

★ **The Heart: Frida Kahlo in Paris****Marc Petitjean****Adriana Hunter, Translator**

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Marc Petitjean grew up with Frida Kahlo's disturbing painting "The Heart" hanging in his living room. As a child, he was terrified of the image of a huge bleeding heart lying in the sand, with its handless woman pierced by a metal rod staring at him out of the frame. That painting, and the unexpected arrival of a stranger bearing news of his father's mysterious relationship with Kahlo, led Petitjean to uncover much about a conflicted time in the artist's life, and about the father he barely knew.

When Kahlo arrived in Paris in early 1939, Europe knew her as the wife of the famed Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. But it wasn't long before the artist, who wore traditional Mexican Indigenous garb, her dark hair bound with ribbons and flowers, captured the attention of the Paris art scene on her own.

Petitjean's book reveals an intense, three-weeks-long affair between his father, Michel, and fiery, complex, passionate Kahlo, who had just been advised by Rivera that he was divorcing her. Though aware of his many infidelities and not above dalliances of her own, including an affair with Leon Trotsky, Kahlo's discovery of Rivera's relationship with her sister left her reeling. Feeling alone and abandoned in damp, grey Paris, her time with the sensitive, adoring Michel brought her comfort, and when the lovers parted, Kahlo gave him "The Heart" as a gift.

The book paints an intimate, unforgettable portrait of a brief but transformative time in Kahlo's life and of the turbulent beginnings of France's Surrealist Movement, which claimed the iconic Mexican artist as one of its own. Behind it all lies one of Kahlo's most powerful paintings—a tortured, confrontational work that speaks of pain and transformation, abandonment and betrayal, in a voice of quiet dignity.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2020)

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