

Frida Kahlo – a life lived on the canvas

At LFS, we find inspiration all around us. But one area that has been a constant source to draw from has been the wider world of visual arts, and painting in particular. Among our favourite artists is Frida Kahlo (1907 – 1954), whose love of nature and frequent use of flowers and plant material in her work offers a direct and tangible link for students first encountering it in a floristry setting.

Self-taught, Frida's style was unique – part realist, part surrealist, influenced by her indigenous Mexican culture, and infused with potent intellectual themes like nature, love, sex, death and politics.

“I am my own muse, the subject I know best.”

- *Frida Kahlo*

Frida's love of the natural world, and her use of flowers to address some of these themes are evident in much of her art. *Magnolias*, for example, a 1945 piece inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe, sees the addition of a pear cactus flower – a sensitive and short-lived, though beautiful, blossom that symbolized the intertwined themes of life and death.

Her interest in flowers was not always so weighty – in the same picture, an open calla lily is hiding. The significance? It was her husband Diego's favourite flower, and as such featured in many of her paintings.

“I paint flowers so they will not die.”

- *Frida Kahlo*

Frida's life off-canvas saw her immersed in nature and indigenous Mexican culture, and she cultivated her garden at the Blue House in Coyoacan, Mexico City, turning it into a tiny floral paradise. It is no surprise, then, that these elements run through her art like veins in marble.

“When it comes to colours and their symbolism, it is impossible not to remember Frida's mastery in creating harmony with high contrasting colours and vibrant patterns.”

- *Marcelo Deguchi, LFS*

Perhaps the clearest example of the confluence of these elements in Frida's art comes in the painting *Self portrait along the boarder line between Mexico and the United States*. Here, we see Frida express her longing for her native Mexincan culture and its agricultural society, associated with nature, flowers, and the earth. Her caricature of America as a capitalist dystopia, and the small Mexican flag in her hand, leave viewers with no doubt as to where her loyalties lie.

Marcelo Deguchi, in-house photographer for LFS, explains how we try to engage creatively with Frida's work in-class: “When creating these images during the Career Course, we didn't want to simulate a version of Frida's work using floristry and photography, but in fact to push students to use their own

imagination and artistic eye to interpret colours from another perspective without being constrained by rules of composition or a limited colour palette.”

It is a testament to Frida’s talent that her pieces remain as fresh and vibrant today as they were in her own lifetime. At the root of her genius lay an ability to take tragedy – which was only ever a step away – and force it to live in the shadow of love, meaning, and creativity. This alchemy was one which typified the life she lived in the world, but also the life she lived on the canvas.