

Episode 4: Linda Larissa Gamino

My name is Linda Larissa Gamino and I am a San Francisco-based dancer, choreographer, performance artist, and entertainer. It is practically impossible for me to discuss Frida Kahlo's influence on me without mentioning my tia, Martha Estrella, who is a San Francisco artist and activist.

Not only did my tia, Martha, introduce me to Frida Kahlo's work when I was a child, but she was also my first theater and mime instructor, and serves as an artistic mentor to me to this day.

Growing up, I loved moving to music, and with the encouragement of my family and the rich, colorful tapestry that is San Francisco's Mission District, I've been able to explore various styles of dance and performance, including Mexican folk dance.

Similar to Frida's own disabilities, I experienced my own back injury as a young adult. Although my injury was not to the extent of Frida's, my injury did halt my ability to perform for several years. It was then, Frida's work took on new meaning to me. Frida's example of resilience led me to dedicate my time to discover myself and my own artistry.

In 2008, I was invited by René Yañez to create and perform an original performance art piece interpreting the life of Frida Kahlo as a part of the closing ceremony for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Frida Kahlo exhibition.

Preparing for the event really tested my physical abilities at the time. My focus on creating the piece was to show the various sides of Frida and the different stages in her life. What I didn't expect was for the piece to allow me to share my own story of resilience with the audience.

The whole experience solidified my need to create and push my own physical boundaries, and I am grateful that René gave me the opportunity to reclaim myself as a performer.

Since then, I have been invited to perform and make appearances as Frida. I've returned to dance. I've also debuted original performance art pieces at various Bay Area art institutions, including SOMArts and the de Young.

Being able to perform and collaborate with other artists over various platforms has broadened my source of inspiration. I've seen my own interpretation of Frida and vision of myself as an artist evolve.

In 2016, I toured nationally as a member of Fiesta Mexico Americana, a celebration of Mexican American heritage, featuring Grammy award winning band, Los Lobos and Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Carlos Moreno.

I've also gone on to become the artistic director of Ensembles Ballet Folklórico de San Francisco, where I've not only been able to teach and perform, but assist with choreography, assemble vestuario and work on staging as well.

It's fair to say that I've learned many lessons from Frida, and that as long as we have open hearts and open minds, we can continue to grow. We are all storytellers, and as storytellers, we are responsible for learning from the past, defining the present, and hopefully inspire the future.

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