

Photo: Arturo Piéra

IN THE DOLORES OLMEDO MUSEUM

The Dolores Olmedo Patiño Museum, located in Mexico City's historic Xochimilco, houses the world's most complete collection of paintings by muralist Diego Rivera: 137 canvases from different periods of his life's work. In addition, the museum boasts a select collection of paintings and drawings by Frida Kahlo, Diego's third wife. They are all exhibited in a magnificent 64,000 square-foot hacienda building surrounded by spacious gardens.

Besides their artistic merit, the history of the museum's collections is intimately linked to the relationship between collector Dolores Olmedo and painter Diego Rivera, a relationship full of affection and admiration. That is the only explanation for the enormous interest Olmedo displayed in acquiring different Rivera canvases, as well as paintings by Frida and Angelina Beloff (Rivera's third and first partners, respectively), the fortune she invested in her collection and her wish to leave them to the people of Mexico,

as though she wanted to perpetuate her own admiration through everyone who viewed them.

THE COLLECTIONS' HISTORY¹

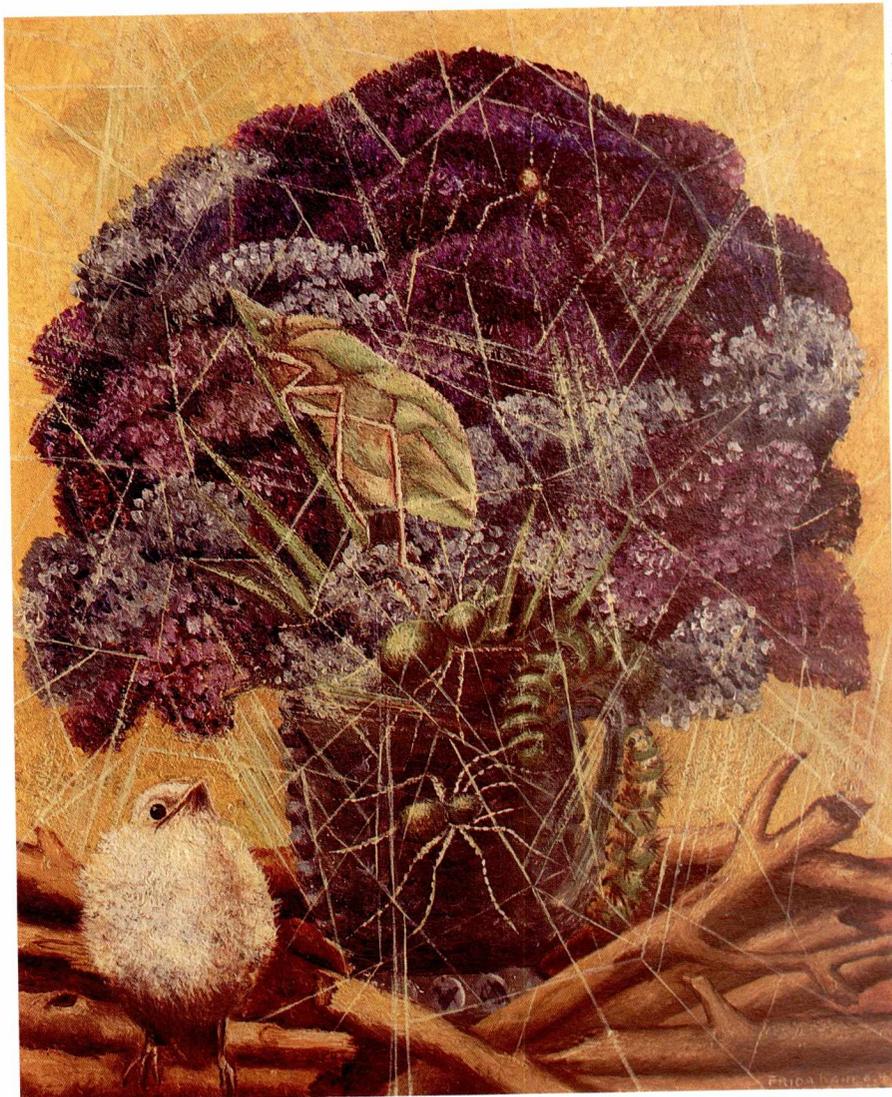
The first Riveras in the Olmedo collection were gifts from the painter dat-

¹ The stories and comments in this section all come from Dolores Olmedo, "Las colecciones de mi museo," *Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño*, Bancomext-Banamex-Nafinsa-Telmex, Mexico City, 1994, pp. 25-38.

ing from the period when he was working on the murals at the Public Education Ministry. When Olmedo visited the building one day with her mother, they were introduced to the muralist. Rivera asked to be allowed to make some drawings of Dolores. “[My mother] gave her permission without knowing I would pose nude. I never told her about it. It was like magic watching how such beautiful shapes came forth from his tiny hands and how, without lifting the pencil from the paper, he could draw such long, smooth lines. The time went by without my noticing it while I posed,” says Olmedo. That was how the friendship was born between them, a friendship that would become a lasting devotion.

Olmedo says that Rivera did canvases to make up for what he considered a terrible business: painting murals. This made it possible for many of his admirers to have the pleasure of owning his work, particularly Olmedo, *Woman from Tehuantepec* (1955), a portrait of her daughter (1955), and *The Market* (1944), a series of 10 drawings, three of which were gifts from Rivera.

In 1956, Olmedo asked Diego Rivera to make a list of the paintings he considered his most important. List in hand, Olmedo began her campaign to recover canvases from Rivera’s time in Spain, like *The Mathematician* (1919) and *Dancer at Rest* (1939), *Dance to the Earth* (1939), *Dance to the Sun* (1942), *Avila at Night* (1907),

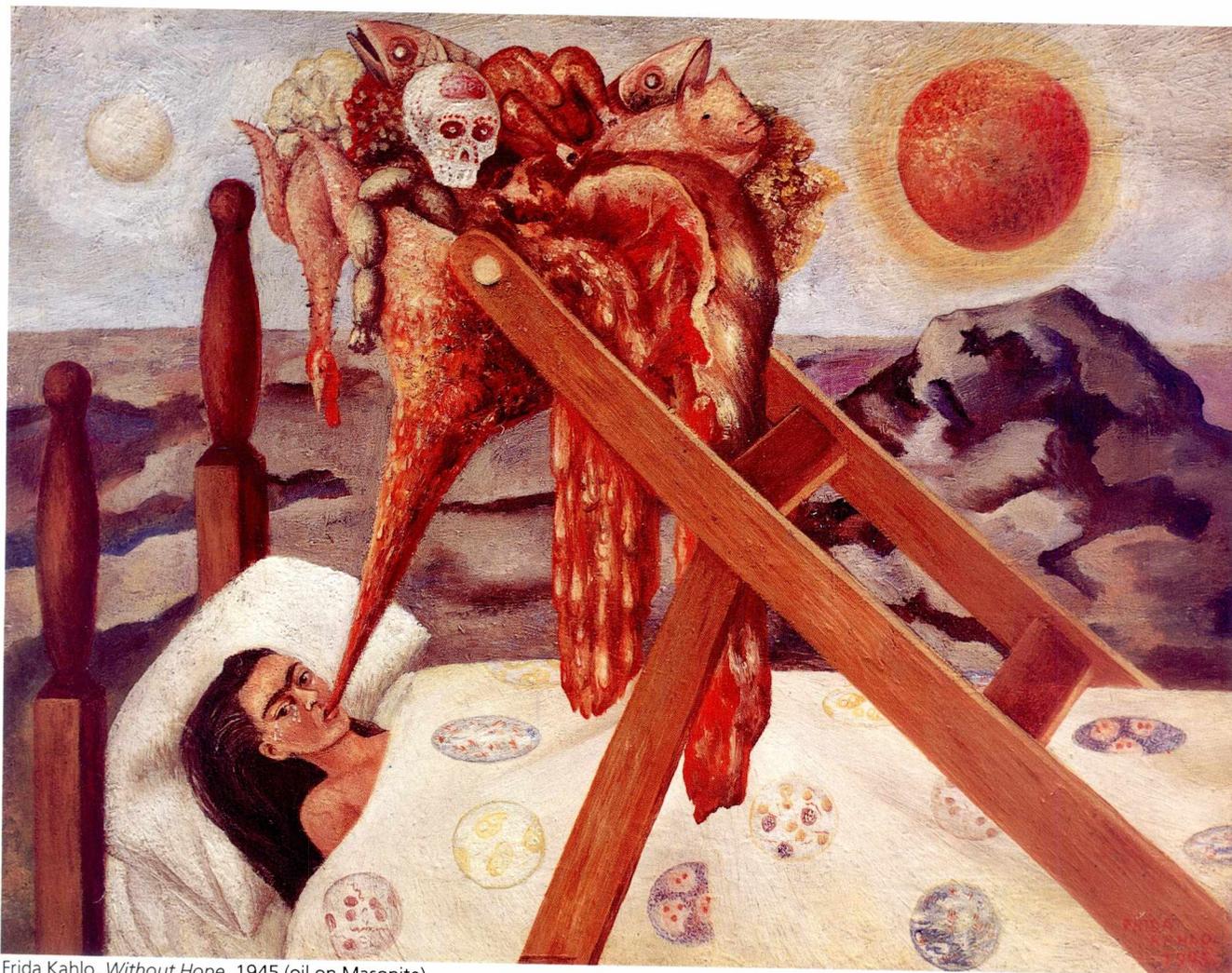


Frida Kahlo, *The Chick*, 1940 (oil on Masonite).

Self-Portrait with Chambergo Hat (1907), *The Telegraph Pole* (1916) and *Sun Breaking Through the Mist* (1913), but particularly the canvases owned by Rivera’s friend and collector, Enrique Friedman. The way Olmedo tells it, that very year she went to Paris to purchase the collection, but met with an unpleasant surprise. Friedman’s son-in-law would not put a price on the canvases because he knew that Rivera

was terminally ill and he wanted to wait until after the painter’s death to put them up for auction. So, it was not until 1959 that Dolores Olmedo went to New York to the auction of 19 of Friedman’s Rivera canvases at the Park Bernet Gallery. She bought 11, among them: *The Outskirts of Toledo* (1912), *The Fountain of Toledo* (1913), *Young Man with Quill* (1914), *Woman with Goose* (1918) and four still lifes

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Frida Kahlo, *Without Hope*, 1945 (oil on Masonite).

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(1916-1917). A year later, Friedman visited Mexico City and sold Olmedo four more canvases.

Of Rivera's work between 1956 and his death in 1957, the collection contains five portraits of Soviet children (done from notes and sketches he made during a 1955 trip to Moscow), *The Hammock*, 20 different versions of *Sunset*, and three large charcoal drawings done while he stayed at Olmedo's house in Acapulco. The museum also holds the last canvas signed by Diego Rivera, *The Watermelons*. Years later, the collection was completed with the pur-

chase of five watercolors (1935) Rivera had painted to illustrate a book.

The selection of Frida Kahlo's work (25 canvases and drawings) was first offered to the Bank of Mexico and then to Rivera himself, but he could not afford it. Olmedo, knowing the collection's great value, as well as what it meant to Diego, decided to make the buy. The collection includes Frida's first canvas, *Portrait of Alicia Galant* (1927), several self-portraits with marked symbolism like *The Broken Back* (1944), *My Nana and I* (1937) and one of her masterpieces, *Little Dead Dimas* (1937).



Diego Rivera, *The Fountain of Toledo*, 1913 (oil on canvas).

This select collection was lent for the 1958 opening of the Frida Kahlo Museum. Olmedo's original intention was to eventually donate it to the Diego Rivera Trust, which manages the museum. However, the donation was never made, thus allowing the collection to be exhibited around the world.²

² Friends of Dolores Olmedo recommended she not give her collection to the trust because its founding document specified that the Frida Kahlo Museum's collection could never leave the premises for any reason whatsoever. This provision would have made it impossible for Frida's work to tour and be exhibited worldwide. José Juárez, "Introducción", *Museo Dolores Olmedo*

Olmedo's interest in collecting the more than 600 pieces from different pre-Columbian cultures which are distributed among the museum's rooms is also a result of her relationship with Rivera, since he was the one who encouraged and guided her in her purchases.³ In addition, the museum's collection of folk art illustrates the

Patino, Bancomext-Banamex-Nafinsa-Telmex, Mexico City, 1994, p. 22.

³ Rivera himself had more than 60,000 pre-Columbian pieces which were also donated to the people of Mexico through the Diego Rivera Trust. Today, almost 2,000 are on view at the Anahuacalli Museum in Mexico City.

"It was like magic watching how such beautiful shapes came forth from his tiny hands and how, without lifting the pencil from the paper, he could draw such long, smooth lines."



Diego Rivera, *The Family (Mother and Children)*, 1934 (oil on canvas).

Olmedo says that Rivera did canvases to make up for what he considered a terrible business: painting murals.

great aesthetic tradition among artisans from different parts of Mexico. Many of these pieces have been used in the traditional offering set up every year for the Day of the Dead (All Saints Day) in memory of Diego.

Lastly, Angelina Beloff's 42 miniatures, obtained only a few days before the museum's inauguration, complete the vast collection, actually an homage to Diego.

THE MUSEUM
AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The Dolores Olmedo Patiño Museum captivates even before the visitor sees a single painting: the setting is a beautiful estate, probably built in the seventeenth century, remodeled to emphasize the architecture's integration as part of the grounds. Most of the museum's almost 8 acres is gardens, which boast 20 species of trees and plants of Mexican origin (like dahlias, agaves and crab apple trees) and others which have adapted to Mexico's climate and geography (like bougainvillea, lilies, pines and orange trees).

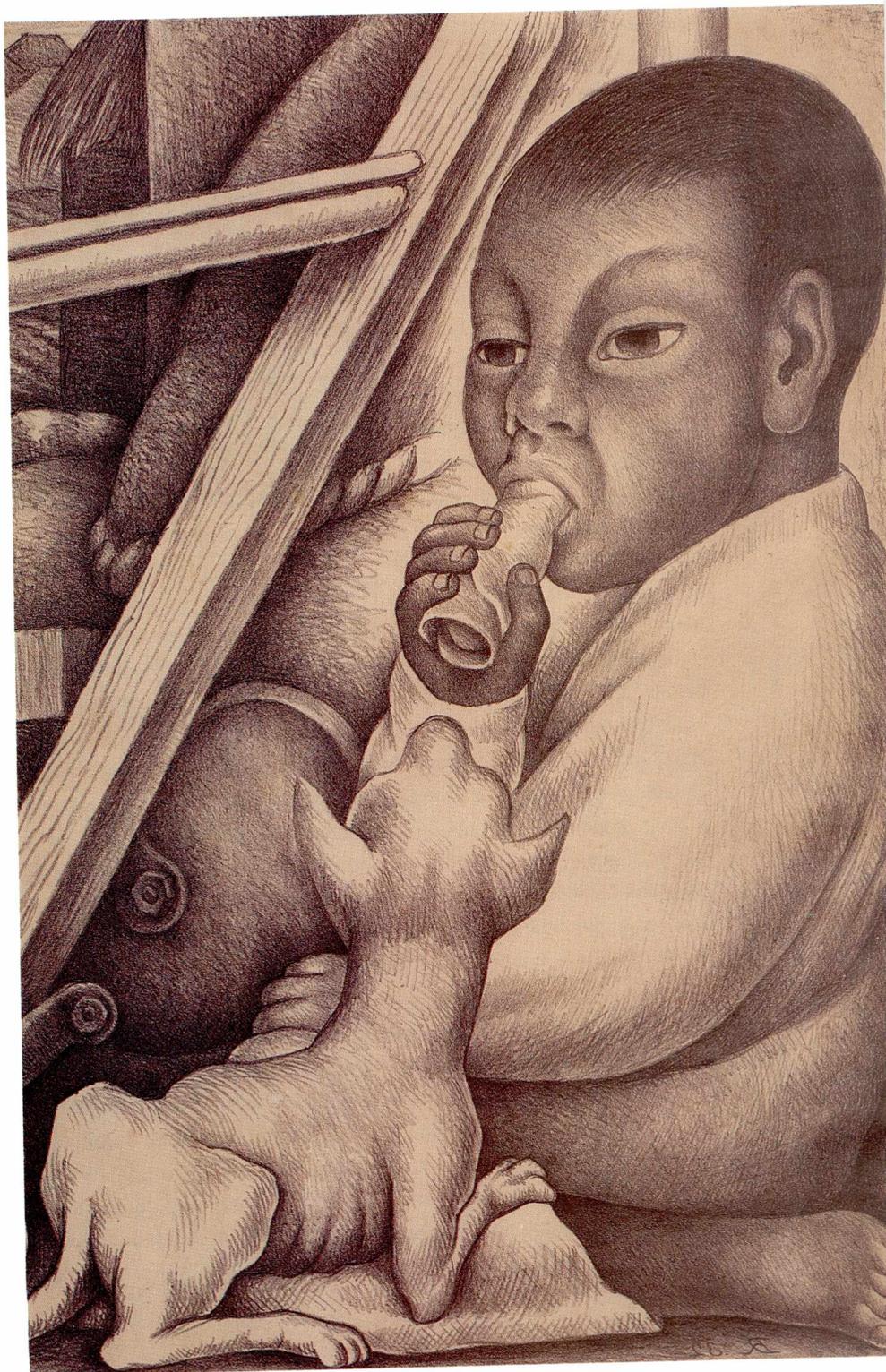
The animals wandering the gardens are a unique attraction; some of them are of pre-Hispanic origin, like the turkey (*hueyxolotl*) and the *Xoloitzcuintle* dog, which, now an endangered species, was originally kept as a pet or used for food or as an offering in religious ceremonies.

The museum also has a library with publications about its temporary and permanent collections, as well as a selection of other articles; a snack bar placed in a beautiful corner of the old hacienda; and installations for temporary exhibits and cultural and social events.

The majestic construction, the gardens, the animals and, above all, the paintings and art objects allow us a glimpse of many lives. The museum is undoubtedly a privileged spot which will delight all visitors no matter what their age, nationality or artistic taste. **W**

Elsie Montiel
Assistant Editor

*The Museum captivates even before
the visitor sees a single painting.*



Diego Rivera, *Boy with Taco*, 1932 (lithograph on paper).