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FRIDA

beyond the myth
más allá del mito

Apr 5–Sep 28, 2025

VMFA

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Frida: Beyond the Myth

Although Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) is one of the most recognizable artists of the 20th century, our understanding of her as an individual is incomplete. A mythology surrounds the artist and focuses on her significant personal challenges: relationships, injuries, numerous surgeries, and severe chronic pain. While her art does express her emotional responses to life events, Kahlo also obscured biographical interpretations by employing a visual language of symbols and selective artifice.

She constructed a public persona composed of opposing characteristics: seductive and innocent, strong and vulnerable. Kahlo was, in essence, the architect of her own myth. Fortunately, her friends, lovers, and fellow artists captured aspects of Kahlo that go beyond this myth.

Organized chronologically, this exhibition examines the events in Kahlo's life and her responses to them. When her works are presented alongside candid and formal portraits of the artist, we can begin to lift the veil of Kahlo's persona and renew our appreciation for her extraordinary life and art.



Guillermo Kahlo

German, 1871–1941

Frida at Four, 1911

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Guillermo Kahlo

German, 1871–1941

Frida at Four, 1911

Photograph; gelatin silver print

It is only in the earliest photographs of Kahlo by her father that she appears not to recognize the defining power that a camera can wield. Sadly, her spontaneous and playful smiles became increasingly rare as she grew more self-conscious and cautious about how she presented herself to others.

Private collection



Look, explore, connect...

Kahlo was only four years old in this picture taken by her father, who was a photographer. Look at Kahlo's clothes, shoes, and hair.

- How would you describe them?
- How would you describe Kahlo's facial expression?
- Can you remember an event or special occasion where you had your photo taken? What was the occasion?

1907–1928 Early Life

Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón was born on July 6, 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico, the third of four daughters, to Matilde Calderón and Guillermo Kahlo, a German émigré and professional photographer. At an early age, she contracted polio, which permanently impaired movement in her right leg. Although her father encouraged her interest in art and art history, her ambition was to study medicine.

Those plans were sidelined when, at the age of 19, the bus she was riding in collided with a street tram. Kahlo was impaled by a railing that caused extensive injuries. During her long convalescence, painting became a solace and a passion, and art gave her a meaningful path forward.

As the daughter of a professional photographer, Kahlo was accustomed to posing for a camera. In pictures of her adolescence, we see her self-awareness and self-fashioning in front of the lens—skills that she later refined in her many self-portraits.



Guillermo Kahlo

German, 1871–1941

Frida with Family, or Kahlo Family Portrait, 1926

Photograph; gelatin silver print

In this family portrait, Kahlo is unmistakably aware of her power to project an identity in front of the camera. She has the natural ease and self-assurance of someone accustomed to frequent posing. Her gaze is confrontational, and her pose is unconventional for a young woman. Flouting gender roles, Kahlo wears her father's three-piece suit. While androgyny was trendy in European artistic circles of the 1920s, her self-fashioning was radical for Mexico at the time.

Private collection



Guillermo Kahlo

German, 1871–1941

Frida Dressed as a Boy, 1926

Photograph; gelatin silver print

While a student at preparatory school, Kahlo became part of a circle of young men who called themselves “Los Cachuchas” (the Caps)—a reference to the caps they wore. The all-male group made an exception by including Kahlo, fondly dubbing her “little sister.” As a constant companion of Los Cachuchas, Kahlo chose to wear clothing resembling theirs. Cross-dressing also helped differentiate her from her few female peers at the school. This sense of unity and belonging was pivotal for Kahlo, and she remembered these years as “the only happy period of my life.” She eventually fell in love with the group’s ringleader, Alejandro Gómez Arias, whose portrait by Kahlo hangs close by.

Private collection



Guillermo Kahlo

German, 1871–1941

Frida at Age 18, 1926

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress, 1926

Oil on canvas

This work is Kahlo's first known self-portrait. It was created a year after her accident as a gift for her boyfriend, Alejandro Gómez Arias. (Kahlo's portrait of Gómez Arias hangs nearby.) Although she was still recovering and in severe pain, she intended the portrait to keep her in his thoughts. Thus, she presents herself as alluring and serene, with ocean waves swirling behind her. Kahlo knew about European Mannerist painters such as Bronzino and El Greco, and it is believed that the elongated physical features seen in 16th-century art were influential in this self-depiction.

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

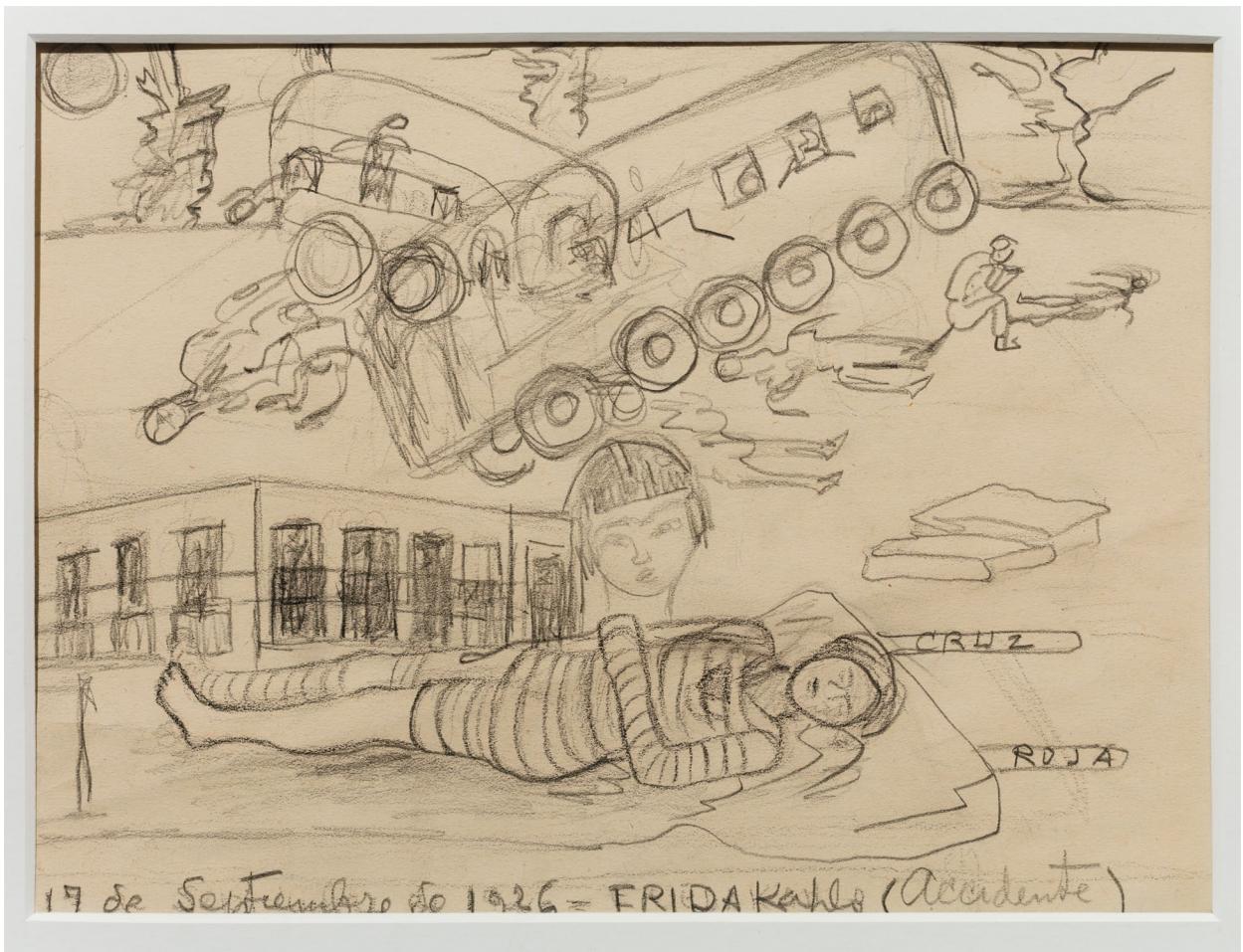
Portrait of Alejandro Gómez Arias, 1928

Oil on board

Kahlo and her first boyfriend, shown here, met at school in 1922 and were both injured in the bus accident in 1925. He convinced doctors at the scene to help Kahlo despite their doubts for her survival, thereby saving her life.

The painting differs from Kahlo's earlier portraits influenced by European artists from previous centuries. Here she adopted a more direct manner with expressive color. The inscription on the upper right was added in 1952, which tells us that Kahlo held onto this painting for over 24 years.

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

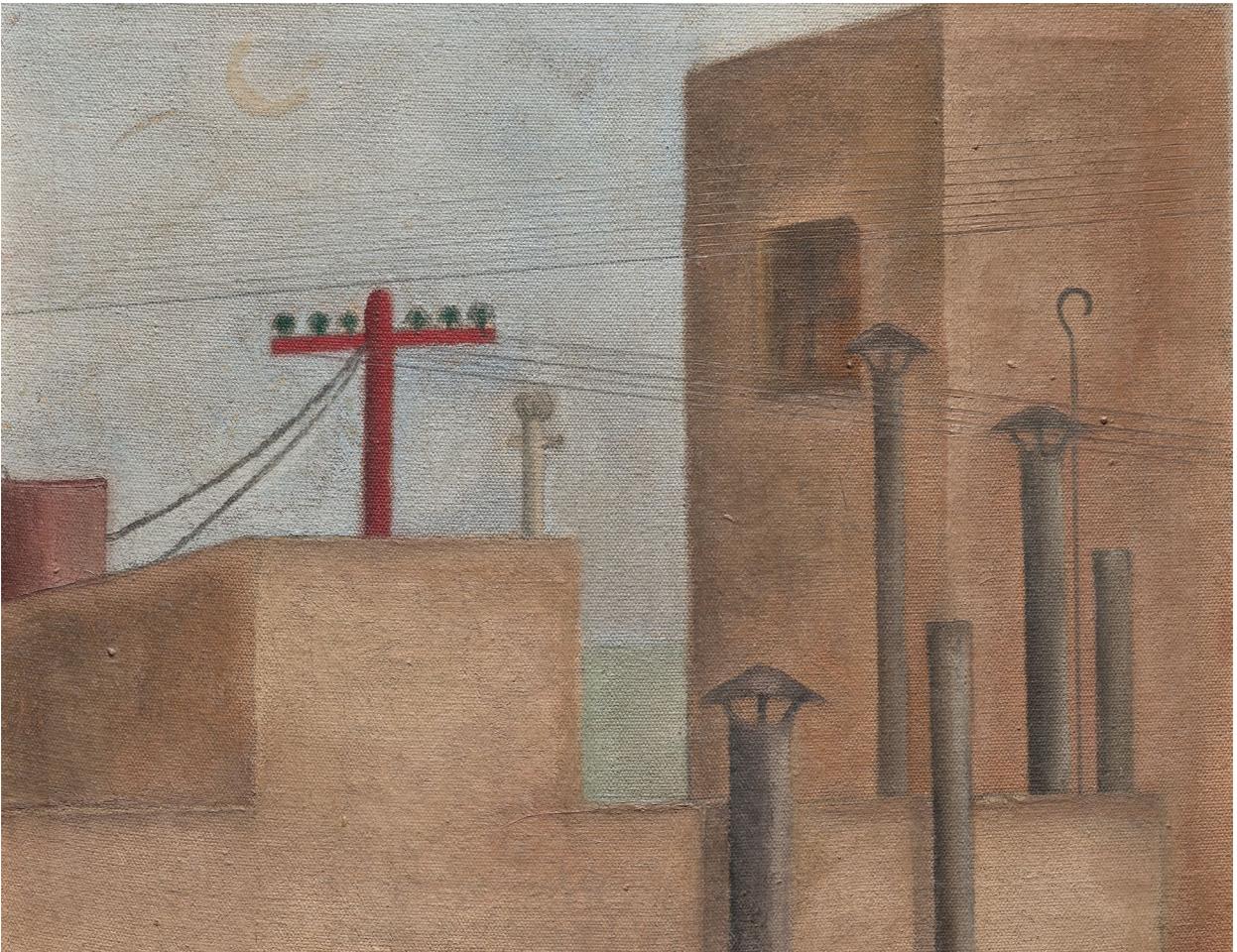
Mexican, 1907–1954

The Accident, 1926

Pencil on paper

In this work, Kahlo looks back on the terrible bus accident that occurred on September 17, 1925—an event that irrevocably altered her life. Doctors did not expect her to survive her extensive injuries (a fractured spine, broken ribs and collarbone, dislocated shoulder, crushed right foot, and multiple fractures in her right leg). As a symbolic rendering of her improbable survival, this drawing resembles a traditional Mexican ex-voto painting that expresses gratitude for the heavenly intervention that saved her.

Collection of Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Urban Landscape, 1925

Oil on canvas

As a young artist, Kahlo embraced modernity and technological advancement in the urban environment. Works like this one, which with the inclusion of power lines and smokestacks acts as an ode to progress, contrast with the ways she emphasized Mexico's ancestral past for most of her career.

Museo Nacional de Arte

ERNESTO
HERNANDEZ BORDES



CARACOL DE
DISTANCIAS

Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Two Women, 1925

Ink on paper; linocut

Two Women is the only known instance in which Kahlo used the linocut printmaking process. This print was used as a cover image for Ernesto Hernández Bordes's widely distributed book *Caracol de distancias* (Snail of distances). This opportunity was instrumental in boosting her confidence and belief in her potential as an artist.

Private collection

Although Kahlo first saw Diego Rivera in 1922, they did not meet until 1928, when she asked him to critique her paintings. They were married in 1929 and spent much of the next three years traveling in the United States for Rivera's mural commissions, including time in San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York, and Detroit. Early in their marriage, she terminated their first pregnancy when Rivera insisted they remain childless, and a few years later, she suffered a devastating miscarriage. Kahlo returned to Mexico to recuperate. These events greatly shaped her life and practice during this time.

In the United States, she encountered social elites and fellow contemporary artists. She also began wearing traditional Mexican Tehuana clothing—attire that

became Kahlo's signature style. While this self-fashioning displayed her Mexican pride, it also gave her a distinctive and even "exotic" appearance among Rivera's wealthy patrons, who were garbed in designer clothing.

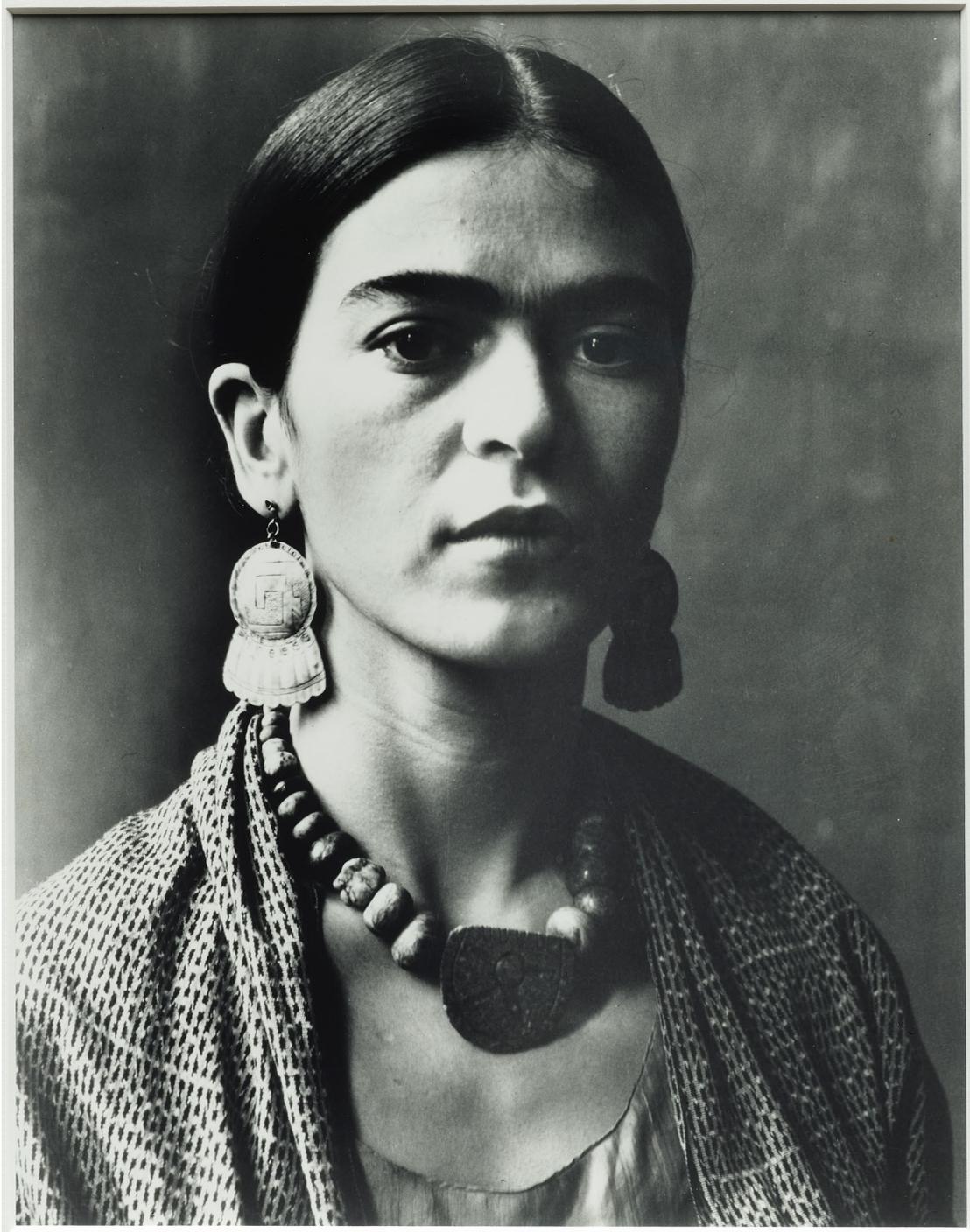
Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company Collection

Footage of Frida Kahlo drawing in Detroit, Michigan, followed by her visiting Diego Rivera at the Detroit Institute of Arts, where he was commissioned to paint the *Detroit Industry Murals* from 1932 to 1933.

Running time: 53 seconds

Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration



Imogen Cunningham

American, 1883–1976

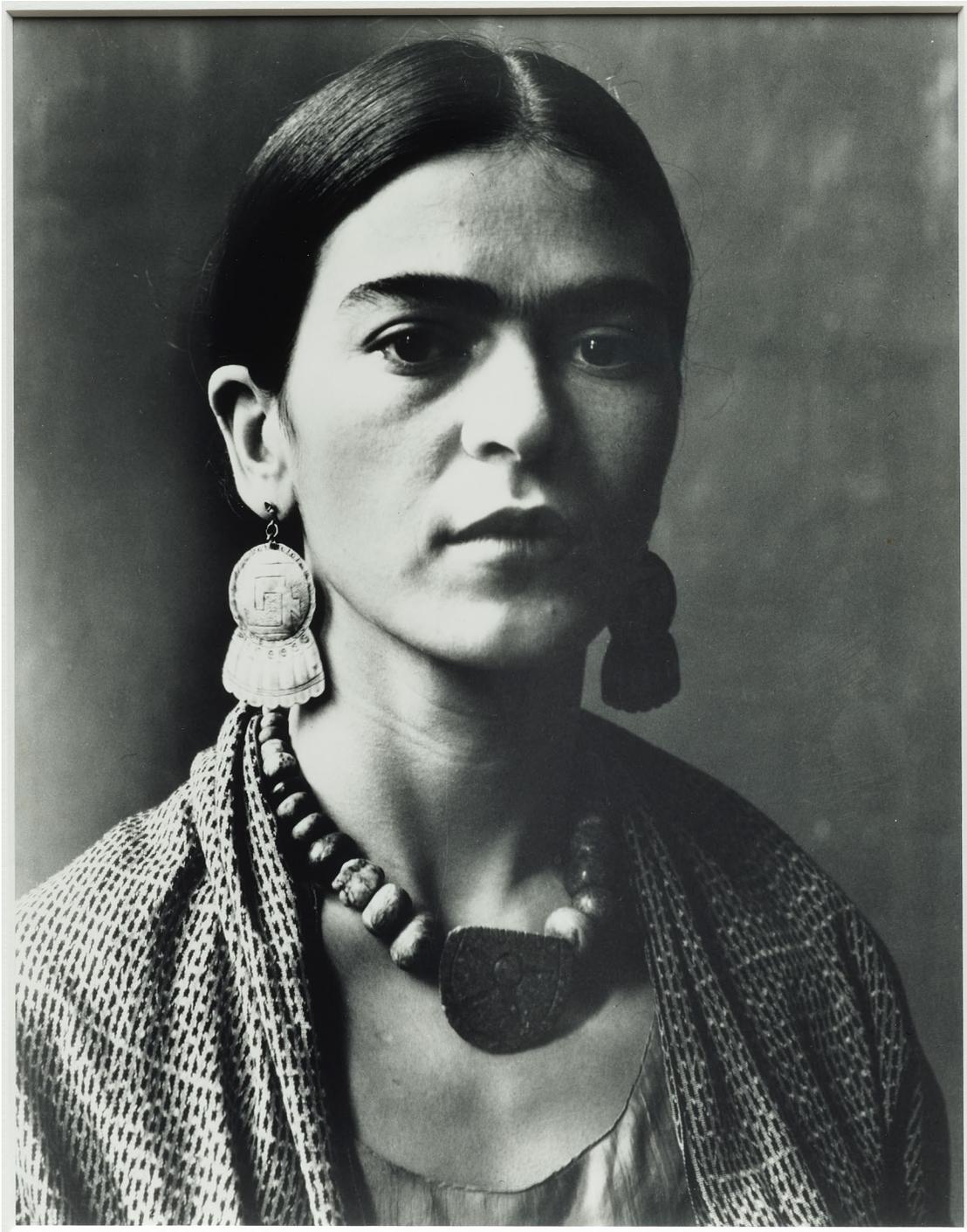
Frida Kahlo, 1931

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Although best known for her photographs of flowers and industrial subjects, Cunningham also trained her lens on many celebrities, but she found their self-consciousness difficult to overcome.

Kahlo's familiarity with presenting herself to the camera was an exception. The photographer was one of several fellow female artists whom Kahlo befriended during her first trip to the United States. The result is an intimate image that conveys the painter's characteristic projection of both strength and vulnerability.

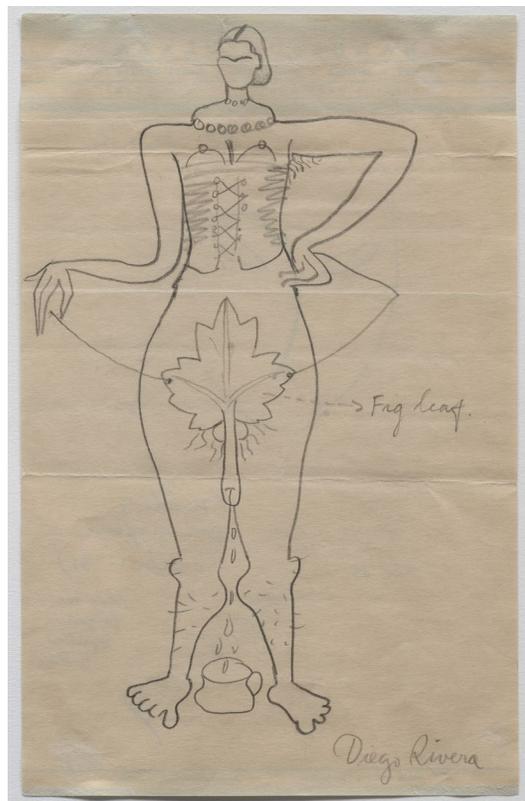
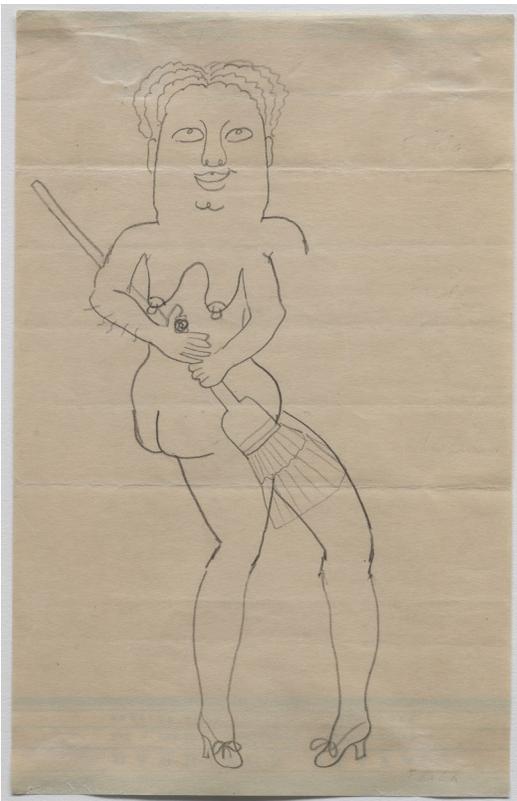
Private collection



Look, explore, connect...

Kahlo often had her portrait taken by other artists, like this one by Imogen Cunningham. Kahlo chose what to wear, how to style her hair, and how to look at the camera.

- If your portrait was being taken, what would you wear?
- Would you include something special, like Kahlo, who chose to wear traditional Mexican jewelry?
- What would your expression be like?



Frida Rivera

Lucienne Bloch

American, born Switzerland, 1909–1999

Frida Kahlo

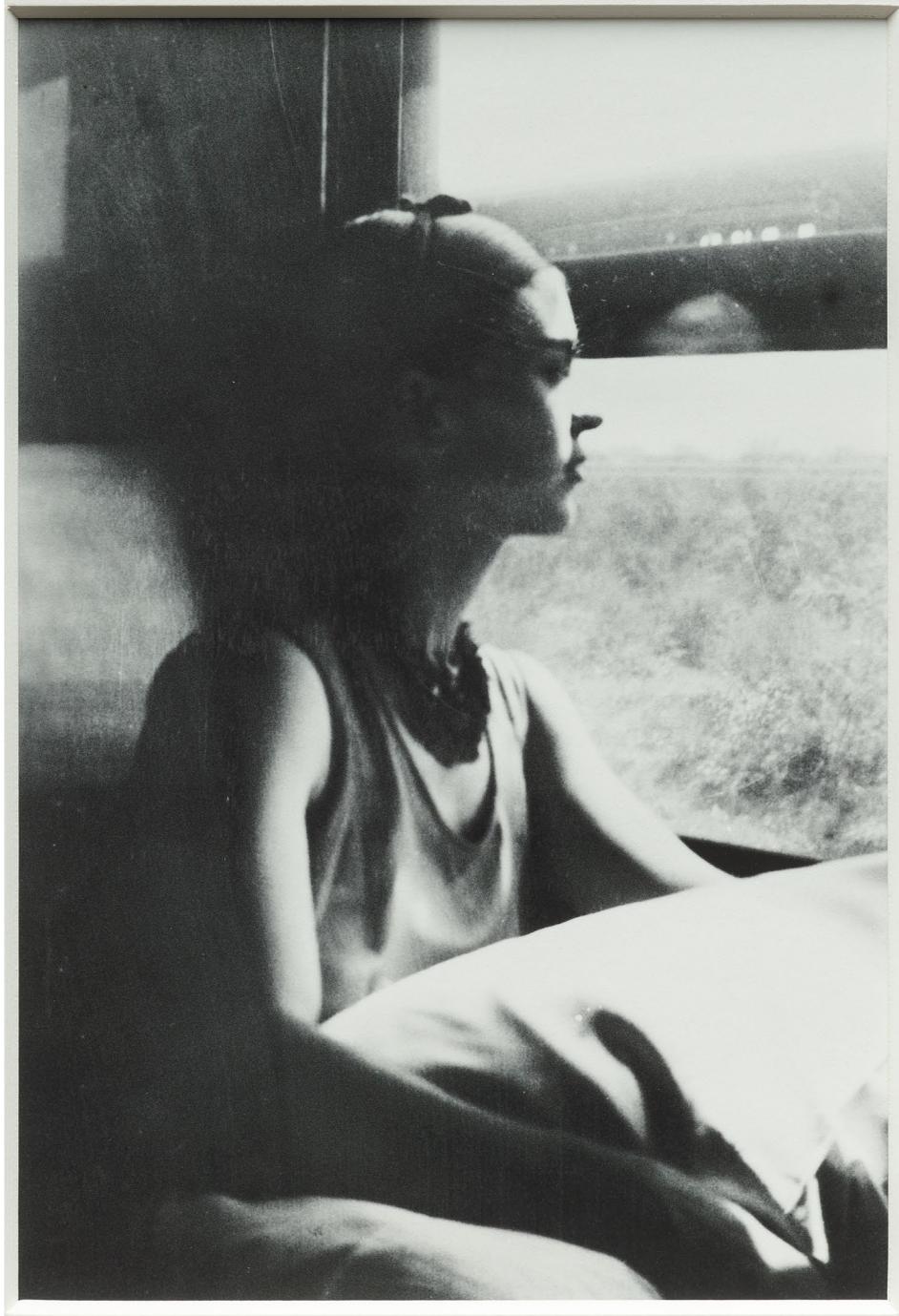
Mexican, 1907–1954

Exquisite Corpses, 1932

Pencil on paper

The concept of the exquisite corpse became popular with French Surrealists in the 1920s. It involves collaboration between artists who each add a drawing to build, by sections, a larger composition without seeing the portion produced by their collaborator(s). The results can be bizarre, as witnessed in these two drawings produced by Bloch and Kahlo. The intention was to free artists from their own creative styles and open their minds to chance and new sources of creativity.

Private collection



Lucienne Bloch

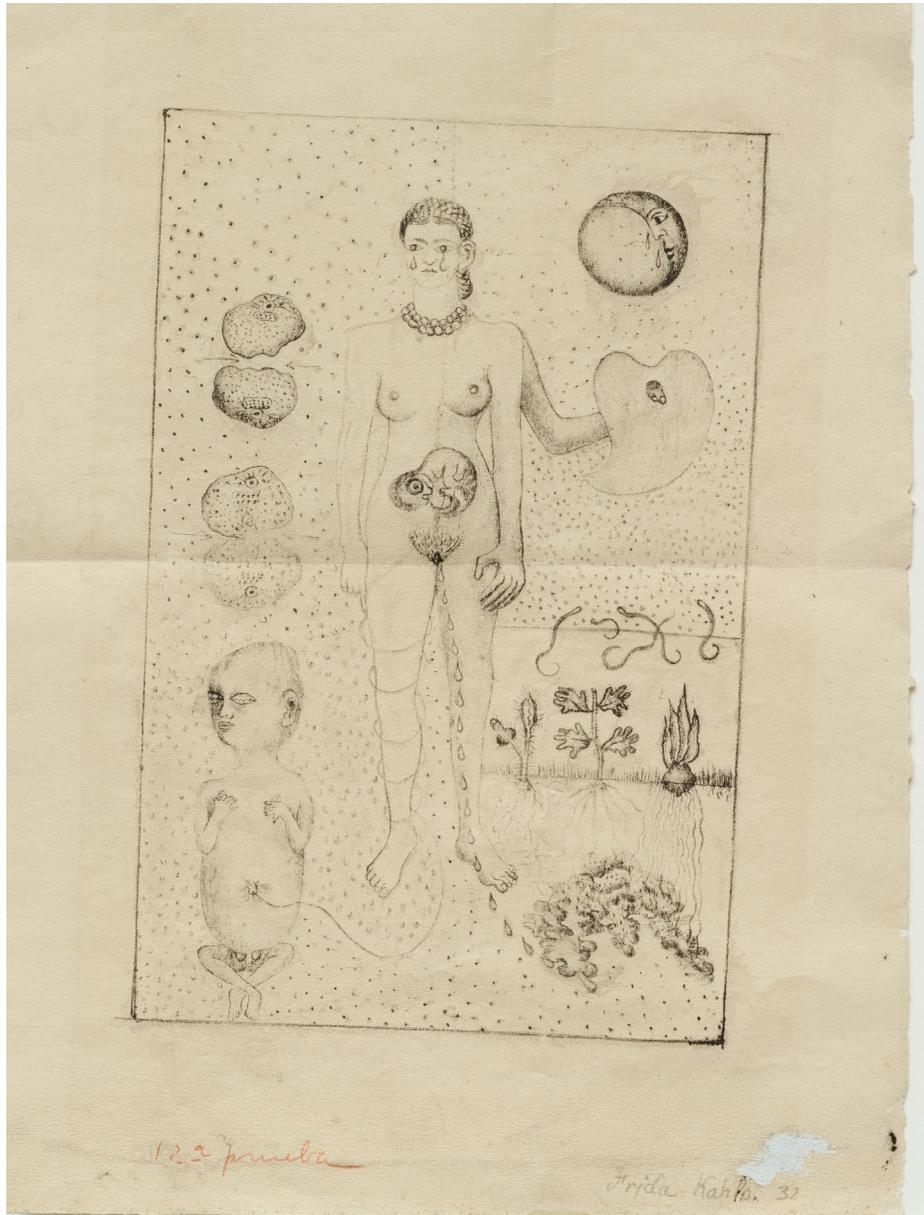
American, born Switzerland, 1909–1999

En Route from Detroit to Mexico, 1932

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Bloch served as an apprentice to Diego Rivera on his Detroit murals and became close friends with Kahlo. Following Kahlo's miscarriage, Bloch accompanied her on the train to Mexico, where she planned to recuperate and tend to her ailing mother. While Kahlo was in Mexico, her mother died during surgery.

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

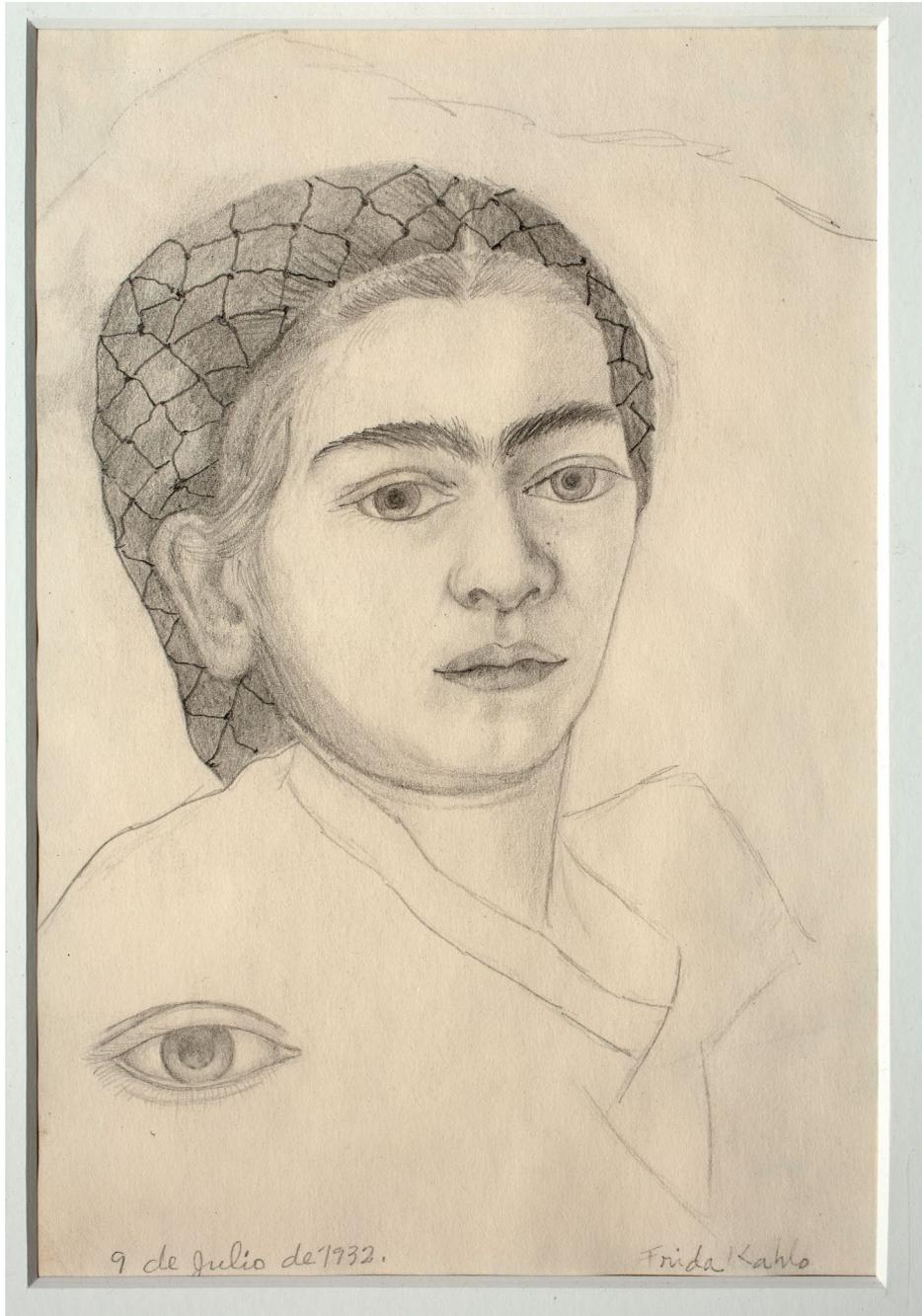
Mexican, 1907–1954

Untitled (Frida and the Miscarriage), 1932

Ink on paper; lithograph

While in Detroit with Diego Rivera, Kahlo lost a pregnancy, and afterwards experienced severe depression. She tried lithography as a distraction and source of emotional relief; however, as this print makes clear, the loss remained foremost in her mind. Weeping, she holds a heart-shaped painter's palette, possibly implying that her paintings will be her only offspring.

Private collection



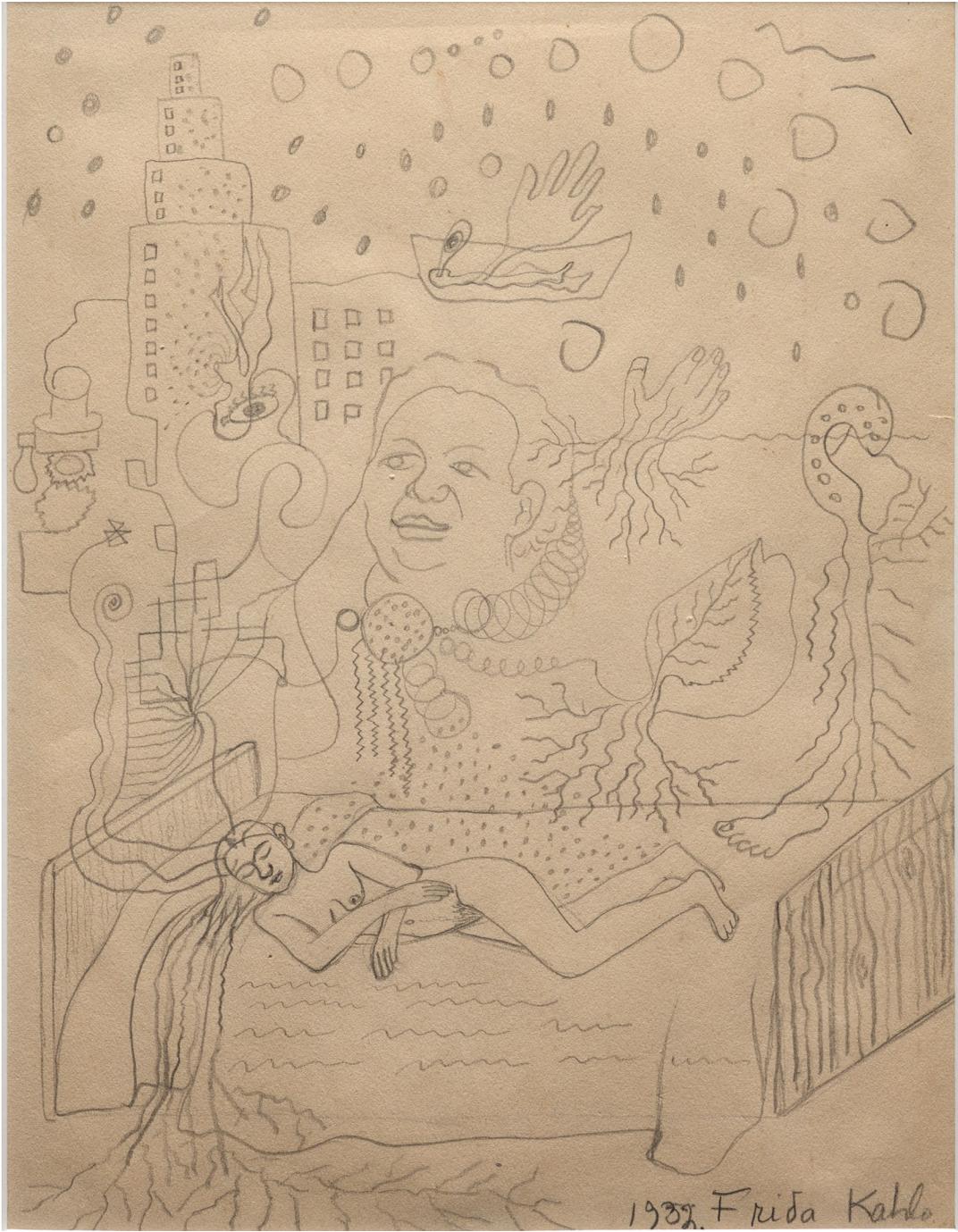
Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Self-Portrait 9 July 1932, 1932

Pencil on paper

Collection of Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

The Dream (I) or Self-Portrait Dreaming, 1932

Pencil on paper

In this dream landscape by Kahlo, she incorporates elements central to her travels in the United States in the early 1930s. Diego Rivera's visage at the center and Kahlo reclining on a bed at bottom dominate the composition. The skyscraper at upper left is also noteworthy—it may refer to the Fisher Building, a skyscraper she saw in Detroit. Kahlo includes a small falling nude figure, perhaps indicative of her depressed mental state after her hospitalization, and foreshadowing her depiction of a falling figure in *The Suicide of Dorothy Hale*, also on view later in the exhibition.

Collection of Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

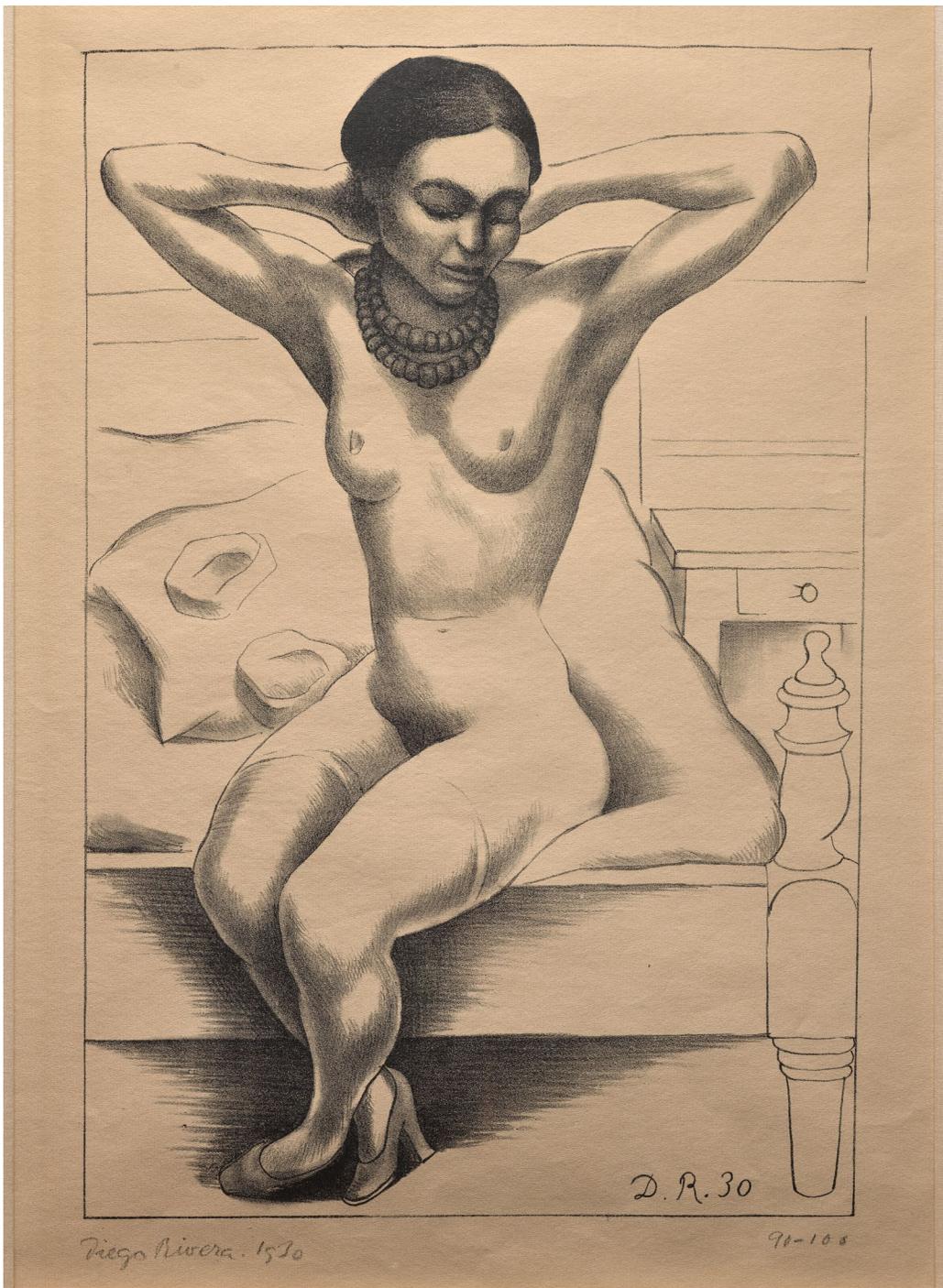
Sketch for Luther Burbank's Portrait, 1931

Pencil on paper

This sketch is a study for a posthumous portrait of the botanist and horticulturalist Luther Burbank, who revolutionized agricultural science. Kahlo's image hints at Burbank's burial beneath a tree. She depicts him growing from a tree trunk with its roots embracing a shrouded figure in the soil. Similar roots are depicted in *The Dream*, a drawing also on view in this gallery.

Kahlo rarely made preparatory sketches; this work is one of the few exceptions. It is also the first time Kahlo explored the cycle of life and death in her art—a theme to which she repeatedly returned.

Collection of Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera



Diego Rivera

Mexican, 1886–1957

**Seated Nude with Raised Arms
(Frida Kahlo), 1930**

Ink on paper; lithograph

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Diego and Frida 1929–1944, 1944

Oil on Masonite with original painted shell frame

Created on the 15th anniversary of their relationship, this work shows Diego Rivera and Kahlo united, with their faces conjoined and their necks bound together by a barren vine. Her sad face contrasts with his smiling countenance. By this time, the couple had separated and reconciled several times, including a divorce in 1939 and remarriage in the following year.

Kahlo depicts him without an ear, perhaps implying that he is deaf to her hopes and desires. She also hints at the conflicting gender roles and personalities that challenged the total union she craved. To the right, we see the sad moon (Kahlo)



Guillermo Dávila

Mexican, 1898–1990

Frida Kahlo with Cigarette and White Dress, Coyoacán, Mexico City,

1929

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Dávila's photograph of Kahlo was taken during her first year of marriage to Diego Rivera. In it, Kahlo projects a decidedly feminine persona. While her dress is not Tehuana, she wears a Mesoamerican jade necklace with a central bead bearing an Aztec glyph, a gift from Rivera.

Private collection

1932–1939 New York and Paris

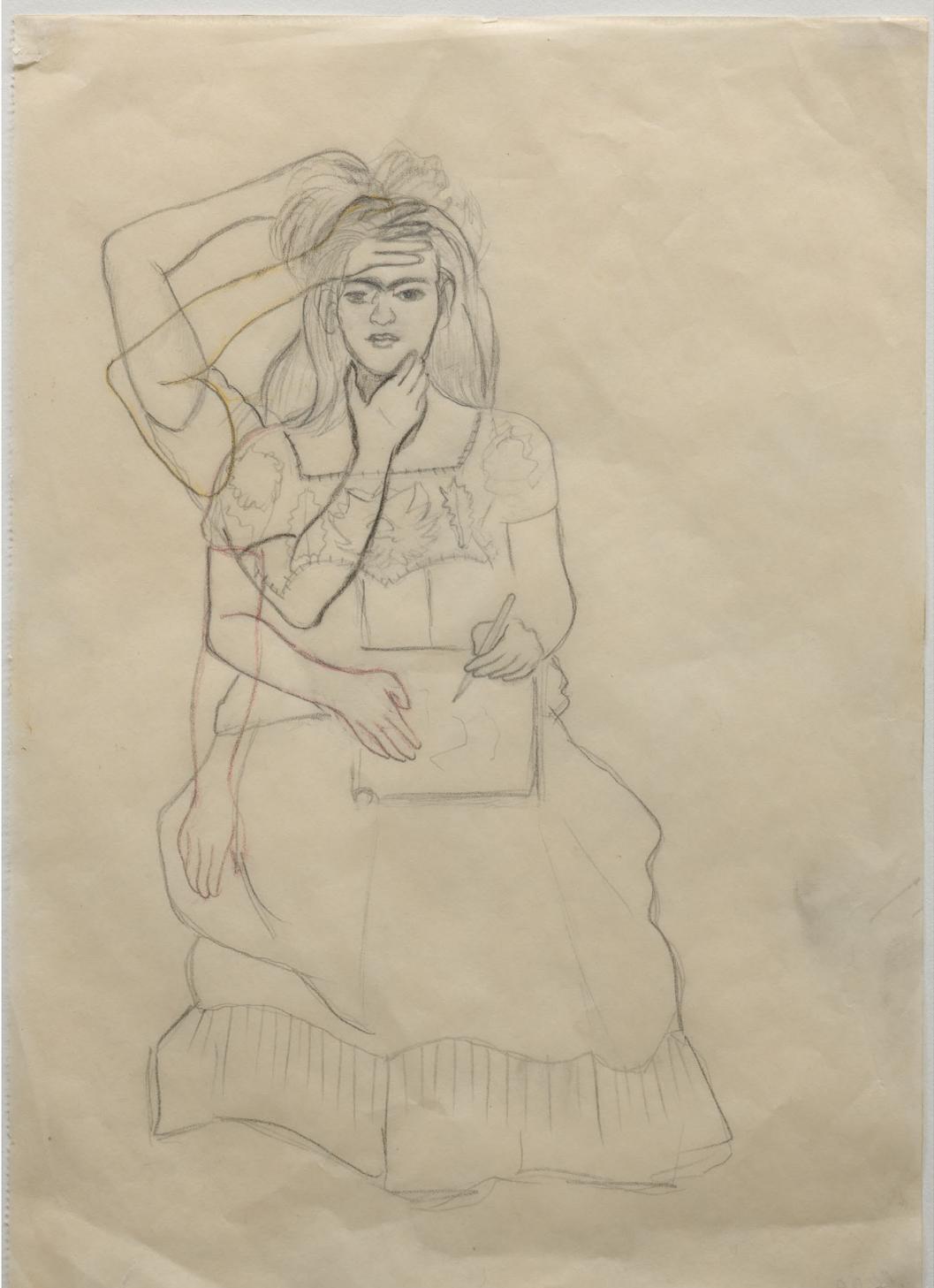
Following the death of her mother, Kahlo rejoined Diego Rivera in Detroit. In late 1932, the two traveled to New York for his mural commission at Rockefeller Center. After their return to Mexico at the end of 1933, Kahlo suffered several setbacks, including major surgery on her right foot, and, devastatingly, her husband's infidelity with her younger sister, Cristina. She retaliated against Rivera's betrayal by taking several lovers. When she became pregnant a third time, she chose to end the pregnancy.

The 1930s also brought important milestones for Kahlo's professional career. During a visit to New York in 1938, she was invited to exhibit at the Julien Levy Gallery. (The gallerist's photos of Kahlo appear in this section.) This same year, the French Surrealist André Breton saw

Kahlo's work in Mexico City. He declared Kahlo to be a Surrealist and invited her to exhibit in Paris in 1939. After her return from Paris, she separated from Rivera and moved back to her childhood home in Coyoacán.

juxtaposed against the spiked, aggressive rays of the sun (Rivera). Kahlo designed the elaborate seashell-encrusted frame, which imbues the image with the status of a religious relic or icon.

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Self-Portrait While Drawing, ca. 1937

Pencil on paper

Private collection

Look, explore, connect...

At first glance, this might look like a simple self-portrait of the artist seated and sketching something on her lap—but look closer!

- How many arms does Kahlo have?
- What is each arm doing?
- If you had this many arms, what would you do with them?



Julien Levy

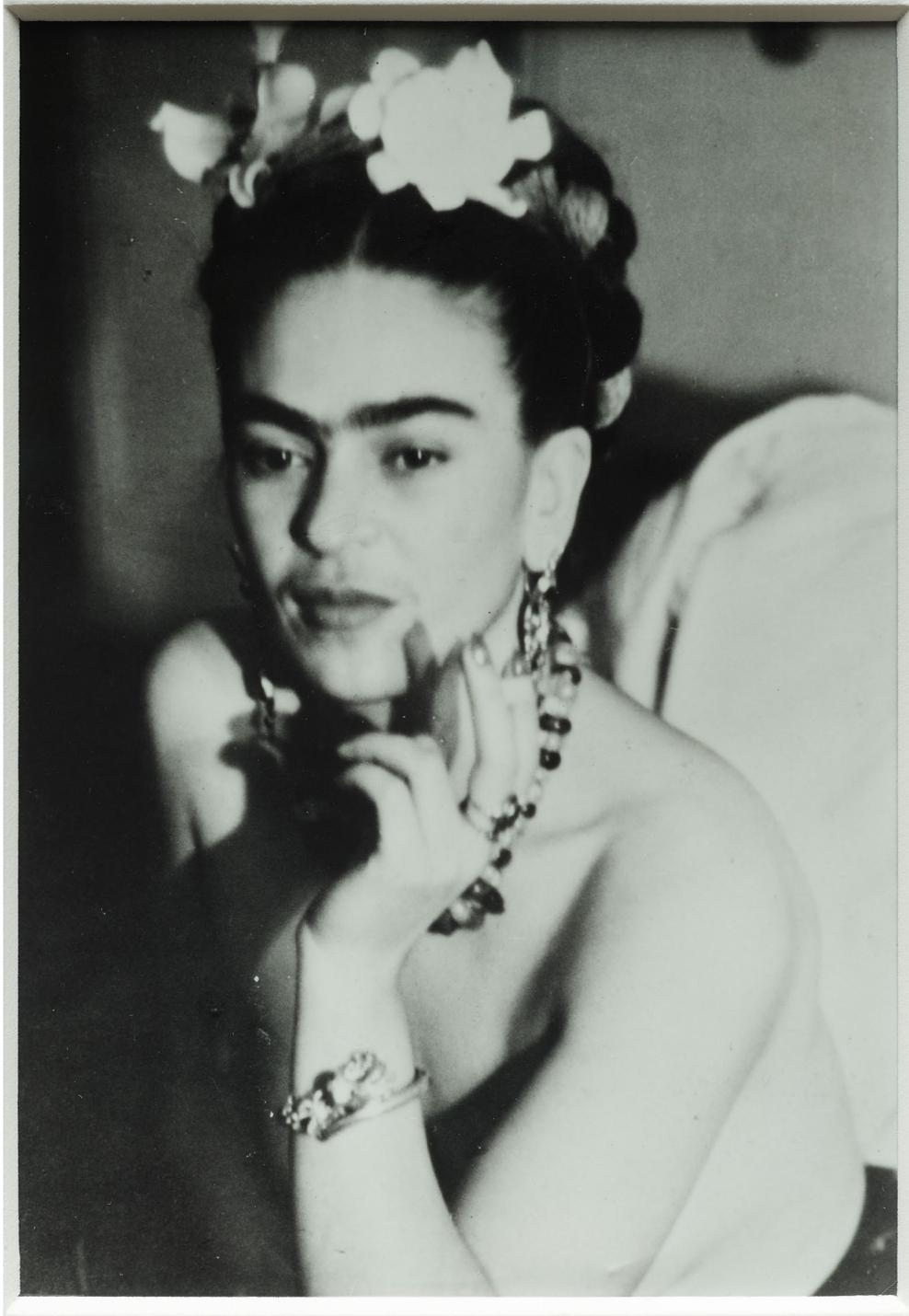
American, 1906–1981

Frida Kahlo, 1938

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Known for its promotion of Surrealist and avant-garde art, the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City hosted Kahlo's first solo show in America. It was rumored that Levy and Kahlo were lovers, as these two seminude images of Kahlo could imply. Regardless, Levy captured these candid images as Kahlo was emerging from Diego Rivera's shadow and poised on the threshold of international fame.

Private collection



Julien Levy

American, 1906–1981

Frida Kahlo, 1938

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Henri Cartier-Bresson

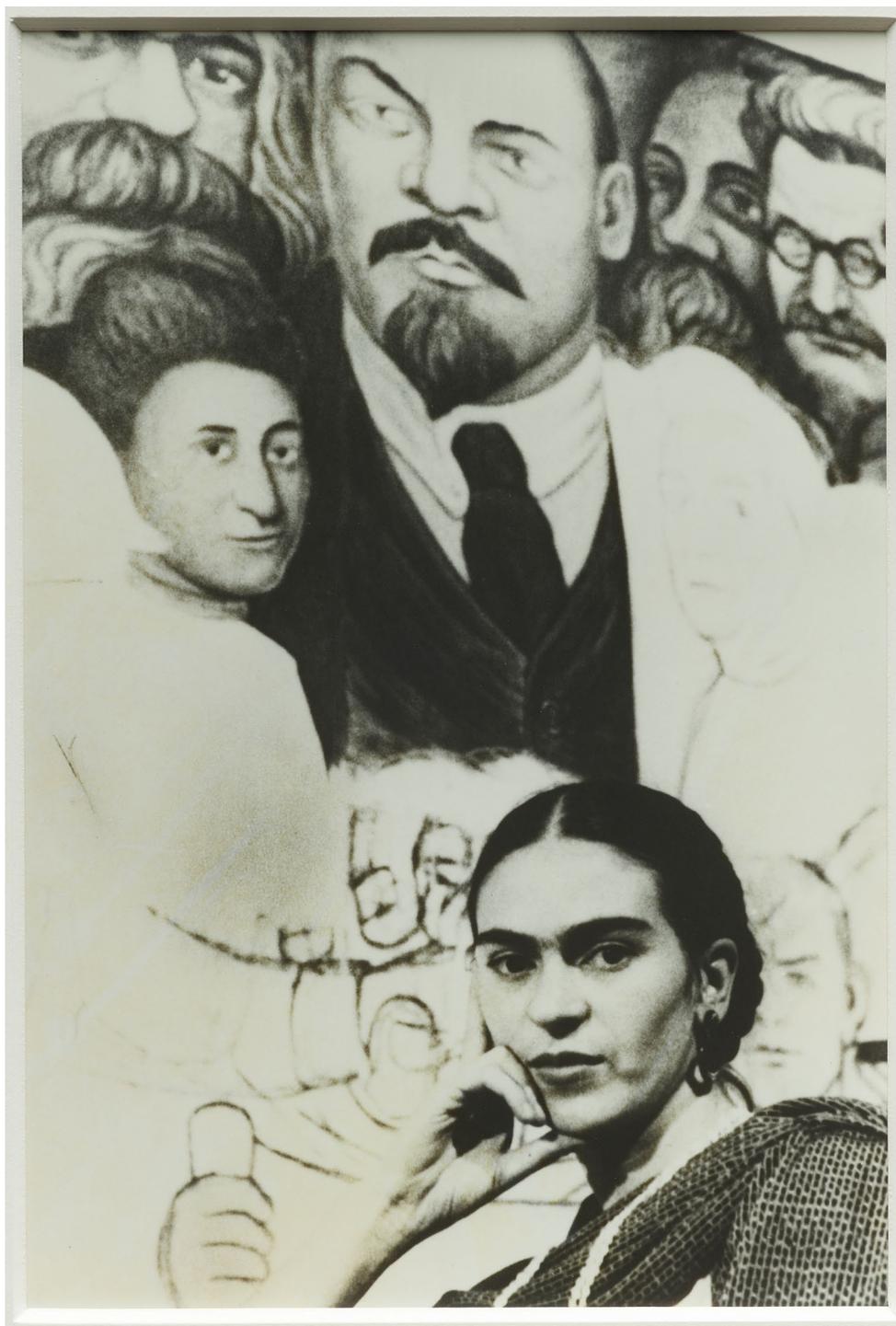
French, 1908–2004

Cristina and Frida Kahlo, 1934–1935

Photograph; gelatin silver print

The famous photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson visited Mexico in 1934 and stayed for a year. He documented various muralists and their revolutionary frescoes, and Diego Rivera was one of his subjects. During this period, he also took a photograph of Kahlo and her younger sister, Cristina.

Private collection



Lucienne Bloch

American, born Switzerland, 1909–1999

Frida in Front of the Unfinished Communist Unity Panel, New Workers School, 1933

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Like many American and international artists in the 1930s, Diego Rivera and Kahlo were both committed communists. One of his commissions in New York was a series of mural paintings for the New York Workers School, founded by the Communist Party USA. The central panel, known as Proletarian Unity, advocated for the unification of workers in America and around the world. Lucienne Bloch captured Kahlo posed before the central panel, immediately below Rivera's depiction of Vladimir Lenin, the Russian revolutionary and former leader of the Soviet Union.

Private collection



Unidentified photographer

Frida and Diego at an Exhibition of the Works of Lionel Reiss, New York, 1933

Photograph; gelatin silver print

In May 1933, Diego Rivera gave a lecture for the Menorah Artists' and Writers' Committee in New York. Before dinner, he and a fashionably dressed Kahlo visited an exhibition of Lionel Reiss's paintings. Reiss challenged Nazi racial theories by demonstrating that the Jewish people were a cultural group with great diversity spread over many geographical regions.

Rivera had Jewish ancestry; his family was converso (forced to convert to Catholicism). Kahlo also stated that her father was Jewish, but this claim has since been disproven. As a communist, she might have hoped this ethnic affiliation would deflect any suspicions about her father's German roots during the rise of the Nazi regime.

Private collection



Manuel Álvarez Bravo

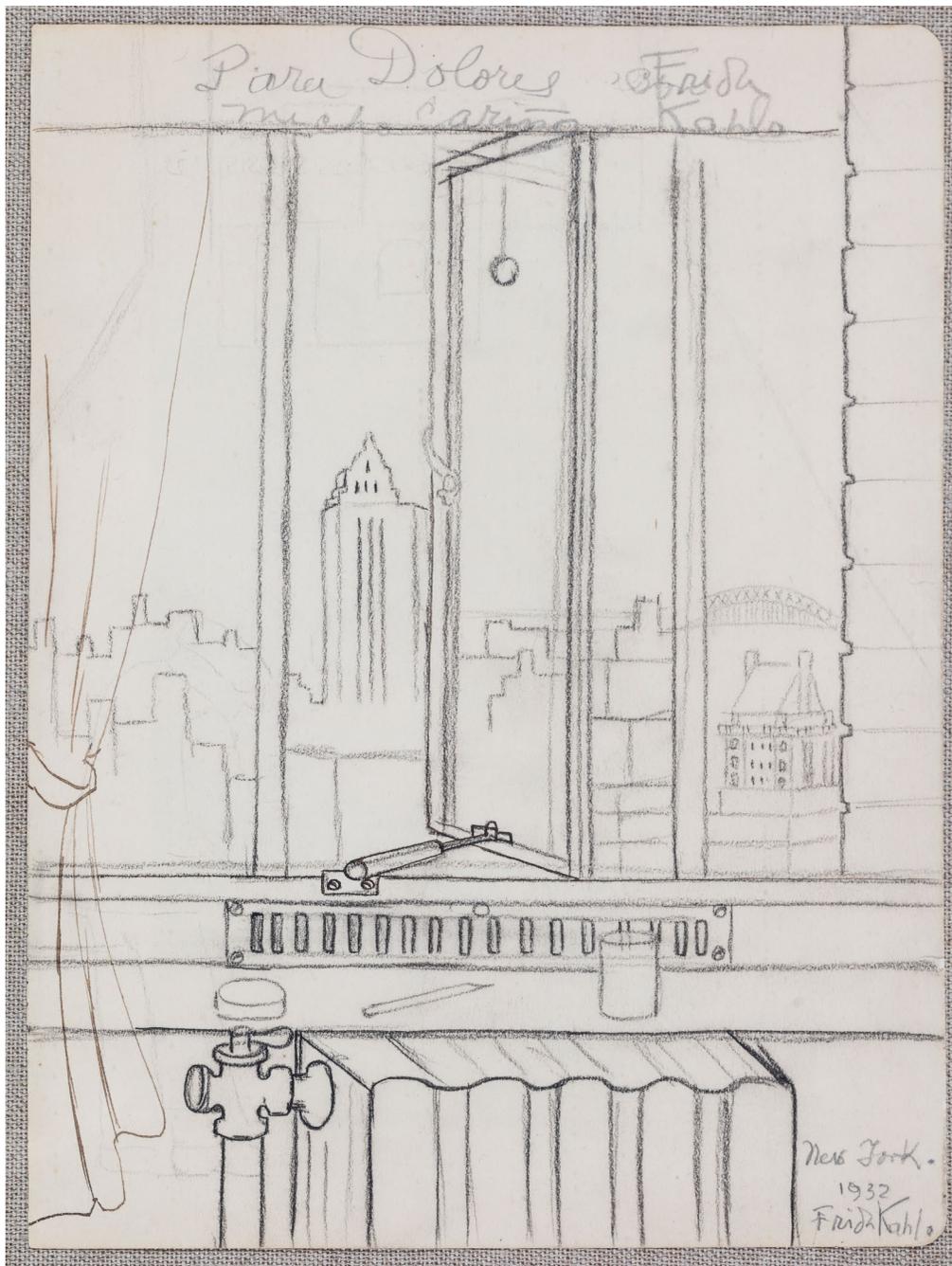
Mexican, 1902–2002

Frida Kahlo with Globe, 1937

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Manuel Álvarez Bravo photographed Kahlo in his Puente de Alvarado studio in Mexico City. Kahlo is seated beside a mirrored globe reflecting an expanse of the artist's studio, with an Aztec sculpture at her feet. Perhaps the best-known Mexican photographer of the 20th century, Bravo took photographs that were included along with paintings by Kahlo in André Breton's exhibition of Mexican art and Surrealism, *Mexique*, on view in Paris in 1939. Bravo and his first wife, Lola, were close friends of Kahlo and Rivera. Lola Álvarez Bravo's photographs of Kahlo are also on view later in the exhibition.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Florence and Brian Mahony, 2024.346



Frida Kahlo

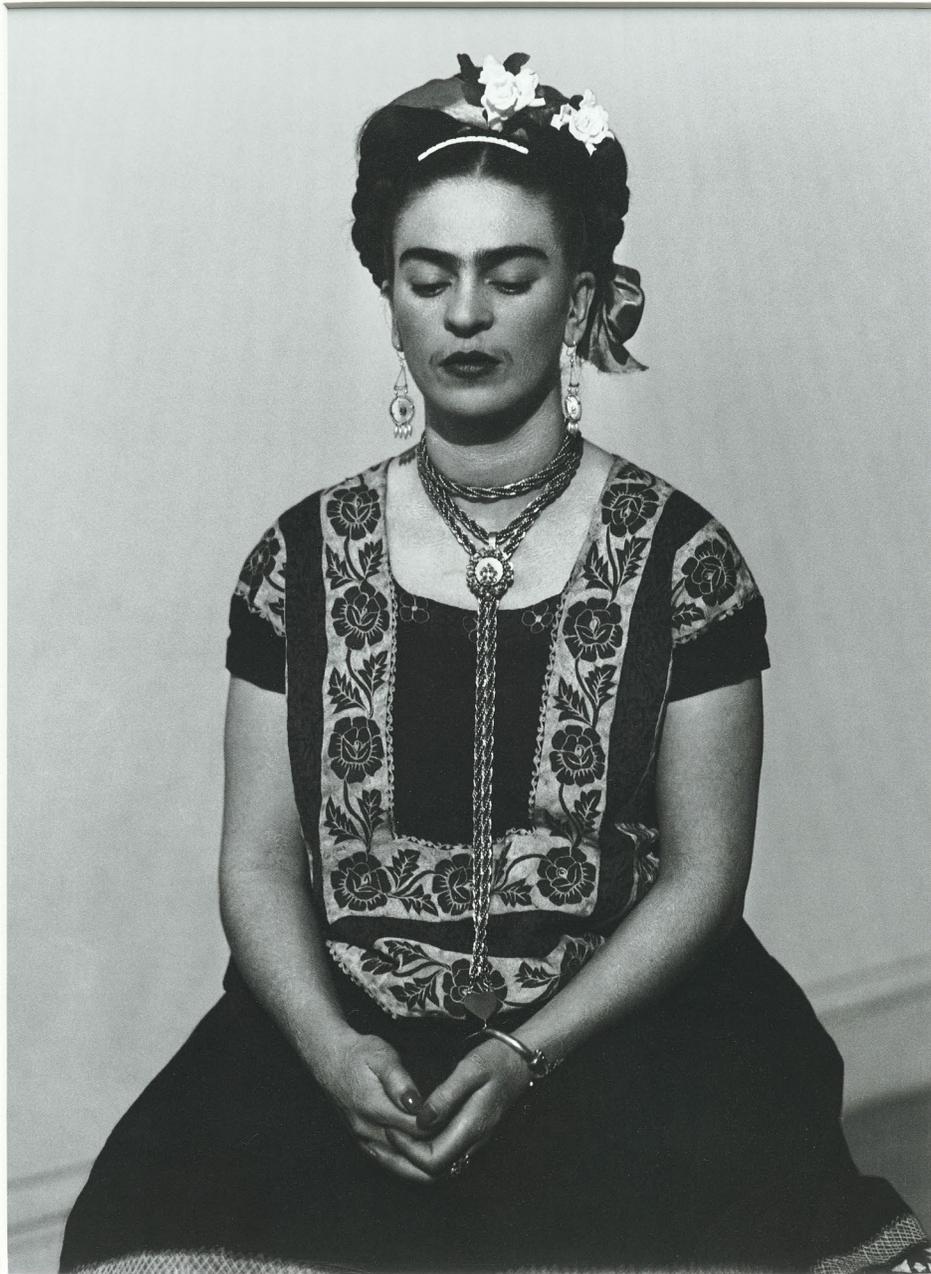
Mexican, 1907–1954

View of New York (Dedicated to Dolores del Río), 1932

Pencil on paper

Kahlo captured this vista of the New York skyline while she and Diego Rivera were staying at the Barbizon Plaza Hotel. She dedicated the drawing to Dolores del Río, a Mexican actress who built a successful career in Hollywood and with whom she later had a romantic relationship.

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



Dora Maar

French, 1907–1997

Frida in Paris, 1939

Photograph; gelatin silver print

In January 1939, Kahlo traveled to Paris, where several of her works were to be included in an exhibition, *Mexique*, organized by the French Surrealist André Breton at the Renou & Colle Gallery. When she disembarked in France, she was met by Jacqueline Lamba, Breton's wife, and the photographer Dora Maar, then Pablo Picasso's lover. The three women became friends, and Maar captured several images of Kahlo in her traditional Tehuana dress. Unlike most photographs of Kahlo, those by Maar convey a sense of unease and insecurity.

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

My Dress Hangs There (My Dress Was Hanging There [New York]),

1933–1938

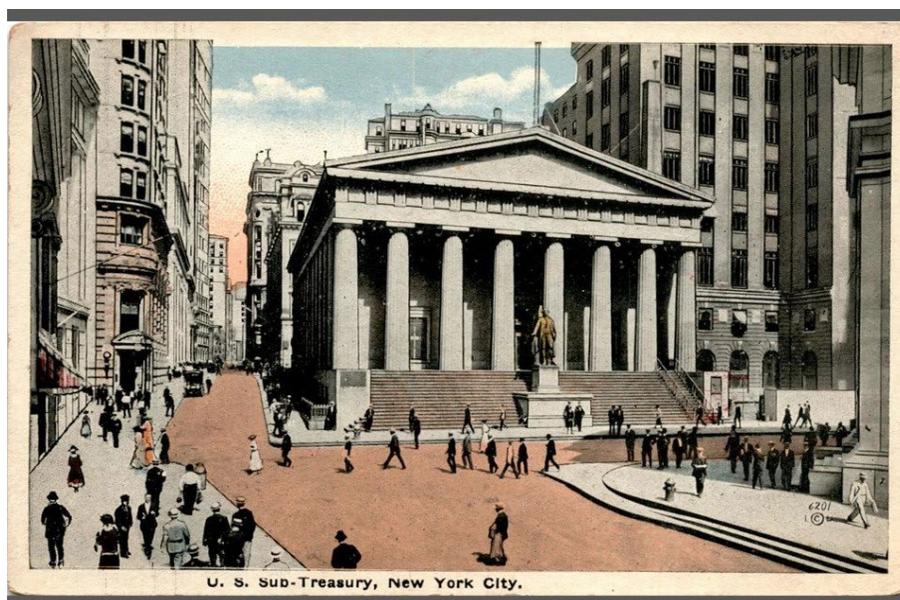
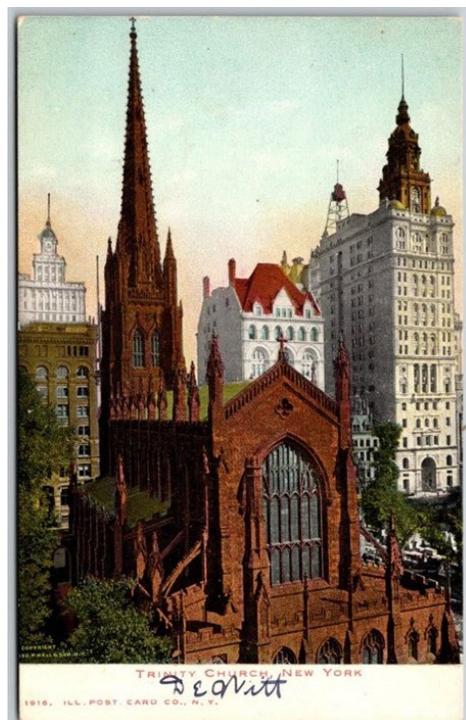
Oil and collage on Masonite

Kahlo began this work immediately following the international upheaval surrounding the destruction of her husband's Rockefeller Center mural due to the inclusion of a depiction of Lenin. Angry about the anti-communist debacle, she used this urban landscape to highlight the United States' hypocrisies. American society prided itself on social advancement but ignored the dire conditions of unemployed people, as implied in the collaged photos along the bottom of the work. Kahlo emphasized the nonsensical nature of social norms in the US by juxtaposing elements from high and low



culture, such as the Mae West billboard from the 1936 movie *Klondike Annie* in front of Trinity Church. Kahlo's Tehuana dress, suspended in the central foreground between pillars serving as pedestals for a toilet and a trophy, suggests her yearning to return to Mexico. Although Kahlo began this painting in 1933, she changed the composition over a number of years, adding new elements as late as 1938.

Colección FEMSA



Press Photo of Mae West in *Klondike Annie*, 1936

Gelatin silver print

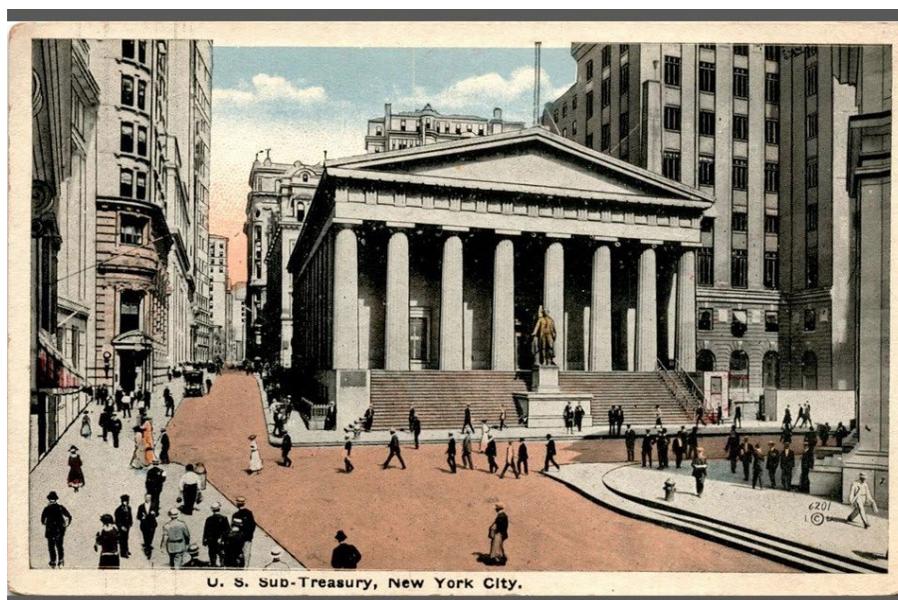
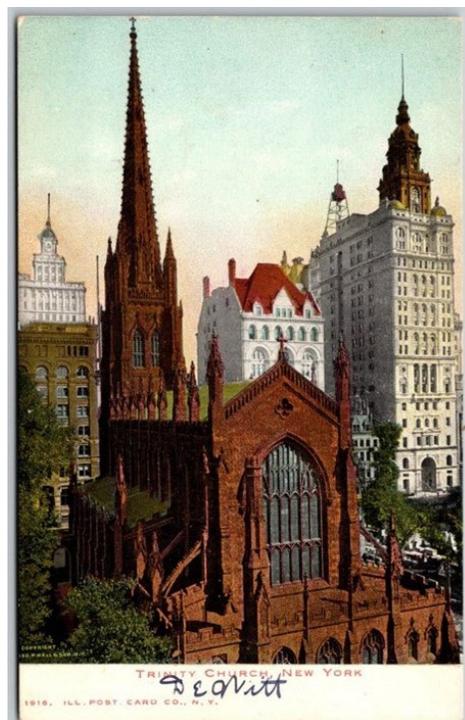
Trinity Church, New York, ca. 1930

Postcard

Federal Hall, US Sub-Treasury, New York, ca. 1930

Postcard

In My Dress Hangs There (My Dress Was Hanging There [New York]), 1933–1938 (on view in this gallery), Kahlo paid close attention to the details of New York architecture and images from contemporary popular culture. A comparison of the painting to images of the monuments she depicted in the painting, such as Trinity Church and



Federal Hall in downtown Manhattan, suggest that she probably looked at postcards or some other readily available source to make sure that these symbols of American institutions were clearly recognizable to the viewer. In addition, she took her depiction of Mae West, perhaps the best-known Hollywood star of the day, from the press images from the 1936 film, *Klondike Annie*.

Collection of Sarah Powers



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Survivor, 1938

Oil on tinplate, with original tinplate frame

In 1938, when Kahlo created *Survivor*, she and Diego Rivera were separated and awaiting their divorce. Despite this emotionally taxing event, Kahlo was also poised for her first solo exhibition to open at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City. To express both her sense of isolation and her hope that she would survive, she depicted a small clay Nayarit figure abandoned in a field. The solitary ceramic is Kahlo's way of signaling that, like Mesoamerican peoples, she too will endure and overcome oppression and persecution.

Colección Pérez Simón, Mexico



Unidentified Nayarit artist

Seated Figure Playing an Instrument,

ca. 300 BC–AD 200

Terracotta with polychrome pigments

Kahlo and Rivera kept collections of Mesoamerican objects at each of their homes, and Kahlo often looked to them for inspiration in her own work. In the nearby painting *Survivor*, a small Mesoamerican sculpture resembling this Nayarit figurine from Western Mexico is depicted wandering alone in the wilderness, perhaps a metaphor for her isolation after her separation from Rivera. In many Mexican cultures, shamans, or ritual performers, played instruments such as the traditional, flat, rasplike object depicted in this piece as a means of communicating with the spirit world.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Freeman F. Gosden, 60.29.2



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

View of Central Park, the Zoo, 1932

Watercolor and pencil on paper

In late 1932, mural commissions took Diego Rivera and Kahlo to New York City, where they stayed for nearly a year at the Barbizon Plaza Hotel, located on Central Park South and Sixth Avenue. This watercolor captures her view from a hotel window looking out onto Central Park's wintry landscape. Both the barren trees and the view downward suggest her mental state at this moment. While in New York, she felt disconnected from her family and Mexico.

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



*En la ciudad de Nueva York el día 21 del mes de OCTUBRE de 1933, a las seis de la mañana, se suicidó
la señora DOROTHY HALE tirándose desde una ventana muy alta del edificio Hampshire House
En su recuerdo,
Frida Kahlo pintado FRIDA KAHLO*



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

The Suicide of Dorothy Hale, 1939

Oil on Masonite with hand-painted frame

Dorothy Hale was an actress with a failing career who, rather than continuing to rely on the generosity of her wealthy friends, died by suicide in late 1938 by jumping from the 16th-story window of her apartment at the Hampshire House Hotel in Manhattan. Writer and politician Clare Boothe Luce commissioned Kahlo to create a simple *recuerdo* (portrait of remembrance) for Hale's mother. Instead, Kahlo chose to depict Hale's final act. Luce was so shocked by this graphic portrayal that several friends had to convince her not to destroy it.

Collection of Phoenix Art Museum; Gift of an anonymous donor

The Detroit News, October 21, 1938

Dorothy Hale death announcement

Hampshire House Hotel, New York,

1930S

Postcard

The shocking death of screen actress

Dorothy Hale made national headlines in the fall of 1938, when she fell from the 16th-floor window of her apartment at the fashionable Hampshire House Hotel in New York (postcard also on view). It was widely speculated that she died by suicide. Hale was rumored to have been engaged to Harry L. Hopkins, WPA Administrator and close friend of President Roosevelt, and the breakup of this relationship was the reason for her suicide. Hale's death made the front-page headline news in her hometown of Detroit, on par with wartime events in the Pacific.

Collection of Sarah Powers

Nickolas Muray

Hungarian-born Nickolas Muray (1892–1965) became one of the most successful commercial photographers in the US during the first half of the 20th century. He was also an accomplished fencer who competed in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics. In 1931 the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias introduced Muray to Kahlo. Their attraction was mutual and immediate, and resulted in a decade-long affair. He was dependable and kind, and he openly adored her—in stark contrast to Diego Rivera. Muray hoped that he and Kahlo might start a life together, but he gradually realized that she and Rivera were permanently intertwined.

Muray's photographs of Kahlo remain some of the most arresting and beautiful portraits of the artist. As demonstrated by the examples shown here, his images

cemented her status as a cultural icon. Keeping in mind their relationship, it's also possible to see how Muray's camera captured Kahlo's admiration and affection for the man on the other side of the lens.

Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Muray Home Movie, ca. 1941

Footage of Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Miguel Covarrubias at La Casa Azul in Mexico City around 1941. Video was captured by Nickolas Muray, a romantic companion of Frida Kahlo's at the time.

Running time: 2:36 minutes

Courtesy George Eastman House, Rochester, New York



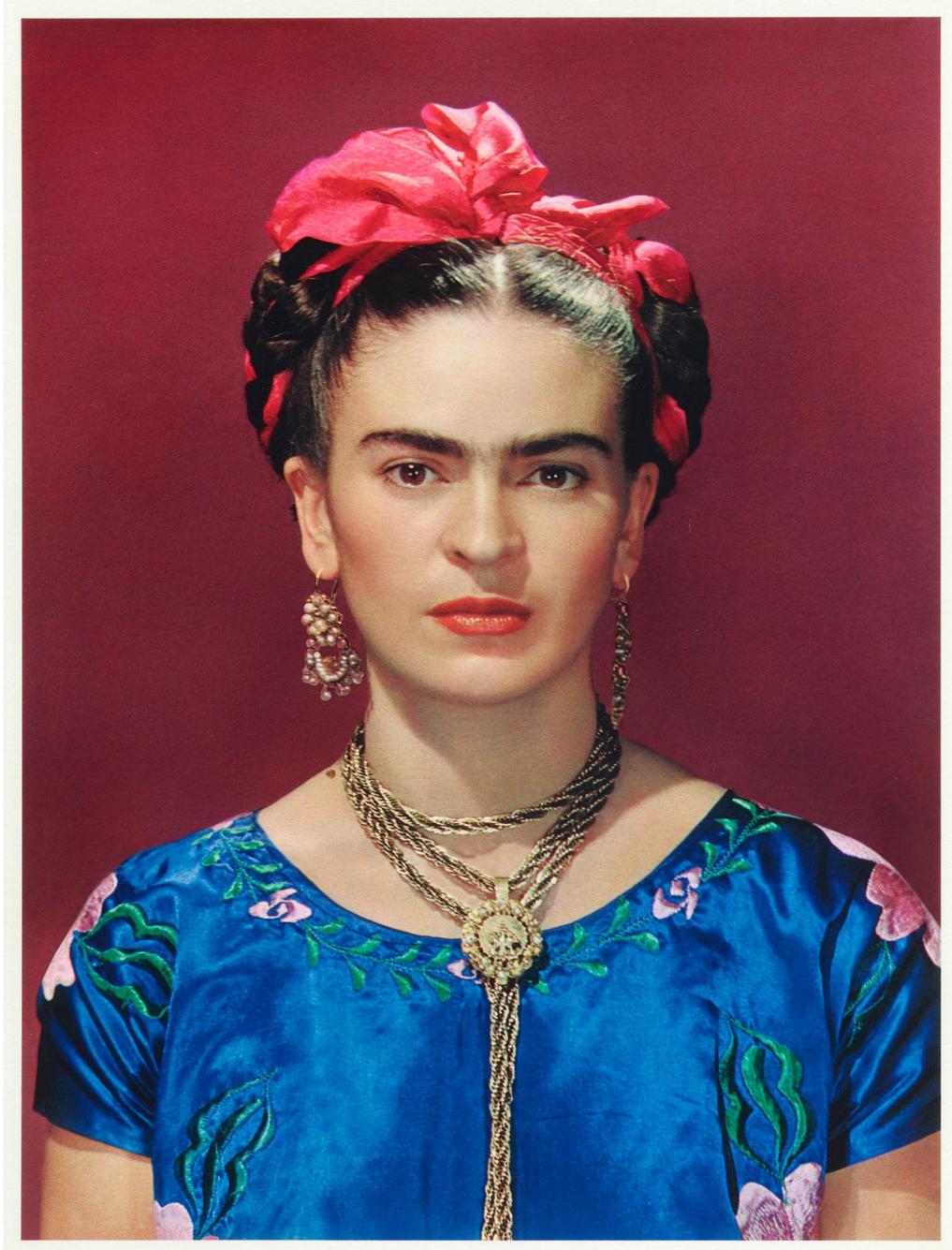
Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida Kahlo with Nickolas Muray, 1939

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida with Blue Satin Blouse, 1939

Photograph; carbon pigment print

Private collection



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida with Olmeca Figurine, Coyoacán (20/30), 1939

Color carbon print

Throckmorton Fine Art, Inc., New York



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida with Magenta Rebozo, 1939

Photograph; carbon pigment print

Private collection

Look, explore, connect...

Kahlo was very interested in fashion and dressing up. Take some time to look closely at this photograph. Notice Kahlo's brightly painted nails, gold jewelry, styled hair, and her magenta rebozo, or shawl—these were some of her favorite things to wear.

- What is your favorite thing to wear?
- How does it make you feel when you are wearing it?



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida with Cigarette, Altavista, 1941

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



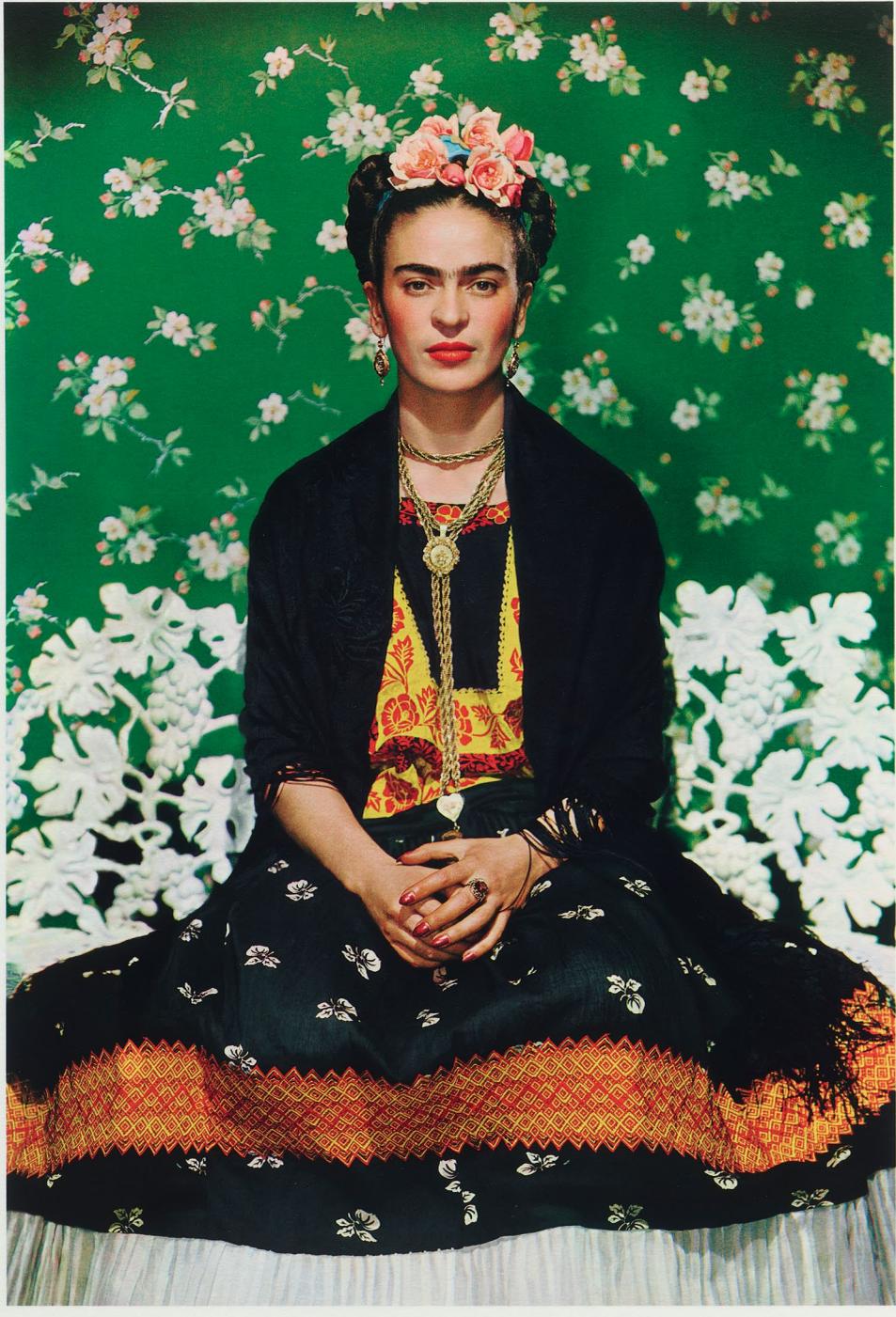
Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida with Fawn, Granizo, 1939

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida on White Bench, New York, 1939

Photograph; carbon pigment print

Private collection

After divorcing in 1939, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera remarried in December 1940. Professionally, her expanding fame brought awards, grants, and participation in several international exhibitions during the 1940s. Unfortunately, these successes were offset by the crushing loss of her beloved father in 1941 and her increasing health challenges as the years passed. Kahlo had become a professor of painting, but her poor health often confined her to bed and obliged students to attend class at her house. By 1944, she began wearing a steel corset to support and immobilize her back. In 1946 incessant pain prompted her to travel to New York City for a spinal fusion. The surgery and a series of subsequent operations were unsuccessful, and she slipped into more frequent bouts of depression.

Finally, in 1948, she endured Rivera filing for divorce twice: the first time to wed actress María Félix, and the second, to wed his art dealer, Emma Hurtado.

He ultimately rescinded the divorce papers and remained with Kahlo until the end of her life. These years of immense physical and emotional pain resulted in some of her most powerful self-portraits.



Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Frida Kahlo in New York, 1946

Photograph; carbon pigment print

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Magnolias, 1945

Oil on Masonite

Private collection



Lola Álvarez Bravo

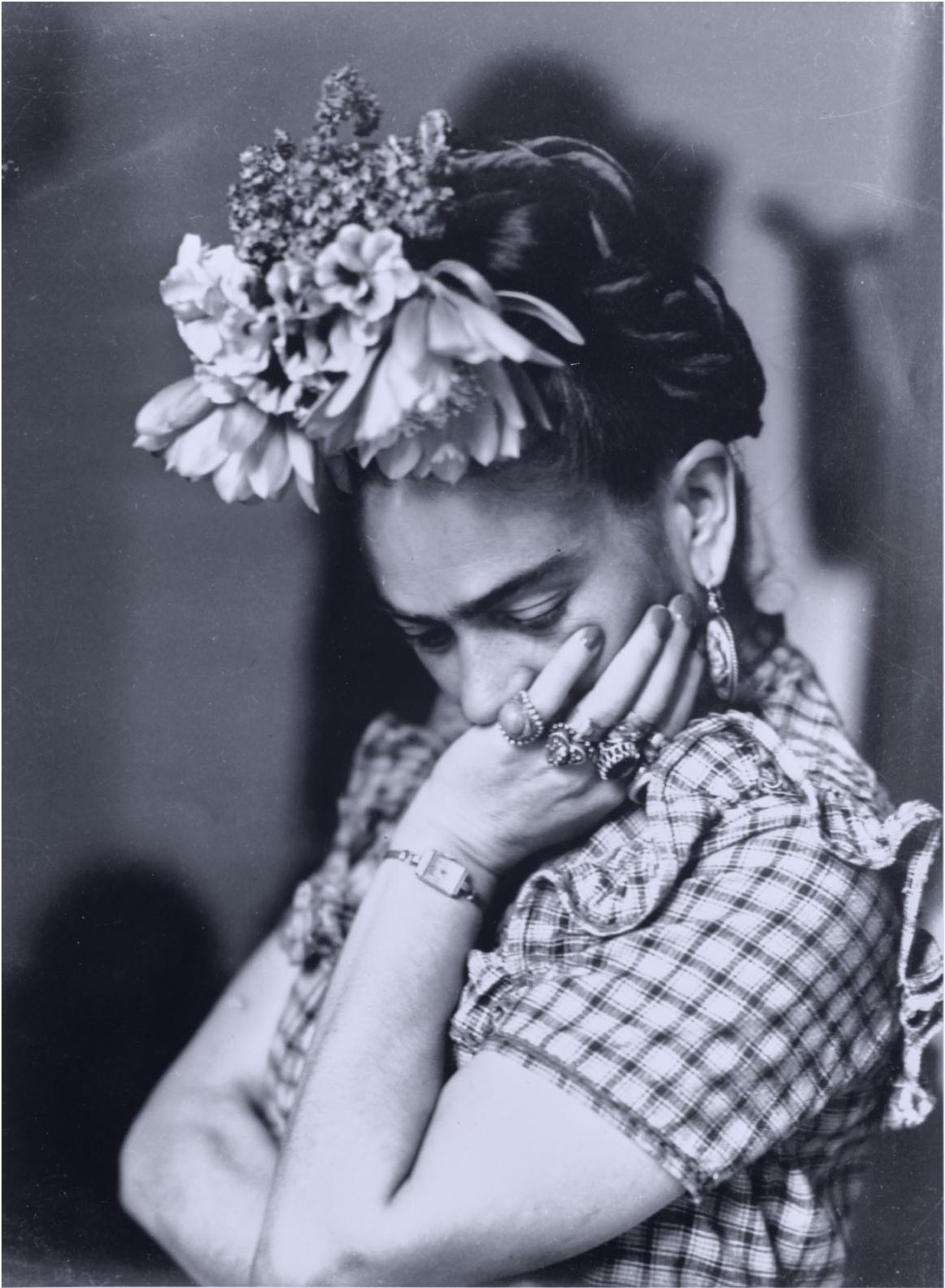
Mexican, 1907–1993

Frida Facing Mirror with Two Hairless Dogs, 1944

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Lola Álvarez Bravo is considered the first and most significant Mexican female photographer of the 20th century. She and Kahlo met as students in 1922 and remained close friends until Kahlo's death. Kahlo let down her guard in front of Álvarez Bravo's lens. The photographer recalled this image many years later, saying that it was unplanned. When Kahlo approached the mirror, Álvarez Bravo encouraged her to move closer to her reflection. "Suddenly, . . . I said yes, two Fridas."

Private collection



Sylvia Salmi

American, 1909–1977

Frida in Thought, 1944

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Lola Álvarez Bravo

Mexican, 1907–1993

**Frida Kahlo Lying in Bed. Angular
Reflection on Canopy Mirror, ca.**

1945

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Self-Portrait with Monkey, 1945

Oil on Masonite

Every time Kahlo made a self-portrait, she seized the opportunity to re-create herself. Although her expression typically remains emotionless, she employed other elements to convey aspects of her interior state. For example, previously Kahlo had always represented herself with a precise coif with braids. Starting with this portrait, she depicted her hair unpinned and hanging loose. For Kahlo, her natural hairstyle denoted grief. When she made this painting, her health had greatly worsened, and doctors could no longer manage her pain, so she spent much of her time bedridden.

Robert Brady Foundation Mexico



Look, explore, connect...

Notice in this self-portrait that Kahlo included her pet, a spider monkey named Fulang-Chang. Look at the monkey and the artist.

- Do you notice any similarities between the two?
- How is the monkey positioned in the portrait?
- Do you have a pet or an object you'd include in a picture?



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Sun and Life, 1947

Oil on Masonite

In many cultures' ancient myths, the setting sun entered the underworld and was reborn the next day. Here, Kahlo uses similar myths to ponder the cycle of life (birth, death, and rebirth). This sun has Kahlo's facial features, as well as a weeping third eye. Surrounding the sun is a wall of plants teeming with forms resembling wombs, some of which contain ejaculating phalluses; however, the plant directly above the sun encases a crying embryo, possibly revealing Kahlo's sadness over the end of her fourth pregnancy.

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico

Nickolas Muray

American, born Hungary, 1892–1965

Muray Home Movie, ca. 1941

Footage of Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Miguel Covarrubias at La Casa Azul in Mexico City around 1941.

Running time: 30 seconds

Courtesy George Eastman House, Rochester, New York



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Self-Portrait with Loose Hair, 1947

Oil on Masonite

Despite the inscription noting her age as 37, this self-portrait was created around Kahlo's 40th birthday. The false inscription reflects Kahlo's desire to have been born in 1910, the year of the Mexican Revolution. Unlike her previous portraits, Kahlo shows herself stripped of adornment and artifice, her hair uncombed. She seems exhausted and resigned. The prior year, she had an unsuccessful spinal surgery that she later referred to as "the beginning of the end."

Private collection



Rosa Covarrubias

Mexican, born United States, 1895–1970

Frida Kahlo, Xochimilco, Mexico, 1941

Platinum print

Rosa Covarrubias and her husband, the Mexican artist and caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias, were close friends with Kahlo and Rivera. Born Rosemonde Rolanda in Azusa, California, she began her career as a dancer in New York City before moving to Mexico City in 1924, where she took up photography. In 1930 Rosa married Miguel Covarrubias, by which time she had established her reputation as a modernist artist and photographer inspired by Surrealism. It was through Rosa and Miguel Covarrubias that Kahlo met the Hungarian-born photographer Nickolas Muray, with whom she embarked on a decade-long romantic



relationship and collaboration. In this portrait, Rosa captured her friend in a relaxed, unguarded moment, as she reclines on the ground and shields her eyes from the sun.

Throckmorton Fine Art, Inc., New York



Unknown Otomí artist

Otomí Huipil Blouse Embroidered with

Deer and Bird Design, 1951

Cotton with red embroidery

This Huipil cotton embroidered blouse is typical of those worn by Otomí women. The Otomí, an Indigenous people from central Mexico, are known for hand-made embroidery of stylized animal and floral motifs. It was given to Kahlo by the Mexican architect Juan O’Gorman and bears her initials, “F.R.” (Frida Rivera), embroidered in the inner collar. In the early 1930s, O’Gorman designed houses for Kahlo and Rivera to live in, connected by a bridge, and was a close friend of the two artists. Frida posed wearing an embroidered blouse with a very similar design in the photograph by Rosa Covarrubias seen in this gallery.

Throckmorton Fine Art, Inc., New York

After another spinal surgery in 1949, Kahlo was hospitalized for nine months and relied on a wheelchair for mobility. She spent increasing amounts of time in bed—either in the hospital or at home. Still lifes became an effective vehicle of expression, and they account for over half of her artistic production during this period. The artist appreciated the fact that she didn't have to worry about her appearance when painting still lifes, so her imagination could lead the way. Still lifes also permitted her to express her growing anxiety in a symbolic, more secretive manner that allowed potential buyers to view them simply as pleasing compositions.

In 1953 Kahlo had a triumphant first solo show in Mexico, but due to her poor health, she was forced to attend the

opening lying in a bed. Months later, it became necessary to amputate her right leg. Her last public appearance was at a protest demonstration in early July, 11 days before she died on July 13, 1954.

Her companion and fellow artist, Lola Álvarez Bravo, captured an image of Kahlo after she passed away, which is the last work in this exhibition at the end of this gallery. We recognize some people have personal or cultural sensitivities around viewing images of human remains. Please proceed with care.



Florence Arquin

American, 1900–1974

Frida Wearing Plaster Corset, 1951

Photograph

Private collection



Bernice Kolko

Polish, 1904–1970

Frida in the Garden, Coyoacán, 1953

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Bernice Kolko

Polish, 1904–1970

Frida in Bed at her Home, Coyoacán,

1952

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Still Life with Parrot and Flag, 1951

Oil on Masonite

As Kahlo's health deteriorated, still lifes became a primary source of expression. The various subjects were always close at hand and could be explored as her strength allowed. She imbued each element with personal meaning. Here, the objects in the composition express her identity—Mexican through the flag and native vegetation, and sensual through the ripe, voluptuous fruits.

She also refers to her history through the sliced mamey fruit in the lower center of the scene. Just as her body was impaled by a railing during the 1925 bus accident, the fruit is pierced by the flag's pole.

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



Lola Álvarez Bravo

Mexican, 1907–1993

**Frida Following Amputation of Her
Right Leg, 1953**

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Private collection



Unidentified photographer

Frida Painting *Naturaleza Viva*, 1951

Photograph

At this point in her life, Kahlo could only paint while lying down, propped up by pillows. This image shows her putting the final touches on *Still Life (Living Nature/ Naturaleza Viva)*, a painting on view nearby.

Private collection



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Still Life (Living Nature/Naturaleza Viva), 1952

Oil on Masonite

Kahlo rejected the traditional concept of the “still life” as a composition of dead, lifeless objects. Rather, she saw these subjects as being fully alive, as the title of this radiant work implies. Set in a landscape, the arrangement is backed by a sky that reflects the dualities of the universe—night versus day, moon versus sun—and the passage of time. A white dove (which some have interpreted as Kahlo’s spirit) resting in the upper portion of the canvas is seemingly about to take flight. Meanwhile, the title spreads its roots along the base, as if affirming Kahlo’s desire to hold onto life.

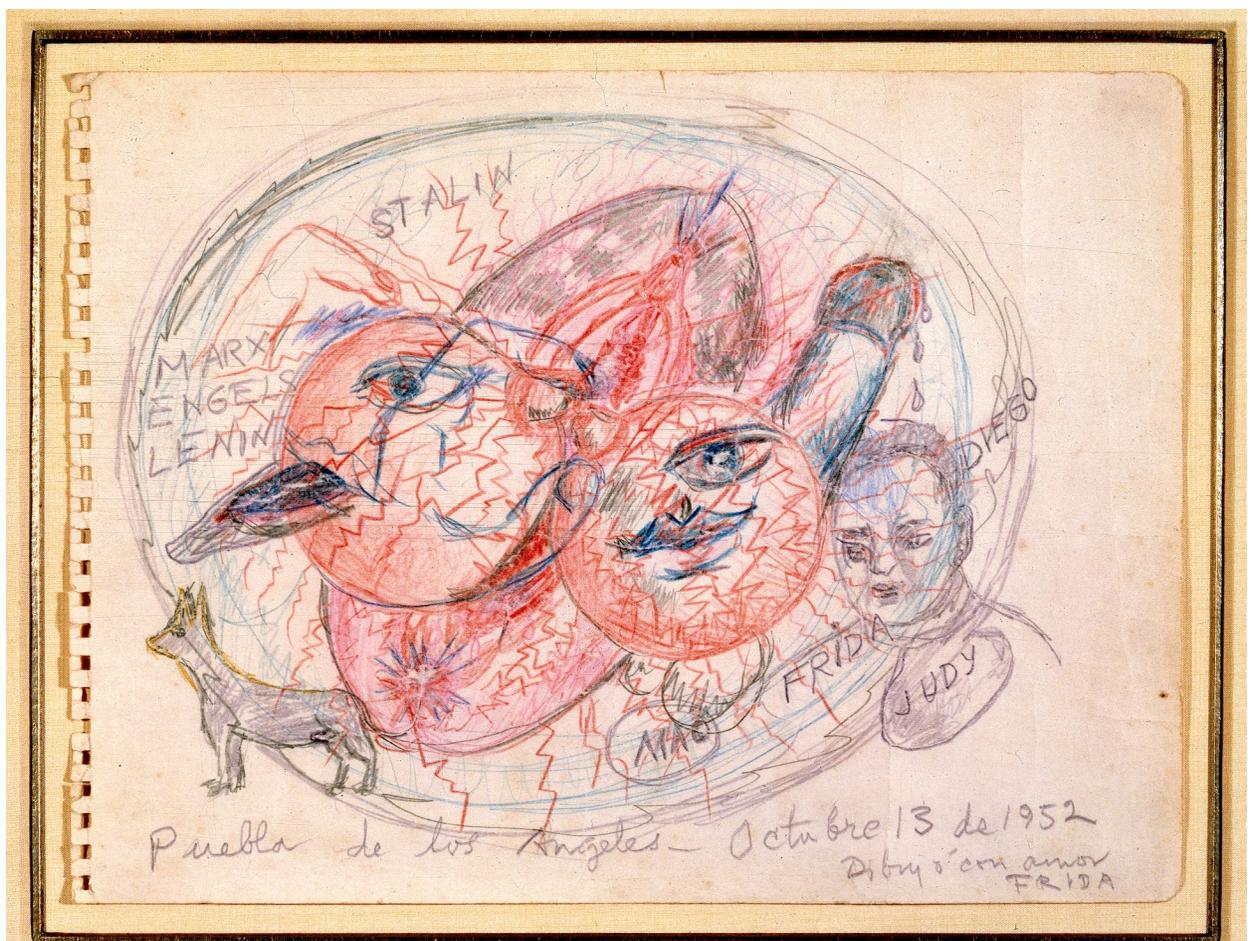
Private collection



Look, explore, connect...

Kahlo painted more still lifes toward the end of her life because it was easy to paint objects that remained still, but not everything in this still life would stay perfectly still. . . . Look closely.

- What objects can you find in this still life?
- Do you see anything that is alive?
- What objects would you include in a still life about your life?



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Puebla de los Ángeles, 1952

Colored pencil on paper

Several of the subjects or ideals central to Kahlo's life (her relationships, food, sex, and communist principles) coalesce in this drawing. Around the perimeter of the circular mass, we find the names of Diego Rivera, herself, Judy (her nurse), and communist philosophers and leaders. At lower left, she includes Mr. Xólotl, her beloved Itzquintli dog (a hairless breed from Mexico). An erotic pairing of a mamey fruit split open (resembling a vulva) and an erect phallus appears in the center and emphasizes the value she placed on sensual pleasure.

Colección Andrés Blaisten, Mexico



Unidentified Colima artist

Dog with a Corncob, ca. 200 BC–AD
300

Terracotta

Highly naturalistic and amusing animals are common subjects in ancient West Mexican ceramics. Many Mesoamerican cultures believed that dogs guided the dead through the underworld in the afterlife. The distinctly human manner in which this dog grips the corncob suggests that the figure may in fact be a shaman transformed into a dog.

Kahlo included a similar figurine in *Still Life (I Belong to Samuel Fastlicht)*, on view nearby, and as she neared the end of her life, dogs appeared more frequently in her paintings and drawings.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 61.31.3



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Still Life (I Belong to Samuel Fastlicht), 1951

Oil on Masonite

During the time when Kahlo was restricted to her bed or using a wheelchair, she found a renewed interest in painting and, for a brief period, a new optimism that is evident in this playful work. Painted in lieu of payment to her dentist, Dr. Fastlicht, Kahlo depicts ripened fruits and vegetables in a riot of color, arranged around a Mesoamerican clay figurine of an Itzquintli dog (a hairless breed native to Mexico).

In gratitude, she planted a small note in the melon at right, declaring, “I Belong to Samuel Fastlicht.”

Private collection, Courtesy Galería Arvil, Mexico



Frida Kahlo

Mexican, 1907–1954

Xibalba-Alado-Xólotl, ca. 1950

Pastel and crayon on paper

Kahlo portrays her favorite pet, Mr. Xólotl, with wings in accordance with Mesoamerican myths. As befits his name, her dog is presented as Xólotl (the evening star), twin brother of Quetzalcóatl (the morning star); it is Xólotl who accompanies the sun during its nighttime journey through the underworld. The two deities represent the harmony of opposites in Mesoamerican thought.

Private collection



EN HOMENAJE a Frida Kahlo,
y recuerdo de su primera y única
exposición individual en Mé-
xico, en la galería Arte Con-
temporáneo del 13 al 27 de
abril de 1953.
Julio 13 de 1955.

Diego Rivera

Mexican, 1886–1957

Untitled (Portrait of Frida Kahlo),

1955

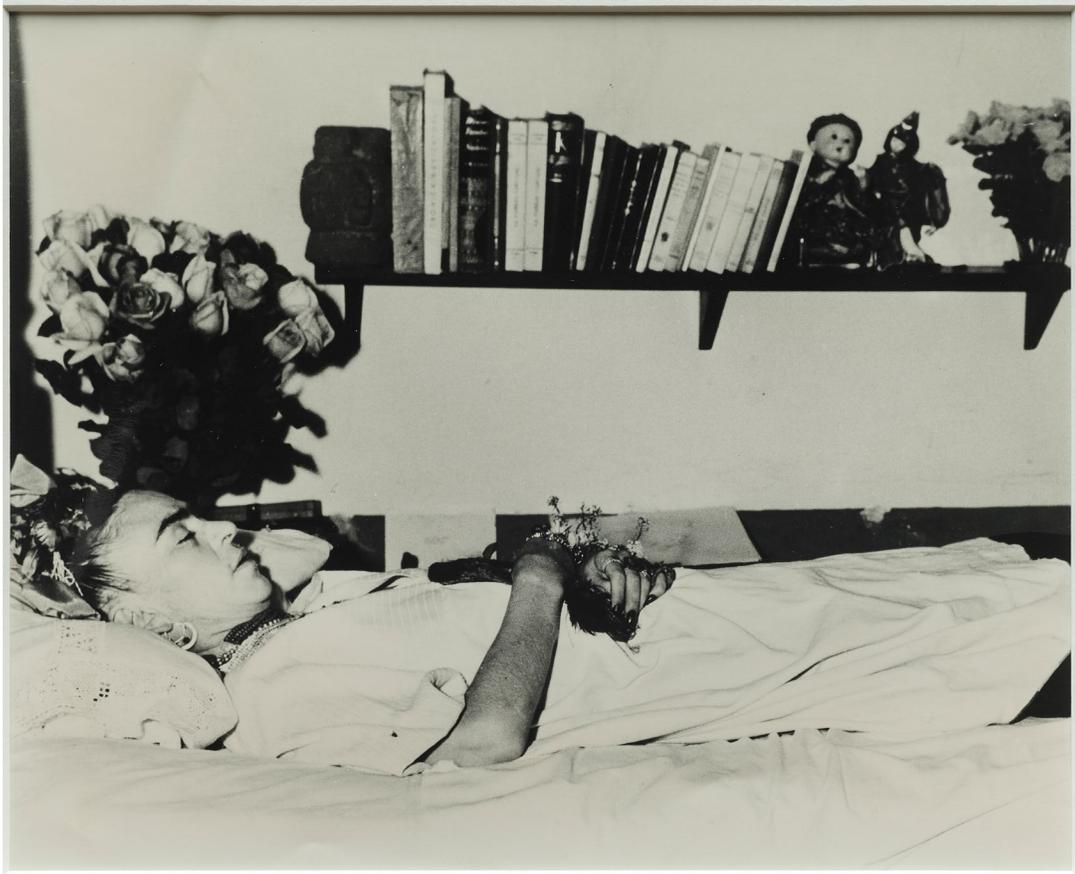
Ink on paper; photogravure

A year after Kahlo's death, Rivera created this image in homage to his late wife.

Kahlo's head is set in a form that resembles the shape of the sacred heart (a traditional Catholic motif), as if to express that, for him, she was all heart and all love. He incorporated her signature braids and ribbons and topped the hairstyle with two artery-like forms that spurt the decorative lines framing her head.

Following Kahlo's death, Rivera devoted his three remaining years of life to ensuring that her house would be preserved as a museum and remain intact and unchanged, just as she had left it.

Private collection



Lola Álvarez Bravo

Mexican, 1907–1993

Frida Kahlo's Death Portrait, 1954

Photograph; gelatin silver print

Kahlo died at home in Coyoacán on July 13, 1954. The last words in her diary read: “I hope the leaving is joyful—and I hope to never return.”

Private collection