



This family gallery guide introduces you to a very important collection of artworks. Just as some of you may collect things that you like, so did the husband-and-wife team of Jacques and Natasha Gelman. They acquired many works of art by their friends Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, who were married.

Diego and Frida were both respected artists. Diego was already the most celebrated of all Mexican artists before he became friends with Jacques and Natasha. In 1931, a huge exhibition of Diego's work was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He was well known for the large public murals he created in Detroit, New York, and San Francisco, as well as in Mexico. Since the 1980s, Frida has become even more famous than Diego. Her intense self-portraits have made her face familiar around the world.



## **DESCRIPTIVE WORDS**

childhood: an early stage of growth

health: someone's mental and physical condition

identity: characteristics that define a person

love: deep affection or caring

*perseverance*: doing something despite difficulties

*strength*: intensity; the quality of being physically or mentally strong

You will see these words on the following pages. They will be below artworks that express these words. As you explore the exhibition, think about these words. How can they help us better understand what we see?

### About the Artist: Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo was born in Mexico City, Mexico, in 1907. When she was eighteen years old, Frida was riding a bus when it was hit by a streetcar. The accident left her with extensive injuries. During her recovery, while she was confined to her bed, she began painting to relieve boredom. Frida painted throughout the rest of her life, but she had only two solo exhibitions of her works while she was alive.

## About the Artist: Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato, Mexico, in 1886. At age ten, he began studying art in Mexico City. He then lived in Europe, where he met famous artists such as Pablo Picasso. He returned home after the Mexican Revolution, which had ended with a new government. While working on a mural at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City, he was approached by a young artist, Frida Kahlo, seeking advice on painting. They soon began a relationship, marrying in 1929. Though they divorced in 1939, they remarried a year later.

# About the Collectors: Jacques and Natasha Gelman

Jacques and Natasha Gelman were from Eastern Europe. Jacques was a Russian-born photographer who became a successful movie producer in Mexico, launching the careers of many actors. Natasha enjoyed traveling around the world and was reading a French newspaper in a Mexican garden when Jacques began chatting with her. The couple married in 1941. Taking part in Mexico City's vibrant art scene, they became avid collectors. The Gelmans formed close friendships with many artists, acting as patrons and promoters.



# HOW DO ARTISTS TELL THEIR LIFE STORIES THROUGH ART?

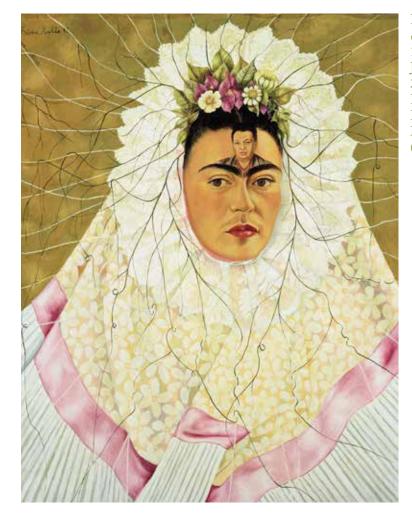
Many of the paintings by Frida express her identity and her personal struggles. In this guide, you will see works that explore these themes:

identity: characteristics that define a person

*self-portrait*: a picture of an artist created by that same artist

symbolism: the use of images to represent ideas





Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907–1954). Diego on My Mind (Self-Portrait as Tehuana), 1943. Oil on Masonite, 29 7/8 x 24 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

FAST FACTS: In this work, Frida painted herself wearing a large Tehuana headdress. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a region in southeast Mexico. Frida's mother grew up there, and Diego visited it in the early 1920s. The white fabric around Frida's face draws attention to the portrait of Diego on her forehead, or on her "mind."

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Frida said she wanted "to be worthy, with my paintings, of the people to whom I belong and to the ideas which strengthen me." How does she show this in this self-portrait?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** love



Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957). Sunflowers, 1943. Oil on canvas, 35 3/8 x 51 1/8 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

FAST FACTS: Thanks to Frida, sunflowers were everywhere around Diego. Friends remembered how she often put fresh flowers in her hair or arranged them with fruit to draw, paint, or photograph. In this painting by Diego, the bright yellow petals highlight the boys' faces. Each child is engaged with his toys. The boy on the right handles a mask, with another on the floor next to him, while the boy on the left seems to be assembling a large doll, its disconnected leg lying alongside his own.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Why did the artist include the large flowers in this work? Where are the children, and how are they interacting with the flowers? What do you see that makes you say that?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** childhood



Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957).

Calla Lily Vendor, 1943. Oil on Masonite,
59 x 47 1/4 in. The Jacques and Natasha
Gelman Collection of 20th Century
Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation.

© 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera
Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City /
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**FAST FACTS:** Diego often represented the everyday lives of native peoples of Mexico. A large bundle of calla lilies dominates this painting. They hide a male figure wearing a sombrero. The girl and the woman in the foreground wear traditional fringed ponchos. The girl is pulling a length of fabric around the basket so that it can be tied to one of their backs as they sell the flowers in the city streets.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Think about the experience of the flower sellers—how would they have to work together? Who might buy their flowers? How many flowers might this family need to sell to buy food and clothing?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** perseverance

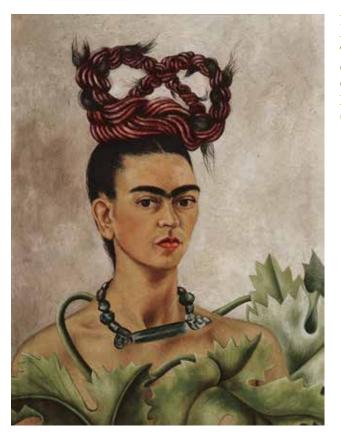


Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957). *Portrait of Natasha Gelman*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 45 1/4 x 60 1/4 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**FAST FACTS:** Jacques Gelman asked his friend Diego Rivera to paint this portrait of his wife, Natasha. Her pose and dress have the glamour of a movie star, which is fitting since Jacques worked as a film producer. Diego included the calla lily here, like in many of his works. Diego plays up the resemblance between his elegant sitter and the long-stemmed white flowers behind her.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Based on this picture, how would you describe Natasha Gelman's life or personality? What does it tell us about the friendship between Diego and the Gelmans?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** love



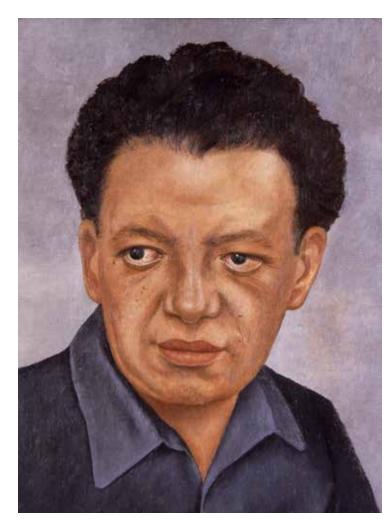
Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907–1954). *Self-Portrait with Braid*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 20 7/8 x 15 3/8 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

FAST FACTS: Hair was an important part of Frida's self-expression. When she divorced Diego in 1939, she depicted herself with very short hair, as if she were starting over. They married for a second time shortly before this work was created. Here, Frida represented herself with her hair braided together with rope—a traditional Mexican hairstyle. The braids, rope, and plant stems are fluid and chaotic, as if they have a life of their own. Perhaps Frida felt that she was being taken over by events in her life.

She wears an Aztec necklace. This self-portrait is meant to illustrate the renewed bond between Frida and Diego, and their connection to traditional Mexican culture.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Why would the length of her hair help reflect events in Frida's life? What else does she use to tell us about her personality?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** identity



Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907–1954). Portrait of Diego, 1937. Oil on Masonite, 18 1/8 x 12 5/8 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**FAST FACTS:** In 1921, when Diego returned home to Mexico, he became involved in the cultural programs of the new government. At the same time, Diego was commissioned to paint a mural (a painting or other work of art created directly on a wall) in the auditorium of the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. It was here that he first met Frida, who was a student there. Many years later, Frida painted this portrait of her husband during a very productive period for her art.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** What do you think Frida was trying to express in this picture? What type of personality does Diego seem to have in Frida's portrait?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** love



Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907–1954). Self-Portrait with Monkeys, 1943. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 24 3/4 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © 2019 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**FAST FACTS:** Frida owned a pet monkey named Fulang Chang. She kept him and other spider monkeys in her home in Mexico City. Some people think she used monkeys in her paintings to represent her nurturing side.

This self-portrait also connects Frida to the native plant life found in Mexico. The lush green leaves contrast with her warm face.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Spider monkeys are sometimes used as symbols of protection. How are they protecting Frida here?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** health



Nickolas Muray (American, 1892–1965). Frida Kahlo, 1939. Carbon print, 9 7/8 x 8 in. The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and the Vergel Foundation. © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives

**FAST FACTS:** In this photograph of Frida, she is wearing a *rebozo*. *Rebozos* are shawls that native Mexican women wear in their day-to-day lives as protection from sun and cold.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:** Frida carefully chose the clothes she wore in order to reflect her identity. Think about your favorite article of clothing. Why do you like to wear it? What does it say about you and your identity?

**DESCRIPTIVE WORD:** identity

In the exhibition, you will find a gallery that examines the styles, patterns, and colors in Frida's fashion. She dressed in a way that was very different from many other people at the time. Frida wore clothing that expressed Mexican folk cultures and the traditions of native peoples. Her style became integral to her identity and is one of the things that makes her a popular and recognizable figure today.



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