

**Rivera**

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“Mr. Rivera’s work seems to embody an appreciation of the wall surface as the theme of his decoration which has hardly been surpassed since the days of Giotto.”

— James Monroe Hewlett  
(President of the Architectural League of  
New York,  
the Society of Mural Painters and a  
member of  
the National Academy of Design), 1929

# Table of contents

[Biographie](#)

[His First Steps](#)

[Discovering Europe](#)

[Homecoming](#)

[His New Exile to Europe](#)

[Mexican Muralists](#)

[A Communist Cheered by Americans](#)

[The Last Years](#)

[List of Illustrations](#)



Self-Portrait, 1941.

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Oil on canvas, 61 x 43 cm.  
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton.

# Biographie

1886: Born on the 8th or 13th December 1886 in Guanajuato, he romanticised his life so much that even his date of birth became a myth. He was a mixture of Mexican, Spanish, Indian, African, Italian, Jewish, Russian and Portuguese origins.

1892: Moves to Mexico.

1894: He enters the Colegio del Padre Antonio where he remains for three months. He then moves to the Colegio Católico Carpentier which he leaves for the Liceo Católico Hispano-Mexicano.

1897: Rivera receives a grant which allows him to study full-time at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts.

1906: He graduates with honours.

1907: Rivera begins his travels in Europe. He goes first to Spain to study with one of the principal portraitists of Madrid, Eduardo Chicarro y Aguera. He then leaves for France where he discovers the artistic life of Montparnasse. He becomes friends with Modigliani.

1914: He meets Picasso in his studio, who approves of his work and admits Rivera to his circle. This is a great opportunity and an opening into the world of such celebrities as Juan Gris, Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Delaunay, Fernard Léger and Albert Gleizes. He enters into a relationship with the painter Marie Vorobieff, but marries Angelina Beloff. He also has several mistresses with whom he has brief affairs.

1920: In January Rivera takes the train to Milan. His travels in Italy last seventeen months and allow him to discover the art of painting frescoes. He returns to Mexico full of this new-found knowledge and ready to devote himself to mural painting. The government offers him the walls of the Anfiteatro Bolívar (National Preparatory School of Mexico).

1922: In June he marries Guadalupe (Lupe) Marín; they have two daughters. At the end of the year he becomes a member of the Communist Party.

1924: Works in the Chapingo Chapel and at the National School of Agriculture.

1927: Travels in the Soviet Union. Divorces Lupe Marín.

1929: Returns to Mexico. In August Rivera marries Frida Kahlo, who was eighteen years old on the day of their marriage. In September he receives a proposition to paint a fresco at the palace of the conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés, in Cuernavaca.

1930: Rivera goes to the United States. He paints at the School of Fine Arts of California, the University of California, Berkeley, and the San Francisco Art Institute.

Deep River

1931: Returns to Mexico, and the famous house of Diego and Frida is built. In November they return to the United States for the exhibition of Rivera's work at MoMA.

1932-1933: Works on the twenty-seven panels at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

1933: Start of the project at the Rockefeller Center in New York.

1934: Returns to Mexico and paints the mural at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico.

1939: Divorces Frida Kahlo.

1940: Final voyage to the United States. Rivera paints the frescos for the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. On the 8th December, Diego's possible birthdate, he remarries Frida.

1949: Fifty-year retrospective at the National Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico.

1954: Frida Kahlo dies on the 13th July.

1955: Marries Emma Hurtado, his agent since 1946.

1957: Diego Rivera dies at San Angel, on November 24th.



## His First Steps

Diego Rivera fictionalised his life so much that even his birth date is a myth. His mother María, his aunt Cesárea and the town hall records list his arrival at 7.30 on the evening of December 8th, 1886. That is the very auspicious day of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. However, in the Guanajuato ecclesiastical registry, baptism documentation states that little Diego María Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez and his twin brother actually appeared on December 13th.



## Landscape

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1896-1897

Oil on canvas, 70 x 55 cm  
Guadalupe Rivera de Irtube  
Collection





The latter, Carlos, died a year and a half later while the puny Diego, suffering from rickets and a weak constitution, became the ward of his Tarascan Indian nurse, Antonia, who lived in the Sierra Mountains. There, according to Diego, she gave him herbal medicine and practiced sacred rites while he drank goat's milk fresh from the udders and lived wild in the woods with all manner of creatures.



Whatever the truth concerning his birth and early childhood, Diego inherited a crisp analytical intellect through a convoluted blending of bloodlines, being of Mexican, Spanish, Indian, African, Italian, Jewish, Russian and Portuguese descent.



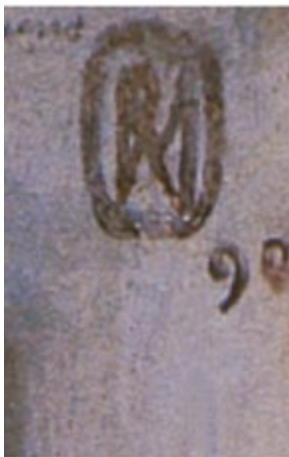
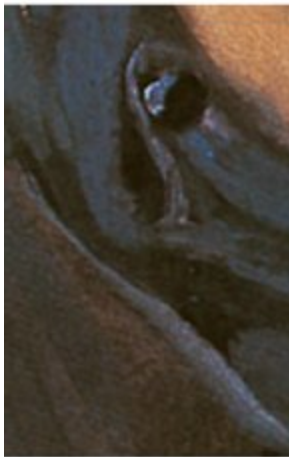
### Landscape with a Lake

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c. 1900

Oil on canvas, 53 x 73 cm  
Daniel Yankelewitz B. Collection,  
San Jose





The young Diego was a pampered son. He could read by the age of four and had begun drawing on the walls. When they moved to Mexico City it opened up a world of wonders to him. The city rose on a high plateau atop an ancient lake-bed at the foot of twin snow-capped volcanoes, Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl. After the dusty rural roads and flat-roofed houses of Guanajuato, the paved thoroughfares of the capital with its elegant French architecture and the *Paseo de Reforma* rivalling the best of Europe's boulevards overwhelmed Diego.

### Self-Portrait

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1906

Oil on canvas, 55 x 54 cm  
Collection of the Government of  
the State of Sinaloa  
Mexico





At eight he was enrolled in the Colegio del Padre Antonio. He remained there for three months, tried the Colegio Católico Carpentier and then departed to the Liceo Católico Hispano-Mexicano.



Having driven the French out of Mexico in 1867, the president, Díaz, spent the next few years of his administration wiping out the democracy of Benito Juárez and re-establishing French and international cultures as examples of progress and civilisation for the Mexican people. The downside of this cultural importation was the denigration of native society, arts, language and political representation. The poor were left to die, while the rich and the middle class were courted because they had money and appreciated being able to keep it.



Landscape with a Mill,  
Damme Landscape

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1909

Oil on canvas, 50 x 60.5 cm

Ing. Juan Pablo Gómez

Rivera Collection

Mexico City





In the same year that Díaz and Juárez were chasing the French out of Mexico, a book was published, *Capital - A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, which represented a lifetime study of the political economy of the working class in a scientific manner. This work avoided the usual rabble-rousing demands of repressed workers, substituting well-thought-out deductions that established the basic socialist premises of its author, Karl Marx. If there was ever an autocratic government ripe for a strong undercurrent of revolution supported by intellectual pillars of socialist ideology, it was Mexico. The Díaz government's cultural and economic philosophy devolved strictly around the concept of creating wealth before addressing the issues of the poor, who were, unfortunately for the Mexican *científicos* who set the policy, not dying off fast enough to offset their birth rate.

Notre-Dame, Paris

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1909

Oil on canvas, 144 x 113 cm  
Private collection, Mexico City







By the age of ten Diego had experienced the results of Mexico's autocracy. Making the most of his gift of drawing and endlessly sketching concerned his parents now. Diego liked to draw soldiers, so his father considered a military career, but the boy also spent much of his spare time at the railway station to draw the trains - so what about a job as a train driver? Subject matter aside, Diego's mother defied her husband's wishes that the boy enter the *Colegio Militar* and sent him instead to the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts for evening school classes.



Portrait of Angelina Beloff

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1909

Oil on canvas, 59 x 45 cm  
Collection of the Government of  
the State of Veracruz  
Veracruz





Diego struggled with this day and night school education for a year until at the age of eleven in 1898 he received a scholarship to move his studies full time to the San Carlos Academy. While the school was considered the best in Mexico, its curriculum was bound by dusty European artistic dogma compounded by the societal engineering of the government *científicos* that mandated strength over weakness in all life experiences.



By 1906, Rivera had completed eight years of study at San Carlos and graduated with honours, appearing in his final student show with twenty-six works. His efforts had paid off with an excellent reputation among the government people he had to impress to keep grant money coming in.



### The Old Ones

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1912

Oil on canvas, 210 x 184 cm  
Museo Dolores Olmedo,  
Mexico City





This was accomplished, but the money for study in Europe did not arrive for six months, allowing young Diego to live the life of a bohemian artist among his school chums.

This gang of “intellectuals, artists and architects” - *El Grupo Bohemio* - who had struggled to finish college, worked hard at exploring a dissolute lifestyle.



During this time he also came into contact with the curious character Gerardo Murillo, a faculty member and anarchist political agitator against Díaz. Murillo chose the name “Dr Atl” while living in Mexico. In Indian dialect, *Atl* is the name of the fourth sun - *Nahui Atl* - and means *Water Sun*, but Murillo was actually a rabble-rousing *criollo*, the same as the rest of the governing class.



Portrait of a Spaniard  
(Hermán Alsina)

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1912

Oil on canvas, 200 x 166 cm

Private collection