

# FRIDA KAHLO DIEGO RIVERA AND MEXICAN MODERNISM

FROM THE JACQUES AND NATASHA GELMAN COLLECTION

Born in Russia, Jacques Gelman (1909–1986) pursued a career in Mexico as a movie producer during the country's Golden Age of Cinema. He made a star of Mario Moreno, a comedic actor whose character Cantinflas is beloved in the Spanish-speaking world. In 1941, Jacques married Natasha Zahalka (1912–1998), another Eastern European émigré, and two years later he commissioned a full-length portrait of her from Diego Rivera, Mexico's most celebrated painter. Jacques and Natasha Gelman became avid and discerning art collectors and acquired many more works by Rivera, his wife Frida Kahlo, and other Mexican artists, such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, María Izquierdo, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo. Together the Gelmans assembled one of the finest collections of Mexican modern art in the world.

In the early twentieth century, Mexico's artistic avant-garde was closely tied to political and social revolution. Following Mexico's civil war from 1910 to 1920, the government enlisted male painters to produce monumental murals in public buildings. Using art, which could be understood by the masses, Mexico fashioned a new identity rooted in its own unique history. Rivera was a leading figure in Mexican muralism. An avowed Communist concerned with the common man, he also created easel paintings representing poignant scenes of everyday life and labor in Mexico, such as *Calla Lily Vendor* (fig. 1). It shows a man, woman, and child encircling an enormous bundle of long-stemmed flowers. Only the top of the man's sombrero is visible. The girl, who like her mother wears a poncho, braids, and no shoes, is tying a ribbon around the basket so that it can be strapped onto the father's back and carried through the city streets as they offer the flowers for sale. Luminous in its colors, the painting celebrates the beauty and strength of Mexico and its people.

Like Rivera, Kahlo infused her work with *mexicanidad*, an identification with Mexico's indigenous roots. About a third of her paintings are self-portraits, which she started creating while still a teenager after a bus accident left her disabled and often bedridden. Spending hours before a mirror, she studied her face and its *v*-shaped unibrow, deep brown eyes, and mustache. She carefully coiffed her hair with braids, and the indigenous Mexican clothing she wore became part of her personal iconography. In *Diego on My Mind (Self-Portrait as Tehuana)* (cover), for example, she crowns herself with a festive Mexican headdress known as a *resplandor*.



Figure 1

This presentation of the Gelman Collection is enhanced by more than fifty photographs of Kahlo and Rivera that illuminate their passionate love affair. There is also a special gallery focused on Frida's personal style, which offers insight into her wardrobe, hairstyles, and jewelry. The exhibition concludes with haunting black-and-white photographs of Kahlo's crutches, corset, and bed taken recently by contemporary artists. Directly associated with her pain, these objects are venerated as relics. As these photos attest, Kahlo's ability to create magical paintings despite the suffering caused by her broken body captivates and inspires many of us today.

Trinita Kennedy  
Curator

COVER: Frida Kahlo (Mexican, 1907–1954). *Diego on My Mind (Self-Portrait as Tehuana)*, 1943. Oil on Masonite, 29 7/8 x 24 in.  
FIGURE 1: Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957). *Calla Lily Vendor*, 1943. Oil on Masonite, 59 x 47 1/4 in.  
Images from 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

INGRAM GALLERY  
MAY 24-SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

Exhibition organized by the Vergel Foundation and MondoMostre in  
collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL)



Platinum Sponsor



Gold Sponsor

The Sandra Schatten  
Foundation

Hospitality Sponsor



Education and Community  
Engagement Sponsor



Translation Sponsor



The Frist Art Museum gratefully acknowledges the generosity  
of Friends of the Mexican Renaissance.

#### LOS VISIONARIOS

Anonymous (2)

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph N. Barker

Ann and Frank Bumstead

Laurie and Steven Eskind

Roger and Genma Holmes

Howard and Carol Kirshner

Nancy Menke and Sara Rosson

Agatha L. Nolen

Brenda and Joe Steakley

Hope Stringer

Jan van Eys and Judith Hodges

Alex von Hoffmann and Bob Doyle

#### LOS BENEFACTORES

L. H. Armistead III in memory of Jack C. Massey

Karyn McLaughlin Frist

Bob and Julie Gordon

Leslie and Scott Newman

Ron Pizzuti

Mr. and Mrs. James C. Seabury III

The exhibition is supported in part by



**Frist Art Museum**

919 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203 • [FristArtMuseum.org](http://FristArtMuseum.org) • #TheFrist #FristMexMod

