

NORTON MUSEUM OF ART

1450 S. Dixie Highway
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401

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Norton Presents *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection*

Major Exhibition of Mexican Modernism Showcases Masterpieces and Marks Museum's Largest Presentation of Works by Kahlo and Rivera

WEST PALM BEACH, FL (July 1, 2021) – This fall, the **Norton Museum of Art** will present *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection*, on view from October 23, 2021-February 6, 2022. Featuring over 150 paintings, works on paper, photographs, and period clothing collected by Jacques and Natasha Gelman, the exhibition includes the largest group of works by **Frida Kahlo** and **Diego Rivera** ever on view at the institution. Presenting these artists' creative pursuits in the broader context of the art created during the renaissance following the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, the exhibition also includes work by Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, Miguel Covarrubias, Gunther Gerzso, Graciela Iturbide, María Izquierdo, Carlos Mérida, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juan Soriano, and Rufino Tamayo. The exhibition is organized by MondoMostre.

Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism is curated from the Gelman Collection curator, Magda Carranza de Akle, and for the Norton by Ellen E. Roberts, Harold and Anne Berkley Smith Curator of American Art, and explores these artists' distinctive interpretations of modernism as expressed in themes of nature, home, and family in photographs and easel and large-scale mural paintings.

In conjunction with this exhibition, the Norton will launch *Guía*, an eight week-long bilingual docent training program for students from the local John I. Leonard High School. Participants will learn to facilitate conversations with exhibition visitors and sharpen their visual literacy and public speaking skills. After the eight-week program, students can lead tours of the exhibition in Spanish.

A companion exhibition titled *Frida and Me*, curated by Assistant Curator Rachel Gustafson, will present a selection of works that respond to and are inspired by Kahlo's works and practice. Additional related programming will be announced in the coming months.

"*Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism* is among the largest exhibition of Mexican art that we've ever presented," said **Ghislain d'Humières, Director and CEO of the Norton Museum of Art**. "We are thrilled to have the opportunity to exhibit works by esteemed artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera in the context of their peers and in conversation with our collection. Beyond presenting outstanding art, this exhibition reflects the relationships and tastes that the Gelmans shared with the artists in their orbit. Offering audiences the chance to view these works through the lens of their collection, the exhibition suggests fresh modes of experiencing beloved works of art."

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Jacques Gelman and his wife Natasha built strong relationships with leading figures of the artistic movement that had arisen after the Mexican Revolution. The Gelman Collection consists primarily of works the couple acquired from modernist friends in this period. Gelman was a film producer during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema in the mid-twentieth century and their close bonds with Mexico's creative community are underscored by the numerous portraits of them made by friends featured in the exhibition.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera are among the most influential figures of Mexican art in this period, known for their creative synergy with each other along with their personal relationship. *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism* emphasizes the connections between Kahlo, Rivera, and their contemporaries' collective experimentation with modernism. Featuring 22 paintings and works on paper by Kahlo and 18 paintings, works on paper, and photographs by Rivera, the exhibition addresses the artists' private experience with each other and situates their work in the larger history of modernism in Mexico, a narrative enhanced with portraits and photographs of the couple by artist friends and peers. Sections of the exhibition address the resonance and exchange of influence evident in the two artists' work, along with Kahlo's struggles with lifelong chronic pain induced by a childhood battle with polio, and a bus accident that shattered her pelvis and spine at 18 years old.

Tracing the influence of *Mexicanidad*, the belief that Mexicans could create an authentic modernism by exploring the country's indigenous culture, the exhibition reveals the centrality of this idea to Kahlo's iconography, manifested as a distinctive brand of magical realism colored by Mexican folk art. Even her adoption of traditional Tehuana clothing reflected Kahlo's desire to establish a connection with ancestral Mexico while expressing a cross-cultural identity that honored her heritage and status as a modern woman. A selection of period vintage dresses sourced in Mexico, which include colorful embroidered blouses and full skirts, will be on view in the exhibition, enriching the presentation's examination of her art in the context of her life and persona.

"This exhibition offers viewers the opportunity to see beloved works by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera in-person and experience the physical impact of their creative vision," said **Ellen E. Roberts, Harold and Anne Berkley Smith Curator of American Art**. "The scope of *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism* returns major works of Mexican Modernism to the context in which they were produced—in a collaborative artistic community seeking to make an authentically Mexican modern art by exploring and embracing shared roots and folkloric traditions. It will be especially exciting to have the exhibition on view at the Norton, since these works have such resonance with the masterpieces of American and European modernism in the museum's collection."

Notable works in the exhibition include:

- **Juan Soriano, *Girl with Still Life*, 1939** – Juan Soriano first encountered Kahlo at the age of fifteen, not long after he moved to Mexico City from Guadalajara. His early works are often subtle and dream-like, utilizing a personal visual language that owes much to Kahlo's own metaphorical narratives. In the late 1930s Soriano painted a number of images of children

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holding and contemplating objects, their meaning often mysterious. They evoke the unique ways in which children perceive objects and the world around them, often uninhibited by established ideas of utility or beauty.

- **Nickolas Muray, *Frida Kahlo on Bench #5, 1939*** – This photograph was taken in the New York studio of the photographer Nickolas Muray, who photographed celebrities across the world for magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. Muray and Kahlo met in 1931 and embarked on a volatile romantic relationship that lasted nearly a decade. Muray's photographs of Kahlo are among the most well-known images of her, capturing the artist's confidence and poise in vivid color. Muray was also a supporter of Kahlo's work, purchasing her painting *What the Water Gave Me* (1938) from her exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1938.
- **Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkeys, 1943*** – Flora and fauna feature prominently in Kahlo's paintings, often representing larger themes within her work. In this painting Kahlo is surrounded by four monkeys, which she was kept as pets in Coyoacán. Frequently described as surrogates for her maternal energies, the monkeys in this work may allude to Kahlo's new role as a mentor as she began teaching at La Esmeralda, the Ministry of Public Education's art school, the previous year. When her declining health stopped her from teaching, she invited students to meet at her home, forming a small group of four regulars who became known as "Los Fridos."
- **Diego Rivera, *Calla Lily Vendor, 1943*** – In murals, easel paintings, and watercolors made throughout his career, Rivera represented the everyday lives of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Among his most iconic subjects were calla lily sellers, the earliest of which he painted in 1925. In this version the jubilant bundle of calla lilies dominates the canvas, largely obscuring a figure behind them who appears to be adding more to the basket. The two women in the foreground wear traditional fringed shawls, the one on the left pulling a length of fabric around the basket that will be used to tie it to one of their backs.
- **María Izquierdo, *Bride from Papantla (Portrait of Rosalba Portes Gil), 1944*** – This colorful portrait depicts a young bride from Papantla, a region in the state of Veracruz. Brides there traditionally wear a white covering over their back called a *quexquémitl*, as well as a long white veil and floral headdress. Izquierdo's interest in representing Mexico's diverse clothing traditions in her work, as well as wearing them herself, mirrors Kahlo's own practice. Both were part of a larger trend of wearing traditional costumes that became prevalent in the decades following the Mexican Revolution and was a means of paying homage to the country's native cultures while also supporting the new emerging identity of the nation.

The Norton's presentation of *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism from the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection* is designed by Brooklyn-based architecture firm Matter Practice.

The Exhibition is organized by the Vergel Foundation and MondoMostre in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL)

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Related Programming

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Norton will host programming including an opening lecture for Museum members by Julián Zugazagoitia, Director of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, as well as presentations by other arts leaders and experts in the field of Mexican modernism.

In accordance with recommendations by the CDC, the Museum is maintaining limited capacity and requiring visitors to wear masks, have their temperatures taken upon arrival, and reserve advanced, timed tickets. For full details on the Museum's health and safety protocols, please visit Norton.org/visit.

About the Norton Museum of Art

The Norton Museum of Art is home to the leading and most far-ranging collection of art in Florida and the region, with distinguished holdings in American, European, Contemporary, and Chinese art and Photography. In 2019, the Norton unveiled an expansion by Foster + Partners, featuring the new 59,000-square-foot Kenneth C. Griffin Building, which greatly enhanced the Museum's facilities and was accompanied by the complete reinstallation of the museum's renowned collections in state-of-the-art galleries.

The Norton is also recognized for advancing the practice and appreciation of emerging and under-recognized artists. In 2011, the Norton launched RAW (Recognition of Art by Women). Since its inception, the series has presented the work of Jenny Saville, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Phyllida Barlow, Klara Kristalova, Nina Chanel Abney, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Svenja Deininger, and María Berrío. In January 2019, the Museum launched an artist-in-residence program, which hosts four artists annually who are literally in residence in restored homes that border the Museum's campus. This year, María Berrío was in residence during the presentation of her first museum survey, and photographer Jessica Ingram, whose publication *Road Through Midnight* was recognized by the *New York Times*, returned to participate after being forced by the pandemic to cut short her planned 2020 residency.

The expansion of the Norton also provided new and enhanced facilities for its educational programs, special exhibitions, lectures, tours, and other activities that serve the Museum's diverse audiences. It also transformed the Norton's 6.3-acre campus into a "museum in a garden" which celebrates the beautiful year-round weather in West Palm Beach and features new, verdant public spaces and a 37,000-square-foot sculpture garden.

For more information on museum hours and safety protocol, please visit Norton.org.

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For more information, please contact:

Media in Florida:

Hilary Greene
Norton Museum of Art
greeneh@norton.org

National Media:

Megan Ardery / Daniel Rechtschaffen
Resnicow and Associates
212-671-5181 / 212-671-5188
mardery@resnicow.com / drechtschaffen@resnicow.com