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Moscow Hosts First Show of Kahlo and Rivera

A retrospective of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera finally comes to the Russian capital

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"The Bus" 1929 by Frida Kahlo **Courtesy of Dolores Olmedo Museum**

“Viva La Vida: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera” at the Manege Central Exhibition Hall may be the most anticipated exhibition this winter in Moscow. The show is a collaborative project between St. Petersburg’s Faberge Museum, the Link of Times Cultural and Historical Foundation, and Moscow City Department of Culture.

“Viva La Vida” showcases important works by both Frida Kahlo and her husband Diego Rivera, the best-known Mexican artists of the 20th century who are almost as well-known for their active participation in political and art movements.

Most of the works at the exhibition belong to the Dolores Olmedo Museum, which holds the largest collections of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in the world. “Of the 148 works that we own, we are showing forty pieces at this exhibit,” Adriana Jaramillo, Communications Director of the Dolores Olmedo Museum, said at the opening press conference at the Manege.

This is the first exhibit of works by these artists in Moscow, but not the first time the Faberge Museum has brought Kahlo’s paintings to Russia. A few years ago there was a highly publicized retrospective of Frida Kahlo in St. Petersburg. “We were a bit surprised that people were standing in line to see the exhibition even when it was freezing cold with a temperature of minus 22. But we know that a Frida Kahlo show is an art blockbuster,” said Adriana Jaramillo.

The Olmedo Museum brought to Moscow the artist’s earlier paintings such as “The Bus" and the mature iconic works “A Few Small Nips,” “Henry Ford Hospital” and “The Broken Column.” A significant collection of her portraits is also on view.

But the exhibition is not all about Kahlo. Unfortunately, today Diego Rivera is mostly known as Kahlo’s husband, but in fact, Rivera is “one of Mexico’s most important artists, a maestro,” Jaramillo said. Although he is most famous for his large-scale murals, his oeuvre “goes beyond muralism, and in this exhibition you’ll be able to take a journey through his artistic evolution,” she added.

Rivera’s masterpieces on display include “The Mathematician,” “Knife and Fruit in Front of the Window” and a watercolor entitled “The Family,” as well as works from his cubist period, scenes from some of his famous Mexican murals, portrayals of Mexican people, pre-Columbian images and portraits of his friends, including Irene Philipps, Dolores Olmedo’s daughter.

Also on view are some works that Rivera painted almost at the end of his life, including “Russian Drawings” produced during and after his second visit to the Soviet Union in 1956. The unexpected series of blue-eyed kids on sleds is hard to miss.

In the main hall, Frida’s works are juxtaposed with those of her husband. The side halls exhibit works by each of the artists separately. One of the highlights is the rarely shown four-meter mural “Glorious Victory” by Diego Rivera, which belongs to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, a gift from the artist to U.S.S.R.

At the hall in the back visitors will be able to see paintings by other Mexican artists who were active in the middle of the 20th century, all part of a large gift to the Soviet Union in 1945. These paintings are part of the Pushkin Museum collection but have never been exhibited before. You’ll also be able to see a few art objects from pre-Columbian era from private collections. There is also a large cinema hall, which shows several documentaries about the artists on a loop.

“This exhibition is a perfect display of how both artists viewed life: intimate, social, happy, tragic, personal. Each is an individual artist, each can stand alone and yet stand together, like at this spectacular exhibition,” Adriana Jaramillo said.

The exhibition is open till March 12. More information in Russian and ticket purchases can be

found here. There is an audio guide in Russian and English.

1 Manege Square. Metro Okhotny Ryad. moscowmanege.ru/en

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