

WHY WE CHOSE THIS MASTERPIECE

Diego Rivera, Mexican (1886 - 1957)

Diego Rivera, husband of Frida Kahlo, was one of the leading figures of the Mexican muralist movement, a major public art initiative that emerged in the 1920s. His first major mural, *The Creation* (1922), was painted at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. That same year, he co-founded the Union of Technical and Plastic Workers. In the 1930s, Rivera brought his art to the U.S., creating murals in San Francisco, Detroit, and New York—most famously a controversial piece for Rockefeller Center, destroyed in 1934. In 1938, he co-signed the Manifesto for an Independent and Revolutionary Art with André Breton. A towering figure—literally and artistically—Rivera dominated Mexican art from the post-revolutionary era until his death in 1957. He became synonymous with large-scale, socially conscious murals, reviving the fresco technique to portray the struggles and spirit of the working class. Rivera's *The Rivals* (1931) was the most expensive Latin American artwork when it sold at auction in 2018 for 9.7 million USD. The record was later broken by Rivera's wife: Frida Kahlo's *Diego y Yo* (1949) sold for 34.9 million USD underpinning the rising potential of the Latin American market.

Children portraits

Diego Rivera's portraits of children offer a more intimate counterpoint to the monumental themes of the Mexican Muralist movement. While his murals aimed to educate and mobilize the masses through grand narratives of revolution and indigenous identity, his child portraits focus on individual emotion and vulnerability. Often depicting working-class or indigenous children, these works reflect the same social concerns but through a personal, humanized lens. Executed with technical precision and emotional depth, Rivera's child portraits reveal his versatility and empathy. Though smaller in scale, they align with the muralist mission of elevating the marginalized, showing that Rivera's revolutionary ideals extended beyond public walls into private, poignant expressions of dignity and innocence. Prices for the artist's children portraits have been steadily increasing. Most recently, Christie's sold Rivera's *La ofrenda de Janitzio* (1947) for 5.5 million USD indicating a strong market appetite for this group of works and possibly marking a push in the interest in Rivera and his children portraits.

Academic relevance

Diego Rivera, a pivotal artistic and political phenomenon of the 20th century lastingly influenced artists after him and challenged the role of an artist in society. His politically charged oeuvre and his restless activities to promote social justice, labor rights and anti-imperialism through his art turned him into one of the most influential Latin American artists to date. Major museums and private collections hold his works and keep acquiring whenever possible: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which famously held Rivera's first exhibition in the United States in 1931, holds various works on paper by the artist. The Museum of Fine Arts Houston recently bought *La Bordadora* for over four million USD, more than five times its estimate. The Bernard and Edith Lewin collection, one of the most important private collections of Latin American art recently donated parts of their works to LACMA. While politically charged works are of great academic interest, scarcity and immobility of the murals turn smaller, easel works like his children portraits of great demand both for museums and for private collections.

(Sources: Artemundi 2025, Artprice 2025)