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# FRIDA KAHLO'S SPIRITUAL WORLD

## The Influence of Mexican Retablo and Ex-voto Paintings on Her Art

By María A. Castro-Sethness

Frida Kahlo's (1907-54) incorporation in her art of Mexican retablo and ex-voto images exhibits a complex dialectic between the social dimension of these art forms, their intimate relationship to religion, the creation of art, the struggle to create life, and the inevitability of death. This dialectic reflects the nature and character of retablo and ex-voto images, in both their private devotional functions and collectively shared traditions.

The nationalistic, intellectual, and artistic fervor born of the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) sought to establish an indigenous cultural identity through the revival of popular art forms. Fomented by the Minister of Education José Vasconcelos and his circle, the nationalists sought the glorification of ancient and pre-Colonial Mexico, especially Aztec imagery, as a source of purity and honor in the construction of a post-Revolutionary conscience. Kahlo also regarded Aztec imagery with great respect, and incorporated it into her work. This political/aesthetic statement combined the utopian dream of a unified, independent Mexico—it was the Aztecs who had unified a large area of the Middle Americas—with a desire for beauty and harmony through the nation's reconnection to the Aztec cosmological vision.<sup>1</sup>

Post-Revolutionary Mexican artists found a model of indigenous expression and popular beliefs in the retablo and ex-voto paintings that, although introduced in Colonial times, flourished during the 19th and early-20th centuries in rural Mexico. Interestingly, the renaissance of these art forms and their political implications coincided with Mexican independence from Spain in 1821. Several modern Mexican painters, in their rejection of the centralized academicism perpetuated since the Spanish Conquest, admired both the spirituality of these religious paintings as well as their expressions of freedom and self-determination. For example, Kahlo's contemporary María Izquierdo (1902-55) honored Mexican rural religiosity in her *Retablo de Dolores* (1946), which pays homage to the Virgin Mary on Good Friday.<sup>2</sup> Izquierdo reinterpreted the traditional Madonna and Child theme in *Madonna* (1943) and used the retablo of N.S., *Refugio de Pecadores* as a model for her painting *Invierno* (1943).<sup>3</sup> Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) incorporated the theme of miraculous apparitions in his engraving *Second Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the Hacienda de la Lechería* (1893), and the subject of group invocations to saints in his illustration to the ballad *Pleas of the Lonely Unmarried to Our Miraculous Saint Anthony of Padua* (n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Roberto Montenegro (1887-1968) wrote an informative book on Mexican votive paintings<sup>5</sup> and integrated the naivety, simplicity, and faith of the ex-voto manifestations in some of his paintings.<sup>6</sup>

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera (1886-1957) were passionate collectors of Mexican art.<sup>7</sup> The Blue House in Coyoacán, where Kahlo was born and died, contains a large number of pre-Columbian artifacts and Mexican folk art collected mostly by Rivera, as well as about 2,000 retablos gathered by Kahlo at Rivera's suggestion. The objects are displayed in the dining room, inner patio, and entrance; some were placed as decorative and spiritual elements in the bedrooms and within the stairwell.<sup>8</sup> The Blue House—now a museum holding the collections of both artists—is a living document of

Kahlo's fascination with the power and symbolic content of her beloved images that, in a magical way, transcended her own space and became re-elaborations of a utopian dream.

Gloria Fraser Giffords distinguishes the European retablo from the Mexican retablo and ex-voto. The word *retablo* comes from the Latin *retro tabula* ("behind the altar"). It was used in Spain and later in the Americas to describe the compendium of religious images, paintings and sculptures, unified by means of an architectural frame, that decorated the back of the main altar (*altar mayor*) and the subsidiary chapels (*capillas menores*) of churches and cathedrals. Painted on wood or canvas, retablos served a strong didactic purpose, and contributed greatly to the understanding of the sacred texts as well as honoring holy persons. In Mexico, a retablo or *retablo santo* refers to small oil paintings that portray a single saint, Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a group of holy personages. They can also be referred to as *imágenes pintadas* (painted images), *santos sobre hoja de lata* (saints painted on tin), or *laminas* (plates).<sup>9</sup>

Due to the availability of tinned sheets, a medium that proved to be inexpensive and durable, retablos destined for home altars flourished during the 19th century. The makers of these religious works were not trained artists but devout believers. Either self-taught or members of a provincial workshop, they copied their works from religious paintings and sculptures in Mexican rural churches or from woodcuts, etchings, and engravings contained in sacred books imported by the friars. Sold on the occasion of church festivities or commissioned by individuals, these images were thought to contain miraculous powers and were invoked through prayer, meditation, and good deeds for problems of every sort, affecting any member of the family or community. Technically speaking, retablos exhibit an emotional quality that results not only in a naïve conception of human anatomy and perspective but also a powerful feeling for vibrant color and ornamentation.

Ex-voto paintings are also known as *retablos ex-votos*.<sup>10</sup> Most depict a miraculous cure through the portrayal of one or more persons praying for the sick individual who is usually prostrate in bed. This "reality" special dimension or "earth realm" usually occupies the middle section of the composition. Above, in the "supernatural world," the painter represents one or more sacred personages responsible for the healing through invocation of the faithful believers. The lower register of these painted images contains a written text in which the donor explains the gravity and circumstances of the illness and the miraculous cure through divine intervention, also expressing gratitude for the recovery. These commemorative works of art can also depict an accident, criminal assault, imprisonment, or any incident in which the victim escapes death, danger, or physical or moral suffering. Whereas in most ex-votos the three distinctive divisions appear unequivocally, the holy and terrestrial realms sometimes do not follow a strict spatial differentiation due, possibly, to a rudimentary conception of perspective or a need to emphasize divine power through size or proximity to the depicted event.

Ex-votos also flourished in rural Mexico throughout the 19th and

into the 20th century because of the promotion of an independent spiritual force within the indigenous rural populations after centuries of imposed Colonial rule. Ex-votos were usually made by untrained artists from the community, and in some cases by the individual who experienced the miracle. Unlike the retablos, which interpreted traditional iconographic sources, the ex-voto pictorial narratives of divine aid display great imaginative power. The artist's use of a specific situation allowed for a statement that truly reflected the spirituality and faith of the Mexican villagers and was an important document of their lives, sorrows, hopes, and fears. Technically speaking, the ex-votos reveal a concern for directness and emotion, resulting in vivid, simplified forms and dramatic color contrasts.

Although many Kahlo scholars, among them Salomon Grimberg, Emmanuel Pernoud, and John Yau, have recognized the influence of retablos and ex-votos in her art,<sup>11</sup> none have done any extensive analysis or precisely identified her iconographical sources. First, the presence of ex-votos as objects of daily contemplation in her home and studio was certainly a powerful cultural and aesthetic source of inspiration. Second, the process of her incorporation of such religious objects establishes an emotional link between Kahlo's present and past, her identification with the Mexican nation, and her private suffering. Third, the profound spirituality of the retablos and ex-voto paintings can be viewed as decisive forces that allowed for the existence of the supernatural and religious dimension in her art. Her use of specific retablo and ex-voto iconographical sources in her paintings can be related to the traumatic bus accident that occurred on September 17, 1925, when she was 18 years old. Kahlo's injuries were so severe that the doctors thought she might not survive. Her spinal column and pelvis had been broken and she was confined to bed, immobilized in a series of plaster casts. The enormous physical and psychological pain that resulted from these injuries stayed with her throughout her life and was transformed through sublimation and mysticism into an artistic production that reveals the profound relationship between her perception of suffering and power to express it.

Through her persistent use of self-imagery, Kahlo meticulously examined her agony. Because of her long confinements and isolation, she entered into a spiritual realm that inevitably led, consciously and unconsciously, to the incorporation of the Christian beliefs and iconography rooted in her cultural heritage and upbringing. Her mother, Matilde Calderón, a devout Catholic, instructed her three daughters in the principles and doctrine of the church and educated them in religious schools. Although her father Guillermo was a German Jew and she was a declared atheist, Frida never abandoned Catholic imagery. That she retained Catholic beliefs and ritualistic practices throughout her life is evident in some of her letters. Using this line of analysis, Salomon Grimberg pointed out the parallels between Saint Teresa of Ávila's *Transverberation*, or "the piercing of her heart by the arrow of divine love," and Frida Kahlo's 1937 painting *Memory*. In his view, Kahlo identified herself with the Spanish saint for multiple reasons, among them the suffering of the Carmelites, members of Saint Teresa's religious order, who injured their feet by walking barefoot. Most important, he speculates about the artist's religiosity.<sup>12</sup>

One of the most influential traditional Mexican retablo and ex-voto icons in Kahlo's art is the *Mater Dolorosa* or *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* (19th c.; Fig.1). This painting represents the Blessed Virgin mourning the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. The sword at her heart symbolizes the piercing of her heart with sorrow. The image is based upon the Gospel verse in which, upon presenting Jesus at the Temple, Simeon says to Mary: "Yea, a sword shall pierce though thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke, 2:35), referring to the crucifixion. The figure of the Virgin in a red gown and black cloak is surrounded by the sacred heart and the symbols of Christ's Passion: the crown of thorns, the three nails used

to crucify Jesus; wheat ("Then he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me," Luke, 22:19); the scourge he was beaten with; the spear that was plunged into his sides; and the hyssop used to wet his lips. Her hands in prayer refer to Jesus praying at the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest.

Other *Mater Dolorosa* retablo images have included the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary, with seven swords or daggers appearing in her breast, thereby intensifying her expression of pathos. Since Mary's suffering is often considered as important as Christ's own passion, the *Mater Dolorosa* is among the most popular retablo images of Mary. She was invoked in times of pain, sorrow, loss of a child, or at the hour of death.

Kahlo's *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932; Pl. 13) exhibits the direct influence of the *Mater Dolorosa* image and symbolism. In April of 1932, Kahlo and Rivera traveled to Detroit, where he was commissioned to paint murals on the subject of modern industry for the Detroit Institute of Arts. That July Kahlo had a miscarriage and was taken to Henry Ford Hospital. This painting represents the tragic death of her unborn child, and commemorates her unbearable suffering of separation and isolation. In this small work, painted on tin, Kahlo depicts herself naked on a hospital bed, bleeding and holding, through vein shaped ribbons, emblematic objects that portray her suffering: a masculine fetus—her unborn son; a snail—symbol of conception, pregnancy, and birth in some Indian cultures; an orchid—regarded in antiquity as an aphrodisiac and fertility symbol; a pelvis; a machine used to make casts; and an anatomical model of the lower part of a female body. The identification with the *Mater Dolorosa* is twofold: the surreal objects connected to her recall the symbols of the Passion that often accompany representations of the *Mater Dolorosa*, and her face in the painting reveals a striking similarity—in features, expression, and positioning—with the faces in many 19th-century *Mater Dolorosa* retablo images. In one of her letters she called herself "Virgen Lacrimorum" (Virgin of the Tears),<sup>13</sup> an unequivocal sign of her personal identification with the Virgin Mary represented with tears streaming down her face. In *Henry Ford Hospital* Kahlo confronts her maternal reality; she is dispossessed of her ultimate desire to have a child. This agonizing loss of her son is another factor in this process of iconographic and spiritual approximation to the *Mater Dolorosa*.

*Henry Ford Hospital* also shows the considerable influence of ex-voto paintings. According to Herrera, Rivera suggested that Kahlo paint on metal, that she paint her life in the ex-voto format.<sup>14</sup> *Henry Ford Hospital* is one of the first compositions she did in that medium, and, like most ex-votos, is small, only 12" x 15". Other ex-voto-like characteristics include the directness of the scene, simplification of pictorial means, emphasis on feeling and emotional distress, and isolation of the victim. Kahlo appears in bed in a vast empty room, alone and in pain. The explicit absence of holy figures in the space normally reserved for the supernatural realm has resulted in a secular interpretation of her pictorial statement.<sup>15</sup> However, although elliptic and transferred to her body—and more specifically, her face—the religious symbolism here is apparent. *Henry Ford Hospital* commemorates the miracle of Kahlo's continual defeat of death through the unbearable experience of miscarriage.

Kahlo's painting *My Birth* (1932) is also rooted in the *Mater Dolorosa* symbolism: religious syncretism is clearly present. On the one hand, Kahlo's representation of the act of giving birth is believed to have been drawn from the Aztec sculpture of the goddess Tlazolteotl, an image that also appears in Rivera's mural *The History of Medicine in Mexico: The People's Demand for Better Health*, created in 1953 for the Hospital de la Raza in Mexico City. According to Dina Comisarenko, Tlazolteotl was an important source of inspiration for both



Fig. 1. Anonymous, *Mater Dolorosa* or *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* (19th c.), oil on metal, 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

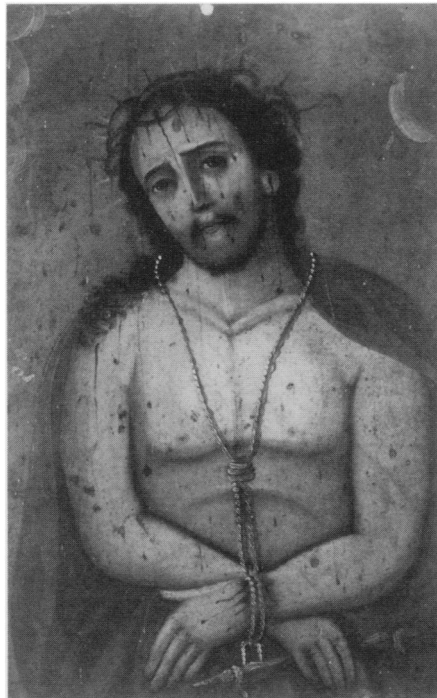


Fig. 2. Anonymous, *Ecce Homo* (19th c.), oil on metal, 13" x 8".

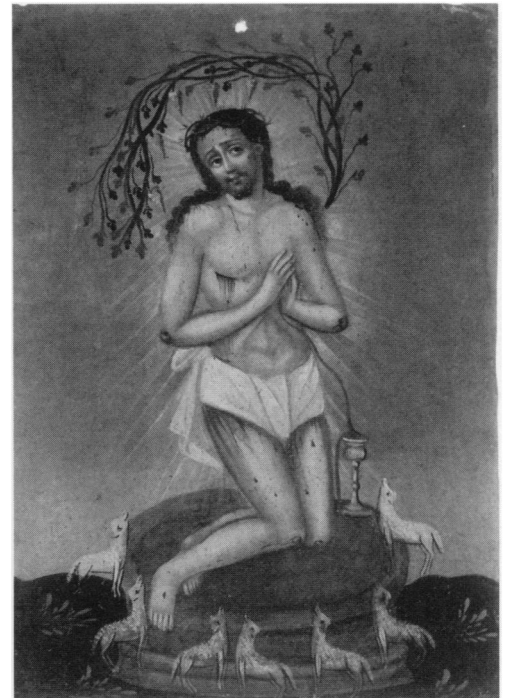


Fig. 3. Anonymous, *The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows* (19th c.), oil on tin, 14" x 10".

Kahlo and Rivera.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the *Mater Dolorosa* image on the wall above the bed in *My Birth* gives the painting Christian significance. Created at the time of the death of her mother, the painting portrays life and death simultaneously—her mother's death and her own birth. In this sense, the Mexican pre-Colonial myths of creation, in which life comes out of death and sacrifice, are present in this composition. Similarly, in the *Mater Dolorosa* the Virgin contemplates the death of her son as well as the spiritual renewal of humanity through Christ's sacrifice. At the same time, the *Mater Dolorosa* acts as a protective and consoling holy figure, both watching over the soul of Kahlo's departed mother and identifying with the pain of her labor and delivery. In a magical and surrealistic dimension, the Virgin's influence extends to the objects in the room: the blue of the veil seems to have invaded not only the wall but also the pillow and bed sheets, and the pleats of the veil echo the pleats of the sheet that covers the mother's head. Thus *My Birth* identifies at once with women during childbirth, the explicit subject of the painting, and the stoic acceptance of a child's death, the painting's implicit meaning.<sup>17</sup>

*My Birth* also relates to ex-voto paintings. Done in oil on metal and only 12" x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", it portrays a woman in a difficult situation—in the act of giving birth—accompanied by a Christian image. Formally speaking, reduction to essential details to convey pathos and intense emotion follows the ex-voto format, and the miraculous event—the continuity of life through birth—is present through the sacred intervention of the *Mater Dolorosa*. The absence of the traditional inscription at the bottom of the painting explaining the miracle could testify to Kahlo's paradoxical vision of her own life—her tormented existence and her desire to sublimate her pain through her art.<sup>18</sup>

The *Ecce Homo* ("Behold the Man"<sup>19</sup>) (Fig. 2) retablo images also served as an iconographical source in Kahlo's art, especially in relation to *The Broken Column* (1944). Because of the emotional emphasis on suffering, an essential component of medieval European sacred images, the Passion scenes had great appeal in Mexico. The spirit of suffering was deeply rooted in the spirit of the native people, whose own civilization and religious system were based on the belief

of human and divine redemption. The *Ecce Homo* is one in a series of representations of the Passion of Christ. Related scenes equally popular in retablo art include *The Lord of the Scourges*, *Our Lord of the Hardships*, and *Christ at the Column*, images that could have served as secondary sources of inspiration for *The Broken Column*.

If Kahlo was not familiar with this *Ecce Homo* retablo, she certainly had access to similar works. Christ here is presented frontally, his naked torso draped in a red mantle that extends to his lower body. He wears the crown of thorns and a long knotted cord hangs from his neck. His stoic face denies the bleeding wounds on his body. He denounces the physical agony of his martyrdom, inviting the viewer to feel empathy and spiritual communion. Similarly, *The Broken Column* presents a frontal view of a figure tormented by physical suffering, with a naked torso and a mantle covering her lower body. Clearly a self-portrait recalling her own passion, she shows herself with an impassive and unalterable facial expression. The nails penetrating her body and face reveal the same bloody spots as in the *Ecce Homo* and refer to the crucifixion; the knotted cord in the Christ image relates to the orthopedic corset that confines Kahlo's torso; and both figures are isolated against a negative background—Kahlo in a barren, cataclysmic landscape and Christ before a dark, ominous sky—contributing to the overall feeling of calamity and distress expressed in both paintings.<sup>20</sup>

Kahlo's *Itzcuintli Dog with Me* (1938; Pl. 14) also draws on the *Ecce Homo* retablo. Both paintings present an isolated figure in a frontal position, seated against a cloudy background. The positioning of arms and hands is strikingly similar, and the facial expressions reveal the same stoic acceptance of suffering and loneliness. The Christ figure's semi-nakedness has been replaced with a long, traditional Mexican dress that, in a cathartic way, masks her wounds. The very explicit element of confinement, the knotted cord that also ties Christ's hands, has been transformed into a golden necklace; the knot has been replaced by a stone or antique coin at her neck. The crown of thorns has become a braid adorned with a blue ribbon. The sinister dark sky of the *Ecce Homo* painting has been trans-

formed into a neutral white and light blue background.<sup>21</sup> These modified images indicate Kahlo's desire to sublimate her physical and psychological pain through beauty, adornment, and light. Yet, in spite of all these alterations, Kahlo's self-portrait is still disturbing. Even with the presence of the dog, the feeling of alienation and isolation is pervasive; the colors convey sadness and detachment, and she seems to be floating in a surreal space between earth and sky.<sup>22</sup>

Another possible iconographical source in Frida Kahlo's paintings is the retablo representation of *The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows* (19th c.; Fig. 3), particularly in connection with *Roots* (1943; Pl. 15). The religious image of *The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows* does not represent any specific narrative cycle and is based upon a posterucifixion devotion taken from mystical contemplation. The figure of Christ with a grapevine coming out of his side, with his blood feeding the lambs gathered around him, is a Eucharistic symbol. Of all plants used in Christian art, the vine is the most universal. In Christ's own words: "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing," and "Who so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 54).

The grapevine motif is interpreted in *Roots* as leafy branches born out of the artist's open torso. Similar to the retablo, in an act of propitiation and homage to nature, Kahlo's blood, like roots that sprout from the leaves, nourishes the barren earth, recreating the Eucharistic ritual of salvation through her sacrificial offering. In both compositions the figures are centered and surrounded by a background that echoes the cycles of creation and destruction—the division between day and night and light and darkness in *The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows*, and the cataclysmic vision of the earth's crust tempered by the appearance of incipient life in *Roots*. The Christian identification with renewal in *Roots* is another example of the permanence of Catholic imagery in Kahlo's art: a mystical, supernatural force unites life and death and perpetuates them in a circular, harmonious motion. This indivisible unity, central in ancient Mexican philosophy, is intermixed with the Christian belief of death as redemption as earth and humanity's rebirth.

The vine motif also appears in Kahlo's *The Dream* (1940). The painting shows Kahlo sleeping in a bed floating among clouds. The leaves on the vine growing out of the yellow bedspread protect Kahlo's dream. On the bed's canopy, echoing Kahlo's position, rests a skeleton in the form of a papier-mâché Judas. Instead of a vine, the skeleton holds a floral arrangement from which grow wires connected to explosives. In *The Dream* we encounter a surrealistic feeling of transformation and sublimation: the spiritual presence of death and resurrection—the skeleton, and the grapevine motif and the ascending movement conveyed by the painting, respectively—are united in a cycle that assures the continuation of life through rebirth and renewal.

The influence of the retablo and ex-voto paintings on Frida Kahlo's artistic vision is confined not only to a dialogue based on formal and stylistic terms, it is rooted also in the very Mexican soul, in its religious spirit, and its vision of Holy Omnipotence. This identification reinforces the mysticism in her work. By her incorporation of sacred characteristics or intrinsic elements of holy persons, Kahlo produced a body of work that has a place in the religious tradition of Mexican art. •

#### NOTES

1. Janice Helland, in "Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo's Paintings," *WAJ* (F90/W91), 8-13, discusses the political component of Aztec iconography in Kahlo's work.

2. For reproduction, see Margarita Michelana, et al., *María Izquierdo* (Guadalajara: D.R. Departamento de Bellas Artes, 1985), 90.

3. Izquierdo's *Invierno* is similar to the retablo representation of *N.S. de*

*los Remedios*. Gloria Fraser Giffords, in *Mexican Folk Retablos* (Albuquerque: University of Arizona, 1974), 62, states that the copy of the original painting of this theme was brought to Mexico in 1719 by a Jesuit missionary and placed in the city of Zacatecas, where *N.S., Refugio de Pecadores* (Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners) became patron.

4. For reproduction see Anita Benner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson and Clark, 1929), 156 and 185, respectively.

5. Roberto Montenegro, *Retablos de México* (México: Ediciones Mexicanas, 1950).

6. McKinley Helm, in *Modern Mexican Painters* (New York: Dover, 1974), 165, states that Montenegro's Surrealism has its origins in retablo painting.

7. Hayden Herrera, in *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991), 48, says that Kahlo and Rivera extolled and collected indigenous forms of visual art; Erica Billeter, in "Fritz Henle Photographs: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera," *The Blue House: The World of Frida Kahlo* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1993), 49, states that Kahlo collected pre-Columbian idols and objects of art for her mental stimulation; Salomon Grimbberg points out the artistic importance of their collection of retablos in "Frida Kahlo's Memory: The Piercing of the Arrow of Divine Love," *WAJ* (F90/W91), 2.

8. Alice Adams, "Frida Kahlo's Passion," *Art and Antiques* (January 1989), 65.

9. Gloria Fraser Giffords, in *The Art of Private Devotion: Retablo Painting of Mexico* (Fort Worth: Intercultura and the Meadows Museum, 1991), 33, and in *Mexican Folk Retablos*, 2. Giffords discusses Kahlo's use of retablo images.

10. Whereas Giffords uses the terms retablo and ex-voto in *Mexican Folk Retablos* from 1974, she uses *retablo santo* and *retablo ex-voto* in *The Art of Private Devotion*.

11. See Grimbberg, "Frida Kahlo's Memory," 3; Emmanuel Pernoud, "Une Autobiographie Mystique: La Peinture de Frida Kahlo," *Gazette de Beaux Arts* (January 1983), 44; John Yau, "The Phoenix of the Self," *Artforum* (April 1989), 150.

12. Grimbberg, "Frida Kahlo's Memory," 3-7.

13. Letter to Alejandro Arias, August 21, 1926, published in Billeter, *The Blue House*, 185.

14. Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*, 73-74. All the images discussed here are reproduced in color in this book.

15. Pernaud, "Une autobiographie mystique," 46.

16. Dina Comisarenko, "Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Tlazolteotl," *WAJ* (S/S 96), 14. See p. 14 for reproduction.

17. Ibid., 16. Comisarenko has also recognized the importance of the *Mater Dolorosa* in this painting. She interprets her inclusion as a symbol of mourning of the mother during childbirth.

18. Ibid. Comisarenko believes that the empty space traditionally devoted to the inscription robs the image of any devotional connotation.

19. John 19:5 "When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'"

20. Another possible source for Kahlo's *Broken Column* could be a Zapotec terracotta polychromed vase in the form of a vertebral column, from Monte Albán, Oaxaca. Sharyn Udall, in "Frida Kahlo's Mexican Body," *WAJ* (F03/W04), makes this connection. See Fig. 1, p. 11. For color reproduction of *Broken Column*, see Pl. 7.

21. Gannit Ankori, in *Imaging her Selves: Frida Kahlo's Poetics of Identity and Fragmentation* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), classifies a series of Kahlo's self-portraits as *Imitatio Christi* self-portraits.

22. Kahlo owned several of the small Itzcuintli dogs. The Aztecs believed they had mystical healing powers. They are affectionate dogs, thought to provide comfort to their owners. The Aztecs also thought they were a guide to the dead, the spirit link to the living. Whatever the need Kahlo had for these dogs, it is not clear in this painting.

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# FRIDA KAHLO



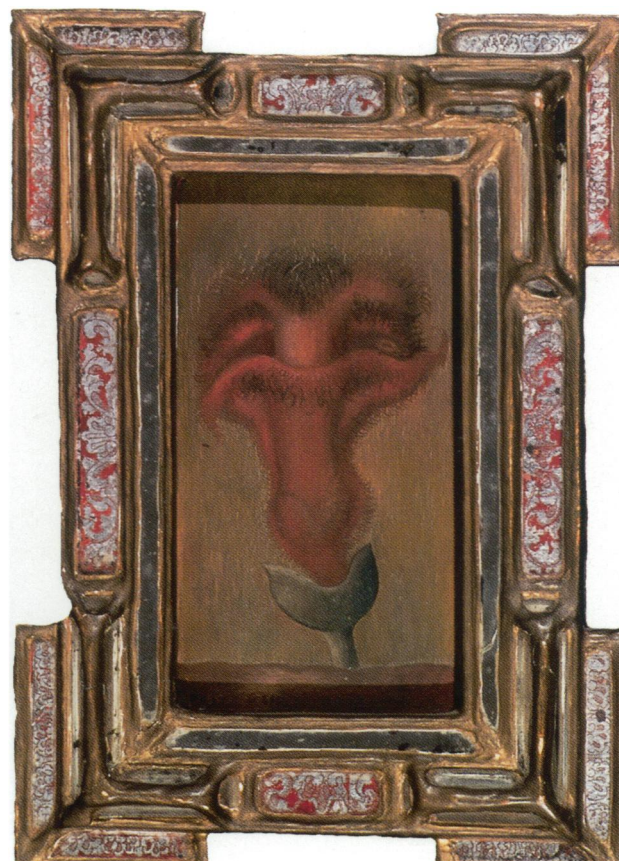
Pl. 13. Frida Kahlo, *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), oil on metal, 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Collection Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City.



Pl. 14. Frida Kahlo, *Itzcuintli Dog with Me* (1938), oil on canvas, 11" x 8". Private Collection, Dallas.



Pl. 15. Frida Kahlo, *Roots* (1943), oil on metal, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Private Collection, Houston, Texas.



Pl. 16. Frida Kahlo, *Xóchitl* (1938), oil on metal, 7 $\frac{1}{16}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Private Collection, Mexico City. Photo: Scott Metcalfe