

# Frida on Diego

Extracts from "A Portrait of Diego," an article by Frida Kahlo reprinted from *Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño* (The Dolores Olmedo Patiño Museum), published by Bancomext, Banamex, Nafinsa and Telmex in Mexico City in 1994. The article was first printed in "Diego Rivera. Fifty Years of Artistic Labor," a national homage and exhibit, published by the National Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico City in August 1951.

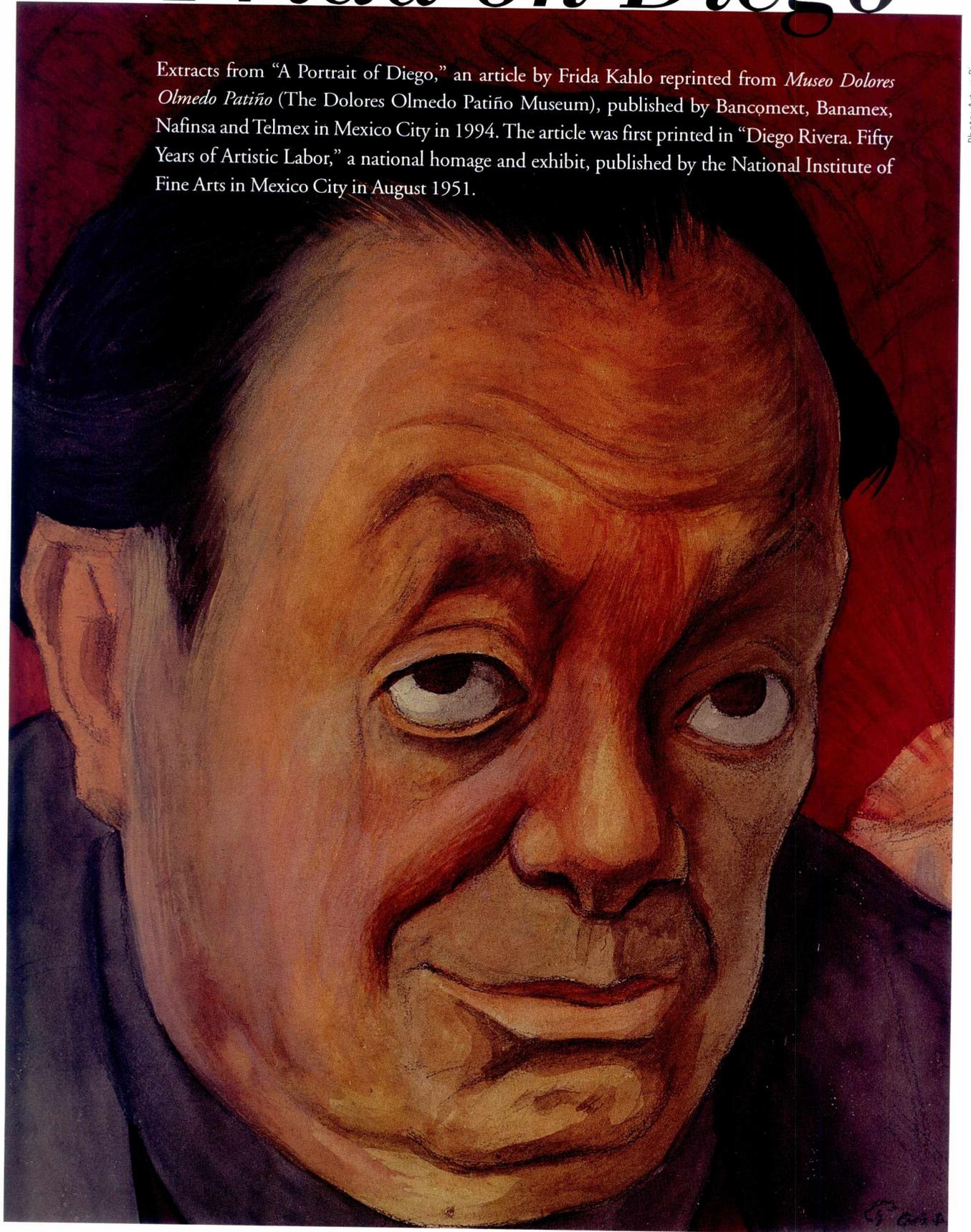


Photo: Arturo Plera

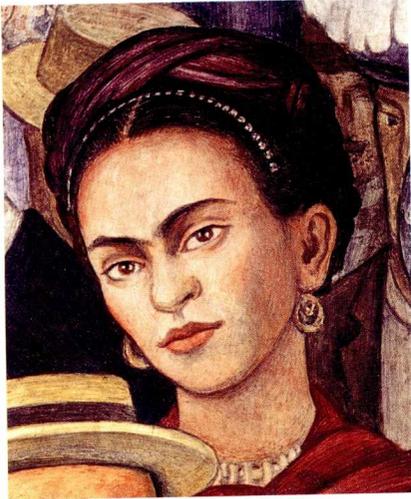


Photo: National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature

Diego Rivera, detail from the mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon at the Alameda*, 1947.

**Opposite page:** Diego Rivera, *Self-Portrait*, 1948 (watercolor).

I am going to paint this portrait of Diego in unfamiliar colors: words. So, it will be a poor painting. Also, I love Diego in a way that makes it impossible for me to be a “spectator” in his life; I must be part of it. For that reason, I may exaggerate the positive sides of his unique personality in an attempt to soften anything that might even remotely be painful to him. It will not be a biographical chronology... I will not speak of Diego as “my husband,” because that would be ridiculous; Diego has never been—and he never will be—anyone’s “husband.” Neither will I speak of him as a lover because he goes so far beyond sexual limits. And if I spoke of him as I would of a son, what I would really be doing would be writing or painting my own emotions... With that word of warning, I shall attempt to tell the only truth, my own, and sketch his image to the best of my abilities.

His shape... Diego is a big kid, immense, with a friendly face and a

slightly sad look about him. His bulging eyes, huge, dark and highly intelligent, are barely contained by his swollen, protuberant eyelids, like a frog’s, very far apart... They give him a much broader field of vision, as though they had been specially made for a painter of spaces and multitudes. Between those eyes is a mind which divines all that is hidden of oriental wisdom, and only very seldom is his Buddha-like mouth without an ironic, tender smile, the flower of his image.

Seeing him nude immediately conjures up a frog-boy standing on his hind legs....

His childlike shoulders, narrow and rounded give way smoothly to feminine arms ending in wonderful hands, small and delicately cast, sensitive and subtle like antenna that communicate with the entire universe.

Of his chest it must be said that if he had landed on Sapho’s island, he would not have been executed by her Amazons. The sensitivity of his wonderful breasts would have ensured his admission, even though his virility, specific and strange, makes him desirable even in the domains of empresses avid for male lovers.

His belly, enormous, taut and tender like a sphere, rests on his strong legs, beautiful like columns, which end in large feet, splayed as though to cover the whole earth and hold himself up over it peerlessly, like a being from before the Flood from whom emerges at the waist a prototype of the humanity of the future, 2,000 or 3,000 years ahead of us.

Diego’s shape is that of a beloved monster, whom the grandmother, the

Ancient Concealer, the necessary and eternal matter, the mother of men and all the gods that men in their delirium have invented out of fear and hunger, WOMAN, among all of them, I, MYSELF, would always want to hold in my arms like a newborn.

His substance: Diego is beyond all personal, limited and precise relationships. Contradictory, just like everything which moves in life, he is simultaneously an immense caress and a violent discharge of unique and powerful forces. He is experienced within you, like a seed treasured by the earth, and without, like landscapes.

I will not cheapen Diego’s fantastic personality, which I respect profoundly, by mouthing idiocies about his life. I would prefer to express myself about him as he deserves, to say what he really is, with the poetry I do not possess.

I think there are three main directions or lines in his portrait. First, he is a revolutionary fighter, constant, dynamic, extraordinarily sensitive and vital. He works untiringly at his trade, which he knows as few painters in the world do. He is a fantastic enthusiast of life and, at the same time, he is always dissatisfied at not having learned more, built more and painted more. Secondly, he is eternally curious, an untiring investigator of everything. And third, he has absolutely no prejudices or, therefore, faith, because Diego accepts, like Montaigne, that “where doubt ends, stupidity begins,” and anyone who has faith in something allows for unconditional submission, without the freedom to analyze or change the course of events.

This triangle, upon which Diego’s other attributes are based, exudes a sort



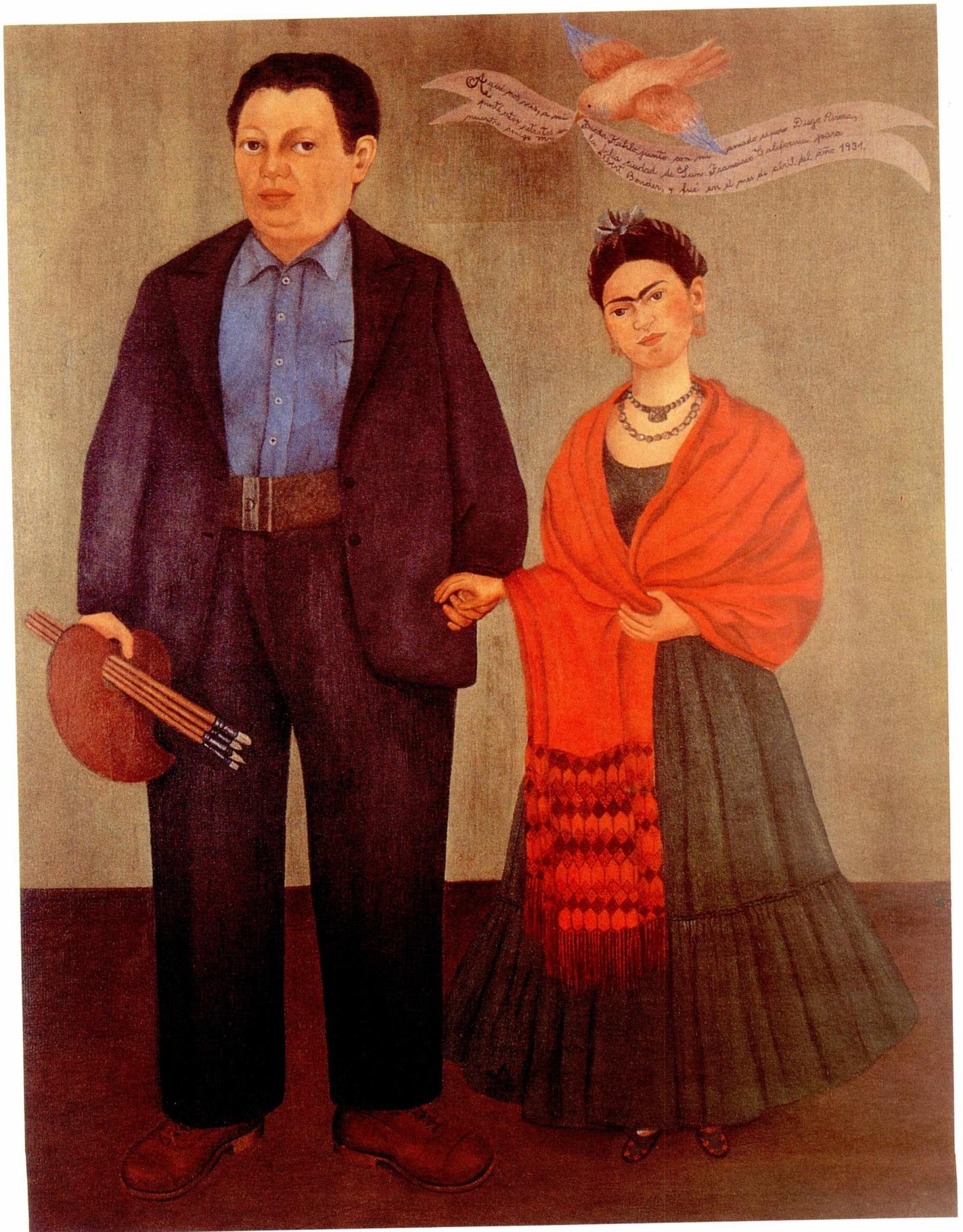
Diego Rivera, detail from the mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon at the Alameda*, 1947.

of atmosphere that envelops the whole... the love, but love as a general structure, like a movement which builds beauty. I imagine that the world he would like to live in would be an enormous fiesta in which all beings would take part, all contributing with their own beauty and creative power....A spherical, intelligent, loving fiesta, which would cover the entire surface of the earth.

He fights continually to hold that fiesta and offers everything he has: his genius, his imagination, his words and his actions.

Though not sentimental, he is intensely emotional and passionate.... He admires and appreciates everything of beauty, whether it resonates in a woman or a mountain. Perfectly balanced in all his emotions, he never sur-

renders himself....He lives with his strong sap in the midst of ferocity; he illuminates alone, like a sun seeking revenge on the greyness of the stone; his roots live despite unearthing him, going beyond the anxiety of loneliness or sadness and all the weakness that breaks other beings. He sprouts with surprising strength and, like no other plant, flowers and gives fruit. **W**



*Aquí nos casamos, en paz  
y amor, con mi  
querido Diego Rivera,  
en la ciudad de San Francisco  
California, el día 21 de  
enero del año 1931.*

Frida Kahlo, *Frida and Diego Rivera*, 1931 (oil on canvas).