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Treasures found in Kahlo museum

Wire services
April 10, 2005

A two-year renovation project at the home-turned-museum of legendary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo has uncovered a vast wardrobe of previously undiscovered clothing and other valuable artifacts.



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Commonly known as the Blue House for its indigo external paint job, Kahlo and her husband, famed muralist Diego Rivera, lived in the home in Mexico City's fashionable Coyoacan neighborhood until her death in 1954.

Rivera turned it into a museum four years after her death, but it wasn't until work to restore areas closed to visitors began last summer that officials found the 180 articles of clothing which included traditional Mexican dresses depicted in Kahlo's famous self-portraits, as well as shoes, shawls and Pre-Hispanic jewelry that belonged to her.

Also discovered were photographs taken by Kahlo's father, Wilhelm, a Hungarian photographer. There is also a pair of earrings believed to be a gift from Picasso.

"We were all surprised by the dimensions of this treasure," said Ignacio Custodia, an administrator of the Kahlo museum. He added that the artifacts were found when workers "opened spaces that were closed for many years." Many of the dresses recently discovered are from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, where seamstresses often tailor fashions according to centuries-old Indian tradition.

Kahlo was especially inspired by artistic traditions of Oaxaca's Tehuantepec, where women continue to hand-embroider traditional dresses according to Zapotec Indian traditions, said Hilda Trujillo, the Blue House's coordinator.

The painter looked up to the women of Tehuantepec, who often served as the head of their households, following strong matriarchal traditions, Trujillo said.

During her life, Kahlo became a mythic figure in Mexico famous for her marriage to Rivera as well as her communist ideals and her celebration of native Mexican dress and jewelry. After her death, her fame grew in this country and around the world.

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The Blue House is now one of Mexico's most-visited museums. Rivera ordered any artifacts recovered in the house to stay there making it the only place the newly discovered clothing will be on display.

Museum officials expect a special exhibition featuring the finds to be ready in about a year.

"This should attract more people to the museum," Trujillo said. "The articles are a very important part of her artistic life and personality."

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