

Episode 7: Jean Franco

Hola my darlings. Me llamo Jean Franco Pilas. [Spanish] . Within this story that unfolds before you, you will discover how I became Frida.

In 2007, I moved to San Francisco's Mission District. In 2008, the Frida Kahlo exhibition came to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. On her birthday, July 6th, I decided to dress up as Frida. It was the first time I had read her diary, which I had just purchased at the museum store.

Since I was a little bit hungry, I decided to grab a sandwich, get some coffee, and eat it outside of the museum's cafe. Deeply engrossed in the diary while thumbing through its pages, a voice of a woman interrupted my thoughts and said, "Happy birthday, Frida. This is a ticket to go see exhibition," and that René Yañez is looking for me.

This is one of those memories that I will always remember until the day I die. Little did I know at that time, the significance of that single moment in time. I rode my bike ferociously up Valencia Street and made a left onto 24th towards Galería de la Raza, where I met René Yañez and his son, Rio.

They, at this point, was putting together the *Pasión por Frida*, a tableaux vivants bringing together community and art through the passionate expression of Frida Kahlo, the great artist. The San Francisco Museum of Art's closing celebration of her exhibition.

In 2010, I get an email from a mutual friend who worked at the MoMA and told me that my picture is going to be published in the San Francisco MoMA's 75th anniversary book. I was page 413.

Some years later, I finally was able to save some money and purchase my ticket early so I could fly into Mexico City and visit the Frida Kahlo Museum for the first time in this lifetime. Since I wanted to save some money, I had bought my ticket months in advance.

Before I was to fly for Mexico City, the universe gave me another gift. The de Young Museum was preparing for their Jean Paul Gaultier, Frida Kahlo fashion catwalk runway. I immediately went to Encantada, which was two blocks away from my house. There in the back, I encountered Mia Gonzalez and Martina Ayala, and so another chapter begins.

One day at the rehearsal, I remember meeting David de la Torre, who was at that time the director of the Mexican Museum. He pulled me aside and encouraged me to dress more up as Frida. Of course, I was telling him that this summer was going to be my first time in Mexico City.

If I were to describe my visit to Mexico City at Frida Kahlo Museum in one word, it would be a recharge because I felt this energy that felt like it was part of me. I just soaked it in like a rechargeable battery.

As my adventures in Mexico City unfolded, I met so many people that are part of my history. One of my own excursions in Mexico, I met Grant Peterson, who saw my resemblance and asked me if he could take my photo at the Casa Azul.

I met him there a few days later. I remembered waking up and it was pouring rain. Thank God that by the time I arrived at the museum, the rain had just stopped. I was there outside waiting in line.

This Frida tour bus comes along and the driver yells, "Ay, Frida. [Spanish] ." [laughs] I said, "OK. OK. Everyone make way. Please let me in." [laughs] Everybody started laughing.

I even freaked out one of the museum attendants that day because he saw me and he says, "I've seen so many people come to this house dressed up. But you, you scare me. You have her energy."

Even [indecipherable 5:36] , the museum director saw me and asked what was I doing being photographed? I says, "This was a project of discovery." Then, he saw how many people wanted to take a photograph with me. It really touched his heart because he said he saw something that I was doing, was making people happy. He said, "This is your house now. Welcome to Mexico City."

Sadly, my two-week adventure in Mexico City had to end. I had to come back to San Francisco. Also, I went back to Encantada and told Mia what had happened to me in Mexico City over many, many shots of tequila. I miss Encantada so much because it feels like the community of the Mission and District at that time...