



BIOGRAPHY OF FRIDA KAHLO

By: Hilda Trujillo

FRIDA KAHLO, or MAGDALENA CARMEN FRIDA KAHLO CALDERÓN, was born on July 6, 1907 in the Mexico City home owned by her parents since 1904, known today as the Blue House. Daughter of Wilhelm (Guillermo) Kahlo, of Hungarian-German descent, and Matilde Calderón, a native of Oaxaca, Frida was the third of four daughters of whom her two sisters, Matilde and Adriana, were the eldest and Cristina, the youngest.

At the age of six Frida fell ill with polio, causing her right leg to remain shorter than the other, which resulted in bullying. However, this setback did not prevent her from being a curious and tenacious student. She completed her high school studies at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria.

At the age of 18, on September 17, 1925, Frida was in a tragic accident. A streetcar crashed into the bus she was traveling in. The consequences to her person were grave: several bones were fractured and her spinal cord, damaged. While she was immobilized for several months, Frida began to paint. Afterwards, she formed relationships with several artists, including the photographer Tina Modotti and the already renowned artist Diego Rivera.

In 1929, Frida married the muralist. The couple lived at the Blue House, Frida's childhood home, as well as at Diego's studio in San Ángel. They stayed for short periods of time in Mexico City. Kahlo and Rivera also resided in Cuernavaca and in various cities of the United States: Detroit, San Francisco, and New York.

In 1930, Frida suffered her first miscarriage. In November of that same year and for work-related reasons, the couple traveled to San Francisco. There, the painter met Doctor Leo Eloesser, who would become one of her most trusted doctors and one of her closest friends.

Diego's infidelities unleashed a series of emotional crises. Frida divorced the muralist in 1939, only to remarry him one year later.

Despite her poor health and having been subjected to operations on multiple occasions, Frida was an intensely active artist. In political terms, she was a member of the Communist Party and a faithful left-wing activist. Together with Rivera, she refurbished the Blue House to provide asylum for over two years to Leon Trotsky and Natalia, his wife. A few days before her death, Frida even participated in a protest march against the coup that overthrew Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz, suffering a pulmonary embolism as a result.

She taught at La Esmeralda National School of Painting and Sculpture. Both in her work and in her daily life –language, wardrobe, and household décor– Frida sought to salvage the roots of Mexican folk art, an interest that is reflected in all her work; for example, her attire or her self-portraits, as well as the simple and direct style characteristic of the *ex-voto* folk art she collected.

Frida claimed that, unlike the surrealist painters, she did not paint her dreams but rather, her reality. Outstanding in her work are the self-portraits influenced by the photographic portraiture style she learned from her father, Guillermo Kahlo.

Toward the end of her life, the artist's health deteriorated. From 1950 to 51, she remained confined at the Hospital Inglés. In 1953, subjected to the threat of gangrene, her right leg was amputated.

Frida Kahlo died at the Blue House of Mexico City on July 13, 1954, while the National Institute of Fine Arts was preparing a retrospective exhibition as a national tribute to her.

Among the canvases that comprise the painter's oeuvre, some of the more famous are: *The Two Fridas*, *Long Live Life!*, *A Few Little Pricks*, *The Broken Column*, and *Diego on my Mind*.

During her life, the artist held several exhibitions: one in New York at the Julien Levy Gallery, another in Paris at the Renou et Colle Gallery, and another in Mexico in the Lola Álvarez Bravo Gallery. She also participated in the Group Surrealist Show at the famous Mexican Art Gallery.

The Louvre Museum has acquired one of her self-portraits. Her paintings are also found in numerous private collections in Mexico, the United States, and Europe. Her personality has been adopted as one of the banners of feminism, handicapped people, sexual freedom, and Mexican culture. Frida Kahlo has become a reference that surpasses the myth the painter created around herself.