

KAHLO

SIN FRONTERAS

MUSEO CASA ESTUDIO DIEGO RIVERA Y FRIDA KAHLO

In the late 1940s, Frida Kahlo's physical deterioration began to permanently undermine her health. In 1950 she was hospitalized for several months at the ABC Medical Center in Mexico City, where she went through seven surgeries. This event had a decisive influence on her mood and marked the last stage of her life.

Kahlo Without Borders offers a new approach to one of the most well-known topics in the painter's life: her physical health. The exhibition includes previously unreleased information that paves the way for novel reflections on Frida Kahlo. Among them, on display for the first time, are documents from the ABC Medical Center archives.

This exhibition is conceived as a multidisciplinary project that goes beyond a clinical examination and into the artistic sphere. The curatorial line thus disrupts spheres that at first glance may seem dissimilar, but that converge through the visual arts.

Through a curatorial approach that oscillates between the visual arts and archival material, a direct relationship is established between objects, documents and photographic images that offer new clues for reconstructing the last stage in the painter's biography. Through this work we seek to contribute to a better understanding of the personal life of one of the most studied and discussed figures in the history of Mexican art, who constantly surprises us with unexpected findings that enable us to examine her artistic production from different angles.

ORIGIN AND FAMILY CIRCLE

This collection of family and personal pictures of Frida Kahlo invites us to enter her private sphere and get to know her closest circles. In these images, we are struck by the physical similarities she shared with her parents Guillermo Kahlo and Matilde Calderón, with her German grandparents on her father's side and her Mexican grandparents on her mother's side. But going further, through these images and letters we can trace a timeline through which we recognize the girl resting on a chair, waiting for the shutter of her father's camera, or the captured moment in time in which she appears between her nephews Isolda and Antonio, the children of her sister Cristina.

These images are evidence of the constant presence of photography in the painter's life. The journey through this series of images is like opening a box of keepsakes: a stroll through a visual memory that enables us to more clearly evoke the past. There in lies one of the charms of photography: through it, we can relive the story of a universal artist.

LIFE COMPANIONS DIEGO RIVERA AND FRIENDS

This section includes documents, letters and portraits of the people in Frida Kahlo's closest company.

In some photographs we can see an adult Frida, alluring and seductive in front of the camera, ready to awaken passions, as was the case with Nickolas Muray, a Hungarian photographer who took portraits of the painter over the course of ten years at different stages of her life. In other images, she is accompanied by people close to her, her family, friends, and of course, her muralist partner, Diego Rivera.

This section includes works by photographers such as Antonio Kahlo, Julien Levy, Nickolas Muray and Gisèle Freund, who took iconic portraits of Frida and some of the people close to her during the last years of her life, as well as personalities such as Dolores del Río and André Breton, among others.

PHYSICIANS ELOESSER, JUAN FARILL, GLUSKER

Frida Kahlo was treated by a significant number of doctors. However, the presence of Dr. Leo Eloesser, whom she met during a stay in San Francisco, California, in 1931, is particularly noteworthy in her life. After this stay, the doctor-patient relationship became a friendship that lasted until Frida's death. The known correspondence between the two spans from the year they met until 1950. These letters are a valuable source of information on the life of the artist, who consulted with Eloesser on the medical aspects of her afflictions as well as on personal, political and artistic matters.

Her correspondence with her doctor and friend recapitulates an extensive clinical history of Kahlo's ailments. Her letters are also evidence of their strong complicity and friendship.

In the framework of this written communication we can highlight details such as the change in the signature of the painter from "*Frieda*" to "*Frida*", likely related to a growing awareness of her own Mexican identity. Likewise, these letters were returned with a punctual and affectionate response from her "*little doctor*".

Leo Eloesser and his partner Joyce Campbell settled in Tacámbaro, Michoacán, in 1954 until the doctor's death in 1974 at the age of 95.

Frida Kahlo was also treated by other doctors who were part of her life and whose merits are worth mentioning as well. For instance, Dr. Juan Farill was one of the most famous orthopedical specialists in Mexico in the fifties. On the other hand, the affection and admiration that Frida Kahlo expressed for him was also recorded in her diary, where she reiterated her gratitude. She dedicated two of her best-known works to him: *Autorretrato con el retrato del Dr. Farill* (Self-portrait with portrait of Dr. Farill, 1951) and *Naturaleza muerta. Viva la vida y el Dr. Juan Farill* (Still life. Viva la vida and Dr. Juan Farill, 1953).

Dr. David Glusker was another specialist who treated Frida Kahlo. Remarkably, he was married to the noted anthropologist, publisher, promoter, model and translator Anita Brenner.

STAYS AT THE AMERICAN BRITISH COWDRAY HOSPITAL

After an accident in her youth, Frida Kahlo's life was spent mostly between her home in Coyoacán, her studio in San Ángel Inn and several hospitals in Mexico, the United States and France.

Her most important and longest stays took place in Mexico City, particularly at the American British Cowdray Hospital (ABC Medical Center). Two photo series of the painter in this hospital were taken near the end of Frida's life. In the first, by Juan Guzmán in 1950, the artist can be seen wearing bracelets, earrings, rings and her hair braided with satin ribbons. It is worth noting that, despite her condition as a hospitalized woman, in these images we can still appreciate her lively, smiling face.

The second series, photographed by Raúl Anaya and as yet unpublished, can perhaps be dated between the autumn of 1953 and the summer of 1954, if we consider the image in which the artist is seen lying in a hospital bed. In it we can see the prosthesis that she must have used after the "amputation of the middle third of her right leg" that took place in August 1953. In this series, Frida Kahlo appears smoking in her room, with an emaciated face and graying hair, an unusual appearance compared to the image we have known of the painter until today.

This section highlights the letter sent by Matilde Kahlo Calderón, Frida's older sister, to Dr. Leo Eloesser, dated April 1950, in which she meticulously describes Frida's physical deterioration. Included in this section are unpublished photographs by an unidentified author, showing the operating rooms, rooms and various views of the American British Cowdray Hospital in its original location.

CLINICAL RECORDS

The historical archive of the ABC Medical Center records different moments of Frida Kahlo's admission to that institution: August 1934, September 1936, January 1950, January and December 1951, June 1953 and May 1954. Unfortunately, these medical records have been lost.

The medical file that has survived and is displayed in this exhibition gives an account of the time Frida Kahlo spent at the ABC Medical Center between 1952 and October 1953. These documents are here exhibited for the first time. They describe the treatments she received and reveal the prescriptions given by her doctors. They also describe the amputation that was performed on Kahlo, which caused a marked deterioration in her morale.

The prescriptions, suggestions, impressions and recommendations of people close to Frida Kahlo are especially noteworthy.

The visual quality of these materials is striking, emphasizing that the clinical archive is here not only a reference, but a singular crossroads of views in which actors from different disciplines can converge and offer us approaches rich in nuance and meaning.

RE-VISIONS

Western art has formally explored multiple understandings of the human body. For centuries, body representations in art have alluded to the concept of beauty and expressed the disorders that affect it. Throughout the history of art there have been significant cases in which artists have represented diseases, either as witnesses or through their own condition as patients.

In 2005, Graciela Iturbide photographed some of the objects found in one of the bathrooms of the Casa Azul, which remained closed for fifty years after Frida's death. These are visual compositions in which the absence of the artist is apparent. However, the materiality of the elements presents the objects as witnesses of the person who used them.

These two works by Cristina Kahlo are made from the hospital robes used by Frida during her stays at the ABC Medical Center. The first consists of two black and white images, in which one of Frida's robes (front and back) acts as an absent portrait of the painter.

The second work, *Rayos, soles y ritmos escondidos* (Rays, suns and hidden rhythms), is a polyptych made up of photographic images from the paint stains preserved in one of those robes. The photographer makes a reinterpretation of these stains, highlighting the color palette used by the painter and therefore showing us a window into her creative universe.

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