

BEAUTY THAT HURTS

by Annette Förster

"Viva la vida" that's to say: long live life, that was the device of her last painting. Frida Kahlo, Mexican painter and life-partner of the muralist Diego Rivera, became on her 18th a physical wreck as a consequence of a bus-accident. Director Paul Leduc Rosenzweig made a collage-like portrait of her, of her work and her life, which testifies of the express will to exist. A conversation with the actress who plays the role of Frida, Ofelia Medina.

"Frida? Frida has been an obsession for me and she is that for many women in Mexico. For a long time we were all possessed of her, my friends and the theatre company with whom I worked. Now she has a more steady place in our lives. But at various people and occasions she turns up again".

During the press conference you said that Frida is an example for Mexico for two reasons. The first one you said was her "Mexicanity"...

"Frida and Diego has a very open house. Artists, foreigners and bullfighters came around. And Indians to sell little things, which Indians make since long time and which she appreciated. There was a place for everyone. There was laughing, singing, talking and eating. In the film you can also see students working in the garden. Because Frida could no longer sit in a car, she did no longer go to school, but let the students come to her. When they passed they were called 'Los Fridos'. Their first work was painting in pulcherias places where people drink pulche, the cheapest booze in Mexico. In ancient times these pulcherias were decorated with fresco's and in Frida's time this tradition was almost extinct. The "Los Fridos" have restored it.

The second reason you gave was the innovation of the language...

"Because of her accident Frida has had no more education than secondary school. She had many girlfriends and boyfriends and she dressed like a boy with her hair backward and in costume. This friends-club was called 'Los Cachucos'. A cachuca is a whore who does not even want money for her services - which implies that you don't have anything.

The innovative of Frida's language was, that she used the language of the lowest social class. Much of what she said was ambiguous and she countered men especially with words, just in order to say: do as you like but don't bother me. Women were supposed not to be able to act like that, leaving apart acting like that. Women were supposed to listen if men were playing with language and women were to pretend that they didn't understand. Frida made an optimal use of the possibilities of a language and did that very smart. That was revolutionary.

The film shows her as someone who by her own life can be an example. She knew no moral conflicts...

"One could call her an integrated artist: she made no distinction. Not between materials and not between people. In a very natural and direct way she was not contemplative. Like she, when she gets a box of paint on a very young age from her father, smears it on her hand, so she she liked what she wanted and whom she wanted, as well among women as men. Very direct and without fear.

At what moment did you get involved with the film?

"I gave director Paul Leduc the idea for this film. We are befriended and work a lot together. With a few girlfriends I suggested to make a movie about the life of Frida and because I resembled her so much, they suggested to Paul that I should play her. Shortly afterwards he phoned me: together with the Chilean writer J.J. Blanco he had already made a structure for the story.¹

In the film there are only three love-affaires she had apart from Diego: the one with Trotzki and two with women. I think there have been more...

"There have been many affairs, but it was only necessary to show the possibility. Many people loved her and she loved many people".

Her love for Diego has been designed very well in this film: they sing, give presents, hardly talk. Still I think she talked a lot in her life...

"A lot, a lot, a lot. That has also been a point of discussion between Paul and me. Paul said he wanted silence. I said then, no Paul, that's no good, she innovated language in Mexico, so she should talk. At last we decided to let her sing. That fits with her character because she loved singing and the songs are beautiful".

How did Paul Leduc instruct you, how did you communicate about your role...

"Before the shooting we talked very much about the film, but during the shooting that was no longer needed. Juan Jose Gurrola, who plays Diego, and I have often improvised. We knew very much about Frida's life and sometimes Paul just said: sing! Like in the scene that Gurrola is lying in the bath, he felt himself very comfortable, the water was warm and the atmosphere relaxed, the song we sing there was created there and then.

The takes in which we became very emotional have all been cut out by Paul. He wanted to stop just before the melodrama. In the beginning I was very angry because he had left away my best moments. Now I can appreciate his choice. It took a long time before I could consider the film to be his film.

It is a very clever method to stop just before real emotion comes, because it gives the audience the occasion to have the emotion. Did you do a lot of preparations for your role?

"For some scenes I had to make physical preparations, for instance that long scene in the night in bed, which has been cut throughout the film, the night before she died. It exacted an enormous concentration, I drank a lot of tequila and I came under a kind of trance. I didn't feel my hands and my legs any more. After the shooting it appeared that I had lost four kilo's weight. I was exhausted for about a week.

Frida could never forget her body, because she had always pain. Once it was the leg, then again the corset which was squeezing and often everything did hurt. At the accident seventeen bones were broken. Incredible.

This fysical pain made that her beauty - and she is very beautiful - becomes very smarting, even the beautiful hurts...

"I think she used make up to be able to forget a little bit about the pain. I had a headache of her every day. What she did with her hair was very complicated, completely strechted with all kinds in it. I also think that she corrected her eye-brows during painting. She tried to divert all her attention from her head to the places in her body where she was suffering.

Where did Frida die from?

"I think it was the pain, but we're not sure. It could also have been an overdose. Often she wrote she was just tired and only stayed alive because Diego needed her. But this was not the real problem: he had so many affairs. She must have been exhausted, because in her diary she wrote: I want to quit, I am not sorry".