

odds and ends

The combination of tomatoes, quelites and peppers produced the *mole*, vitamin-rich juices pressed out on the stone-grinder called *molcaxitl*. Today this Mexican dish is characteristic of the states of Oaxaca and Puebla.

70 According to Novo, both ignorance and an absence of fats and cooking oils, excluded fried foods from Mexican cooking. Their techniques were limited to boiling and roasting food, as well as pickling raw fruits and vegetables. Absent in the frugal diet of these Indians were the fried foods that make digestion a difficult and heroic process; the fats that accumulate into adipose tissue and raise cholesterol levels in the arteries of the gluttons of the Western world, causing heart attacks and trombosis.

"The highland gave forth basic seeds, plants and wild game; the lagoon contribute proteins. Trade, called *Pochtecayotl*, provided the tropical-climate foods which wouldn't grow in the highland climate."

A city as large as Tenochtitlan needed a daily market in which everything was available. This was the Tlatelolco market that dazzled the conqueror Cortés, who described it to the King of Spain as being "as large as twice the size of the square in the city of Salamanca, surrounded by archways on all sides, and where *daily* there are more than sixty thousand souls buying and selling; where there all the kinds of goods found in different lands, both for maintenance and victuals."

"...There is a street along which all sorts of fowl are sold, such as hens, partridge, quail, wild ducks, flycatchers, turtledoves, pigeons and many other small birds. They sell rabbits, hares, deer and small castrated dogs raised especially for eating... There are all sorts of vegetables, especially onions, scallion, common cress, borrego, thistle and cardillo."

"There are many fruits resembling those found in Spain, such as plums and cherries. They sell bee honey and wax, and a syrup from sugar cane which is as honeyed and sweet as that made from sugar."

"They sell corn..., fish cakes and pies filled with birds' meat... a lot of fish is sold salted and fresh, raw or cooked... there are

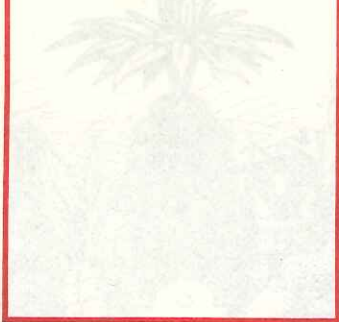
eggs from hens and geese..."

Finally, Cortés adds: "that in these markets they sell everything found on earth, which besides what I have already mentioned, are so many and of so many qualities, that because they are so prolific and will not come to my memory, and even because I have no name for them, I cannot express them all."

"Ours is a fun country because of its diversity, especially concerning food," says Guillermo Tovar y de Teresa.★

Jesús Yáñez Orozco

Theater



And Now, Frida's Life Inspires a Play

Las dos Fridas (The Two Fridas) Directed by Abraham Oceransky
Starring Diana Bracho and María del Carmen Farías

Thirty years after her death, Frida Kahlo is in vogue in the contemporary Mexican cultural scene. Her life and her works are being examined in new biographies, art exhibits, a film, and now, in an extraordinary play.

Frida was a strong woman, a painter by trade and vocation, a person of deep roots, strong emotions and much love for Diego Rivera; a woman who cared about color combinations, about the libertarian struggles of her times, a woman shattered: Frida's life presents a wealth of angles. "The Two Fridas' is cut from that wealth, from the depths of the person, from the decisive moments that marked her path and an entire period of Mexican history.

On stage, Frida speaks through two characters, one young and the other mature. Polio, painting, her accident, Diego Rivera and her longing for social justice flow together to form the woman, and they interact, through the two characters, to shape the play.

Diana Bracho and María del Carmen Farías, who play the young Frida and the mature Frida, respectively, carry the audience with them on a wonderfully fresh and tender excursion into the fantasies of childhood, the audacity of adolescence and the cruel passion of solitude.

Frida, totally *sui generis* in life becomes universal. Like a character out of a Greek tragedy, Frida transcends the

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limits of the individual. "I do not think life. I feel it; I live it," says the mature Kahlo. "I am not sick. I am shattered. But as long as I paint, life is lovely."

Born during the Mexican Revolution of a German father and a Oaxacan mother and proud of being Mexican, Frida becomes one with the very roots of the nation. She is the rough and unpolished Mexico, and she is the cultured Mexico, the Mexico whose development is marked by the daily consciousness of death, and thus, of life. "I am not afraid of death," says Frida, "but I want to live. It is the pain that I cannot tolerate."

Nonetheless, pain followed Frida throughout her life, playing with her as a cat with a mouse. From the time she contracted polio at the age of six, she knew the hospital's silence and its screams. Her childhood and her life were marked by the effects of her illness; her deformed leg accompanied her throughout her life. Her parents were overprotective, but she developed a tremendous desire to live fully.

In the play, the solitary and lame Frida returns to her childhood and recreates her enchanted games with an imaginary friend, her other self. The two girls delight in their play, savoring the moments of bubbling laughter, nurturing each other; the fantasized Frida feeds on the force of reality, and the real Frida on the freedom of fantasy. Reality and fantasy are interwoven in the construction of the painter's personality, and her fantasy becomes, as she says, "the best of what I know."

One September 19 (a very painful date for Mexico now after last year's earthquake on that day), when Frida was eighteen, she was riding a bus that was struck by a streetcar. The handrail pierced her body and damaged her spinal cord, leaving her a broken woman, split in two.

In the scene, the young Frida, covered with a sheet, becomes physical pain, the incarnation of the memories that the mature Frida recalls. She tells of her second meeting with death, while a thick, long chain is strapped to her leg; its metallic, thudding lashes continuously strike home the image of a broken woman, broken, but not

finished. "I have not died," said Frida, "and I have something to live for. That something is painting."

Frida painted Frida, her anxieties, her solitude, her fantasies, her torments, her identification with Diego, who was for her, "Diego, the prince, Diego, builder, Diego, my child, Diego, my lover, Diego, my husband, Diego, my father, Diego, my mother, Diego, I...". She painted from her very entrails and her divided heart, mixing the ethereal of fantasy, with the weight of reality. Her art also reflected a mixing of European surrealism with Mex-

and genial, tough and tender, takes on romantic love in the way that women are taught to live it. "I love you, Diego, more than I love myself." Frida built her adult life with that extraordinary and "horrible elephant," as she called him when she was angry with him. It was a life filled with passion, of love and hate, of artistic creation and of struggles on the side of the oppressed and exploited of the world.

He nurtured her with his energy and warmth, and at the same time, helped remove the weight of her troubled solitude. They accompanied each other



A shot from *Las Dos Fridas*

ican content. Frida Kahlo is one of a very few Mexican surrealists.

While Diego Rivera and others founded the Mexican muralist school, inspired by the great events in their people's history ("He paints big pictures so the people will enjoy them."), Frida stayed within the realm of the most intimate, within the rivers that flowed in her own veins. The colors of Indian Mexico and the expressive form of European fantastic realism are the heart of her work. Her woman's essence is expressed in blood.

The contradictory Frida, difficult

throughout twenty-five years, through the ups and downs between love and contempt, but Frida always knew the truth of what she once wrote, "You have never been mine, Diego, you are of yourself."

This is the stuff of which "The Two Fridas" is made. It was created with love and through a deep search into the pathways of Frida Kahlo's personality. Conceived and brought to life by director Abrahám Oceransky and the two original actresses, María del Carmen Farías and Bárbara Córcega, the material for the play was drawn from Frida's diaries. The work is a

odds and ends

collective creation that expresses the sensitivity and the contradictions of the main character, as well as of the dramatists who bring her to life. And in a special way, the play also expresses the very essence of Mexico. ★

Elizabeth Maier

72

Cinema

The Mexican Public Rediscovered its Own Cinema

The success of Paul Leduc's film *Frida*, which opened earlier this year, gave rise to something no Mexican film had produced in a long time: now both movie buffs and average movie-goers are once again attentive to national cinema.

Frida's impact was reinforced by *Luz's Motives*, directed by Felipe Cazals, which opened around the same time and was also highly polemical. Feminists charged the film was misogynist, opportunistic and sensationalist. The movie is based on the real-life story of Elvira Luz Cruz, a poverty-stricken woman sentenced a few months ago to ten years in prison for having killed her four children in a fit of despair because of her economic situation. *Luz's Motives* was awarded the Silver Conch at the Saint Sebastian Festival in 1985.

Thus, Mexican interest in locally-produced films is at a new high. We are currently awaiting two new openings, following others that are in the editing stage and expecting shooting to begin on another film shortly.

We are all awaiting the opening

of *How Does it Look?*, Leduc's latest film. Marginal youth in Mexico City constitute the movie's theme: punk gangs, tenant farmers who have migrated from the countryside, transvestites, prostitutes, and under-employed young people. Additionally, some of the most important figures in Mexican rock are woven into the plot, such as the TRI and its mythological leader Alejandro Lora, singer and song-writer Rockdrigo González (who died in last September's earthquake, shortly after the shooting of the film was completed), composer Jaime López and singer Cecilia Toussaint.

The same team who wrote the script for *Frida*, Leduc and José Joaquín Blanco, wrote the script for *How Does it Look?*, although this time they were aided by the renowned Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis. The actors include Blanca Guerra and Ana Ofelia Murguía, as well as members of the theatre group "Vámonos recio" and the dance group "Barro rojo."

Arturo Ripstein's *The Wheel of Fortune* is the other awaited film debut. This is a re-make of *The Golden Rooster*, based on a script especially written by Juan Rulfo, the famous Mex-

ican writer who died a few months ago. Interest in the film is great despite the fact that previous attempts to translate Rulfo's world and characters into film have failed (*Pedro Páramo*, played by John Gavin, is one example.)

Another film about to be completed is the documentary *Ulama: The Ball Game*, directed by Roberto Rochín. Arturo de la Rosa is director of photography, and the script is by Tomás



Fons in *The Bricklayers*.

Photo by Jose Alonso.



Felipe Cazal's *The Three of Clubs*.

Photo by Casablanca.