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# FRIDA KAHLO'S MEXICAN BODY

## History, Identity, and Artistic Aspiration

By Sharyn R. Udall

**F**rida Kahlo (1907-54), whose body and biography were her chief subjects, mythologized them into a revealing life epic. Her paintings tell stories—intimate, engaging, terrifying, and tragic ones. Together with her writings, they explore the toughness and vulnerability of the human body. When Kahlo looked into death's dark mirror, she saw herself. In the act of painting and in the resulting canvases, she documented her own attempts to survive pain, to make sense of it, to act out through images layered with fantasy, irony, and allegory. Her work is searingly candid, overlaid with the unreality of an endless nightmare. When she abandoned hope in her daily life, Kahlo embedded her despair within paintings, which, by virtue of their very existence, act as the artist's envoys in search of salvation, or something like it.

At times archaizing and romantic, at times brutally immediate, Kahlo's subjects impose stasis on history, freezing together the ancient past with living memories. When she used time as a referent, it was with ambivalence; she refused time's linearity and its arbitrary divisions. "Heute ist immer noch" (Today still goes on), she wrote beneath her signature on the back of *Self Portrait with a Velvet Dress* (1926; Pl. 5).<sup>1</sup> In that revealing statement the artist demonstrated early on that in her mind the present is living, continuous with a past of history and of art. By following Kahlo's lead, by thinking about time as a thread connecting the episodic with the eternal, we can begin to understand her work in new and telling ways.

This early work echoes several art-historical precedents: Kahlo admired Bronzino's famous mannerist portraits, especially *A Young Woman and her Little Boy* (c. 1540), and praised the refined grace of Botticelli, whom she mentioned several times in letters. After she gave the self-portrait to Alejandro Gómez Arias, her first love, painter and portrait became one in her mind. She wrote Alejandro that "your [Botticelli]...remembers you always."<sup>2</sup> It is here, perhaps, that Kahlo's ability to transcend both time and inherited identity begins; in many future paintings she exchanges and merges personae with painted selves, with animals, plants, and mythic beings. It is a practice as much shamanic as artistic, one related to the concept of Aztec duality and addressed in other terms as well.

Time and specifically the opposition of the modern and antimodern in her work figure prominently in her next self-portrait, *Time Flies* (1929; Pl. 6). Painted the year of Kahlo's marriage to Diego Rivera, this severely frontal, well-lit portrait appears far less mysterious and romantic than the one she made for Alejandro. The clock and airplane ground it in the modern era. Yet the painting is far more complex, far less direct than it first appears. Beneath its surface frankness lie multiple temporal clues, pulling the here and now into a web of art-historical, narrative, and allegorical referents.

Spanish painting, particularly that of Velázquez, has always been a powerful presence in Mexican art. As Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser have written, "Velázquez is central to any consideration of the impact of the European artistic heritage on that of Latin America."<sup>3</sup> Young Frida Kahlo, enamored of Renaissance, Mannerist, and later European painting, certainly knew the work of Spain's greatest Baroque master. Velázquez's *Queen Mariana*

(1652) belongs to a tradition of court painting that reaches back to Titian and forward to Goya. *Queen Mariana* memorializes a royal dynasty, the Spanish Hapsburgs, who represent (besides much else) a significant part of Mexico's own colonial past. In many forms, the ruling dynasty provided an enduring fascination for generations of Mexican artists, among them the 20th-century painter Alberto Gironella, who borrowed elements from *Las Meninas* and other works by Velázquez. More specifically, *Queen Mariana* is a remembered prototype and a key to the multiple meanings within *Time Flies*.

Two immediate similarities to the Velázquez painting are the queen's formalized, static pose and the massive, tie-back draperies. The more critical formal and symbolic element in both paintings is a clock, an unmistakable allusion to the concept of time. In each case the clock is located to the sitter's left and behind her. The Velázquez gold clock, as Baddeley and Fraser point out, is a "rare, expensive and ornate" object.<sup>4</sup> It would have been a status symbol in 17th-century Spain, or perhaps an updated, secularized reference to the transience of life formerly suggested by an hourglass in moralizing vanitas paintings. In any case, the hour is not visible; seemingly, Velázquez used the clock to make an oblique reference to his own modernity, to timeliness in a painting whose immobility places it otherwise entirely outside time. Kahlo's use of the clock seems to place *Time Flies* specifically within time. Hers is a cheap, modern alarm clock, strictly utilitarian, with large black hands and numerals declaring that it is 2:52, perhaps an oblique reference to the date of the Velázquez painting, 1652.

There are several ironies involved in Kahlo's invocation of Velázquez. She appropriates elements from an Old World, Old Master painting in the New World; she is neither old, nor (being female) a "master," nor is she clear at this point in her life about her own artistic heritage. She is trying on identities, both personal and artistic: from the melancholy aristocrat of her first self-portrait, she seems to be testing an image that speaks of her own mixed Euro-American and Indian heritage.

Other aspects of Kahlo's clock compel notice: placed exactly at Kahlo's eye level, the wide oblique angle of the hands on the clock's face forms a shape that mimics her own dense eyebrows—joined like dark bird wings above her nose. The clock face thus rhymes with her own; and like it, she becomes an instrument that measures time—that mediates between past and present. It also forecasts the way Kahlo would paint other faces to mimic her own—on coconuts, her pet monkeys, and on a variety of other objects, animate and inanimate. For example, in *Tears of the Coconut* (*Weeping Coconuts, Coconut Tears*) (c. 1950) a hairy coconut is given prominent eyes from which tears drop onto the surrounding fruit in a still-life arrangement. Kahlo also used clocks in a number of other drawings and even as a design in the rock-encrusted ceiling of her home.<sup>5</sup> The little alarm clock, or a similar one, remains today on a bedside table at her home in Coyoacán.

In *Time Flies* the clock rests on a carved wooden column, whose spiral shaft rises exactly the length of Kahlo's own spinal column,

further reinforcing the interpretation of the clock and its pedestal as some kind of mechanical alter-ego, looking over her shoulder and marking time. But it has an ancient resonance as well. We are reminded in the visual pairing of “columns” of the ways pre-Columbian peoples in Mexico anthropomorphized objects, such as the Zapotec terracotta polychromed vase in the form of a vertebral column, from Monte Alban, Oaxaca (Fig. 1). Kahlo, whose own shattered spinal column supplied only fragile support, could rely on these other columns for metaphorical support. In her famous 1944 self-portrait *The Broken Column* (Pl. 7), she invoked still another kind of column—a Greek fluted one—as interior support. It is a cracked Ionic column, the “I” and its traditional association with female proportions perhaps a punning reference to herself.

Another time reference in *Time Flies* is the necklace she wears of heavy, hand-carved jade beads, relics of Mexico’s pre-Cortesian past. The center stone is inscribed with the Aztec glyph for movement, with connotations of “beginnings” or “nowness.” Such meaning would not have been lost on Kahlo, whose sophisticated knowledge of the pre-Columbian past fueled her art and her own eventual mythification.<sup>6</sup> It is also an appropriate symbol for a personal beginning: her marriage to Rivera that year.<sup>7</sup>

Time and history rise along Kahlo’s body, from the ancient necklace to the jeweled colonial earrings to the penetrating *now* of her gaze. Above that gaze, pushing Kahlo’s questions of time still further, hovers a plane, an element clearly announcing the 20th century. At the same time, like the clock, it poses multiple mythic possibilities: not those of Velázquez’s Spanish Baroque, but of even older allegories of flight, of striving, and of art itself.

Kahlo was certainly aware of Charles Lindbergh’s 1927 solo flight over the Atlantic. Hurling eastward through multiple time zones, his legendary flight turned considerations of time and distance upside down. He joined other pioneering aviators such as the French flyer Louis Blériot, whose 1909 crossing of the English channel had been memorialized by the painter Robert Delaunay.<sup>8</sup> Like Blériot, Lindbergh became a modern hero, inscribed forever into popular history. His daring earned him millions of admirers on both sides of the Atlantic, but he gained special acclaim as a hero for the Americas.<sup>9</sup> Mexicans were among those swept into the mass adulation, and the American ambassador in Mexico City, Dwight Morrow, saw a way to build on Lindbergh’s heroics to create good will for the United States among its southern neighbors. A few months after the Atlantic crossing, Morrow invited Lindbergh to pilot his single-engine craft to Mexico City. In a delirious reception, more than 100,000 Mexicans, including President Calles, welcomed the aviator-hero upon his arrival on December 14, 1927. Lindbergh stayed two weeks in the Mexican capital, during which he made many public appearances and met his future wife, the ambassador’s daughter Anne.

Then, and during a subsequent visit in 1929, Lindbergh flew over unexcavated ruins in Guatemala and the Yucatán, making photographs from the air. This effort (initiated by Lindbergh in New Mexico in 1927) was hailed as the first successful application of aerial photography for archaeological purposes.<sup>10</sup> It demonstrated to the world new ways of using technology to link past and present; for many, it was an American counterpart of Heinrich Schliemann’s rediscovery of Troy decades earlier, a feat Freud declared was like bringing forth a mythic past into modern reality.<sup>11</sup>

Kahlo was very much aware of Lindbergh and may well have met the aviator; she certainly knew the Morrow family. Late in 1929, the year of Lindbergh’s marriage to Anne Morrow (as well as Kahlo and Rivera’s), the Morrrows commissioned Rivera to paint a series of murals on the wall of the old Cortés Palace in Cuernavaca, outside Mexico City. The project took nearly a year, during

which Rivera and Kahlo lived in the Morrrows’ home while the Americans were in Europe. While Rivera was painting the saga of the Spanish conquest, Kahlo had time to think about the proximity of past and present in Cuernavaca, where Cortés had spent his last years.

Winged flight, symbolized by Lindbergh, seemed to hold endless promise for the future, though it held significant dangers as well. In 1928, a young Mexican aviator, Emilio Carranza, made a flight to the United States to reciprocate Lindbergh’s Mexico visit the previous year. Forgotten today in the United States, but well remembered in Mexico, is the tragic ending to Carranza’s journey:

Upon takeoff from a Long Island airfield for his return home, lightning struck the plane, plunging the pilot to a violent death.<sup>12</sup>

The plane in Kahlo’s *Time Flies*, as well as its title, seems on one level a clear reference to Lindbergh’s celebrated accomplishment or to Carranza’s tragic flight. On the other hand, knowing the kind of symbolic and allegorical play Kahlo enjoyed, another level of meaning for the plane can be considered as well. For example, a closer look at the fuselage of the plane, small but insistently painted, reveals, beneath its whirling propeller, a red shape, curved like an aviator’s helmet, framing lines that describe a crude face. Seen this way, the plane becomes more than a machine; it takes on the vaguely living character of an inhabitant of the skies. Is it human, celestial, insect, bird—or some combination? Half plane, half winged talisman, it rises above Kahlo’s head into mythic or allegorical status. However, trying to decipher precisely who or what the plane represents can only end, as it begins, with speculation. With greater confidence we can think of the plane merely as an emblem of the artist’s interest in flight. And with that demonstrable fact as starting point, we can look at other examples of winged flight in Kahlo’s life and work.

Even as a child, Frida had been fascinated by the notion of flight. Not long after she developed, at age six, the polio that would atrophy her right leg, she asked her parents for a model airplane. Instead, they gave her a pair of straw wings and dressed her in a white robe like an angel.<sup>13</sup> The useless wings must have reinforced the frustrations of a child whose mobility was already hampered. The memory of that childhood disappointment, coupled with her suffering multiple foot surgeries in the 1930s, is a likely source of Kahlo’s 1938 painting (now lost) *They Ask for Planes and Are Given Straw Wings* (Fig. 2). In it a child, whose Tehuana dress and hair ribbon identify her as a miniature Frida, holds the model plane she did not receive. Tethered to the earth, yet suspended by the straw wings from above, the child longs to fly but cannot. On a personal level, this is a painting of frustrated aspirations. But, typical of the artist who universalizes her own experience, Kahlo invites a broader interpretation: in 1938 the Spanish Civil War aroused the artist’s grave concern for its refugees and victims.<sup>14</sup> Newspapers in Mexico were filled with accounts of the desolation. To press their struggle, the Spanish Republican Army re-

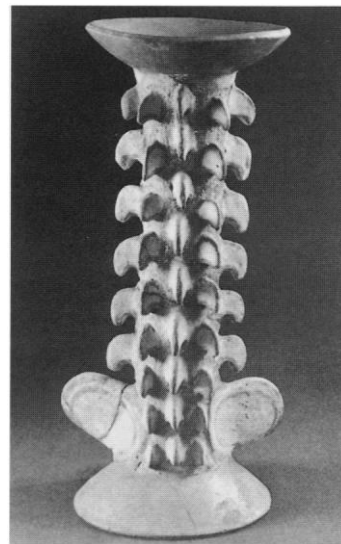


Fig. 1. Vase in the Form of a Vertebral Column (200 B.C.-200 A.D.), polychromed terracotta, h. 16 1/2". From Monte Alban, Oaxaca.



Fig. 2. Frida Kahlo, *They Ask for Planes and Are Given Straw Wings* (1938).



Fig. 3. Frida Kahlo, *Alas Rotas*, diary page 124. Frida Kahlo Museum.

quested planes, but did not receive them. Kahlo's *They Ask for Planes and Are Given Straw Wings* could allude to that tragic disappointment as well.<sup>15</sup> Her preoccupation with the war in Spain may well have prompted still another painting that year. Kahlo biographer Hayden Herrera suggests that *The Airplane Crash* (1938), in which bloodied corpses litter the ground, may echo the kind of searing war protest Picasso expressed in *Guernica*.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the 1930s Kahlo referred to wings and flight in her painting and writing. In an era when most people traveled long distances by train or ship, she and Rivera flew as early as 1931, returning by plane from San Francisco to Mexico. In a metaphorical sense as well, Kahlo continued to think of herself as a winged being; in 1934 she wrote to friends of her disappointment in learning they would not visit Mexico soon: "My wings fell down to the ground, since you do not know what I would give to have you guys here."<sup>17</sup> Planes and wings, then, are metaphors of time travel in Kahlo's work. But they demand to be seen as much more; as symbolic vehicles, they are keys to Kahlo's development of a private, object-based language. And they raise personal events and present-day happenings to the level of allegory.<sup>18</sup> Kahlo knew this, and so did many of the people who admired her work.

André Breton, for example, visited Mexico in 1938, the year Kahlo painted *They Ask for Planes and Are Given Straw Wings*. But it was in another of her paintings that Breton caught the sensation of flight. Of Kahlo's self-portrait painted for Leon Trotsky (1937), Breton wrote: "She has painted herself dressed in a robe of wings gilded with butterflies."<sup>19</sup> Breton wanted to make Kahlo's imagery surrealist, an appellation Kahlo resisted. A few months later she protested, somewhat disingenuously, "I didn't know I was a Surrealist till André Breton came to Mexico and told me I was."<sup>20</sup>

Breton, though soon a collector of pre-Columbian art, knew little about the ancient sources of Kahlo's imagery. She, however, was intimately familiar with the Mexican past and cloaked herself in its conventions, as intermediary between past and present, myth and reality. Whatever the level of Breton's understanding of Kahlo's "robe of wings gilded with butterflies," he had touched upon imagery

in her work both more personal and more profound than he knew.

The butterfly was of vital interest to the peoples of ancient Mexico, for whom duality and transformation were founding tropes. As Peter and Roberta Markman write, "Throughout the development of Mesoamerican art, the image of the butterfly recurs."<sup>21</sup> Janet Berlo explains in greater detail:

*The butterfly is a natural choice for a transformational symbol. During its life it changes from caterpillar to pupa wrapped in hard chrysalis, to butterfly: a process of birth, apparent death, and resurrection as an elegant airborne creature. To the Teotihuacano, the butterfly surely was an emblem of the soul as it was for the later Aztecs.*<sup>22</sup>

For Kahlo, the butterfly was clearly a kind of emblem as well; she kept them near her—photographs show a collection framed under glass and mounted under the canopy that surmounted her bed. Their brilliant colors and transformative symbolism distracted and sustained her during her long bedridden hours. In butterflies as with other symbolic life forms, Kahlo relished the escalating possibilities of

meaning—from winged insect to transcendent soul—riding on the wings of a butterfly.

Kahlo must have imagined herself, in one of her winged avatars, as a butterfly, so often did she use it in her self-portraits. Delicate yet resilient, the butterfly mirrors her own life. In *Self-Portrait* (1940; Pl. 8) a pair of them, reproduced in colonial silver, nestles in her hair, while winged blossoms, the sexual organs of plants, hover above, carrying the reproductive promise of their species. Kahlo painted herself within a natural world that is far from natural. Death and transfiguration, disguised as plants and animals, populate this mysterious Eden, with an iconic Kahlo at its center. Carlos Fuentes saw this timeless, tragic element in the artist's life, likening her to a "fragile, sensitive, crushed butterfly who forever repeated the cycle from larva to chrysalis to obsidian fairy, spreading her brilliant wings only to be pinned down, over and over, astoundingly resistant to her pain, until the name of both the suffering and the end of the suffering becomes death."<sup>23</sup>

If pain and release inhabit Kahlo's self-portraits, they often arrive via the winged creatures she includes. Birds are also frequent companions. In the 1940 self-portrait a dead hummingbird hangs suspended from her menacing necklace of thorns. The tiny, pan-hemispheric hummingbird held many meanings. In folk tradition it was a love charm. As she painted this self-portrait in the months following her painful divorce from Diego, perhaps Frida included it as a talisman to restore lost love.

Beyond the personal, Kahlo also would have cherished the hummingbird's wider pre-Columbian associations. Linked symbolically with the great god Huitzilopochtli, and with the rain god Tlaloc, the hummingbird is a multivalent image of courage, oracle, and magic. The Aztecs believed it to hang lifeless from a tree in winter, then to renew its youth as summer approached. Because Kahlo painted the hummingbird so insistently, with a wing shape that replicates her own dark brows, we must consider it as a metaphor of self. Like the hummingbird, who also does not walk well, Kahlo's oft-impaired mobility made her aspire to flight. And because she tied the tiny creature so conspicuously (and literally)

to the thorn necklace, dead center along her vertical axis, we are reminded again (as in *Time Flies*) of the vertical ascent of time along the columnar axis of her own body. Once more, to understand Kahlo's complex language of symbols is to recognize, always, its encoding within her biological self.

Still another bird must be considered within the iconography of Kahlo's self-portraits. The parrot appears even more often than the hummingbird, particularly in the early 1940s. The artist kept parrots and posed with them seated on her shoulder or nestled, like children, against her breast. She drew too upon pre-Columbian lore, in which the parrot was prized for its gift of speech and looked upon as a supernatural being. Kahlo used fantasy in her paintings to allow such ancient beliefs to co-exist as living memories with modern ones. As her friend Anita Brenner wrote, the parrot's Aztec name, *nahual*, means a being that takes many forms: "In cultured Aztec circles *nahual* gave *nahualli*, wise man and poet, and *nahuatato*, speaker of many tongues."<sup>24</sup> In modern Mexican folklore, adds Brenner, the bird remains a symbol of sorcery. Kahlo, who thought of herself as something of a sorceress—she called herself "la gran ocultadora," the great concealer—recognized her own veiled identities, multiple like the very history of Mexico itself.

The concept of the *nahual* was of central and abiding importance in Aztec thought, a key to the pervasive concept of duality. Various defined as an opposition of values, a cleavage in the Aztec soul, the ancient dualities were managed by means of shamanic practice, the ability to traverse the realms of matter and spirit. Peter and Roberta Markman have described the role of the *nahual*, or companion animal:

***True to its shamanic base, Mesoamerican spiritual thought sees man as spirit temporarily and tenuously housed in a material body. "Soul loss" is a constant possibility, and curers from pre-Columbian times to the present have been called on to reunite body and spirit. That spirit/matter dichotomy is represented metaphorically throughout the history of Mesoamerica and for most indigenous groups today by the belief that each person has a companion animal who somehow "shares" his soul.***<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, such soul-sharing between the person and her *nahual* uncovers, add the Markmans, "a different kind of reality, one in which the spirit and the man, the magician and the disguise became strangely unified and, finally, interchangeable."<sup>26</sup> Such is the case, we can argue, with Kahlo's use of the winged creatures—the parrot, the hummingbird, and the butterfly—all her *nahuals*, her totemic links to other realities. These links she frequently underscored with ribbons that tie her, literally, to her companion animals.

The diary Kahlo kept during the last decade of her life was published in 1995. Though fragmented, with long interruptions between some entries, this intimate journal provides glimpses into her thought processes, emotional life, and physical decline. The images she drew and painted on its pages occasionally relate to finished paintings, but most are a separate visual narrative, captioned with words and phrases—occasionally in Nahuatl, Sanskrit, or Russian. Fantastic winged creatures, some of a mythic or semidivine nature, populate the pages. These include an Egyptian bird, a griffin, a pregnant bird-woman, and several with unmistakable references to herself. Diary page 124 (Fig. 3) is captioned. "Te vas? No. Alas Rotas." (Are you leaving? No. Broken wings.) Here Kahlo stands, wings unfurled behind her shoulders while her body, surrounded by a mass of foliage, is being consumed by flames below. Always, Kahlo mirrored her thoughts with overt or concealed self-portraits; here broken wings seems a probable lament for her own physical and emotional immobility at that stage of her life. On another diary

page (92) a winged woman floats among the repeated word *Sueno*—sleep. Wings in such images suggest escape, apotheosis.

Even more poignant, and considerably more complex, are Kahlo's imagery and text on diary pages 140 and 141, which layer personal history and myth. To be understood, they must be taken together with page 142, which reads, "Se equivoco la paloma; se equivocaba..." (The dove made mistakes. It made mistakes. Instead of going North it went South/It made mistakes/It thought the wheat was water/It made mistakes.) By themselves, the lines are mysterious, but when connected with the clues given on page 140, the meaning becomes clearer. There she muses on the greatness of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Breugel the Elder, whom she calls "the magnificent" and "mi amado" (my loved one). Breugel, the 16th-century Flemish painter of moralistic allegories, provides the context for Kahlo's words and the winged creature drawn on page 141.

Famous among Breugel's allegories is that of the flight of Icarus, a mythological trope of aspiration and failure. Breugel used Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the source for his *The Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558). Ovid's account describes the attempted escape of Daedalus and his son Icarus from their exile in Crete. Daedalus fashioned wax wings for both of them, instructing his son to fly north on a middle course, not too close to either sky or sea. But the son, questing for the heights, soared too near the sun; his wings melted and he plunged to his death. The Icarus myth has long pointed to the irony at the heart of the artist's quest: the more one aspires to the ideal, the more certain is her doom.<sup>27</sup>

Kahlo's references to flying south instead of north and mistaking wheat for water now read as clear references to Icarus. So does the drawing itself: upon her marriage to the massive Diego, her parents likened the union to that between an elephant and a dove. In the diary drawing the dove nests atop the headless shoulders of the winged female creature, whose cracked spinal column is unmistakably Kahlo's own, as seen in *The Broken Column*. She labels her two legs "Support Number 1" and "Support Number 2." The latter, stiff and columnar, is encircled with a spiraling line, suggesting a cast or an umbilical cord from an earlier lithograph, but also reminiscent of the carved spiral clock pedestal in *Time Flies* and the column supporting Frida in an earlier diary page, captioned "Yo soy la desintegracion."<sup>28</sup>

In that earlier diary entry (from the 1940s), as in the Icarus page (July 1953), Kahlo shows herself with only one functioning leg. In both, curiously, it is the right one, the one crippled by her childhood polio and the one amputated in the summer of 1953 to halt advancing gangrene. In its absence she longs for wings, those metaphorical defiers of gravity, disease, and time itself. On another diary page dated 1953 (page 134), she drew her severed feet and captioned it "Feet what do I need them for/If I have wings to fly."

Kahlo's wings, like her art, were mythically powerful. Unlike pedestals, spinal columns, and feet, which could not be relied upon, her imagined bird-butterfly-Icarus-artist wings could lift her above the pain of the physical world into a realm where differences of time and reality collapsed. Even without the severed leg, she had appendages to spare: "I have many wings," she wrote in another defiant diary entry from 1953. "Cut them off and to hell with it!"<sup>29</sup>

In these multiple examples Kahlo shifted time into spatial structures; she refused linearity and traditional notions of "progress." Always, she drew her story into history. To her assertion that "I never painted dreams, I painted my own reality," one can reply that dream, reality, and history were for her interchangeable.

Frida Kahlo wanted her paintings to be timely—that is, modern, original, without precedent. But she also wanted them to be timeless, existing outside time, like some ancient, essential truth.

To achieve that duality she incorporated elements from her nation's ancient past, as well as those, like the airplane, that unequivocally announced the 20th century. While Kahlo's 1929 self-portrait *Time Flies* at first seems to condense or telescope time along the vertical axis of her own body, what it does ultimately is to condense other realities—historic, nationalistic, mythic, and symbolic—into its own. In this way art finally becomes its own reality. ●

#### NOTES

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1. Picasso shared his conviction that art forms one continuous living present. "To me," he wrote, "there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present, it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was"; quoted in Alfred Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 270-71.

2. Kahlo to Arias, March 29, 1927, quoted in Hayden Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 45.

3. Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (London: Verso, 1989), 48.

4. *Ibid.*, 55.

5. In her drawing *Fantasy* (1944), for example, a weeping eye has a clock at its center, and in *¡Ojo Avisor!* (All-Seeing Eye, 1934) she places a clock within an eye filled with other objects and landscape fragments. These drawings are reproduced in Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 128, 108.

6. See, for example, Janice Helland, "Culture, Politics, and Identity in the Paintings of Frida Kahlo," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 397-408.

7. In that connection, the clock may also pay homage to her new husband, who had painted a very similar object in a Cubist-style work from his Paris years, *The Alarm Clock* (1914). This work belonged, in fact, to Kahlo.

8. Delaunay painted a series of works celebrating machine flight, circular rhythms, light and space, culminating in his *Homage to Blériot* (1914). At the same time, the Italian Futurists made airplane imagery important in their poetry and painting, beginning in 1909, the year of Blériot's historic flight. By 1912, an "airplane mania" was at its height in France. The *Livre des Independants* that year contained homages to the precursors of modern flight: Icarus, Leonardo, Santos-Dumont, and Blériot. Diego Rivera, who was in France during the decade of the 1910s, was influenced by Delaunay in his Cubist explorations. He would have been aware of the mania for flight and the 1912 *Independants* publication. Such activity may have stimulated Rivera's own avid interest in planes and the history of flight, as demonstrated in part by a photograph taken in his studio, where a model plane (of the vintage of Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis") is suspended prominently from the ceiling. See Adrianna Williams, *Covarrubias* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 102. On the Rivera-Delaunay connection, see Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (Chelsea, Mich.: Scarborough House, 1963), 78, 87. On Delaunay, the Futurists and "airplane mania," see Sherry A. Buckberrough, *Robert Delaunay: The Discovery of Simultaneity* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1982), 226-31.

9. Lindbergh rapidly came to represent the quintessential American hero, a modern reincarnation of the American values of daring, exploration, and risk; stretching a metaphor across genders and occupations, Alfred Stieglitz declared in 1928 of his protégée Georgia O'Keeffe, "She is the Lindbergh of art. Like Lindbergh, Miss O'Keeffe typifies the alert American spirit of going after what you want and getting it"; quoted in B. Vladimir Berman, "She Painted the Lily and Got \$25,000 and Fame for Doing it!" *New York Evening Graphic*, May 12, 1928, 3M.

10. For a fuller account of this activity, see Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1992), 110; and Charles A. Lindbergh, *Autobiography of Values* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), 85-88.

11. Suzanne Cassirer Bernfeld, "Freud and Archeology," *American Imago* 8 (1951), 111.

12. See Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue*, 64.

13. Bertram D. Wolfe, "Rise of Another Rivera," *Vogue* (October/November, 1938), 131.

14. Demonstrating their concern about this war, Kahlo and Rivera helped several Spanish refugees upon their arrival in Mexico. See Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 26.

15. Another of Kahlo's paintings, *Portrait of Lucha Maria* (1942), is an image of a seated girl holding a toy airplane. In the background is a divided sky containing a sun and moon, each positioned above the pyramids of the sun and moon, respectively, at Teotihuacán.

16. Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 26. The location is not known.

17. Kahlo, letter to Ella Wolfe, July 11, 1934, in Martha Zamora, comp., *The Letters of Frida Kahlo: Cartas Apasionadas* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1995), 55.

18. Women painters and writers have often expressed elation or frustration in terms of flight. O'Keeffe, during her first exhilarating summer in New Mexico, wrote that the sight of Taos mountain looming above vast expanses of fields made her feel like flying. Hélène Cixous has concluded that "Flying is a woman's gesture." Her description of women's flight as deliberately disruptive of the societal status quo (though not written specifically about Kahlo), parallels many of Kahlo's subversive gestures: "jumbling the order of space...disorienting it, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up...and turning propriety upside down"; see Hélène Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," in Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel, eds., *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 291.

19. André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, Simon Watson, trans. (London: Taylor MacDonald, 1972), 35.

20. Quoted in Wolfe, "Rise of Another Rivera," 64.

21. Peter T. Markman and Roberta H. Markman, *Masks of the Spirit: Image and Metaphor in Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 148.

22. Janet C. Berlo, "Artistic Specialization at Teotihuacán: The Ceramic Incense Burner," in Alana Cordy-Collins, ed., *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Peek Publications, 1977), 99.

23. Carlos Fuentes, intro., in Sarah M. Lowe, ed., *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait* (New York: Abrams, 1995), 10. For reproductions and review by Salomon Grimberg, see *WAJ* (F97/W98), 42-43.

24. Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke, 1929), 38. Brenner's interpretation may take liberties with the parrot's name in the Aztec (Nahuatl) language, using it interchangeably with *nagual*, or "guardian beast."

25. Markman and Markman, *Masks of the Spirit*, 144.

26. *Ibid.*

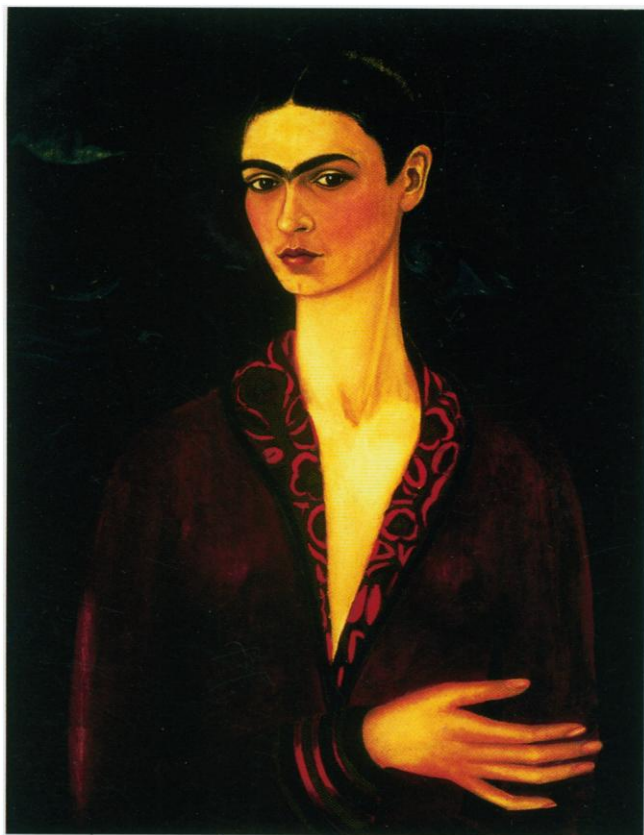
27. Among the countless poets and painters who have used the Icarus legend in their work are Hendrik Goltzius, Baudelaire, and, more recently, Henri Matisse, W. H. Auden, and William Carlos Williams. My thanks to Bill Garrison for directing me to those references.

28. Kahlo's 1932 lithograph *Frida and the Miscarriage* (reproduced in Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 77) shows an umbilical cord wrapped around her right leg connecting a foetus inside her body with a larger foetus outside her body.

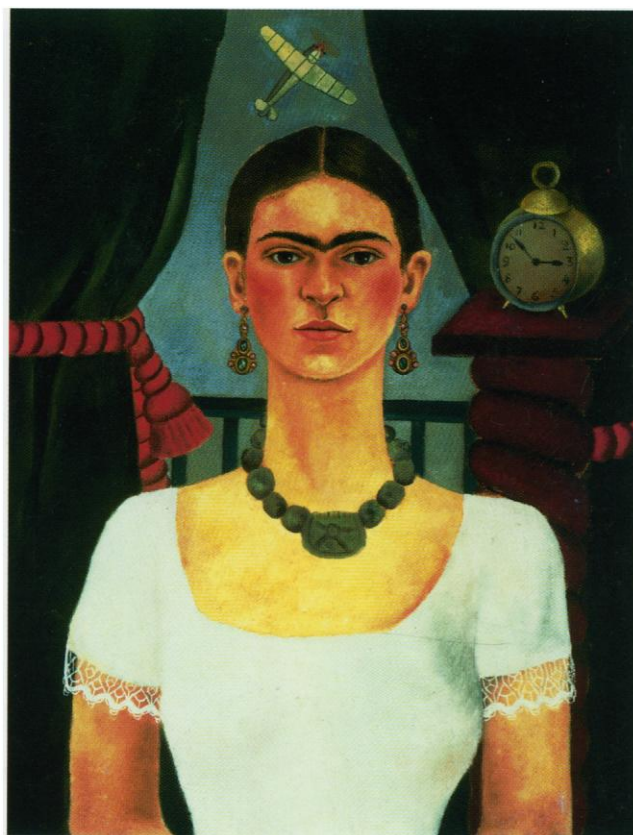
29. Diary page 139, July 1953.

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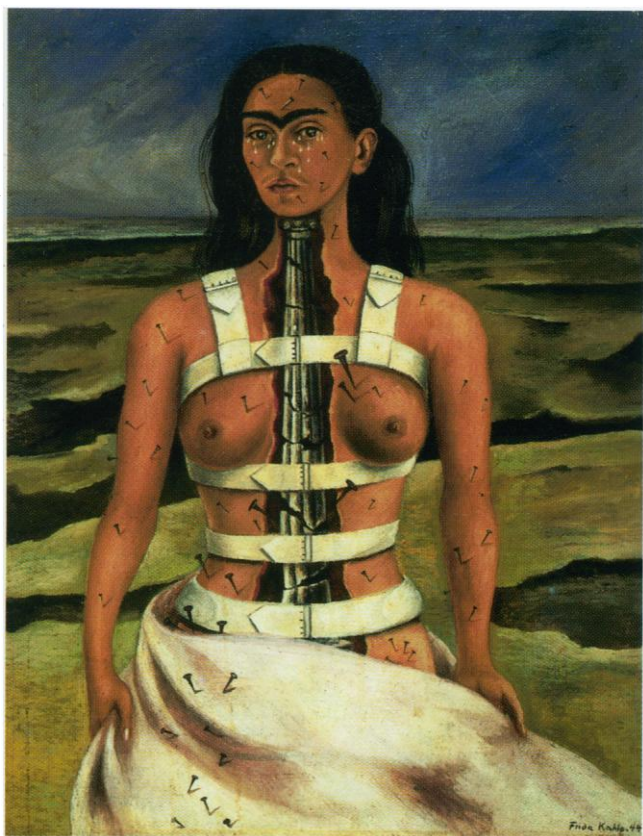
# FRIDA KAHLO



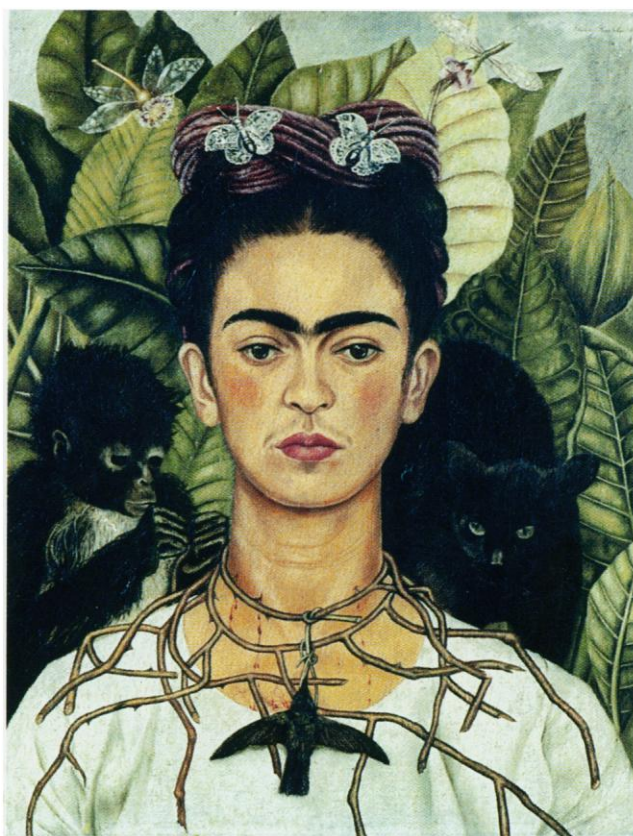
Pl. 5. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Velvet Dress* (1926), oil on canvas, 31" x 23". Private Collection.



Pl. 6. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait [Time Flies]* (1929), oil on masonite, 31<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>". Private Collection.



Pl. 7. Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column* (1944), oil on canvas mounted on masonite, 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 12". Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño, Mexico City.



Pl. 8. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait* (1940), oil on canvas, 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". Iconography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Photo: Courtesy Salomon Grimberg.