

Photos by Arturo Fiera

Diego on Frida

Extracts from "Frida Kahlo y el arte mexicano" (Frida Kahlo and Mexican Art) by Diego Rivera, from the book *Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño* (The Dolores Olmedo Patiño Museum), published by Bancomext, Banamex, Nafinsa and Telmex, in Mexico City in 1994. This article was first printed in *Mexico en la cultura* (Mexico in Culture) a supplement of the daily *Novedades*, published in Mexico City July 17, 1955.

In the midst of all the good Mexican painting produced over the last 20 years, like a diamond at the very center of the setting, clear and hard, precious and sharp, glitters the work of Frida Kahlo Calderón. The Christ, the Virgin and the saints have all disappeared from the *retablo*.¹ Instead of just any old miracle, we have the permanent miracle of painting, the life force always flowing, always different and always the same as it circulates through veins and the firmament. One life contains the elements of all lives, and if its bottom is reached, the profundity of the abyss, the dizzying heights and the tissues of the infinite ramifications reaching through centuries of light and shadow of LIFE are to be found.

That is why Frida's *retablo* always paints her own life. The two Fridas, one just like the other, but different.

The German analyst, builder-destroyer and fanciful skeptic —the father's genes— took the upper hand, opposing everything Spanish and allying with everything Indian —the mother's genes. Behind the gate to heaven, wide open, there was only space, implacable and marvelous, whence the sun and the moon are at the same time atop the pyramids, portentous in their grandeur, micro-

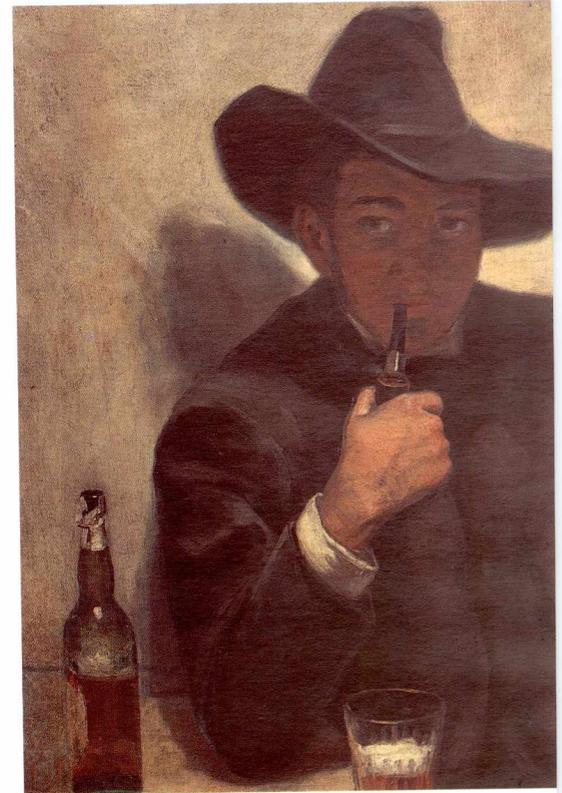
scopic next to the star and the planet and immense in their systems of proportions which are those of the entire universe. The little girl seated at the center of the world had a toy plane, much faster than the speed of light, with the velocity of the imagination, the reason she could know the stars and cities before going there by telescope and locomotives. The velocity in Frida, alone in mechanized space, lying on a cot from which she sees, weeping, that the life-fetus appears to be a flower-machine, a slow snail, a mannequin and bone frame [corset] but is, essentially, about imagi-reason that travels faster than light.

A recurring self-portrait which never looks the same and increasingly looks more like Frida, changing and permanent like the universal dialectic.

Monumental realism glitters, occultist materialism is there in the heart cleft in two, the flowing blood of the tables... the arteries closed by the painter's hemorrhage-stopping forceps...

Collective-individual is Frida's art. A realism so monumental that in its sphere everything possesses infinite dimensions; as a result, she paints the exterior, the interior and the deep recesses of herself and the world all at once.

And Frida is the only example in the history of art of someone who rent her breast and heart to tell the biological truth about what she felt there, and, possessed of the reason-imagination faster than light, painted her mother and her nurse, knowing that she had not really seen their faces, the face of the "nurturing nana only in an



Diego Rivera, *Self-Portrait with Chambergo Hat*, 1907 (oil on canvas).

Opposite Page: Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, 1945 (oil on Masonite).

Indian mask of hard stone and her glands... the face of the mother, *mater dolorosa*, with the seven daggers of pain that make the gaping hole from which the child Frida emerges possible, the only human force that, since the Aztec master who sculpted in black basalt, has plastified birth in its very and real action.

Birth that produced the only woman who has expressed in her art the feelings, the functions and the creative power of women... that produced the most masculine painter of the woman painters and the best proof of the rebirth of Mexican art. **W**

¹ *Retablo* is both an altar-piece and, in Mexico, a painting, usually small, done on tin by the faithful as thanks to a particular saint for a miracle he or she has performed. These paintings, also called "miracles," describe the problem overcome. Diego and Frida had a large collection of these pieces of folk art, part of which is today exhibited in the Frida Kahlo Museum. [Translator's Note.]