



TASCHEN

presents

En la ciudad de Nueva York el día 21 del mes de OCTUBRE de 1938, a las seis de la mañana, se suicidó la señora DOROTHY HALE tirándose desde una ventana muy alta del edificio Hampshire House. En su recuerdo, este retrato, habiéndolo ejecutado FRIDA KAHLO.



Guillermo Kahlo  
**Frida Kahlo on her first  
 Communion**, c. 1909  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 10 1/4 x 14 1/4 in. (26.2 x 36.5 cm)  
 Mexico City, Instituto Frida Kahlo  
 Archivo

Guillermo Kahlo  
**Self-portrait**, c. 1907  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 17 x 11 1/4 in. (43.2 x 29.2 cm)  
 Mexico City, Instituto Frida Kahlo  
 Archivo

Linda Fiala (standing at the  
 far right) at five years old,  
 c. 1901  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 11 1/4 x 7 1/4 in. (28.9 x 18.8 cm)  
 Mexico City, Instituto Frida Kahlo  
 Archivo



Five artists of the 20th century have had their personal and private lives as closely examined as the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1955). Her work has created intense interest concerning even the most minute details of her life story, turning her in the process into a cult figure with a somewhat fanatical following. Today her work might seem to be very much in keeping with the way society in the late 20th century has become obsessed with individuality and the consumption, and rapid turnover of images, and with such a narcissistic materialism that it even threatens the future of the planet and all the aspects that inhabit it. By way of contrast, this book seeks to go back to the source, and is intended to be a monograph about Kahlo in which each and every one of her authenticated paintings is described in detail - including those that were destroyed or lost.

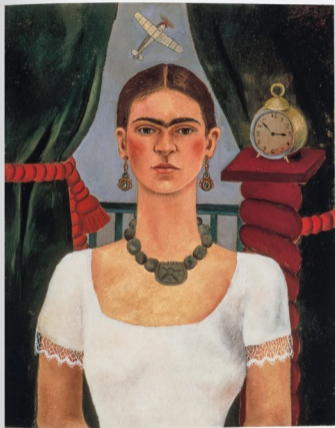
The book begins with an introductory essay, followed by a critical catalogue of the paintings with corresponding images and explanatory text. It concludes with an appendix in which the most recent publications about Kahlo are listed in the bibliography.

Kahlo's artistic career was marked by a series of upheavals that were intimately connected to events in her personal life, and, thus, combined with certain occupational opportunities that enabled her to develop, made it impossible for her to be compared of this way with any other Mexican artist of her time. Several different factors contributed to her profile as an artist and have helped to sustain an ever-growing interest in Kahlo since her death in 1955, amongst the general public and specialists alike. In spite of the fact that her career as an artist was relatively short and her output amounted to a little more than 150 paintings together with several drawings that have only come to light in recent years and have not yet been studied in full, her aesthetic and conceptual ideas continue to inspire enormous fascination across the world.

The first chapter of this introduction focuses on Kahlo's early development as an artist, on her initial sense that she wanted to become a painter and her earliest experiences of art in Mexico. These main sources have been used for this first phase of her artistic career, chief amongst which is of course, and most importantly, her own work. Beyond this there are the various sources that have gathered together much of the factual information about Kahlo as it is known today, the series of interviews she had in 1951 with Raquel Tibol (1921-2005), which became the basis for Tibol's book as it was eventually published in 1977, and the archival research carried out in the 1970s by Hayden Herrera for her historical thesis which has become a bestseller when it was published, as Kahlo's biography, in 1983. Early on other works have been invaluable sources for additional research, namely the catalogue raisonné published in 1988 by Peggy-Frida, Ginzburg, and Kozintseva, which was the first work to collect all of Kahlo's paintings as they were known at the time, albeit without including a critical description for each entry and Herrera's monograph, published in 1991, which discussed almost all of Kahlo's pictorial output as it was known up until that date.<sup>1</sup>

In 1935, Kahlo's husband Diego Rivera (1886-1957) travelled to South America to take part in the Congreso Continental de la Cultura (Continental Conference of Culture) being held in Santiago de Chile. While he was there he met Tibol, a young fiction writer from Argentina who was living in Chile at the time and trying her hand at journalism.<sup>2</sup> Tibol interviewed Rivera for the culture section of the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Prensa* and he was the first to speak to her about the "marvelled beauty"

of Kahlo's paintings: "... the tragedy in Frida's work is not to dominate them [...] the darkness of her pain is only the subtle background for the marvellous light that peeps out from her biological strength, her exquisitely refined sensitivity, magnificent intelligence, and her irrefutable compulsion to fight for life." I am inclined to think that it was Rivera, given his awareness of the fragile state of Kahlo's health, who realized the need to put something in writing about her artistic career. It is possible that he saw an opportunity for someone in Tibol's position to take on the task of collecting information to publish a biography of Kahlo, and with this aim in mind he invited Tibol to go to Mexico, where he arranged for her to stay in Kahlo's house in Coyocacán.<sup>3</sup> Tibol admitted that the "was going there to be her nurse. Although I already had my little heart set on being a journalist, it didn't bother me."<sup>4</sup> However, despite what Rivera was hoping for with the situation and Tibol's initial enthusiasm, it quickly became apparent that it was going to be difficult since Kahlo was suffering periods of pain and distress as a result of all her operations, and her health was not at all good: "As Tibol wrote: "[...] I arrived on May 21, 1935 [...] I was supposed to stay with Frida and by living with her I would then be available to look after her, as the bad week into a deep and insupportable state of depression [...]. Cristina Kahlo, who helped her since as much as she could, appraised this idea as offered her some respite from her vigil which she had otherwise not been able to leave unless someone took her place. [Rivera] had given me no forwarding address but the heavy atmosphere surrounding her in her actual condition, for which it would have been better if I had been prepared in some way, with a kind of spiritual passport so that I could move about more freely in that strange environment into which my presence had intruded without any prior warning for either me as the visitor or my hosts [...] I suggested to Frida that she dictate the story of her life to me, she agreed enthusiastically, and we soon made a start [...] that poor wounded dove, so badly wounded, our plan soon flourished in the face of her continued suffering. When it became clear that the difficulty of the situation and the unmitigated morose inside that became in Coyocacán dashed with my efforts on my part to try and collect information, I decided to move on."<sup>5</sup> Acknowledging the acquisition of part of her life, Kahlo never recovered the mental fortitude to be able to continue with anything, and after several months of living together in such difficult circumstances, Tibol left.<sup>6</sup> Even so, the valuable biography she was able to gather from her interviews served as the beginning of a biography as told by Kahlo herself, which was published on Mexico with the title "Fragmentos para una vida de Frida Kahlo" (Fragments towards a Life of Frida Kahlo in *Albión de la cultura*, a supplement of the newspaper *Novedades*). The amount of information Kahlo provided for Tibol shows that she did want to tell her story and leave a record of her life, and to show her observations and memories of her life with the main source for what is known about her parents, her childhood, and her youth, and the first two books published by Tibol about her are largely based on that information: *Frida Kahlo. Crónica, testimonio y apuntes* (1977) and *Frida. Una vida altera* (1978). They were also a key source for Hayden Herrera's biography, *Frida. A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (1983). While this information provided directly by Kahlo herself was clearly present in these first books about her, which were essentially biographical, subsequent publications about Kahlo's relationships and her family life have been plagued with imaginative conjectures and mistaken interpretations (for example, a supposed enan-



*California Daily*  
**Frida Kahlo** (detail), 1938  
New York, collection of Spencer  
Thornburn

**Self-portrait (Blue Flower)**, c. 1929  
Oil on canvas, 70 1/2 x 46 cm (27 3/4 x 18 1/2)  
California, private collection,  
courtesy Sotheby's, New York  
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Sketch for Portrait of  
Luther Burbank, c. 1920  
Pencil on paper, 10 1/2 x 11 cm  
©1970, 1971  
Museum City, private collection

Portrait of Luther Burbank, 1920  
Oil on canvas, 86.2 x 61.7 cm  
Inv. 4. 2. 19. 1  
Museum City, Washington,  
Museum of the University  
©1970, 1971, 1972

