

Frida



Kahlo

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

iBienvenidos! This special exhibition includes artworks and personal objects that belonged to the artist Frida Kahlo. She told the story of her life through her art and appearance. Use the questions and activities in this Discovery Guide to “read” her story with your family and friends.

*“With friendship and affection . . .
I have the pleasure to invite you to
my humble exhibition.”
—Frida Kahlo, 1953*

Roots

*“At the end of the day, we can endure
much more than we think we can.”
—Frida Kahlo*

Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón was born July 6, 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico City. Her mother was from Oaxaca, Mexico, and her father was from Germany.

From a very young age, Kahlo observed her father working as a photographer—he loved to take pictures of her. He also taught her to use a brush to paint colors on his black-and-white photographs.

At age six, she got sick with polio, an illness that affected her growth and left one leg shorter than the other. Kahlo did not slow down and was a politically engaged teenager. When Kahlo was 18, a near-fatal bus accident changed her life forever. She was hurt so badly that she could not return to school. She was confined to bed and given an easel to paint while lying down.

Look and Discuss

See Kahlo grow up: can you find photographs of Frida Kahlo by her father, Guillermo Kahlo?

Can you find Frida Kahlo at six years old?

At 14 years old? At 18 years old?

Gallery Guidelines: Help care for the art! Please walk (don't run) in the galleries, and don't touch or get too close to the art; 18 inches is a safe distance. Be aware the galleries may be crowded. If sitting, avoid leaning on the walls or lying on the gallery floor. Thank you.



Symbolism

In self-portraits, Kahlo showed herself surrounded by color, animals, and nature. In fact, she filled her home, La Casa Azul (the Blue House), with these

things as well as with artworks and ancient sculptures from Mexico. In her art she developed a language of symbols.

“Nothing is absolute. Everything moves, everything revolves, everything flies and goes away.” —Frida Kahlo

Look and Discuss

Kahlo wove symbols throughout her work that represent ideas and significant events in her life.

As you go through the exhibition, look for the symbols below.

symbol:

an action, object, or event that expresses or represents a particular idea

Which symbols do you see repeated in Kahlo's work?
What do you think they symbolize? What do they mean to you?

Can you think of more symbols that we commonly use today?



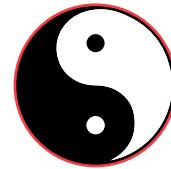
Birds



Flowers



Arrows



Yin-yang



Butterflies



Dogs



Thorns



Sun & Moon



Disability and Creativity

Kahlo at times wore body braces after surgeries as a result of her accident. She wore one elevated shoe to lengthen the leg shortened from having polio and later in life used a prosthetic leg. During her lifetime Kahlo spoke of the pain she experienced due to her injuries. She used her creativity—in both her art and her dress—to tell her own story of perseverance, independence, and determination.

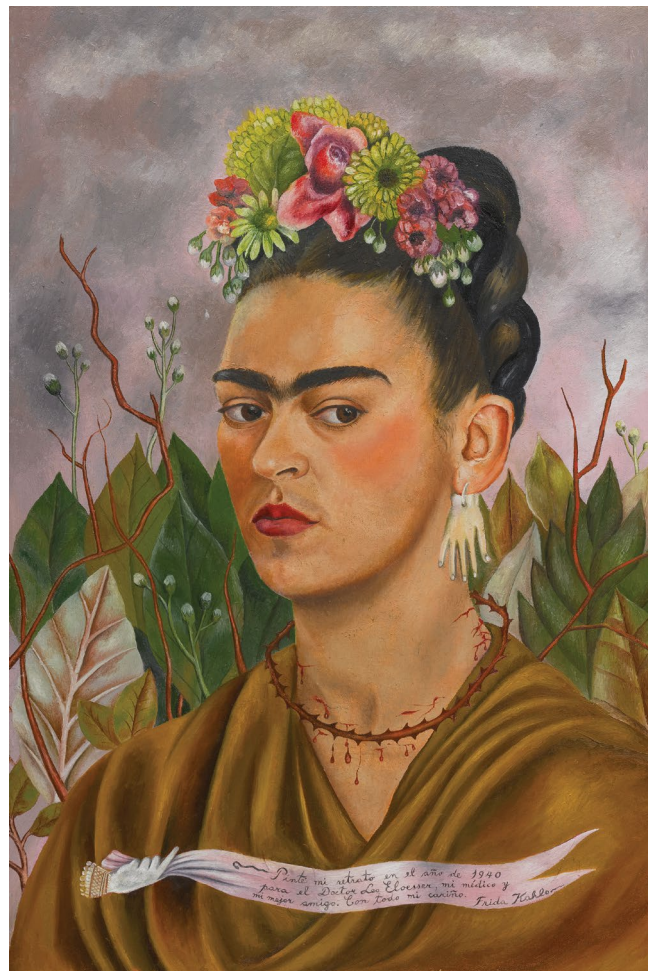
*“I am not sick, I am broken . . .
but I am happy to be alive as
long as I can paint.”
—Frida Kahlo*

Reflect

Look at the images and objects in this gallery.
Find examples of Kahlo's creativity and
perseverance.

Have you ever had an injury or illness that meant
you had to stay in bed? What do you remember
about that experience?

How do you think art can be a source of hope?



disability:

a physical or mental condition that substantially
limits one or more major life activities

perseverance:

the quality that allows someone to continue
trying to do something even though it is difficult



Art of Dress

*“The gringas really like me a lot and take notice of . . .
the dresses and rebozos [shawls] I brought with me.
Their jaws drop at the sight of my jade necklaces.”
—Frida Kahlo*

Frida Kahlo created and re-created herself every day with her clothing, hairstyle, and accessories. She used her self-portraits as well as her fashion to tell different stories about who she was, at times celebrating or concealing parts of her identity.

Look and Discuss

Can you find an outfit on view that is also seen in an artwork?

What do you notice about the things that Frida Kahlo liked to wear?

Do you have a piece of clothing or special-occasion item that expresses something unique about you?

What do you imagine it would feel like to wear or touch some of this clothing or jewelry? How would you describe the textures?



Self-Portrait

Frida Kahlo is famous for her self-portraits. She used symbols, color, and costume to tell the story of her choosing. In this exhibition you've seen how her creativity extended to how she shaped her daily appearance.

Get Creative

At home, create your own self-portrait that tells a story about your life.

What do you want to share about yourself?

What will you keep to yourself?

What will you wear?

What symbols will you use to express yourself?

Where will you put these images in your picture?

Share your drawing with someone in your family and discuss what they see in your portrait.



“I paint myself because I am so often alone, because I am the subject that I know best.”
—Frida Kahlo

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This Discovery Guide is developed by Suzanne Couture, senior teaching artist at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

This exhibition originated in the extensive investigation of Frida Kahlo's personal belongings found in trunks, wardrobes, drawers, bathrooms, and cellars of La Casa Azul that had remained closed for over fifty years before being exhibited for the first time at the Museo Frida Kahlo (2012–2014) and later presented at the V&A London.

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