

Nickolas Muray, *Frida Kahlo*, Fresno Art Museum, Feb 27, 2016.

“In May 1931, photographer Nickolas Muray (1892-1965) traveled to Mexico on vacation where he met Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). The two started a romance that continued on and off for the next ten years and a friendship that lasted until the end of their lives.

Approximately 50 photographic portraits taken of Frida Kahlo comprise the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Through the Lens of Nickolas Muray*. The photographs, dating from 1937 to 1946, explore Muray's unique perspective; in the 1930s and 1940s, he was Frida Kahlo's friend, lover, and confidant.”

*The exhibition has been organized by the Nickolas Muray Photo Archives*

Portraits of famous people are difficult to evaluate aesthetically because they cannot be isolated from the pre-existing persona we have of them. Portraits of famous deceased people are even more difficult to judge due to the buildup of information and misinformation. But the most difficult to evaluate are portraits of famous deceased people who have become icons to later generations. Frida Kahlo has entered into popular culture as a symbol of the modern independent women. Her art made her famous on a small scale. Her attitudes and life style (perceived or real) are making her famous on a grand scale. Her life is fixed and unchanging in historical fact. The interpretation of her life is evolving as our culture revolves around it.

Despite being in an art museum, this is a commercial venture. The pictures on display are digital reproductions by the Muray Archive. They are available from the archive as prints or posters on the internet. This is not evident at the museum show but a quick search on the net locates archives' sales.

Kahlo's appearance is so uniform in these images that either she or the photographer chose to photograph the same women over and over.

The digital reproductions look contrastingly modern. The colors are suspiciously bright and the edges are crisp. I wonder if in fact these images have been re-interpreted (photoshopped) to suit our current aesthetic. If so, is that any more or less valid than the interpretations that Muray made when he created them.

The images are stunning and the show includes biographical information, reproductions of hand written letters, and a video.

