Letter from Mexico City

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Art fairs can be a time-effective way of taking the artistic temperature of a city. Mexico’s ZONA MACO also has some very fine public museums, and its incomparable Museo Nacional de Antropologia, covering ten or so millennia of Mesoamerican culture, is an awe-inspiring reminder of the depth of the Mexican visual legacy. The Palacio de Bellas Artes, the Museo de Arte Moderno, the recently re-opened Museo Rufino Tamayo and the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC) constitute a fourroum of contemporary art institutions with extensive collections, all hosting major temporary exhibitions, with a special mention for MUAC’s current Felix Gonzalez-Torres (Cuba/USA) retrospective Somewhere/Nowhere. Arguably the most impressive work of all can be seen for free in the many public buildings adored by the great muralists Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros and Jose Orozco. And above it all floats Saint Frida, her likeness as ubiquitous and iconic as the Mona Lisa, a Virgen for our times, to millions of people an embodiment of all that is essentially Mexican in art. A sentimental visit to her Casa Azul (the Blue House, now the Frida Kahlo Museum in the bohemian southern suburb of Coyoacán) left me musing at the mystery of why some art resonates in this way across time and culture.

Looking at her little bed (with mirror), her kitchen, her studio, I reflected that this modest and obsessive woman would never in her wildest dreams have imagined that she would come to define the art of a nation.

David Corbet is an artist and writer with a particular interest in ‘southern’ art, particularly from Latin America, South Africa and Indigenous Australian art.

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