



ARTY STORIES

Book 7

PAST VOICES
Stories behind the Art

**Art and life
across the centuries**



Ian Matsuda, FCA, BA (Hons)

for
Noko

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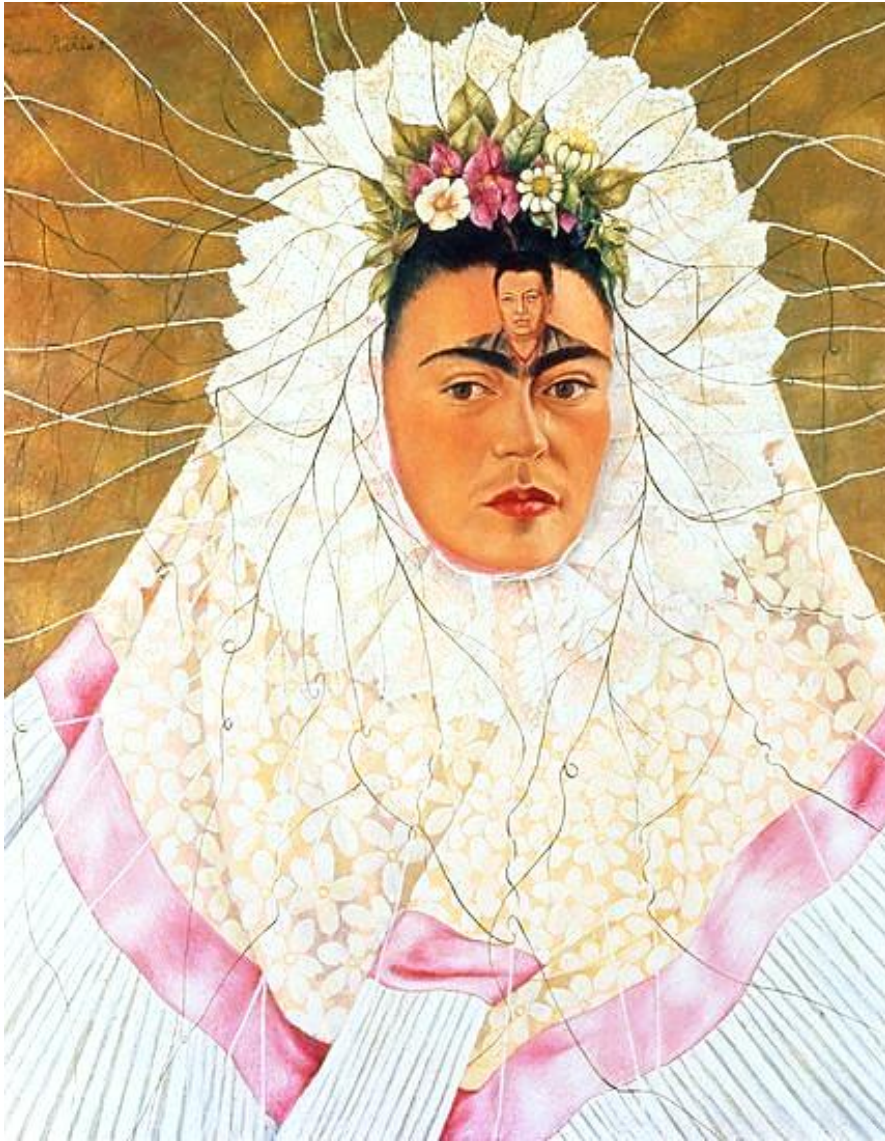
Book 7

PAST VOICES

Stories behind the art

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FRIDA KAHLO 1907-1954

'Diego on my mind'

Self-portrait, 1943 Natasha Gelman Collection

My Diary

September 1923

Oh joy, back to school and meet up with my lovely Arias and talk of socialist revolution! My parents think he is too extreme and have forbidden me to see him - tricky! But we will write and soon be back together.

September 17, 1925

Horrors! Such pain, the bus home crashed and I have been pierced 'the way a sword pierces a bull'! The agony when my friends pulled the guard rail out of my pelvis! The doctors aren't sure if I will ever walk again! So many drugs, I am having hallucinations of skeletons. All from changing buses with Arias.

December, 20, 1925

So many bones broken, my body has been wrecked. But at last I am home - confined to bed, but I can still paint with an easel propped up. I am even using a mirror to paint a self-portrait. I have taken my first steps!



June, 1928



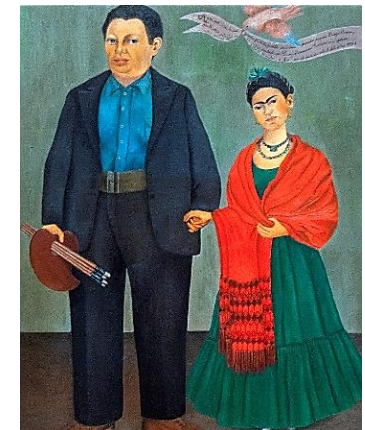
I must know if I am good enough to earn my living as an artist so I took my work to the famous artist Diego Rivera. He said that they had 'an unusual energy of expression, personality and that I was an authentic artist' - Wow! He has even painted me holding ammunition in his giant mural of the Mexican Revolution. 124 frescoes! (1) I am immortalised!

August, 21, 1929

Yee! - against my mother's wishes, we are married. But she worries that he is 20 years older and it is 'a marriage between an elephant and a dove'! But I feel 'we are born for each other'. Even if he has short lived affairs, we are bound by 'loyalty not fidelity'. It's all power and intensity.

'The Arsenal', 1928

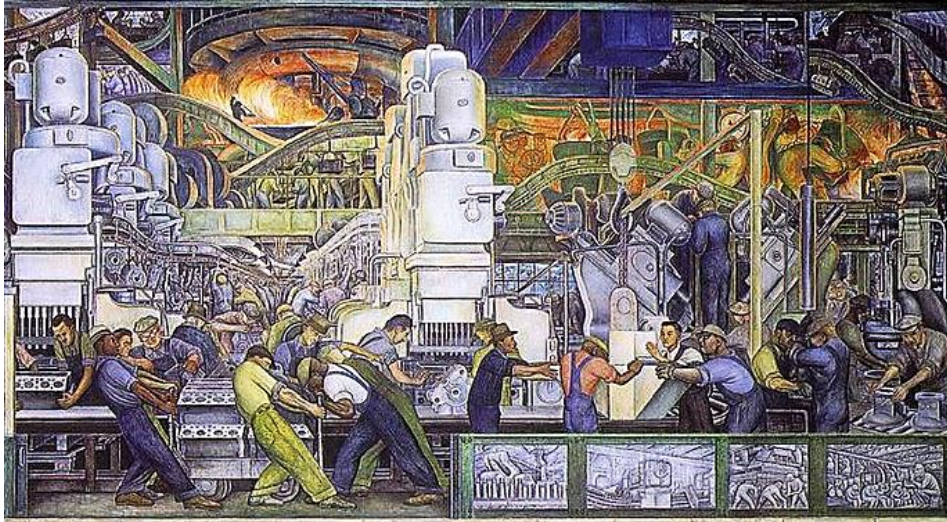
Our wedding, Frida Kahlo, San Francisco, 1931



November, 1931

Our trip to New York has been a great success and I am to share a show with Diego. But each of our affairs cast a shadow between us. My pain only increases and now I have lost our baby. I despise the capitalism of America.

April, 1932



We have moved to the hard city of Detroit and I find my suffering in body and in mind has led me to produce religious paintings. I am so depressed. Oh Diego, there have been 'two accidents in my life, the bus and you - you are by far the worst!'

Diego has again drawn praise and criticism in equal measure with his 27 giant frescoes. He thrives on deliberately stirring emotions - including mine! But I share the excitement and inspiration in my own work. We must go back home to Mexico, where I have always dreamed of having my own show.

'Detroit Industry', 1932-33

January, 1935

My body has been assaulted with abortions, appendicitis and now the amputation of two toes. I feel weak and now Diego has even seduced my younger sister! I am moving out. We must surely part for both our sakes. But?

January, 1937

Now we are thrust into the political limelight as Leon Trotsky and his wife flee Stalin and come to live with us. What conversations over dinner to hear how communism has been hijacked by Stalin. Leon feels that his Russia is lost and is now a police state. He is a very engaging and vibrant man. I feel very drawn to him - infidelity?!

November, 1939

Diego and I are divorced. I missed him so when we were apart. We are both worn down by our infidelities. Now my art opens up to absorb me. My pain can be shown in these works - a pain that the whole world is now feeling.

September, 1940

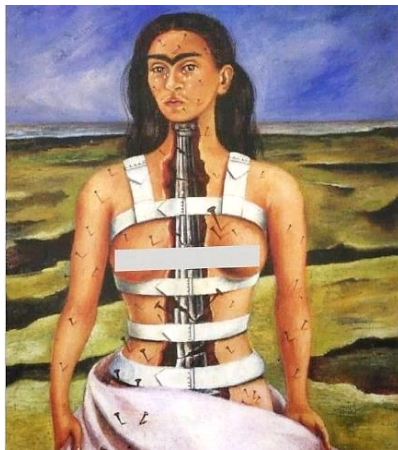
My paintings have a new life, portraying myself in my endless suffering. Diego is ever-present 'on my mind'. (depicted in the opening picture of the wedding dress) He visits every day and encourages all my work, lifting me to new heights.

December, 8, 1940

We are together again. He says he 'misses us'. We feel so much for each other, despite all the torments we have made. But we must live apart if we are to live together. My supportive corsets are giving less and less relief on my spine and it's so hard to stand at my easel. I feel my body collapsing each day.



November, 1950



I seem to have been in this hospital for ever, but the new bone graft to my spine seems to have finally helped. Spending time in my wheelchair has let me dedicate myself to the communist cause. People now listen to me -my suffering seems now to have a purpose. I pray for peace in the world.

May, 1953

My own exhibition, here in Mexico! No doctor will keep me from going! I sent my bed on ahead and they carried me in! Such joy, such pride, such sadness, such pain.

'The Broken Column', Frida Kahlo, 1944

February, 1954

My life has now lost its purpose - I feel lost - 'they have amputated my leg and given me centuries of torture'. I have tried to end it all, but it is the thought of 'Diego that keeps me, through my vain idea that he would miss me. I have never suffered more'. 'I joyfully await the exit - and I hope I never return'.



Frida died in July, 1954, but her works would go on to be declared part of the Mexico's cultural heritage and tour the world. (2) The Tate Modern considers her 'one of the most significant artists of the 20th century'. Diego is now considered the greatest Mexican artist of the 20th century, credited with the reintroduction of fresco painting in modern art. Diego died in 1957, 3 years after Frida.



CECILIA GALLERANI c.1473-1536

'Lady with an Ermine'

Leonardo da Vinci, 1489-90, National Museum of Poland

My diary

1486, my 13th Birthday

Great changes - having studied with my brothers, the time has come for me to move and live with women - actually nuns! It has been decided that I should continue my studies in the Monastero Nuovo, which has a great library where I can read poetry with tutors who can speak Latin with me.

It will be hard to leave my family, but it is for my future and I have high hopes!

1489, my 17th year



The grand Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, came to the monastery to hear my poetry. Apparently, he had heard of me through the young Ippolito d'Este who shares my interest. His father; the Duke of Ferrara; is a great patron of the arts. He is a friend of this Duke of Milan who is betrothed to his daughter and Ippolito's sister, Beatrice. All between families!

The Duke of Milan - Ludovico - is very handsome and seemed to take an interest in me and we enjoyed sharing our interests. Perhaps this is the future I have waited for. I have high hopes!

He has commissioned the great artist Leonardo da Vinci to paint my portrait. He has suggested including an Ermine, celebrating Ludovico's prestigious appointment to the Order of the Ermine., by the King of Naples last year. (Book 3)

Cecilia, 'La belle Ferronniere', Leonardo da Vinci, 1490-1495, Louvre, Paris

1489

The Duke has taken me to live in his castle and join all the wonderful balls and receptions. It is a very grand society from all over Europe! The Duke has become the love that I had always wished and hoped for.

1490

The betrothal to Beatrice has fallen due, but the Duke is very confused, as Beatrice is very immature and poorly educated - indulging her time in dancing and parties. But he is committed.

But Ludovico is so happy that I am with child and has heaped great privileges on my brothers. My life today is wonderful.

17, January 1491

Ludovico has finally married Beatrice and I fear that I will have to leave the castle. Ludovico has promised a house and land in Pavia, but first I am to have my child here.

3, May 1491

I have a wonderful boy Cesare Sforza and his father - Ludovico - has even given me the town of Saronno!

'Portrait of a Woman' c.1490-92, Leonardo da Vinci, Beatrice d'Este, aged possibly just 15-17



27 July, 1492



My life here has been full of wonder and we are both so proud of our son Cesare - although he's now a little chubby!

But, Oh dear, great change! Beatrice has become so upset that Ludovico should give us both the same dress that now I need to step out of Ludovico's life! I am to be married to Count Carminati di Brambilla, but Ludovico has lavished a great dowry for me and our son Cesare is to have a palace in Milan in his own right.

I am sad yet happy.

'Ludovico Maria Sforza', Unknown Master, 1494-1495, Palazzo Sforzesca, Milan

29 April, 1498

The Count and I have a wonderful family life with our own children and now - as a woman of fortune and society - the time has come for me to put my younger days behind me. Beatrice has sadly died in childbirth, causing great loss to Ludovico who had come to love her. That great patron of the arts; Isabella d'Este; is looking for an artist to paint her portrait and has asked to see Leonardo's portrait of me when I was just 17 - 'The Ermine'. It is so unlike me today. A different world that I have left behind. From mistress to Countess!

May, 1498

Oh dear, Isabella has decided not to commission Leonardo as his work is too revealing and lifelike! I now have no interest as to what happens to the painting. I'll leave it to 'fate'.

27, May, 1508

I have just heard that Ludovico has died in very poor circumstances, having been thrown into a dungeon by the French King, who had defeated him in the battle for Milan. The great man and Cesare's father, is no more.

Cecilia's father was not born into nobility, but held several posts at the Milanese court, although he died when she was just seven. Unusually for the time, she was educated in Latin alongside her six brothers and grew into a lively conversationalist, accomplished musician, singer and poet. These qualities would have been appreciated by the cultured Duke of Milan. Although he had several mistresses, he always had the courtesy to have one at a time and was believed to have been faithful to Cecilia during their three years together, officially recognising their son. Having been defeated by Louis XII of France, he spent 8 years in comfortable captivity, but was thrown into the dungeon when he tried to escape.

Cecilia had a long and happy marriage with Count Carminati (known as 'Il Bergamino', a popular liqueur!) for 23 years. Her son Cesare was appointed to abbot and latterly Canon of Milan, although dying young at just 21. Cecilia retired to her castle near Cremona, 75km from Milan and lived to be 63. She was universally admired for her patronage of the arts, establishing the first salon in Europe to display works of art. (3)

The later history of 'Lady with an Ermine' is unclear until it was acquired by a Polish Prince in 1489. It was rescued in 1830 from the invading Russian Army and moved to Paris to then escape the German occupation of Paris in 1871. During WW1 the painting was moved from Poland to Dresden for safekeeping and later seized by the Nazis in 1940. Subsequently it was recovered by the allied armies and returned to Poland in 1946.

If only Cecilia had known the journey that her portrait would take when she left it to 'fate'. A forgotten story.



RUBY BRIDGES, born 1954

'The Problem We All Live With'

Norman Rockwell, 1964, Private Collection

My diary

March 1960

I have just passed my test and can go to the 'big' school! Five other children have also passed, so I'll have friends

4, November, 1960

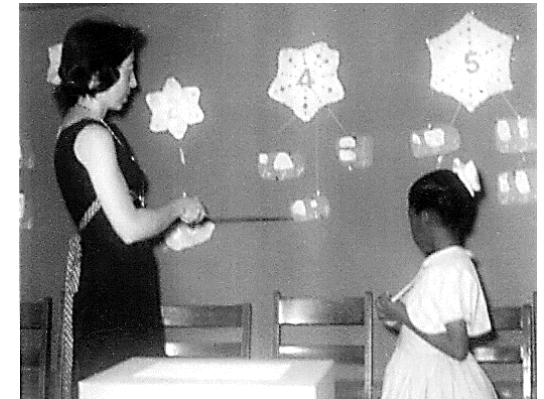


Today was my first day at my new school and it was very strange. Mother gave me a lovely new white dress and we were taken to the school in a big car by four big white men. Mother said they were like policemen. They said the President had sent them and they told me to 'walk straight and don't look back'!

It was like a Mardi Gras with lots of people waving and shouting and throwing things, like tomatoes - very strange. And then we spent the day in the Principal's office without any classes and we came home.

5, November, 1960

The tall men - came again today to take me to school and I met my teacher Miss Henry in our very own classroom. She is very nice and has come all the way from Boston. I wish there were other children in the class.



My friends haven't come to this school and a lot of the other children and teachers seem to have left. The people outside were still shouting and singing. They had a little black doll in a coffin! They don't seem to like my being here.

Miss Henry and I had a nice lunch together in class, which saved going to the café.

May, 1961

After a long 6 months Miss Henry has at last brought some other white children into a few classes and they are really nice. I was starting to feel lonely, but I still had no-one to play with at break. Miss Henry makes the lesson really fun and I am learning so much. We don't miss a day, but then neither do the people outside. They must get tired soon - coming and shouting each day.

Summer, 1961

My father has lost his his job at the gas station, but one of our neighbours has given him a new one. Then grandpa and grandma have been turned off their land. It is very sad - we can't even shop at the grocery store and father has had to leave us. Mother says it is for his new job, but he isn't very far away and she is very sad.

Dr Coles still comes to the house to help and I think his cousin may have helped with those lovely dresses that I can wear to school.

September, 1961

Oh, I am so pleased as I am at last joining the other classes and no-one is shouting anymore so the big men don't come to take me to school. One of them said that 'I showed a lot of courage and never cried. That I just marched along like a little soldier and they were all very proud of me'. Can you imagine!

Much later in my life



I graduated from High School, married had a family and worked as a travel agent. Then I was really lucky to set up the Ruby Bridges Foundation to help people from different backgrounds live a better life together. I have the experience!

I think the lesson I have learned in my life is that you can't judge people from the colour of their skin. You have to give yourself time to get to know them, no matter what they look like.

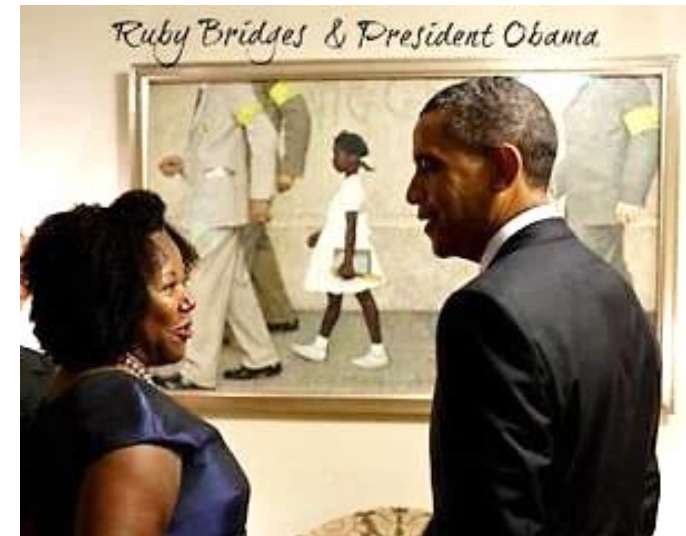
If I am to make a difference, I really had to explain that to kids.

The 50th anniversary

In January 1964 Norman Rockwell painted my first day at school and then in 2011 President Barack Obama had it hung in the White House, where I met him and Norman Rockwell. The President told us that 'If it hadn't been for you guys, I might not be here and we wouldn't be looking at this painting together'. (Book 5)

This was the highlight of my life when Barack Obama opened his arms and hugged me in front of that picture.

July 15, 2011 The White House, with Barack Obama



Desegregation in schools was resisted in the southern states of America, to the extent that even the presidential candidate George Wallace, blocked the doors at one university. The entrance 'test' that Ruby Bridges passed, was designed to exclude black children from white schools, limiting their education and prospects in life. It took six years after segregation for the Supreme Court to declare this unconstitutional. Only then did white schools start to offer places to black children and then only on a very restricted basis.

Her parents' determination to 'take this step forward for all African-American children', cost them dear with her mother and father separating in the face of real hostility within their community. It was only with the help of equally brave white neighbours, that these changes would succeed and it wasn't until 2015 that the last school was ordered to de-segregate and all pupils were allowed to travel on the same school bus. (4) Ruby's story took 55 years to be realised.

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