

Keep in mind

Please keep the following in mind during your visit:

In order to protect the artifacts and preserve them for future generations, factors contributing to their deterioration must be kept in mind. These include physical contact, vibrations, sudden movements, excessive light, and variations in temperature and humidity, all of which are harmful. Visitors should therefore abstain from touching the objects or taking photos or videos and should also avoid producing excessive vibrations.

To better understand the Museum's collections, visitors should view them from left to right; the objects found in the middle of the halls supplement those exhibited on either side.

Packages, umbrellas, suitcases and large bags must be checked at the cloakroom (coat check).

Still photography is permitted for private, noncommercial use only. Photographs cannot be published, sold, reproduced, transferred, distributed, or otherwise commercially exploited in any manner whatsoever. The use of a flash or Tripods is prohibited.

National Museum of Colombia



As a result of anthropological research, donations and acquisitions, the National Museum of Colombia has built a collection of more than 20,000 objects that are symbols of national history and heritage. The collections include remains of the first inhabitants and material culture of prehispanic societies, objects from current indigenous and afrocolombian ethnography, evidence of different periods of the nation's history, and works of artistic value that range from the colonial period through the works of 'the first modern' artists: Fernando Botero, Alejandro Obregón, Guillermo Wiedemann, Juan Antonio Roda, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, Edgar Negret and Enrique Grau.

The Museum offers 17 permanent exhibition galleries with more than 2,500 pieces currently on display, a calendar of temporary exhibitions that allows its visitors to be in touch with important national and international displays of history, art and archaeology, and a varied educational and cultural program that includes seminars, lectures, concerts, video, theatrical and dance performances.

As a contribution to academic discussions on Colombia's cultural history, the Museum organizes the Cátedra Anual de Historia 'Ernesto Restrepo Tirado', an academic event that has been carried out annually for more than 10 years. It also offers a series of publications that compile material on the Museum's collections as well as the memoirs of academic events.

With the development of new technologies such as the website, the Museum is constantly creating new and contemporary ways of being in touch with its public.

The Museum is guided by its Strategic Plan 2001-2010, a 10-year navigation chart that channels all human and financial assets towards the objectives of three major strategic areas: building multiple narratives of the history of cultural processes of Colombia, developing audiences and strengthening the nation's museums.

Museo Nacional de Colombia... the museum of all colombians.

History

The National Museum of Colombia, founded by legislation enacted by the first Congress of the Republic on July 28, 1823, is one of the oldest in the Americas.

It was officially opened on July 4, 1824, by Vice President General Francisco de Paula Santander.

The National Museum was initially installed at the Botanical House, which contained the natural history collection assembled by José Celestino Mutis and maintained by his students. Archeological, historical and artistic pieces were gradually added to the original collection.

The National Museum's collections currently include over 28,000 pieces that were obtained through archeological research, donations and acquisitions. These elements are symbols of our nation's history and cultural heritage and include vestiges of the original inhabitants and cultural artifacts from Pre-Hispanic societies, objects from present-day indigenous and Afro-Colombian ethnography, accounts of diverse periods in this country's history and works of art ranging from the colonial period to such contemporary artists as Fernando Botero and Alejandro Obregón.

Throughout its long history, The National Museum of Colombia has had a number of different locations: from its beginnings in 1823 and until 1842, it was located at the Botanical House, which no longer exists. From 1845 to 1913, it was located in the Las Aulas building, currently the Colonial Art Museum. Another building which has been lost to us, the Pasaje Rufino Cuervo, was home to the Museum from 1913 to 1922. The Pedro A. López building, current site of the Ministry of Agriculture, housed the Museum from 1922 to 1944. The National Museum was transferred to its present location in 1948, prior to which the building had been the Central Penitentiary of Cundinamarca, also known as the "Panóptico".

The Penitentiary was designed by architect Thomas Reed in the 1850s and construction was begun on October 1, 1874. It was Colombia's most important prison for almost 72 years. The inmates were transferred to the new La Picota prison in 1946 and the Government decided to turn the building over to the National Museum.

The building was restored and adapted by architects Manuel de Vengochea and Hernando Vargas Rubiano, and inaugurated as the site of the National Museum on May 1, 1948. Its

architectural and historical value, beauty, and solidity inspired the Government to declare it a national monument on August 11, 1975.

A comprehensive project to restore it as a monument was carried out from 1989 to 2001. A current initiative, undertaken with support from the Office of the President of the Republic, the National Department of Planning, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Office of the Governor of Cundinamarca, The Office of the Mayor of Bogotá, and the United Nations Development Program, is aimed at enlarging the Museum's collections while providing the public with all of the services of a great National Museum worthy of the Colombian people.

MAIN EXPOSITION

Diego Rivera



"An artist is above all a human being, profoundly human to the core. If the artist can't feel everything that humanity feels, if the artist isn't capable of loving until he forgets himself and sacrifices himself if necessary, if he won't put down his magic brush and head the fight against the oppressor, then he isn't a great artist." Diego Rivera

Considered the greatest Mexican painter of the twentieth century, Diego Rivera had a profound effect on the international art world. Among his many contributions, Rivera is credited with the reintroduction of fresco painting into modern art and architecture. His radical political views and tempestuous romance with the painter Frieda Kahlo were then, and remain today, a source of public intrigue. In a series of visits to America, from 1930 to 1940, Rivera brought his unique vision to public spaces and galleries, enlightening and inspiring artists and laymen alike.

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1886. He began to study painting at an early age and in 1907 moved to Europe. Spending most of the next fourteen years in Paris, Rivera encountered the works of such great masters as Cézanne, Gauguin, Renoir, and Matisse. Rivera was searching for a new form of painting, one that could express the complexities of his day and still reach a wide audience. It was not until he began to study the Renaissance frescoes of Italy that he found his medium. It was with a vision of the future of the fresco and with a strong belief in public art that Rivera returned to Mexico.

Frescoes are mural paintings done on fresh plaster. Using the fresco form in universities and other public buildings, Rivera was able to introduce his work into the everyday lives of the

people. Rivera concerned himself primarily with the physical process of human development and the effects of technological progress. For him, the frescoes' size and public accessibility was the perfect canvas on which to tackle the grand themes of the history and future of humanity. A life long Marxist, Rivera saw in this medium an antidote to the elite walls of galleries and museums. Throughout the twenties his fame grew with a number of large murals depicting scenes from Mexican history. His work appealed to the people's interest in the history of technology and progress. The desire to understand progress was visible in the growing industrial societies of the 1930s, and Rivera saw the workers' struggle as a symbol of the fragile political ground on which that capitalism trod.

In 1930, Rivera made the first of a series of trips that would alter the course of American painting. In November of that year, Rivera began work on his first two major American commissions: for the American Stock Exchange Luncheon Club and for the California School of Fine Arts. These two pieces firmly but subtly incorporated Rivera's radical politics, while maintaining a sense of simple historicity. One of Rivera's greatest gifts was his ability to condense a complex historical subject (such as the history of California's natural resources) down to its most essential parts. For Rivera, the foundation of history could be seen in the working class, whose lives were spent by war and industry in the name of progress. In these first two commissions and all of the American murals to follow, Rivera would investigate the struggles of the working class.

In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Rivera arrived in Detroit, where, at the behest of Henry Ford, he began a paean to the American worker on the walls of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Completed in 1933, the piece depicted industrial life in the United States, concentrating on the car plant workers of Detroit. Rivera's radical politics and independent nature had begun to draw criticism during his early years in America. Though the fresco was the focus of much controversy, Edsel Ford, Henry's son, defended the work and it remains today Rivera's most significant painting in America. Rivera, however, did not fare nearly so well in his association with the Rockefellers in New York City.

In 1933 the Rockefellers commissioned Rivera to paint a mural for the lobby of the RCA building in Rockefeller Center. "Man at the Crossroads" was to depict the social, political, industrial, and scientific possibilities of the twentieth century. In the painting, Rivera included a scene of a giant May Day demonstration of workers marching with red banners. It was not the subject matter of the panel that inflamed the patrons, but the clear portrait of Lenin leading the demonstration. When Rivera refused to remove the portrait, he was ordered to stop and the painting was destroyed. That same year, Rivera used the money from the Rockefellers to create a mural for the Independent Labor Institute that had Lenin as its central figure.

Rivera remained a central force in the development of a national art in Mexico throughout his life. In 1957, at the age of seventy, Rivera died in Mexico City. Perhaps one his greatest legacies, however, was his impact on America's conception of public art. In depicting scenes of American life on public buildings, Rivera provided the first inspiration for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's WPA program. Of the hundreds of American artists who would find work through the WPA, many continued on to address political concerns that had first been publicly presented by Rivera. Both his original painting style and the force of his ideas remain major influences on American painting.

Frida Kahlo's Art (An Anatomy of Her Work)

As a young woman, becoming a painter was not a part of Frida's career goals. Her goal in life was to become a doctor but a tragic accident at age 18 left her mentally and physically scared for life. It changed the course of her life forever.

It was during her months of convalescence that Frida began to take painting seriously... *"to combat the boredom and pain"* she said. *"I felt I still had enough energy to do something other than studying to become a doctor. Without giving it any particular thought, I started painting."* It was the beginning of a life-long career for Frida.

Aside from a few art classes in high school and browsing through art books from her father's collection, Frida had no formal training in the arts. As Frida developed her artistic skills, her paintings evolved into her own unique style, heavily influenced by other people, artists, cultures and life itself. She experimented with different styles and motifs and shocked the art world with her "surrealist" style works and paintings with sexual references.

Wilhelm (Guillermo) Kahlo, Her Father:

Frida's father, a professional photographer by trade, was also an amateur painter. It was he who first sparked Frida's interest in art. Frida would often accompany her father on his painting excursions into the nearby country side. He also taught her how to use the camera and how to retouch and color photographs. While Frida was recovering from the bus accident, Guillermo gave Frida his box of paints and brushes and encouraged her to paint.

Fernando Fernández:

Fernando Fernandez, a friend of Frida's father, was a well known and respected commercial printmaker. He hired Frida to work with him after school and taught her how to draw and copy prints by the Swedish Impressionist Anders Zorn. Fernández was surprised at her talent.

19th Century Mexican Portrait Painters:

Early on in her newly found artistic career, Frida had no style of her own and her early paintings reflected the motifs and styles of other artists that she admired. Frida's first self-portrait was "Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress" in 1926. It was painted in the style of the 19th Century Mexican portrait painters who were greatly influenced by the European Renaissance masters. This self-portrait was Frida's interpretation of Botticelli's "Venus". Frida used this style in other portraits that followed: "Portrait of Alicia Galant" (1927) and a portrait of her older sister; "Portrait of Adriana" (1927).

Another characteristic that Frida borrowed from the 19th Century Mexican Portraits is the inscribed banderole across the top or bottom of a painting. These inscriptions served to identify the sitter for the portrait or to describe the purpose or meaning of the painting. One example where this element was used is "Portrait of Eva Frederick" (1931) where she identifies the portrait sitter and then herself as the artist. In another 1931 double portrait, "Frieda and Diego Rivera", she uses the banderole to proclaim that the portrait was painted *"...for our friend Mr. Albert Bender"*. In "Portrait of a Woman in White" (1930), the banderole was included but not inscribed, leaving the sitter or inspiration for this portrait unknown to this

day.

Also borrowed from the 19th Century Mexican Portrait painters was the use of a background of tied back drapes. Frida used this motif in several of her paintings, first in "Self-Portrait - Time Flies" (1929), and later in "Portrait of a Woman in White" (1930), "Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky" (1937) and others as well.

Her Mexican Roots:

Frida was involved in a circle of Mexican artists and intellectuals who were devoted to the beliefs of the artist Adolfo Best Maugard. In a 1923 book, Maugard wrote about returning Mexican art to its native roots. Paintings he said, should reflect the elements and form of the 19th Century Mexican painters. The group would call this "folkloric" style of painting "Mexicanism" and it would be reinstated back into the world of "fine art". The Americans labeled this movement the "Mexican Renaissance".

In her second self-portrait, "Time Flies", Frida employs the "Mexicanism" style. In this portrait the motif has taken on a very "folkloric" style with vivid and varied colors. Simple cotton peasant clothes replace the sophisticated Renaissance velvet dresses that adorned the subjects of her previous paintings. The jewelry she is wearing is a testament of pre-Columbian and colonial cultural influences. One can only observe from this painting that Frida acknowledges her deep roots in the Mexican culture. To further support her national identity, the dominant color used in this portrait are red, white and green....the colors of the Mexican flag. This self-portrait greatly influenced Frida's search for her own unique style of painting.

To please Diego, Frida would often wear the style of dress typically worn by the native women of the Tehuana region of Mexico. These long floor length richly decorative costumes were not only strikingly beautiful but also enabled her to hide the physical deformity of her right leg. When traveling abroad Frida attracted a lot of attention and even inspired a clothing line in Paris.

In many of Frida's paintings she presented herself wearing this style of attire....probably because it was the style of clothing Diego preferred and she wanted to please him. She first appears in this style of dress in the 1931 double portrait "Frieda and Diego Rivera", a painting that was probably based on a wedding photograph. After that painting there were others that followed: "Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States" (1931), "Tree of Hope, Keep Firm" (1946), "Roots" (1943), and two of her very last paintings in 1954, "Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick" and "Self Portrait with Stalin". In two other paintings, the Tehuana dress appears but Frida is not wearing it: "Memory" (1937) and "My Dress Hangs There" (1933). The painting in which the Tehuana costume plays the most significant role is "The Two Fridas" (1939). In this double self-portrait, painted shortly after her divorce, Frida appears twice. The Frida wearing the Tehuana costume represents the Frida that Diego loved and the other Frida in the European dress is the Frida that has been betrayed by adultery and divorce. Most notably was the 1948 painting "Self Portrait" and the 1943 painting "Self Portrait as a Tehuana" in which she appears in full Tehuana costume.

Politics:

Frida and Diego were both very politically motivated and active in Mexico. They were both members of the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM) in 1928 but both left the party because they did not agree with the party's alignment with Stalinism. In the beginning of her painting career, politics had little influence on her art. But, in 1948, Frida again joined the PCM and that inspired her interest in proclaiming her political allegiance on canvas.

In 1951, Frida's health had diminished to the point where some days she was not able to paint at all. In her diary she wrote: "*I feel uneasy about my painting. Above all I want to transform it into something useful for the Communist revolutionary movement, since until now I have only painted the earnest portrayal of my own self, but I'm very far from work that could serve the Party. I must struggle with all my strength to contribute the few positive things my health allows to the Revolution, the only real reason to live.*".

During her last years, Frida painted mostly still life but would politicize them by adding a flag, a peace dove, or inscriptions. One of her last self-portraits in 1954 entitled "Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick" was a strong political statement in support of the PCM. Following that painting she immortalized Stalin in "Self-Portrait with Stalin", another painting with an obvious Communist theme. When Frida died in July of 1954, she left an unfinished portrait of Stalin on the easel in her studio...a testament to the fact that, when she was able, she wanted to paint to "...serve the party" and "... benefit the Revolution".

Color:

Kahlo's paintings are rich in bright vibrant colors. In her diary, Frida attempts to explain the meaning of the colors used in her works:

Green - good warm light

Magenta - Aztec. Old TLAPALI blood of prickly pear, the brightest and oldest

Brown - color of mole, leaves becoming earth

Yellow - madness, sickness, fear. Part of the sun and of joy

Cobalt Blue - electricity and purity love

Black - nothing is black - really nothing

Leaf Green - leaves, sadness, science, the whole of Germany is this color

Greenish Yellow - more madness and mystery...all the ghosts wear clothes of this color, or at least their underclothes

Dark Green - color of bad advertisements and good business

Navy Blue - distance....also tenderness can also be this blue

Red - blood?...well, who knows!

Conclusion:

On a rainy morning in Coyoacán, Mexico, Frida Kahlo was born in the house that her father built just a few years earlier. Her relationship with her father was very warm and close but in contrast, her relationship with her mother was very cold and distant and remained that way throughout her life. At age 18 Frida was involved in a terrible bus accident that changed her life forever. At age 22 she married a "womanizing" man 20 years her senior. Their turbulent relationship survived through the good times, the bad times, through divorce and remarriage,

infidelities, living together and sometimes apart. As a result of the bus accident and three miscarriages, Frida was left childless and often turned to her pets and dolls for comfort during times of despair and loneliness. She smoked, she drank, at parties she often used foul language to shock her friends and was not above "stretching" the truth to embellish the stories she told.

She painted her own reality, she said, and traveled the world to show and some times shock the art world with her creative works. She at times lived in two different worlds and was torn between her love for Diego and the love for her native Mexico. She was politically active, but not always "politically correct", and in the end devoted her painting to her political convictions. She endured more than 30 operations in her lifetime that left her scared both physically and mentally. Despite the years of pain and suffering, she continued to do what she loved doing best....paint. Once when hospitalized she said: *"When I get out of here there are three things that I want to do....paint, paint, and paint."* And paint she did. Although more than once she considered suicide, it was her love for Diego and her passion for painting that kept her alive. In the end it was the painkillers she took to survive that stripped her of her ability to paint. On a rainy night in Coyoacán, Mexico, Frida Kahlo passed away in the house where she was born 47 years earlier.

It was an extraordinary life for an extraordinary woman. Although Frida is gone, her legacy lives on in the more than 200 paintings, drawings and sketches that she left behind. We can no longer view her paintings as just self-portraits or still life but to search for the true meaning and emotion hidden beneath the paint... ***Viva la Vida... Viva la Frida...***

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do a timeline on the History of the National Museum of Colombia
2. Analyze the following phrase:

"An artist is above all a human being, profoundly human to the core. If the artist can't feel everything that humanity feels, if the artist isn't capable of loving until he forgets himself and sacrifices himself if necessary, if he won't put down his magic brush and head the fight against the oppressor, then he isn't a great artist." Diego Rivera

3. Why is Diego Rivera considered the best Mexican Painter?
4. What happened to Diego Rivera's artistic life when he was living in Paris?
5. What main topics were present in Rivera's artwork?
6. What are "Frescoes"?
7. What did Rivera do during the Great Depression in Detroit in 1932?
8. Why was Diego Rivera considered an important individual in the development of Public Art?
9. What event on Frida Kahlo's life changed her forever?
10. What were Frida's art studies based on?
11. Why was Frida's father important in her artistic life?
12. What characteristics did Frida borrow from 19th Century Mexican portraits?
13. What is the "Mexican Renaissance"?
14. What elements of Frida's Mexican roots were used in her paintings? Name them.
15. What were Frida's political ideas and how did she use her art to promote them?
16. What were Frida's most common topics to create art?
17. From the visit to the museum, please describe which Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo's paintings or artwork in general you liked the most and why?
18. Choose one painting from Diego Rivera and one from Frida, and analyze what elements of their art are evidenced in them.