

The curtains are drawn. Frida tries to sit upright and put on the light on her nightstand. A sharp pain shoots through her body, and she knocks over the tray standing nearby. Fruit falls and rolls across the room. The paint brush jar lies on the floor, broken into three pieces. Frida clenches her fists, as well as her teeth. Her blue house now seems to be coated in black.







Yes! Caimito has an idea.

He climbs the wall and jumps onto the street.

From the most beautiful tree in the quarter, his scream flies into the distance and then bounces from peak to peak before resounding in the forest: the monkey is calling his friends!

Frida's voice, always coming from the foot of the bed, has already calmed down a little bit...

"At 5 o'clock, I sit down and arrange my fruit.

I create a still life—one full of vigor!"





“At seven o’clock...”

Frida does not have time to invent the sequel.

Four black monkeys, loaded with odds and ends,
make their entrance into her room—full of drama and triumph.

They place their jumble on the bed:
a canvas, some brushes, paint and fruit.

It’s an explosion of colors! And of joy!

They even bring a flower with them,
a beautiful bird of paradise...





Frida Kahlo



NAME: Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo Calderón, known as Frida Kahlo

DATES: born 1907, died 1954 (aged 47)

COUNTRY: Mexico

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE: painting and realism

CHARACTERISTICS: specialist in self-portraits

WHERE TO SEE HER WORKS? The bulk of her work can be seen at museums in Mexico or the USA. *The Frame (Le Cadre – 1939)*, the only work on show in a European museum, is at the Pompidou Center in Paris. There is also a digital exhibition on Google's Arts and Culture website that allows you to see Frida's art without leaving your home.

A Painful Life

Born to a Mexican mother and German father, the photographer and painter, Frida Kahlo, suffers from polio from the age of 6. She loses the use of her right leg.

More drama takes place at age 18, when she is severely injured in a terrible accident. The bus in which she is travelling collides with a streetcar. Hospitalized for months, Frida undergoes numerous operations. Now she has to wear an orthopedic corset. Frida will suffer throughout her whole life, and despite her desire for children, she will never be able to have any.

Painting as Resistance

Frida's parents have an easel specially made for her that she can use while lying down. This explains why her paintings are usually quite small. They also install a mirror on the canopy of the bed, and her father gives her a box of paints.

Frida reads a lot and devours books on art.

She begins to paint her family, her friends and, most of all, herself.

"I am my own muse. I am the person I know best.

And, I am the subject I want to know more about."

Of the 153 paintings she completed, 55 of them are self-portraits. She expresses her physical and moral suffering in them, letting the paintings become almost the spokespeople for her life. She often represents herself accompanied by favorite animals, such as parrots and monkeys, like her very own Caimito du Guayabal.





Frida and Diego

Diego was 20 years her senior and famous for his murals depicting the Mexican people. Frida's feelings for Diego are mixed. She has a strong passion for him, and a belief that he and she were made for each other:

“I sense that we have been together since our place of origin, that we are made of the same material, the same waves, and that we are guardians of the same senses.”

Yet, she also said: **“I have had two serious accidents in my life—one because of a bus, the other was Diego. Diego was the worse by far.”**

Frida and Diego share everything, including communist idealism and confidence in the emergence of a new world—a world spurred onward by art and nourished by a popular Mexican culture that had long been suppressed. They divorce in 1938, only to remarry in 1940, bound by a pact of mutual respect and friendship. Their two lives remain entwined by love, art and an attachment to the land of Mexico.

A Word from the Author

Portrait of a Self-Portrait

Tackling Frida Kahlo is like diving into the art of a self-portrait. It's as if we are looking into the visual autobiography that she created about her life—her misfortunes, her hopes and her joys, which all form the central feature of her works. But how can you write a history based on self-portraits? Obviously, I need to stage Frida herself at the forefront, in all her most complete reality: the artist who suffers, yet carries on in spite of everything. Moreover, the still life she decides to paint in my story actually exists. It dates from the same year (1943) as *Self-Portrait with Monkeys*, and its name is *The Bride Frightened at Seeing Life Opened*.

On a Popular Note

Frida Kahlo was very proud of Mexican popular culture. I imagined a story that gives pride of place to the contexts celebrated in Frida's paintings, especially when it comes to fauna and flora, which are featured in her works and in her real-life surroundings: her blue house, her garden, her animals and their natural environment. And then in this book, which is primarily aimed at kids, I looked for a popular rhyme that all little Mexicans would likely know. What a delight to discover: “A la una, compro tuna.” Its hour-by-hour structure was ideal for building and unravelling a story! You can listen to it here!

Véronique Massenot



A Woman Free and Engaged

The image Frida leaves behind is one of a strong, avant-garde woman, a muse and a model of courage.

She transforms her face into a work of art, with her elaborate hairstyles that she decorates with ribbons and flowers. Her bright red, highlighted lips and accentuated eyebrows make her face look worn and weathered.

Her style is that of a free, committed artist, inspired by the popular traditions of Mexico. Her colorful outfits, her heavy silver jewelry, her blue house and her collection of handicrafts are integral parts of an artistic universe bursting with color.

A Word from the Illustrator

Frida Kahlo is the very incarnation of resilience. She knew how to overcome her pain and transform it. She is a combative woman and one who moves forward, even though she must have endured great moments of anger and dismay.

In the story, Frida is stuck in her bed at home. My images, therefore, depict her Casa Azul (the Blue House), which has now become a museum. You can visit the house online at www.museofridakahlo.org.mx/en/the-blue-house/.

Discover her bedroom and colorful kitchen, as well as the patio where she liked to rest in the company of the animals she loved very dearly—the little spider monkeys, parrots, a fawn and her Mexican dog.

To illustrate the text, I moved back and forth between Frida's reality (images of her house and studio) and my imagination, which caused me to bounce back to her works, teeming with flowers and fruit.

I imagine she must have been inspired by the multitude of plants in her garden, the bouquets of zinnias and dahlias on her nightstand and the Aztec statuettes that decorated both her house and garden.

Even today, we see her face on clothes and decorative objects—she has become an icon and her art is world famous. What touched me the most while working on her, however, was learning from where she had drawn all of this creativity and inner strength. For me, she is a great example of an artist and a woman.

Élise Mansot