

Information on

Diego Rivera

Mexican, 1886–1957

Delfina Flores 1927

Oil on canvas, 32¼ x 26 in.

Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay

1950.124



Subject Matter

Rivera's *Delfina Flores* is an oil portrait of a young girl standing barefoot on a yellow woven mat that covers a red-orange Saltillo tile floor, before a light blue and white painted wall. Her hair is black, eyes are large and dark, and skin is brown. She is about five-to-seven years old. Delfina was the daughter of one of Rivera's housekeepers, an Otomi Indian. Her mother very likely made the girl's native dress, which has a white top with an embroidered neckline and sleeves; the dress is white down to her hips and the remainder is dark blue. A thin red-orange belt picks up the color of the floor as does the coral necklace and hair ribbons that Delfina wears.

Rivera painted narrow white, wide blue, and very wide orange bands as flat areas behind the figure, except for the markings of the rectangular orange tiles. The yellow mat defines the space, giving the illusion of three-dimensional perspective to the space. Modeling of the girl's face, arms, and skirt reinforce the sense of depth.

The child's hands are together at her waist, perhaps holding her necklace. Centered along the bottom of the painting is written "Retrato de la niña Delfina Flores: lo pinto Diego Rivera" (*Portrait of the child Delfina Flores: Diego River painted it*). At the top left corner, Rivera wrote "Mexico" and at the top right "1927." This painting is the first major oil painting that Marion Atkinson (aka Marion Koogler McNay) purchased for her art collection.

About the Artist

Diego Rivera was born with a twin, José Carlos, in Guanajuato, Mexico. His twin died at a year and a half. In 1892, the Rivera family moved to Mexico City. Around age ten, Diego entered an evening art course at the Academia de San Carlos. Three years later his father insisted he enroll in a military college, where he stayed for two weeks. He then was permitted to register for regular classes at San Carlos.

Early in 1907 Rivera arrived in Spain with a four-year scholarship to study in Europe. In 1909 he met a young Russian artist, Angeline Belof, who became his common-law wife. From 1908 to 1910, he traveled to Belgium, England, France, and Holland. Spending most of the next ten years in Paris, Rivera encountered works by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, as well as by living artists Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso. From 1913 to 1918, Cézanne's painting and Cubism greatly influenced Rivera's work. In 1914 he actually met Picasso. Also, that year the Galerie Berthe Weill gave Rivera a solo exhibition. Rivera later wrote about this period, "When it dawned on me that all this innovation had little to do with real life, I could surrender all the glory and acclaim Cubism brought me for a way in art truer to my inmost feelings." Searching for an art to express the complexities of his day and reach a wide audience, Rivera studied Renaissance frescoes in Italy and found his medium. In 1921, with a strong belief in public art, Rivera left Beloff and returned to Mexico.

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About the Artist continued

A member of the Communist Party, Rivera favored land reform and education for all classes, while he opposed racism and dictatorship in Mexico. Between 1922 and 1927, with Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos's support, Rivera painted murals, including those at the Secretaría de Educación Pública. In 1927–28, Rivera traveled to the Soviet Union for the tenth anniversary of the October revolution. Returning to Mexico, he continued to paint murals, but these were only part of his prolific output.

Diego Rivera stood over six feet tall and weighed over 300 pounds. He was not an attractive person; more than one of his lovers or wives called him "carasapo" (frog-face). In addition to the portrait *Delfina Flores*, the McNay has all but one of the 12 lithographs that Rivera made, including his *Zapata* (1932), a portrait of the revolutionary, land reform champion.

Quote from the Artist

The painter can and must abstract from many details in creating his painting. Every good composition is above all a work of abstraction. All good painters know this. But the painter cannot dispense with subjects altogether without his work suffering impoverishment.

Strategies for Student Tours

Primary Grades (ages 6-8):

Pose like *Delfina Flores*. What are you holding? Use your imagination. The artist painted Delfina several times [show pictures]. How have you changed from baby pictures until now?

Upper Elementary (ages 9-11):

How old do you think Delfina is in this painting? How would you describe her expression? What types of clothes is she wearing? Can we tell anything about her based on her dress?

Middle and High School (age 12-18) and Adults:

Who can translate the words at the bottom of the painting? Show other pictures of Delfina painted later in life. Talk about this being the first oil painting purchased by Mrs. McNay.

Sources Worth Consulting

The Virtual Diego Rivera Web Museum, <http://www.diegorivera.com/> (accessed May 17, 2012).

Los Niños Mexicanos de Diego Rivera, exhibition organized by Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes through the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, and Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo. Mexico City, 1998. *If you read Spanish, it's worth looking at this small book to learn about Rivera's motivation for doing portraits of children.*

Rivera, Juan Coronel, Fausto Ramirez, William H. Robinson, Dawn Ades, and Paul Karlstrom. *Diego Rivera: Art & Revolution*, exhibition organized by Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes through the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. Mexico City: Conaculta, 1999.

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Other Images Related to the McNay's Portrait *Delfina Flores*

Diego Rivera painted Delfina Flores several times from the time she was a young child until she was old enough to have her own child. He also painted other children dressed in clothing with colors similar to what Delfina wears in the McNay's portrait.



Diego Rivera, *Delfina Flores with her Niece Modesta*



Diego Rivera, *Delfina Flores*, 1938

Other Portraits of Children by Diego Rivera



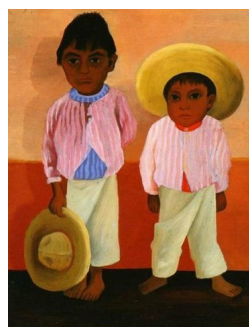
Diego Rivera, *Indian Girl with Coral Necklace*, 1926



Diego Rivera, *Kneeling Child on Yellow Background*, 1927



Diego Rivera, *Delfina and Dimas*, 1935



Diego Rivera, *My Godfather's Sons Modesto and Jesus Sanchez*, 1930



Diego Rivera, *Retrato de Ignacio Sanchez, la.* 1927