



FRIDA (SALMA HAYEK) AND DIEGO (ALFRED MOLINA) LAUGHING TOGETHER.

Passions and Ideals

Life with Frida and Diego

FRIDA: Directed by Julie Taymor. Screenplay by Clancy Sigal, Diane Lake, Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas, based on Hayden Herrera's 1983 biography. Produced by Jay Polstein, Lizz Speed, Nancy Hardin, Lindsay Flickinger, Roberto Sneider, Sarah Green and Salma Hayek. Executive producers Mark Amin, Brian Gibson, Mark Gill, Jill Sobel Messick and Amy Slotnick. Cinematographer, Rodrigo Prieto. Editor, Francoise Bonnot. Production design, Felipe Fernandez del Paso. Original music, Elliot Goldenthal. Starring Salma Hayek and Alfred Molina, with Ashley Judd, Geoffrey Rush, Antonio Banderas, Mia Maestro, Roger Rees, Edward Norton, Saffron Burrows and Valeria Golina. Singers, Caetano Veloso, Lila Downs, Chavela Vargas. Miramax Films, 2002. R. 122 minutes.

If you missed *Frida's* brief appearance last winter, catch it now before it leaves the big screen, because it is a visual treasure. Mexico City in the 1920s and '30s was alive with color, and painters Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek) and Diego Rivera (Alfred Molina) were two of the most colorful people imaginable.

Diego was already a well-established muralist and world-renowned painter by the time Frida met him. She was recovering from a terrible accident that affected her for the rest of life, but she wanted to paint if he said she had the talent. Both were Bolsheviks, as were their friends. Julie Taymor's film wisely places the two of them at the center of Frida's life, even though Frida's fame has eclipsed Diego's since her death at 47 in 1954. And despite their stormy relationship, they were friends who complemented each other both as artists and as lovers. Frida married him twice.

Frida's work includes 200 emotionally revealing self-portraits, and the film goes a long way toward showing why. She had 35 operations following her accident in 1925 and tried any number of experimental treatments to fix the beautiful body that gave her such excruciating pain. As a result of severe pelvic and back injuries, she was frequently confined to bed, where she painted — her only model herself. While much of her art expresses physical distress, other paintings show her love of rich Tehuana costumes, hair ornamentation, large stone jewelry, exotic pet peacocks and monkeys and her deep joy in an active social life.

One of my favorite scenes is at a party Frida attends with Diego before they become lovers. Diego gets into an argument with rival painter David Siquieros (Antonio Banderas), which the hostess, photographer Tina Modotti (Ashley Judd), turns into a drinking contest. Whoever drinks the most gets to dance with me, she announces, setting an opened whiskey bottle on the table. After Diego and David, Frida takes a huge swig, then leads Tina in

a steamy tango. Diego is riveted. It's all over for him.

The film follows Diego and Frida to New York, where Diego has been commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller (Edward Norton) to paint a mural for his building. Caught up as the city's celebrity darling, Diego is whisked from one adoring public affair to numerous private affairs, while Frida whiles away her time with one of his previous lovers, played by Saffron Burrows. Frida's hilarious fantasy of Diego as King Kong is priceless.

Later, Russian exile Leon Trotsky (Geoffrey Rush) falls in love with Frida and proves himself an ardent lover. Trotsky and his wife reside in the home of Frida's father, Guillermo Kahlo (Roger Rees), while Stalin's goons look for him. Like Guillermo, who gives his daughter unstinting support for her art and her rebellious nature, Trotsky cannot resist Frida's beauty, obvious talent and outrageous personality.

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At least two other characters deserve mention. Lupe (Valeria Golino) plays Diego's former wife, who continues to live upstairs at his house with their two children, even after he marries Frida. Diego cannot live without Lupe's special mole. Cristina Kahlo (Mia Maestro) plays Frida's sister. At Frida's urging, Cristina takes the kids and leaves an abusive husband. The sisters are very close, until Diego's inevitable appetite comes between them.

While it's unusual for me to review a film from last year that is about to be available on DVD and video, *Frida* offers a many-layered spectacle that will be lost on a small screen. Highly recommended, it's now playing at Movies 12. **EW**



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