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## Frida and Me in Japan

*Life takes a strange turn as plans change*

By Kat Avila | Web Published 7.28.2003

There I was at the Sumida River Fireworks Festival, sandwiched in a standing position amongst amorous couples, trying hard to ignore the orgy of ear-nibbling, hair-petting, and tender pecking going on around me. Just behind us, the crowd control officers were doing their best to keep the foot traffic moving. The crush of people on the street was like the oxygen-robbing crush of people on the incoming train to Asakusa.

After over an incredible hour of dazzling fireworks, I join the crowd of people moving uniformly down the blocked-off streets toward the nearest train stations. As I walk along like a zombie, I think about how strange my life has become.

Yesterday, I gave notice at my school that I would not continue my "teaching," a.k.a. babysitting juvenile delinquents, for them into the next semester. You try teaching English to a reluctant, slightly autistic ADD child, or grade schoolers chanting "GAMES, GAMES, GAMES," or junior high school boys whose favorite phrase is "KILL YOU," which they will scrawl all over the whiteboard if they can find a marker.

Tomorrow I will go to the Bunkamura in Shibuya where the



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"Women Surrealists in Mexico" exhibit -- the work of Frida Kahlo, Maria Izquierdo, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, Alice Rahon, and Kati Horna -- is on display. The first three artists were born and raised in Mexico. The latter came to Mexico from Europe. These women were active during the same historical period as their male colleagues, the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

When I go to the exhibit, I will be told I can't take notes with my pen and will be handed a pencil. Later, while doing a reference sketch of Frida's imaginative "Drawing of Eyes," I am informed sketching is not allowed. I guess I can just sit and watch "The Arts of Frida Kahlo" DVD they are showing and stay out of trouble that way.

La Chicana and me in Japan. This is the first time I've seen Frida's original work, up close and personal. But I also enjoy the familiar content of Maria Izquierdo's work, e.g., "The Suffering Virgin" (1947), as well as her ability to evoke such profound loneliness and desolation with an oil like "Still Life With Red Snappers" (1946). And the whimsy in Remedios Varo's work, as found in "Vegetarian Vampires" (1962) and "Still Life Reviving" (1963), makes me think of how she might have been equally successful as an animator or children's book artist.

I will be in Japan two months more, unless I can find other work here. Creatively, it has been a rich experience. This month alone I have seen performances by the all-male Kabuki theatre and the all-female Takarazuka theatres. Both theatres provide opportunities for acting professionals to portray the

opposite gender in non-parodic roles. Additionally, I have indulged my love for animation by attending Studio Ghibli-related exhibits and the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka. (Studio Ghibli created the Oscar-winning animated feature "Spirited Away.") Next month I will attend Comic Market in Tokyo, the world's largest market for independent comic book artists.

Leaving Tokyo, the most exciting city I have ever visited, is not going to be easy.

*Kat Avila has a web site on Chicano theatre and Asian American theatre. She appreciates the e-mail she has received from Latinos making inquiries about Japan, though she doesn't have all the answers. [buscandocalifornia@yahoo.com](mailto:buscandocalifornia@yahoo.com)*

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