Frida Kahlo: A Written Invitation
A collection of her letters at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA)

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) was a remarkable Mexican artist known for her self-portraits, which express her physical and emotional pain. Kahlo was also an avid writer, and her letters provide a glimpse into her personal life and artistic process.

The letters in the Frida Kahlo Papers at the Library and Research Center (LRC) at NMWA are a unique and intimate source of information. They reveal the day-to-day concerns of a young Kahlo as she develops as an artist and intellectual. The letters in the Frida Kahlo papers at the Betty Boyd Dettre Library and Research Center (LRC) at NMWA are quotidian and intimate in tone, revealing the day-to-day concerns of a young Kahlo as she develops as an artist and intellectual. The letters in the Frida Kahlo papers at the Betty Boyd Dettre Library and Research Center (LRC) at NMWA are quotidian and intimate in tone, revealing the day-to-day concerns of a young Kahlo as she develops as an artist and intellectual.

The Kahlo letters are varied enough in their content and nature that they lend themselves to a variety of uses. Exhibitions, the user, and advocacy are all great avenues to increase usage and visibility. This in turn would increase the value of the Kahlo collection, and make it accessible to a wider audience.

The collection was acquired by NMWA in 2007. “The value of the Kahlo collection is almost matched by the complexity of its management. The issue of copyright is regularly encountered and must be regularly documented and communicated to the curatorial and educational departments. The LRC plans to increase awareness and use of the collection, thereby empowering researchers, educators and learners new to Kahlo. Enhanced discoverability of the collection would allow it to be more accessible, while preserving the need for careful handling.

The Challenges

- Copyright
- Language
- Translation
- Discoverability and digitization

The iconic nature of Kahlo's work makes her letters an excellent and historical point for both new and returning users. Research on the part of curators and academics reveals new dimensions of Kahlo's legacy, such as calling for a reevaluation of her homosexuality, understanding her relationship with Leon Trotsky, and her sense of humor. The LRC would like to make the letters discoverable in Spanish, but currently lacks the staff and resources to translate finding aids and other collection materials. The LRC commits to diversifying our user base while remaining open to various uses of the material. Kahlo's fame is an attractive discussion point for potential funders, but the collection lacks the staff and resources to translate finding aids and other collection materials.