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"Jacques believed that the collector was not the owner of the work but was instead its guardian, a simple link in the human chain which allows the work to survive the long odyssey from the studio to the museum."

- Pierre Schneider

The Gelman collection is widely regarded as the world's most significant private holding of 20th century Mexican art. With works dating from the 1910s to the 1990s, this exhibition represents the broad range of artistic developments and cultural forces influencing the development of Mexican Modernism during the last century -- from early experiments with European cubism and surrealism, to post-revolutionary efforts to develop an indigenous Mexican aesthetic, to the diverse styles and techniques of post-World War II abstraction and realism. Phoenix Art Museum is privileged to present this exhibition which offers visitors the opportunity to see the artworks as the Gelmans intended -- as an integrated whole reflecting the achievements of individual artists.

Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Twentieth-Century Mexican Art features 140 paintings, sculptures, drawings and photographs by many of the preeminent Mexican artists of the 20th century, including Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, María Izquierdo, José Clemente Orozco, Carlos Mérida, and Rufino Tamayo, as well as a number of significant contemporary figures such as Cisco Jiménez, Silvia Gruner, Gabriel Orozco, and Francisco Toledo, one of the most prestigious and original Mexican artists of the later 20th century. Still life, portraits and landscapes are special strengths of the Gelman Collection and this exhibition.

Jacques and Natasha Gelman saw art as an essential means to connect with their time and culture.

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1909, Jacques Gelman founded film distribution companies in France and Mexico and his fortune was established when he started representing the popular Mexican comic actor Mario Moreno, also known as "Cantinflas." In 1941, he married Natasha Zahalka, a Czech immigrant from Moravia, and the couple settled in Mexico City. It was there they began to assemble extraordinary collections of European and Mexican modern art.

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The Gelmans eventually donated their European paintings to New York's Metropolitan Museum. After Jacques Gelman's death in 1986, his wife continued to collect contemporary works until her death in 1998. The Gelman Estate retained and continues to add to the outstanding Mexican collection.

Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Twentieth-Century Art reflects the personal tastes of the Gelmans and their passion for Mexican art. The artists whose work they collected were not only giants of Mexican Modernism, but many also were the couple's friends. Several portraits of Natasha Gelman are featured in the exhibition by such preeminent artists as Diego Rivera, Gunther Gerzso, Frida Kahlo, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Rufino Tamayo.

Icons of 20th century Mexican art Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera are represented through some of their most famous and compelling paintings, such as a striking group of Kahlo's innovative and symbolic self-portraits blending traditional Mexican motifs and Surrealism -- including Self-Portrait with Monkeys and Diego on My Mind. Rivera's painting Calla Lily Vendor, derived from one of his 1920s mural projects, and his early experiment with cubism, Última hora, are included.

Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Twentieth-Century Mexican Art: The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, the Dallas Museum of Art, and Phoenix Art Museum in collaboration with Robert Littman, former director of the Centro del Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico. A fully illustrated, bilingual English/Spanish catalogue accompanies the exhibition and is available in The Museum Store.

The exhibition is presented courtesy - Vergel Foundation, New York; Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA); and Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Conaculta).

The Arizona presentation is made possible by Diane and Bruce Halle and the Museum's Connoisseur's Circle. Significant promotional support is provided by Phoenix Magazine, KPNX-TV Channel 12, The Arizona Republic, La Voz, and Food City.

Phoenix Art Museum's presentation of Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Twentieth-Century Mexican Art reflects the Museum's strong commitment to Latin American art, as one of only a few museums across the country with a Latin American art collection. Complementing the exhibition, modernist Mexican works from the Museum's collection will be featured in Mexican Modern in the Rineberg Gallery.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera images © 2001 Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. Cinco de Mayo No. 2, Col. Centro, Del. Cuauhtémoc, 06059, México, D.F.

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