

## Diego Rivera



Mother's Helper, 1950  
oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in  
Private Collection



Self-Portrait, 1941  
oil on canvas, 24 x 16 7/8 in  
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton

## The Artist

### Diego Rivera

Born Guanajuato, Mexico 1886; died Mexico City, Mexico 1957

Growing up, Diego Rivera was known for befriending animals and entertaining afternoons in the forest by his home. His father set him up a studio for painting when he was two years old. In 1907, Rivera relocated to Europe where he studied painting for the next 14 years, mainly in Paris. While in Europe, Rivera encountered and found influence in Cézanne, Gauguin, Renoir, and Matisse. On his search for a form of painting to express the complexities of his day while reaching a wide audience, he stumbled across the answer. The fresco from Italy became his main source of inspiration and he returned home to Mexico. Frescoes are mural paintings done on fresh plaster. Diego used them at universities and public places to reach a wider audience. His works in Mexico showed the physical process of human development and the effects of technological progress. Soon his fame rose to gain him commissions in America from the California School of Fine Arts and the American Stock Exchange Luncheon Club, in which he investigated the struggles of the working class.

In 1932, the height of the Great Depression was hitting America hard. Henry Ford commissioned a mural on the walls of the Detroit Institute of Art from Diego and a year later the piece depicting the industrial life in the United States, focusing on car plant workers of Detroit was finished. The painting was a controversy, but a hit enough that the Rockefellers commissioned him for a painting; however, the piece was never finished because Diego and the Rockefellers disagreed on the inclusion of Lenin in the mural. Diego remained a greatly influential artist and a spearhead in the Mexican Renaissance in art for the remainder of his life.

## Art Movement

### Mexican Muralism Renaissance

The Mexican Renaissance came about at the end of the Revolution of Mexico. A Civil War in which the people of Mexico revolted against dictatorship, demanding that the land should be in the hands of the laborers who worked it. The government commissioned artists to create art that could educate people about Mexico's history, thus the rise of murals and of Diego's frescoes in Mexico.

## The Artwork

### *Mother's Helper*

In this painting, a mother hands her daughter a bouquet of flowers. The daughter shadows the mother's bent back. The colors of the painting are rich and vibrant.

## Discussion Suggestions

### **Discuss the Painting:**

- *Have the students describe what they see and what they think is happening.*
- *Why do you think the artist chose these colors? (bright and vivid)*
- *What shapes do you see repeated (look at the shape of the mother and the daughter, they shadow one another, what could this mean?)*
- *What expressions do you see on their faces? How does this painting make you feel?*

## Activity Idea

### **Recreating *Mother's Helper*:**

- Draw the steps on the white board for drawing the girl and woman. Point out the gentle slope of the woman's head, shoulders and back. The line extends from the top of her head to the curve of her knee. The heads are out of proportion with the bodies so do not worry if their bodies and heads are not perfect.
- Place trays of chalk pastels on each table, use newspapers to cover desks. Cleanup is easy with baby wipes.
- Use one finger to blend the chalk, move it in circles to blend the best. Use flat end of the chalk whenever possible.
- Have them color in their people in whatever colors they want, and to cover as much of the background, like Diego did, with little bits of purple around the edges of the colors.
- Encourage them to use bright, vivid colors in the clothes and flowers.
- Next have then students outline the people using the black oil pastel.

### **Materials Needed:**

- Black oil pastel crayon for outlining & chalk pastel for coloring
- 12 x 18 inch purple paper (sulphite paper)