

vivafrida

Frida Kahlo lived most of her artistic life in the shadow of her husband, but half a century after her death she is by far the more famous

For much of her relatively short life, and for several decades after her death at the age of 47 in 1954, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was rarely recognised outside her own country.

When she was remembered, it was as the wife of prominent Mexican painter/muralist Diego Rivera.

But in the early 1980s this began to change and, during the next two decades, Frida moved from virtual obscurity to the limelight, emerging as a feminist and racial icon.

It began in the '80s with an increased focus on an artistic style known as Neomexicanism, with which she became associated.

A year later, the Mexican movie *Frida naturaleza viva* was released to considerable success.

Around the same time, art historian

and biographer Hayden Herrera published *Frida: The Biography of Frida Kahlo*, which was a bestseller. Within 10 years, American jazz musician James Newton released his album *Suite for Frida Kahlo* and, in 2001, Kahlo became the first Hispanic woman to be featured on a US postage stamp.

The next year the movie *Frida*, starring Salma Hayek, made Kahlo an internationally known name.

Contemporary artists are attracted to Kahlo for her vibrant individualistic art, her uncompromising honesty and vulnerability and her sexual and political complexities.

Homage to Frida, featuring a group of emerging artists, has opened at 19 Karen Contemporary Artspace, Mermaid Beach.

Taking part are Abigail Whittaker, Amanda Shelsler, Amaya Hurri, Anne Smerdon, Beck Wheeler, Ben Sheers, Dan Withey, Jeremy Fiert



For Diego by Joshua Smith (right)
Nolwenn Stephan's
Colourful Frida 1 (left)



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Jesse Dolman, Jessica Charlotte, JME Pool, Johnny Romco, Joshua Smith, Juan Arias, Juliet Footrot, Luke Yocum, Kate McCarthy, Maria Rozalia Finna, Nolwenn Stephan, Rebecca Murphy, Richard Denny, Sarah Beeton, Simone Maynard, Sonya G Peters, Gwenda McDougall and Will Duncan.

These Kahlo-inspired works are diverse yet still maintain strong relationships, with each artist using his or her signature style to focus on the Kahlo legend and her legacy to contemporary art practice.

Gallery director Terri Lew, whose enthusiasm for Kahlo began in 1978 when she found the Herrera book in her local library, has curated *Homage to Frida*.

"I fell in love with Frida's art, her country, the Mexican people, her passion for life," says Lew.

Ten years ago Lew gave herself a 50th birthday trip to Mexico and she made a pilgrimage to Kahlo-associated sites, including the Diego murals in which Kahlo appears.

Since then Lew has decorated her Coast home in the Mexican style.

This year, for her 60th birthday, Lew has curated the Kahlo exhibition, as 'the icing on my birthday cake'.

Frida Kahlo, born Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Caldero, was perhaps best known for her somewhat tortured self-portraits. Today her work is celebrated in Mexico for its national and indigenous tradition, and valued by feminists for its honest depiction of the female experience.

Described by some as a surrealist, by others as naive-ist or a folk artist, Kahlo was mostly pure Kahlo, a unique, joyous, yet troubled spirit.

At 22 she married the famous Rivera, then aged 42. It was a turbulent relationship. They divorced, remarried and then separated again. Her serious health problems, needing



Day of the Dead by Ben Sheers

more than 30 operations, were partly because of having polo as a child and partly from a traffic accident in her teens. While convalescing she began to paint, eventually honing a unique, highly personalised, folkloric style that is highly autobiographical, yet at times strangely impersonal.

Her painful physical and personal issues underline much of her work. "I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best," she said.

One of the artists in the *Homage to Frida*, Luke Yocum, summed her up saying: "I can feel her angst hidden behind the vibrant canvases."

But most of all, the 26 artists celebrate in their unique styles the bold, brave, wayward, troubled but enduring spirit that was Frida Kahlo.

Homage to Frida, @ Karen Contemporary Artspace, Mermaid Beach, until July 2