



Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up

Sponsored by Grosvenor Britain & Ireland
Room 38 and 38a
16 June – 4 November 2018
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The V&A explores how Frida Kahlo (b. 1907), one of the most recognised and significant artists and women of the 20th century, fashioned her identity. *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* is the first exhibition outside of Mexico to display her clothes and intimate possessions, reuniting them with key self-portraits and photographs to offer a fresh perspective on her compelling life story. The exhibition presents an unparalleled insight into Kahlo's life revealing some objects that have never been on show before.

Working in close collaboration with Museo Frida Kahlo, the exhibition showcases more than 200 objects from the Blue House. Kahlo's personal items including outfits, letters, jewellery, cosmetics, medicines and medical corsets were discovered in 2004, 50 years after being sealed in the Blue House by her husband Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist, following her death in 1954. Exploring Kahlo's highly choreographed appearance and style, these include 22 distinctive colourful Tehuana garments; pre-Columbian necklaces that Frida strung herself; examples of intricately hand painted corsets and prosthetics are displayed alongside film and photography of the artist as a visual narrative of her life.

Included in Kahlo's make-up selection is her eyebrow pencil 'Ebony,' still within its original packaging, which she used to emphasise her signature mono brow, a defining feature of her self-portraits and her favourite lipstick, Revlon's 'Everything's Rosy' and red nail varnish. Her vividly-coloured cosmetics are striking in the celebrated portraits by photographer Nickolas Muray which show her wearing many of the clothes on display.

Claire Wilcox, Senior Curator of Fashion at the V&A and exhibition co-curator, said: "A countercultural and feminist symbol, this show offers a powerful insight into how Frida Kahlo constructed her own identity. This exhibition is a rare opportunity for visitors, offering unique access to an archive that has never left Mexico before."

Circe Henestrosa, exhibition co-curator and Head of the School of Fashion, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore said: "The exhibition will be a very personal experience with deeply individualised objects on show, particularly her corsets, which she decorated and painted, making them appear as though she had explicitly chosen to wear them. She included them in her art and in the construction of her style as an essential wardrobe item, almost as a second skin."

The exhibition reimagines Kahlo's home, the Blue House, located in Coyoacán, on the outskirts of Mexico City, where she was born, lived and died. It explores her life as a child

with her family up to her marriage to Diego Rivera including an album of architectural church photographs by her German father Guillermo Kahlo, early paintings and photographs of Kahlo and Rivera together and with their influential circle of friends including Communist leader Leon Trotsky.

Kahlo empowered herself through her art and dress after suffering a devastating near-fatal bus crash at the age of 18, which rendered her bed-bound and immobilised for protracted periods of time. Self-portraiture became the primary focus of her art at this point and she began to paint using a mirror inset into the canopy of her four-poster bed. Much more was understood about Kahlo's accident after the discovery of the objects in the Blue House. The exhibition illuminates this story through items such as her medicines and orthopaedic aids. Kahlo possessed many supportive bodices and spine back braces and on display are some of the medical corsets that she painted with religious and communist symbolism and tragic imagery relating to her miscarriages.

The exhibition shows Kahlo's Mexico and her sense of cultural pride following the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). An enthusiastic desire to embrace a national identity led to Kahlo's interest in the art and traditions of indigenous people of the country. She used her striking appearance as a political statement, crafting her identity to reflect her own mestizo (mixed-race) identity and allegiance to Mexican identity.

Mexico flourished in the 1920s and 1930s as a liberal destination that attracted foreign artists, writers, photographers and documentary film makers, in what became known as the Mexican Renaissance. On display are photographs of traditions in clothing, architecture and the popular arts taken by Edward Weston and Tina Modotti in the 1920s that made an imprint on the Mexican imagination and its perception abroad. There is also a wall of ex-votos, from Kahlo and Rivera's collection. These small votive paintings of popular art, made mainly in tin, offered to a saint or to a divinity in gratitude for the fulfillment of a miracle, informed Kahlo's paintings.

On display are garments from her collection: rebozos, a traditional Mexican shawl, huipiles, an embroidered square-cut top, enaguas and *holanes*, long skirts with flounces, and jewellery ranging from pre-Columbian jade beads to modern silverwork. A highlight is the *resplandor*, a lace headdress worn by the women of the matriarchal society from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region in Southern Mexico, paired with a self-portrait of Kahlo wearing it.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up runs from 16 June – 4 November 2018 in Room 38 and 38a. Tickets are available from 8 March 2018. Admission £15 (concessions available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is essential– this can be done in person at the V&A; online at vam.ac.uk/FridaKahlo; or by calling +44 (0) 20 7942 2000 (booking fee applies).

- The exhibition is accompanied by a new V&A publication and a series of related events, courses and creative workshops.
- *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* is co-curated by the V&A's Claire Wilcox and independent curator Circe Henestrosa, with support from V&A research assistant, Ana Baeza Ruiz.
- *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* is designed by Tom Scutt and Gibson Thornley.
- The exhibition includes significant paintings from The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th Century Mexican Art and The Vergel Foundation

Corporate support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition sponsors Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, Aeromexico, Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and GRoW @ Annenberg.

About Grosvenor Britain & Ireland

With a host of retail streets set across the fashionable districts of Mayfair & Belgravia, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland is proud to partner with the V&A. As headline sponsor of this landmark exhibition we have drawn inspiration from this partnership to bring a modern echo of Frida's impact to our London estate.

We will be activating the estate's core destinations of Mayfair & Belgravia throughout the exhibition, starting with 'Frida's Belgravia in Bloom' in May and continuing throughout the summer with bespoke Frida-inspired products and experiences.

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About Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne

Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne considers itself a mentor of the arts. The nonprofit foundation was brought into being with the aim of supporting established and recognized artists and art educators who blaze new and innovative trails in one of the three grant areas, Visual Art, Music and Cultural Education.

About GRoW @ Annenberg

GRoW @ Annenberg is the philanthropic initiative led by Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, a Vice President and Director of the Annenberg Foundation. GRoW is dedicated to supporting humanitarian efforts across the globe as well as innovative projects in health, education, the arts and civic & cultural life.

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For further PRESS information about Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up, please contact Kate Morais in the V&A press office on 0044 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email k.morais@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

