


# Diego Rivera

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Diego Rivera	
	
Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera in 1932, Photo by: Carl Van Vechten	
<b>Birth name</b>	Diego María de la Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez
<b>Born</b>	December 8, 1886Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico
<b>Died</b>	November 24, 1957 (aged 70)Mexico City, Mexico
<b>Nationality</b>	Mexican
<b>Field</b>	Painting, Muralist
<b>Training</b>	San Carlos Academy
<b>Movement</b>	Mexican Mural Movement, Social Realism
<b>Influenced by</b>	Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Paul Cézanne
<b>Influenced</b>	Glenn Gant

**Diego María de la Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez** (December 8, 1886 – November 24, 1957) was a prominent Mexican painter born in Guanajuato, Guanajuato, an active communist, and husband of Frida Kahlo (1929–1939 and 1940–1954). His large wall works in fresco helped establish the Mexican Mural Renaissance. Between 1922 and 1953, Rivera painted murals among others in Mexico City, Chapingo, Cuernavaca, San Francisco, Detroit, and New York City.<sup>[1]</sup> In 1931, a retrospective exhibition of his works was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

## Early life



Amedeo Modigliani, *Portrait of Diego Rivera*, 1914.

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato, Guanajuato, to a well-to-do family. Rivera was descended, on his mother's side, from Jews who converted to Roman Catholicism, and, on his father's side, from Spanish nobility. Diego had a twin brother named Carlos, who died two years after they were born.<sup>[2]</sup> From the age of ten, Rivera studied art at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. He was sponsored to continue study in Europe by Teodoro A. Dehesa Méndez, the governor of the State of Veracruz.

After arrival in Europe in 1907, Rivera initially went to study with Eduardo Chicharro in Madrid, Spain, and from there went to Paris, France, to live and work with the great gathering of artists in Montparnasse, especially at La Ruche, where his friend Amedeo Modigliani painted his portrait in 1914.<sup>[3]</sup> His circle of close friends, which included Ilya Ehrenburg, Chaim Soutine, Amadeo Modigliani and Modigliani's wife Jeanne Hébuterne, Max Jacob, gallery owner Leopold Zborowski, and Moise Kisling, was captured for posterity by Marie Vorobieff-Stebelska (Marevna) in her painting "Homage to Friends from Montparnasse" (1962).<sup>[4]</sup>

In those years, Paris was witnessing the beginning of cubism in paintings by such eminent painters as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. From 1913 to 1917, Rivera enthusiastically embraced this new school of art. Around 1917, inspired by Paul Cézanne's paintings, Rivera shifted toward Post-Impressionism with simple forms and large patches of vivid colors. His paintings began to attract attention, and he was able to display them at several exhibitions.

## Career in Mexico

In 1920, urged by Alberto J. Pani, the Mexican ambassador to France, Rivera left France and traveled through Italy studying its art, including Renaissance frescoes. After Jose Vasconcelos became Minister of Education, Rivera returned to Mexico in 1921 to become involved in the government sponsored Mexican mural program planned by Vasconcelos.<sup>[5]</sup> (See also *Mexican Muralism*.) The program included such Mexican artists as José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo, and the French artist Jean Charlot. In January 1922,<sup>[6]</sup> he painted – experimentally in encaustic – his first significant mural *Creation*<sup>[7]</sup> in the Bolívar Auditorium of the National Preparatory School in Mexico City while guarding himself with a pistol against right-wing students.



Diego Rivera's mural depicting Mexico's history at the National Palace in Mexico City.

In the autumn of 1922, Rivera participated in the founding of the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, and later that year he joined the Mexican Communist Party<sup>[8]</sup> (including its Central Committee). His murals, subsequently painted



*En el Arsenal* detail, 1928

in fresco only, dealt with Mexican society and reflected the country's 1910 Revolution. Rivera developed his own native style based on large, simplified figures and bold colors with an Aztec influence clearly present in murals at the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico City<sup>[9]</sup> begun in September 1922, intended to consist of one hundred and twenty-four frescoes, and finished in 1928.<sup>[6]</sup>

His art, in a fashion similar to the steles of the Maya, tells stories. The mural "En el Arsenal" (*In the Arsenal*)<sup>[10]</sup> shows on the right-hand side Tina Modotti holding an ammunition belt and facing Julio Antonio Mella, in a light hat, and Vittorio Vidali behind in a black hat. However, the *En el Arsenal* detail shown does not include the right-hand side described nor any of the three individuals mentioned. Rivera's radical political beliefs, attacks on the church and clergy, as well as his dealings with Trotskyists and left-wing assassins made him a controversial figure even in communist circles. Leon Trotsky lived with Rivera and Kahlo for several months while exiled in Mexico.<sup>[11]</sup>

Some of Rivera's most famous murals are featured at the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo near Texcoco (1925–27), in the Cortés Palace in Cuernavaca (1929–30), and the National Palace in Mexico City (1929–30, 1935).<sup>[12] [13]</sup>

## Later work abroad



Portrait of Diego Rivera, 19 March 1932. Photo by: Carl Van Vechten

In the autumn of 1927, Rivera arrived in Moscow, accepting an invitation to take part in the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution. Subsequently, he was to paint a mural for the Red Army Club in Moscow, but in 1928 he was ordered out by the authorities because of involvement in anti-Soviet politics, and he returned to Mexico. In 1929, Rivera was expelled from the Mexican Communist Party. His 1928 mural *In the Arsenal* was interpreted by some as evidence of Rivera's prior knowledge of the murder of Julio Antonio Mella allegedly by Stalinist assassin Vittorio Vidali. After divorcing Guadalupe (Lupe) Marin, Rivera married Frida Kahlo in August 1929. Also in 1929, the first English-language book on Rivera, American journalist Ernestine Evans's *The Frescoes of Diego Rivera*, was published in New York. In December, Rivera accepted a commission to paint murals in the Palace of Cortez in Cuernavaca from the American Ambassador to Mexico.<sup>[14]</sup>

In September 1930, Rivera accepted an invitation from architect Timothy L. Pflueger to paint for him in San Francisco, California. After arriving in November accompanied by Kahlo, Rivera painted a mural for the City Club<sup>[15]</sup> of the San Francisco Stock Exchange for US\$2,500<sup>[16]</sup> and a fresco for the California School of Fine Art, later relocated to what is now the Diego Rivera Gallery at the San Francisco Art Institute.<sup>[14]</sup> Kahlo and Rivera worked and lived at the studio of Ralph Stackpole, who had suggested Rivera to Pflueger. Rivera met Helen Wills Moody, a famous tennis player, who modeled for his City Club mural.<sup>[16]</sup> In November 1931, Rivera had a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Kahlo was present at the opening of the New York MoMA show.<sup>[17]</sup> Between 1932 and 1933, he completed a famous series of twenty-seven fresco panels entitled *Detroit Industry* on the walls of an inner court at the Detroit Institute of Arts. During the McCarthyism of the 1950s, a large sign<sup>[18]</sup> was placed in the courtyard defending the artistic merit of the murals while attacking his politics as "detestable."



*Detroit Industry, North Wall, 1932-33. Detroit Institute of Arts.*



*Detroit Industry, South Wall, 1932-33. Detroit Institute of Arts.*



Man, Controller of the Universe

His mural *Man at the Crossroads*, begun in 1933 for the Rockefeller Center in New York City, was removed after a furor erupted in the press over a portrait of Vladimir Lenin it contained. The American poet Archibald MacLeish wrote six "irony-laden" poems about the mural.<sup>[19]</sup> *The New Yorker* magazine published E. B. White's poem "I paint what I see: A ballad of artistic integrity".<sup>[20]</sup> As a result of the negative publicity, a further commission was canceled to paint a mural for an exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair. Rivera issued a statement that with the money left over from the commission of the mural at Rockefeller Center (he was paid in full though the mural was supposedly destroyed. Rumors have floated

that the mural was actually covered over rather than brought down and destroyed.), he would repaint the same mural over and over wherever he was asked until the money ran out.

In December 1933, Rivera returned to Mexico, and he repainted *Man at the Crossroads* in 1934 in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. This surviving version was called *Man, Controller of the Universe*. On June 5, 1940, invited again by Pflueger, Rivera returned for the last time to the United States to paint a ten-panel mural for the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. *Pan American Unity* was completed November 29, 1940. As he was painting, Rivera was on display in front of Exposition attendees. He received US\$1,000 per month and US\$1,000 for travel expenses.<sup>[16]</sup> The mural includes representations of two of Pflueger's architectural works as well as portraits of Kahlo, woodcarver Dudley C. Carter, and actress Paulette Goddard, who is depicted holding Rivera's hand as they plant a white tree together.<sup>[16]</sup> Rivera's assistants on the mural included the pioneer African-American artist, dancer, and textile designer Thelma Johnson Streat. The mural and its archives reside at City College of San Francisco.<sup>[21]</sup>

## Work in museum collections

- Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona
- Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois
- Arthur Ross Gallery, University of Pennsylvania
- Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Great Britain
- Blaisten Collection Museum, Tlatelolco, Mexico City
- Centro Cultural MUROS, Cuernavaca, Mexico
- City College of San Francisco, California
- Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio
- DePaul University Museum, Chicago, Illinois
- Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan
- Diego Rivera House and Study Museum, Mexico City
- Dolores Olmedo Museum, Mexico City
- Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California
- Franz Mayer Museum, Mexico City
- Frida Kahlo Museum (Casa Azul), Coyoacan, Mexico City
- Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Guilford College Art Gallery, North Carolina
- Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia
- Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California
- McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City
- Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin
- Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City
- Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli, Coyoacán, Mexico City
- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL), Mexico City
- Museo Soumaya, Mexico City
- Museum of Modern Art, New York City
- National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



At Plaza San Jacinto, Mexico City.

- Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona
- Pinacoteca Diego Rivera, Xalapa, Mexico
- Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island
- San Diego Museum of Art, California
- São Paulo Museum of Art, Brazil
- Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Iran

## Personal life

Rivera began drawing when he was only three, just a year after his twin brother's death. He had been caught drawing on the walls. His parents, rather than punishing him, installed chalkboards and canvas on the walls for the young painter to make use.



House of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo (built by Juan O'Gorman in 1930)



In Guanajuato, near his boyhood home

As an adult, Rivera was a notorious womanizer who had fathered at least one illegitimate child. He married Angelina Beloff in 1911, and she gave birth to a son, Diego (1916–1918). Maria Vorobieff-Stebelska gave birth to a daughter named Marika in 1918 or 1919 when Rivera was married to Angelina (according to *House on the Bridge: Ten Turbulent Years with Diego Rivera* and Angelina's memoirs called *Memorias*). He married his second wife, Guadalupe Marín, in June 1922, with whom he had two daughters: Ruth and Guadalupe. He was still married when he met the art student Frida Kahlo. They married on August 21, 1929 when he was 42 and she was 22. Their mutual infidelities and his violent temper led to divorce in 1939, but they remarried December 8, 1940 in San Francisco. Rivera later married Emma Hurtado, his agent since 1946, on July 29, 1955, one year after Kahlo's death. He died on November 24, 1957.<sup>[22]</sup>

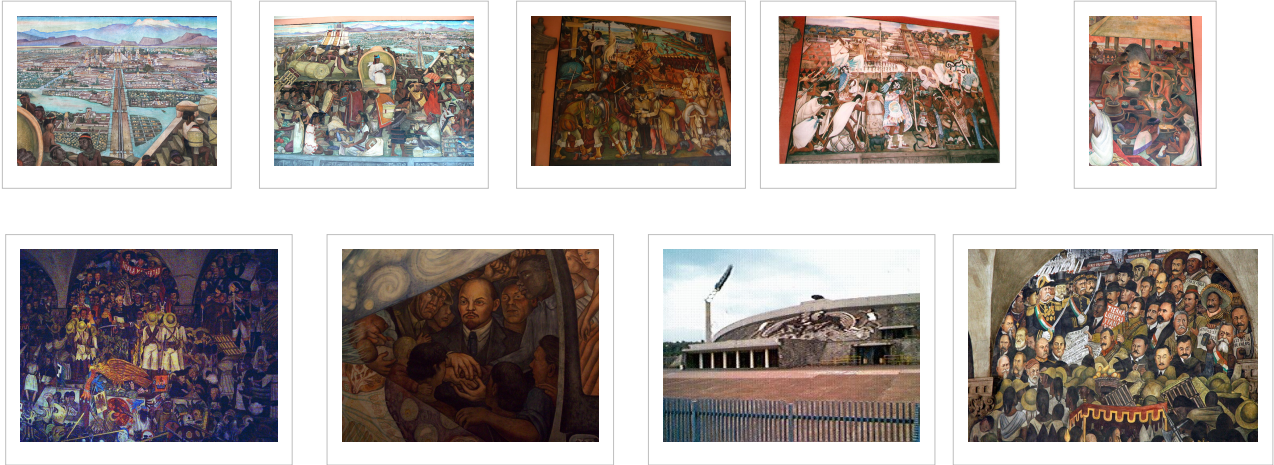
Rivera was an atheist. His mural *Dreams of a Sunday in the Alameda* depicted Ignacio Ramírez holding a sign which read, "God does not exist". This work caused a furor, but Rivera refused to remove the inscription. The painting was

not shown for 9 years – after Rivera agreed to remove the inscription. He stated: "To affirm 'God does not exist', I do not have to hide behind Don Ignacio Ramírez; I am an atheist and I consider religions to be a form of collective neurosis."<sup>[23]</sup>

## Cinematic portrayals

Diego Rivera was portrayed by Rubén Blades in 1999's *Cradle Will Rock*, and by Alfred Molina in 2002's *Frida*.

## Gallery



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- [4] ( – Scholar search ([http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=intitle:M.Marevna,+Homage+to+Friends+from+Montparnasse,+1962,+A+private+collection,+Moscow&as\\_publication=&as\\_ylo=&as\\_yhi=&btnG=Search](http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=intitle:M.Marevna,+Homage+to+Friends+from+Montparnasse,+1962,+A+private+collection,+Moscow&as_publication=&as_ylo=&as_yhi=&btnG=Search))) *M.Marevna, 'Homage to Friends from Montparnasse', 1962, A private collection, Moscow* (<http://web.archive.org/web/20071011211113/http://rusmuseum.ru/eng/exhibitions/?id=140&year=2003&pic=4>). The State Russian Museum. Archived from the original (<http://www.rusmuseum.ru/eng/exhibitions/?id=140&year=2003&pic=4>) on October 11, 2007. . Retrieved 2007-12-14
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The Tomb of Diego Rivera in the Rotunda of Illustrious Persons inside the Panteón de Dolores

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## External links

- Diego Rivera ([http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist\\_id=4942](http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4942)) at the Museum of Modern Art
  - Diego Rivera ([http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Art\\_History/Artists/R/Rivera,\\_Diego/](http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Art_History/Artists/R/Rivera,_Diego/)) at the Open Directory Project
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