

## Frida Kahlo by GREG BALAGIAN

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) is considered to be one of the greatest Mexican artists. Her fame and popularity have grown posthumously.

Inspired by Mexican popular culture, Kahlo employed a naïve folk art style to explore questions of identity, post-colonialism, gender, class, and race in Mexican society.

Kahlo's tumultuous life was marked by both physical and psychological suffering. She contracted polio at the age of five which left her with lifelong deformity of one of her legs. Her painting began while being mostly bedridden as a result of a bus accident in 1925.

At twenty-two she married the famous Mexican artist Diego Rivera who was twenty years her senior; their stormy and passionate relationship survived infidelities, career pressures, divorce, and remarriage. The couple were very active in Communist party of Mexico.

Fifty-five of her 151 paintings were self-portraits and still-lives made in the naïve style filled with colors and forms of

native Mexican art. When asked why she painted so many self-portraits, she answered that she is the subject she knows the best. Autobiographical elements are often mixed with fantasy.

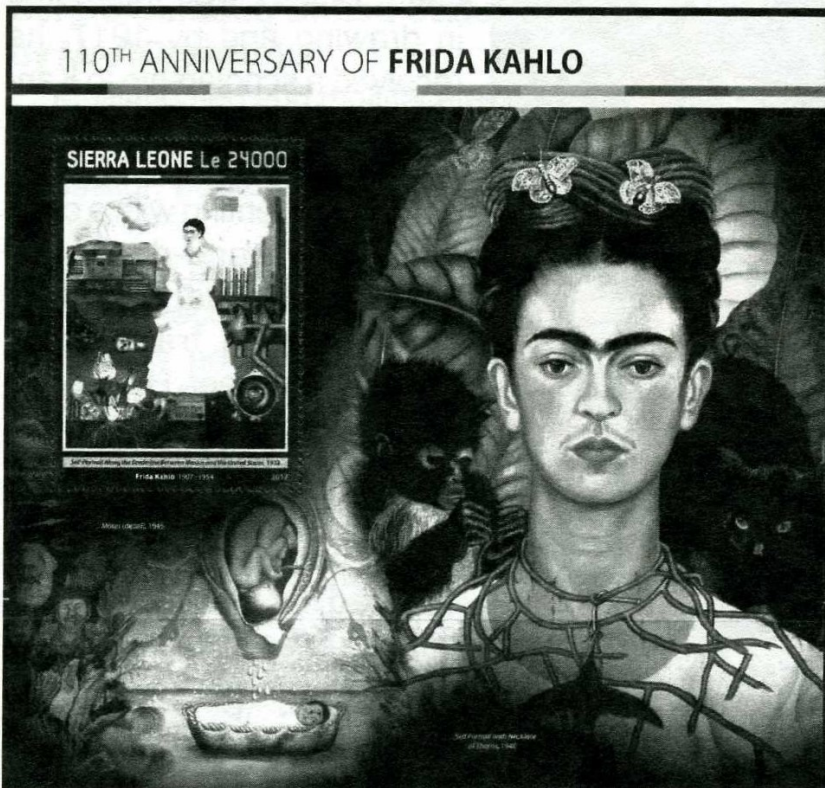
In the famous *Self-Portrait with Necklace of Thorns* (1940), Kahlo presents herself as a Christian martyr, with thorns digging to her neck symbolizing the pain over the divorce from Rivera. Hanging from the thorny necklace is a dead hummingbird which in Mexican folk tradition used as a charm to bring luck in love.

The black cat on her left shoulder symbolizes bad luck and death waiting to pounce on the hummingbird. Her pet monkey, a gift from Rivera, is a symbol of the devil. The butterflies around her head represent the Resurrection.

Details of this painting appear in the selvage of two souvenir sheets issued in 2017 by Sierra Leone and Djibouti commemorating the 110th anniversary of Frida Kahlo's birth.

The painting is in the Nickolas Muray Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Blue House, where Kahlo grew up in Mexico City, was opened as a museum in 1958.🐾



Sierra Leone (at left) and Djibouti each issued a souvenir sheet on January 30, 2017 to commemorate the 110th anniversary of Frida Kahlo's birth. Her *Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940) depicts a black cat for bad luck on her left shoulder. The inscription incorrectly identifies the oil on canvas painting as *Self-portrait with Necklace of Thorns*. See Dibouti's version on the back cover.