

## AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AP

# Experts dismiss dealer's claim to have long-lost Kahlo work

By ARITZ PARRA and BERENICE BAUTISTA June 30, 2020



This Feb 2010 photo provided by the Kunstmuseum Gehrke-Remund shows a licensed replica of the missing, original painting by Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, titled "La Mesa Herida" in an unknown location. The whereabouts of the original 1940 painting, which disappeared more than six decades ago in Poland, will remain one of the great mysteries of contemporary art. Historians and scholars of the Mexican artist strongly reject the claim that the original is in a London warehouse, waiting for a buyer to spend more than 40 million euros on it. (Kunstmuseum Gehrke-Remund via AP)

MADRID (AP) — Scholars in the work of surrealist Frida Kahlo have searched for more than six decades for “The Wounded Table,” a 1940 oil painting illuminating her

pain over the breakup of her marriage to muralist Diego Rivera that hasn't been seen since an exhibition in Poland.

And the historians strongly reject the idea that the mystery of its whereabouts has been solved, as claimed by a Spanish art dealer who says the painting is now sitting in a London warehouse awaiting a buyer willing to spend more than 40 million euros (\$45 million).

Experts consulted by The Associated Press have concluded that published images of the work now on sale show nothing more than a copy of Kahlo's painting.

Helga Prignitz-Poda, an art historian who has fruitlessly tried to track down the long-lost painting, said that there are clear differences between the work for sale and old photographs of the original and that there are similarities between the offered work with inaccurate replicas based on those old images.

In addition, she said, Kahlo did the painting on wood and not on canvas. The work for sale is described as a canvas painting.

Cristian López, the Spanish art dealer who says he represents the anonymous owner of the painting, stands firm in defending its authenticity.

"Time will give us the truth," López said during a phone conversation in which he offered few details on the painting.

López, who is little known in the art world, said specialists have endorsed the painting's authenticity, but he declined to identify them.

"Whoever proves genuine interest and the ability to pay the figure of 40 million euros, can spend as much time as wanted with their experts analyzing the work," López said.

"The Wounded Table" was unveiled at the International Surrealism Exhibition in 1940 in Mexico City. It includes a self-portrait of Kahlo at a long table, flanked by a Holy Week Judas and a monster that embraces her, while the two sons of her sister stand at one end and her pet fawn is at the other. Blood flows from knots of the wood table, which is considered to represent the artist's anguish of the just concluded divorce from Rivera.

Kahlo donated the painting to the Soviet Union in 1945 for a planned Mexico room at the Museum of Western Art in Moscow, but Soviet art officials disdained surrealism as decadent and the project was dropped. The Mexican works ended up in a cellar.

A year after Kahlo's death, a Mexican group organized a traveling art exhibition for shows in Soviet bloc nations and arranged for a loan of "The Wounded Table." Prignitz-Poda said there is photographic evidence the 46-inch by 98-inch painting was shown in Warsaw, but nothing is known of it after that. There is no clue whether it was returned to Moscow, destroyed or perhaps acquired by someone.

Susana Pliego, an art historian who has studied the work of both Kahlo and Rivera, is among the experts who don't think the painting for sale is the real thing.

She said there is a big problem with faked Kahlo painting because the art market thirsts for more works by an artist who produced only about 200 paintings before her death in 1954.

"Fridamania has been a marketing invention," said Pliego, who directs cultural programming at the Casa de México in Madrid and who worked for years on Kahlo's archive. "Because her paintings are sold so expensively, someone makes a proposal to see if anyone falls for it."

Hans-Jürgen Gehrke, an art collector who operates a museum dedicated to Kahlo's works in southwestern Germany, considers it "implausible, if not directly ridiculous," that an unknown 22-year-old businessman operating a website from a town in northwestern Spain is the guardian of the missing painting.

"There are thousands of Frida Kahlo fakes," Gehrke said. "She is possibly the artist who has painted more dead than in life."

Associated Press writer Aritz Parra reported this story in Madrid and AP writer Berenice Bautista reported from Mexico City.