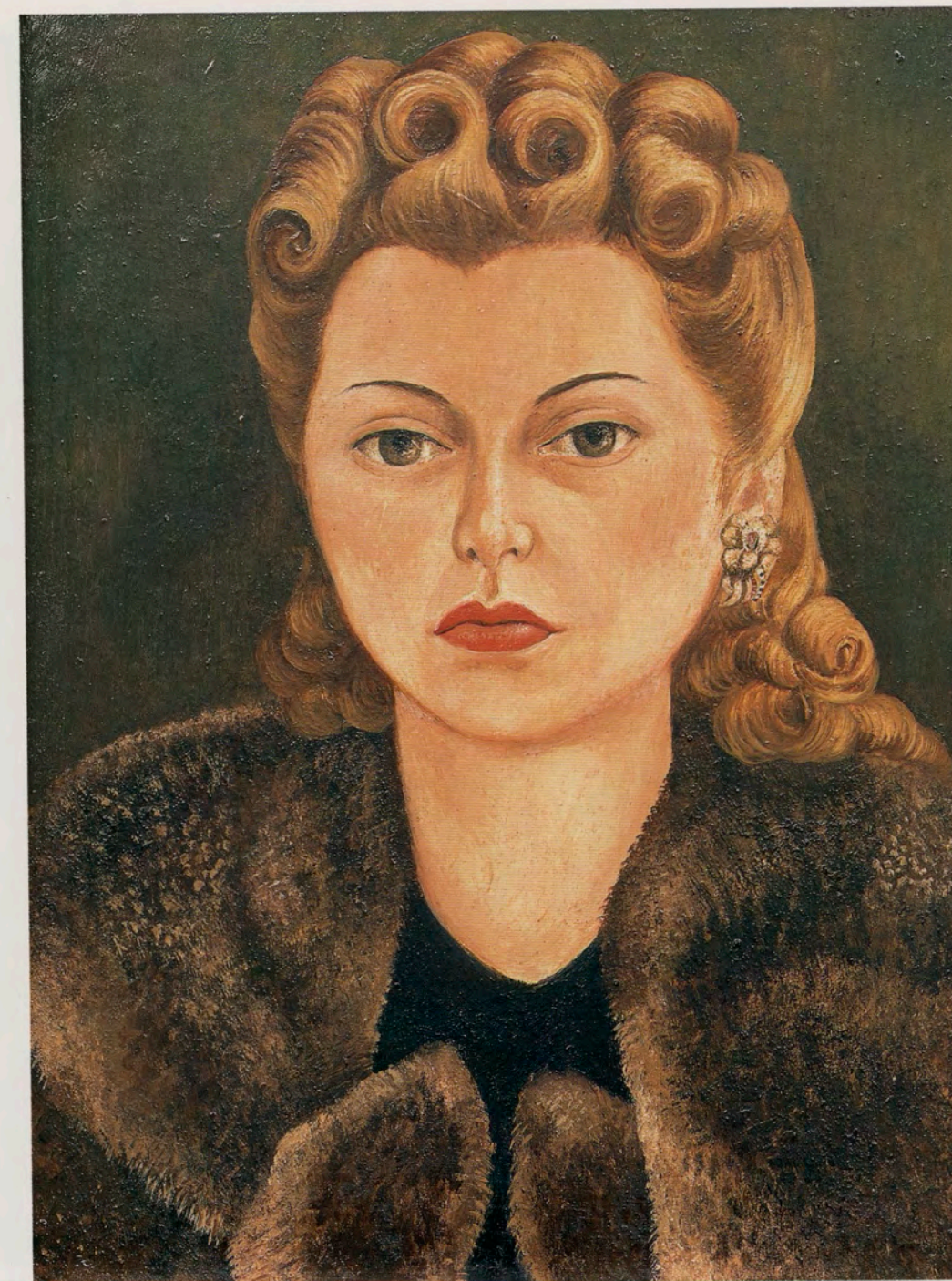
Frida Kahlo Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on My Mind) 1943 Oil on masonite 760 x 610 mm



Frida Kahlo Self-Portrait with Monkeys 1943 Oil on canvas 815 x 630 mm



Frida Kahlo *The Bride Who Became Frightened When She Saw Life Opened* 1943 Oil on canvas 630 x 815 mm



Frida Kahlo *Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman* 1943 Oil on masonite 300 x 230 mm



Frida Kahlo *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me, and Señor Xólotl* 1949 Oil on masonite 700 x 605 mm



María Izquierdo *Horses* 1938 Watercolour on paper 210 x 280 mm



María Izquierdo *Circus Scene* 1940 Gouache on paper 420 x 540 mm



Carlos Orozco Romero *The Bride* 1939 Oil on canvas 410 x 310 mm



Rufino Tamayo *Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman* 1948 Oil and charcoal on masonite 1200 x 910 mm



Gunther Gerzso *The Cat from London's Street* 1954 Oil on canvas 640 x 800 mm



Carlos Merida *Variation on an Old Theme* 1960 Oil on canvas 890 x 695 mm



Leonora Carrington *The Powers of Madame Phoenicia* 1974 Mixed media on silk 425 x 445 mm



Francisco Toledo *Rabbit of the Scorpions* 1975 Oil on canvas with sand 1000 x 1295 mm

VIVA LA VIDA WORKS IN EXHIBITION

Emilio Baz Viaud

Portrait of Nazario Chimez Barket 1959
Watercolour and dry brush on
cardboard, 740 x 530mm

Miguel Calderón

Artificial History #1 1995
C print, AP print, 1040 x 1500mm

Artificial History #8 1995
C print, AP print, 1040 x 1500mm

Leonora Carrington

The Powers of Madame Phoenicia 1974
Mixed media on silk, 425 x 445mm

Rafael Cidoncha

Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1996
Oil on canvas, 920 x 730mm

Elena Climent

Blue Pail 1990
Oil on canvas, 285 x 230mm

Still Life with Brush 1995
Oil on canvas mounted on wood
141 x 203mm

Still Life with Watch 1995
Oil on canvas mounted on wood
202 x 141mm

Miguel Covarrubias

Portrait of Diego Rivera
undated (c.1920s)
Ink and watercolour on paper
290 x 210mm

Gunther Gerzso

The Four Elements December, 1953
Oil on canvas, 1000 x 650mm

The Cat from London's Street, 1954
Oil on canvas, 640 x 800mm

Archaic Landscape 1956
Oil on masonite, 800 x 530mm

Portrait of Mr. Jacques Gelman, 1957
Oil on canvas, 720 x 600mm

Figure in Red and Blue 1964
Oil on canvas, 1000 x 730mm

Sergio Hernandez

Untitled 1982
Paper collage on canvas (diptych)
Side #1: 1145 x 1150 x 30mm
Side #2: 1145 x 1150 x 30mm

María Izquierdo

Horses 1938
Watercolour on paper,
210 x 280mm

Circus Scene 1940

Gouache on paper, 420 x 540mm

Cisco Jiménez

Hairy Olmec 1994
Carved wood and hair,
290 x 150 x 130mm

Hey! What a Screwed Up Country 1994
Oil on canvas, 405 x 303mm

Touristic Soles 1995
Wood, leather, enamel and wire
270 x 1120mm

Frida Kahlo

Self-Portrait with Necklace 1933
Oil on metal, 350 x 290mm

Self-Portrait with Bed 1937
Oil on metal, 400 x 300mm

Portrait of Diego Rivera 1937
Oil on masonite, 530 x 390mm

Self-Portrait 1940
Oil on masonite, 610 x 432mm
Collection of Daniel Gershenson

Self-Portrait with Braid 1941
Oil on canvas, 510 x 385mm

Self-Portrait with Red and Gold Dress 1941
Oil on canvas, 390 x 275mm

Still Life with Hummingbird 1941
Oil on metal, 645mm diameter
Collection of Daniel Gershenson

*Self-Portrait as a Tehuana (Diego on My
Mind)* 1943
Oil on masonite, 760 x 610mm

Self-Portrait with Monkeys 1943
Oil on canvas, 815 x 630mm

*The Bride Who Became Frightened
When She Saw Life Opened* 1943
Oil on canvas, 630 x 815mm

Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1943
Oil on masonite
300 x 230mm

*The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth
(Mexico), Diego, Me and Señor Xólotl* 1949
Oil on masonite
700 x 605mm

Agustin Lazo

Bank Robbery c.1930-32
Gouache and ink on paper
270 x 365mm

Execution c.1930-32
Gouache and ink on paper
246 x 330mm

Dangerous Games c.1930-32
Gouache and china ink on paper
350 x 235mm

Carlos Mérida

Festival of the Birds 1959
Polished board, 500 x 400mm

The Message 1960
Polished board, 710 x 880mm

Variation on an Old Theme 1960
Oil on canvas, 890 x 695mm

Five Panels 1963

- a) Watercolour and pencil
on cardboard
- b) Gouache, watercolour
and pencil on cardboard
- c) Gouache, watercolour
and pencil on cardboard
- d) Gouache, watercolour
and pencil on cardboard
- e) Collage, watercolour
and pencil on cardboard
1300 x 250mm
(each panel)

Roberto Montenegro

Dawn 1950
Oil on canvas, 803 x 803mm

José Clemente Orozco

Study for Torso (Studio drawing for the murals of the 'Escuela Nacional Preparatoria') c.1926
Charcoal on Kraft paper,
978 x 705mm

Figure Study (Studio drawing for the murals of the 'Escuela Nacional Preparatoria') c.1926
Charcoal on Kraft paper,
1029 x 749mm

Self-Portrait December 1932
Watercolour and gouache on paper
370 x 300mm

Female Nude undated
Ink and charcoal on paper,
480 x 640mm

Painting 1942
Oil on paper, 370 x 250mm

Untitled (Salon Mexico) 1940
Gouache on paper, 490 x 670mm

Carlos Orozco Romero

Entrance to Infinity 1936
Oil on canvas, 750 x 550mm

Protest 1939
Oil, gouache and pencil on canvas
390 x 320mm

The Bride 1939
Oil on canvas, 410 x 310mm

Dancers undated
Pencil and watercolour on paper
480 x 590mm

Adolfo Riestra

Pink Torso 1988
Clay, 965 x 705 x 280mm

Diego Rivera

The Last Hour 1915
Oil on canvas, 920 x 730mm

Landscape with Cactus 1931
Oil on canvas, 1255 x 1500mm

Modesta 1937
Oil on canvas 800 x 590mm

Self-Portrait 1941
Oil on canvas, 700 x 420mm
Collection of Daniel Gershenson

Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1943
Oil on canvas, 1150 x 1530mm

Calla Lily Vendor 1943
Oil on masonite, 1500 x 1200mm

Sunflowers 1943
Oil on wood, 900 x 1300mm

Girl with gloves 1943
Watercolour on paper,
730 x 530mm

The Healer 1943
Gouache on paper, 470 x 610mm

Untitled not dated
Pencil on paper, 310 x 230mm

Paula Santiago

Huipil 1997
Rice paper, blood and knitted hair
Glass box: 540 x 522 x 260mm

Amorpheus II 1996
Rice paper, blood and knitted hair
Glass box: 460 x 430 x 180mm

Punto Filete 1996
Rice paper, blood, wax and
embroidered hair
Glass box: 470 x 430 x 180mm

David Alfaro Siqueiros

Siqueiros by Siqueiros, Taxco 3 1930
Oil on canvas, 990 x 790mm

Head of a Woman 1939
Oil on canvas, 545 x 430mm

Woman with Rebozo 1949
Pyroxylin on masonite,
1195 x 970mm

Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1950
Pyroxylin on masonite,
1200 x 1000mm

Juan Soriano

Still life with Brain Coral 1944
Oil on masonite, 603 x 519mm

Girl with Still Life 1939
Oil on canvas, 813 x 652mm

Gerardo Suter

Codex Series: Octecomatl
(Pot of 'Pulque') 1991
Gelatin silver print (ed. 3/10)
1580 x 1250mm

Codex Series: Tlapoyagua (Hand) 1991
Gelatin silver print (ed. 3/10)
1580 x 1250mm

Rufino Tamayo

Portrait of Cantinflas 1948
Oil on canvas, 1000 x 805mm

Portrait of Mrs Natasha Gelman 1948
Oil and charcoal on masonite
1200 x 910mm

Francisco Toledo

Rabbit of the Scorpions 1975
Oil on canvas with sand,
1000 x 1295mm

Self-Portrait with Hat 1987
Oil and tempera on canvas
on masonite, 400 x 500mm

Net 1988
Ink on paper, 495 x 650mm

Palm-rug of Grasshoppers 1989
Pencil and ink on paper,
495 x 650mm

Germán Venegas

Untitled 1991
Carved wood
1235 x 870 x 250mm

Untitled 1991
Carved wood, 1235 x 870 x 190mm

Ángel Zárraga

Portrait of Mr Jacques Gelman 1945
Oil on canvas, 1305 x 1105mm

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

EMILIO BAZ VIAUD

~Far from being a prolific artist, Emilio Baz Viaud's entire output up until 1984 is thought to amount to just fifty paintings. Born in 1918, he spent four years studying architecture, during which time his interest in painting was encouraged by the artist Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. In 1950 Baz Viaud lived in San Miguel de Allende, where he and a friend established the Baz-Fischer Gallery. Aged forty he entered the Benedictine monastery of Santa María de la Resurrección, where he became interested in psychoanalysis. He subsequently returned to painting, working meticulously in the trompe-l'oeil style up until the 1970s, when he experimented with abstraction. He was awarded a gold medal for artistic achievement by the University of Guanajuato. Baz Viaud died in 1991. ☒

MIGUEL CALDERÓN

~Born in Mexico City, 1971, Miguel Calderón graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1994 with a BFA in experimental film and video. He is a co-founder and co-ordinator of La Panaderia, an alternative art space in Mexico City. His 'Artificial History' photographs are staged interpretations of human history which pay particular attention to notions of 'Latino' identity and machismo. ☒

LEONORA CARRINGTON

~Born into an upper middle-class English family in 1917, Leonora Carrington was a rebellious child. She was expelled from two schools and deemed 'un-educable' before, in 1936, she enrolled at the Amedee Ozenfant Academy, London. There she was introduced to the Surrealist movement and, the following year, met Max Ernst. Her relationship with Ernst ended when he was interred as an enemy alien in France upon the outbreak of World War II. Carrington subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown and was placed by her family in a psychiatric hospital in Spain. She was later taken to Lisbon but managed to escape her guards and take refuge in the Mexican embassy, where she was offered protection by a Mexican diplomat, whom she later married. She then travelled, by way of New York, to Mexico, where she and Ernst were reunited in 1940—although, by this time, their romantic involvement was over. Carrington settled in Mexico in 1942, where she remained until 1985, painting symbolic landscapes and portraits inspired by mystical traditions (Assyrian, Egyptian and Christian) and the magical, transformative

aspects of Mexican culture. She is also an accomplished writer in the Surrealist tradition. She currently resides in the United States. ☒

ELENA CLIMENT

~The daughter of exiled Spanish artist Enrique Climent and a Brooklyn-born mother, Elena Climent was born in Mexico City in 1955. While she has studied art in Mexico and Spain, she considers herself fundamentally self-taught. Climent has participated in many exhibitions in Mexico and the United States—including *The Woman in Mexico* in 1991 and *Latin American Woman Artists: 1915-1995* in 1995. Currently based in Chicago, Climent travels often to Mexico. ☒

MIGUEL COVARRUBIAS

~Basing his artworks on the nightlife he observed in the theatres and cafes of Mexico City (where he was born in 1904), Miguel Covarrubias published his first drawings and caricatures in Mexican newspapers and magazines. Between 1923 (when he first visited New York) and 1936, he was the official caricaturist on *Vanity Fair*. Diego Rivera praised Covarrubias's 'caustic but implacably good-humoured drawings, which fortunately for his personal safety, people have been misled into calling caricatures'. Covarrubias travelled extensively around the world on a Guggenheim scholarship. He produced numerous books of caricatures and drawings as well as ethnographic studies, most importantly *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America*, which was published in New York in 1957, the year of his death. ☒

GUNTHER GERZSO

~Of Hungarian and German descent, Gunther Gerzso was born in Mexico City in 1915. After four years in Europe, he returned to Mexico in 1931, before moving on to the United States in 1935, where he found work as a stage designer. In 1940 he began painting seriously and returned to Mexico the next year, where he supported himself designing film sets. During the next two decades he was designer for nearly 250 films, working with such directors as Luis Buñuel and John Ford. After a period of being influenced by the Surrealists—many of whom he had met during their exile in Mexico—Gerzso began exploring pre-Columbian motifs. His works from the 1960s onwards integrate traditional motifs with internationalist abstraction. Octavio Paz has described Gerzso's work as 'a system of allusions rather than a system of forms'. He lives in Mexico. ☒

MARÍA IZQUIERDO

~Raised in the provincial town of San Juan de los Lagos, where she was born in 1902, Izquierdo entered an arranged marriage aged 14. After moving with her husband and three children to Mexico City in 1923, she separated from him and began painting. After a brief period of organized study—during which her work was admired by Diego Rivera—she shared a studio and lived with Rufino Tamayo. In 1930 her works were included in an exhibition of Mexican art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 1935 she organised an exhibition of revolutionary posters by women artists and the following year her work was admired by the visiting French writer Antonin Artaud, who wrote enthusiastically about her paintings and arranged for them to be shown in Paris. Like Kahlo, Izquierdo basked in the Mexican cultural revival from the 1920s onwards, frequently wearing traditional clothing and jewellery. She continued painting still lifes and surrealistic scenes, despite an embolism which, in 1950, left her paralyzed for a time. Since Izquierdo's death in 1955, her reputation has continued to grow. An important painting was included in *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination*, at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in 1998. ☞

CISCO JIMÉNEZ

~Born in Cuernavaca, Morelos in 1969, Cisco Jiménez draws on the non-academic art history of Mexico, integrating folk art elements with the vernacular forms of the modern world. His works often incorporate words from advertising and public signs. Like Kahlo and Izquierdo, he draws on the tradition of ex-votos, although his paintings on tin are inherently secular and often irreverent revisions of such religious source material. Having worked for a time as a newspaper cartoonist, Jiménez uses his art to make social and political comments in the tradition of the Mexican master José Guadalupe Posada. ☞

FRIDA KAHLO

~Born in 1907 (not 1910 as the artist often claimed), Frida Kahlo was the daughter of a German photographer and a Mexican mother. At the age of 18 she was seriously injured in a road accident and was partially crippled for the rest of her life. She married Diego Rivera in 1929 and their traumatic relationship was to be both her inspiration and her scourge. She painted many self-portraits, as well as portraits, still lifes and surrealistic scenes. She died, aged 47, in 1954. As well as becoming a cult figure internationally, Frida Kahlo has achieved almost saint-like status in her native country. ☞

AGUSTÍN LAZO

~Born in 1900, Agustín Lazo trained as a theatre designer in Paris during the 1920s, at which time he became interested in Surrealist art, particularly the work

of Giorgio de Chirico. He is the only Mexican artist to have frequented the Parisian surrealist circle during its heyday. After a brief return to Mexico to paint a mural in 1927 he travelled through France, Belgium, Germany and Italy. Lazo belonged to the 'Contemporaneos' group, which opposed the political and nationalistic objectives of the Muralists, emphasising instead a less rhetorical approach. He spent much of the 1930s and 40s working as a set designer. His work was included in the Surrealist exhibition at the Galería de Arte Mexicano in 1940. In 1971, the year of his death, a retrospective was held at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. ☞

CARLOS MÉRIDA

~A native of Guatemala, where he was born in 1891, Carlos Mérida studied painting and music before travelling to Europe in 1910, where his teachers included Kees van Dongen and Amedeo Modigliani. Returning to Guatemala in 1914 he was involved in the formation of an artistic pro-Indian movement. After two years in New York, Mérida took up permanent residence in Mexico in 1919 and the following year exhibited his Modernist-inclined compositions. In the 1920s he was involved in the Muralist movement and worked for a time as Rivera's assistant. A notable critic and art historian, he wrote a series of books on the Muralists. By the 1930s he was exploring not only the abstract and surrealist art of Europe but also pre-Columbian forms. In the 1950s he studied Venetian mosaic techniques in Italy, then returned to Mexico to produce large murals and reliefs on public buildings (including a kindergarten). He died in Mexico City in 1984. ☞

ROBERTO MONTENEGRO

~Born in Guadalajara, 1887, Roberto Montenegro studied architecture in Mexico City before enrolling at the Escuela Nacional de Arte, where he met Diego Rivera in 1904. The following year, he travelled to France and Spain. Like Rivera, he spent much of the Civil War period abroad, returning in 1920 to paint his first murals. In 1930 he met Sergej Eisenstein and accompanied him during the filming of *Que Viva México*. In 1934 he became director of the Museo de Artes Populares de Bellas Artes. Montenegro died during a journey to Pátzcuaro in 1968. ☞

JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO

~José Clemente Orozco was born in Jalisco in 1883 and received an agricultural education before studying at the Academia de San Carlos, 1908-14. During the Revolution, he worked as a cartoonist for various radical publications. Shortly after his first exhibition in 1916, he travelled to the United States where he worked as a sign painter. Upon his return to Mexico in 1920, he was enlisted to work alongside Rivera and Siqueiros establishing a national school of mural painting. An internationalist, his concerns as a painter went beyond

the nationalism of Rivera. His paintings and murals show the influence of expressionism—particularly the work of Franz Marc and Georges Rouault. They assert not only the primal power embodied in the human figure but humanity's need to recognise and escape the entrapments of history and organised religion. Orozco devoted himself completely to the ideals of socialism and public art, renouncing the commercial artworld and destroying all his early canvases. He died in Mexico City in 1949. ☞

ADOLFO RIESTRA

~Adolfo Riestra was born in 1944. His sculptures often have the baked earth appearance of traditional pottery. As well as connecting with the pre-Columbian past, they reflect a knowledge of Modernist sculpture, particularly the work of Marino Marini. Riestra died in 1989. ☞

DIEGO RIVERA

~'An extraordinary painter, a lighthouse of vitality,' as Robert Hughes has described him, Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato in 1886. He enrolled at the Academia de San Carlos at the age of 10 but left aged 16, having rejected the photographic realism the institution was encouraging. Five years later he was awarded a grant to study in Spain. Apart from a brief return to Mexico, he was based in Europe from 1907 until 1921. He painted his first murals in 1922 and was co-founder of the Union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Graphic Artists. He married Frida Kahlo in 1928 and they moved to the USA in 1930, travelling and working extensively there until 1934. Considered, during his lifetime, the foremost living Mexican artist, Rivera was hugely prolific, creating many murals as well as easel paintings. 'Few 20th Century artists have been as popular in their own societies,' Hughes wrote. 'None is more relevant to the debate over "indigenous" or "national" art language as against "international style".' Rivera died in Mexico City in 1957. ☞

CARLOS OROZCO ROMERO

~Born in Guadalajara, 1896, Carlos Orozco Romero joined the avant-garde group 'Centro Bohemio' in 1913 and moved to Mexico City, where he worked as an illustrator and cartoonist. He travelled to France and Spain during the early 1920s before returning to his hometown where he produced graphic prints and ran a printmaking shop at the Jalisco Preparatory School. Between 1928 and 1932 he and Carlos Mérida co-directed the Galería de Bellas Artes. In 1946 he was a founder member of 'La Esmeralda', the National School of Painting and Sculpture, Mexico City. He continued to travel extensively and participated in the 1958 Venice Biennale. He died in 1984. ☞

PAULA SANTIAGO

~Currently based in Guadalajara, where she was born in 1969, Paula Santiago studied industrial engineering before taking Literature and Art History at the Sorbonne, Paris, and Art at the Universidad de Guadalajara. She continued her studies in the London studio of Nicaraguan artist Armando Moralés. Santiago's art explores the forms, traditions and meanings inherent in baby clothes, dresses, bibs, breastplates and other garments. Her work has been exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art alongside that of Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith and Frida Kahlo. She represented Mexico at the 1999 Venice Biennale. ☞

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

~Born in Chihuahua in 1896, Siqueiros joined the Constitutionalist Army during the Mexican Civil War and, while travelling in Europe as a military attache in 1917, met Diego Rivera. After the Civil War he received a travel grant which enabled him to study for three years in Europe. Upon his return to Mexico in 1922 he joined the Muralist movement. He urged Mexican artists to follow his example and spurn 'so-called easel painting and every kind of art favoured by the ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristocratic, and promote monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property'. Exiled from Mexico in 1932 on account of his politics, he worked in the United States, where he started painting with an airbrush and exploring other new technologies. Deported from the United States the following year, Siqueiros travelled to Uruguay and Argentina. By 1936 he was back in New York, where he established the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop—'A Laboratory of Modern Techniques in Art'. After two years in the Spanish Republican Army, he returned to Mexico in 1940, only to have to flee the country when he was implicated in an attempted assassination of Leon Trotsky. Prolific periods of work during the 1950s and 60s were interrupted by a four year stint in jail for political misdemeanours. Siqueiros died in Mexico City in 1974, having received the National Prize from the Mexican Government in 1966. Major retrospectives were held in Mexico in 1967 and in Kobe, Japan, in 1972. ☞

JUAN SORIANO

~Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in 1920, Juan Soriano had his first exhibition at the age of 14. The youngest member of the 'Mexican School' which emerged in the 1930s, he came under the influence of Roberto Montenegro and Jesús Reyes Ferreira. He went on to work as a printmaker, sculptor and designer as well as a painter. With Leonora Carrington, Octavio Paz and Juan José Arreola, he was a member of 'Poesía en voz alta', the group responsible for introducing the Theatre of the Absurd into Mexico. Soriano has been based intermittently in Rome and Paris, exhibiting in those centres as well as in Mexico and the United States. ☞

GERARDO SUTER

~Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1957, Gerardo Suter currently lives in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He works at the interface of art and technology, creating photographic environments, often using large scale prints. His photography uses state-of-the-art processes to realize effects often associated with aging or decay. His interest in pre-Columbian culture is highlighted in his 'Codex' series. ☒

RUFINO TAMAYO

~Born in Oaxaca in 1899, Tamayo was orphaned and taken as a child to live in Mexico City with an aunt who was a fruit and vegetable wholesaler. He attended the Academia de San Carlos, in Mexico City, from 1917 until 1921, when he became Head of the Department of Ethnographic Drawings at the National Museum of Anthropology. He shared a studio with María Izquierdo from 1929 until 1934, during which time both artists developed into maturity. Tamayo's Modernist sensibility ran counter to the prevailing tone of Mexican Muralism—a fact which may well underlie the artist's decision to live much of his life abroad. He spent extensive periods in Europe and the United States, where he established the Tamayo Workshop at the Art School of the Brooklyn Museum in 1946. During his life he amassed a great collection of pre-Columbian art which, in 1974, he donated to the Mexican people. Tamayo died in Mexico City in 1991. ☒

FRANCISCO TOLEDO

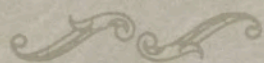
~Of Zapotec Indian descent, Toledo was born in Juchitán in 1940. Aged 16, he began making lino-prints at a workshop run by Arturo García Bustos, who had studied with Frida Kahlo. After successful solo exhibitions in Mexico City and Texas, Toledo moved to Europe in 1960 where he studied printmaking with Stanley William Hayter and met the writers Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes. His work merges decorative devices and patterning with clearly rendered animal and human forms to create dense, mythical compositions. He is presently based in Oaxaca and Mexico City, where he makes ceramics as well as paintings and prints. ☒

GERMÁN VENEGAS

~Born in 1959 in Puebla, Germán Venegas worked in a tapestry studio before meeting a skilled artisan who introduced him to woodworking. Between 1977 and 1982 he attended La Esmeralda, the National School of Painting and Sculpture, Mexico City. His work was included in *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987*, a touring exhibition organised by the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1987. He lives in Mexico City, where he paints as well as makes wood-reliefs. ☒

ÁNGEL ZÁRRAGA

~Born in the City of Durango in 1886, Zárraga studied at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City before leaving for Paris in 1904. In Europe he was particularly impressed by 19th Century French Classicism and Spanish art. At the 1911 Salon d'Automne in Paris two symbolist works by Zárraga were greatly acclaimed, establishing his reputation in both France and Mexico. In 1919, he married the notable Russian sportswoman Jeanette Ivanof (and went on to paint many scenes of sportsmen and women). Turning down a major mural commission in 1921, Zárraga didn't return to Mexico until 1942. Like Rivera, he was initially influenced by Cubism but returned to a realist style, painting many religious subjects. In Mexico, his work has at times been criticised for being upper class and Eurocentric. Zárraga wrote of the physical and spiritual aspects of Mexican life: 'The physical is manifest at the big sports stadiums, the spiritual at the temples. In each one of these spaces, Man finds a mitigation to his anguishes.' He died in Mexico City in 1946. ☒



Nickolas Muray, *Frida and Diego in San Angel*, 1940, San Angel, Mexico City

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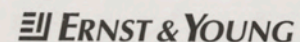
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RUSSELL McVEAGH



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