In August of 1929, after Frida Kahlo painted the Portrait of Miriam Penansky, she dutifully had it photographed and, after inscribing on the verso the name “Salomón Hale,” filed it in her photographic archive (FIG. 1). Twenty-one years later, on October 8, 1950, Kahlo referred to the portrait during an interview when she spoke of the works she had painted shortly after marrying Diego Rivera in 1929: “I began to make paintings with backgrounds and Mexican things in them; I painted the portraits of [Salomón] Hale’s sister [in-law], of Guadalupe Marin and the one of Diego, which I did not finish. These three paintings; who knows where they are?”

The whereabouts of all three paintings remained unknown for another sixty years, but, as will be discussed below, we believe that one — the Portrait of Miriam Penansky (FIG. 2) — has now been found, and in the process, the authenticity of another previously disputed work, her Portrait of a Woman in White (FIG. 3), has been confirmed.

The discovery and documentation of a lost or previously unknown work by a major artist is an extraordinary event; it not only expands the artist’s oeuvre, it can provide insight into the artist’s life, preoccupations, influences, artistic and social circles, and, of course, how she captured the zeitgeist, or spirit of the time. Equally important, it informs our understanding of her creative process and may also shed light on other works whose attribution until then may have been considered problematic, as in the case under discussion. Needless to say, it can also have an effect on the artist’s market; for documentation can make or break a sale, and the commercial value of a well-documented work will be increased to an astonishing degree.

In the case of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), whose rediscovery as a painter goes back only some thirty years to Hayden Herrera’s 1983

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*Jane C. H. Jacob, M.S. is an art historian and President of Jacob Fine Art, Inc. in Chicago, a consulting firm specializing in provenance research and issues of attribution. She serves on the board of directors of several organizations, including The Appraisal Foundation in Washington. She is on the adjunct faculty of New York University SCPS. Jacob Fine Art has been working with the current owners of the Portrait of Miriam Penansky discussed in this article to verify its provenance and coordinate its conservation and display.

*Laurent Sozzani, M.S., is a conservator of Old Master, modern and contemporary paintings in private practice in Amsterdam. From 1990-2012, he was a full-time paintings restorer at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

The authors owe a debt of gratitude to Roberto (“Beto”) Eduardo Hale; Mariana Amor, Director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano; Mary-Anne Martin, Director of Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art; and Dr. Helga Prignitz-Poda for their invaluable help in writing this article.

1 During 1949–50, psychologist Olga Campos interviewed Kahlo for a book she was preparing on the creative process, which was never published. A part of the interview, first published in 2008, consisted of Kahlo telling the story of how she became a painter. This quote is from that interview. See Salomon Grimberg, Frida Kahlo Song of Herself (London: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2008), p. 75. The Portrait of Lupe Marin, 1929 was always in Marin’s collection but, according to her grandson Pedro Diego Alvarado, “She cut it up with scissors” after a quarrel with Kahlo. Personal communication with Salomon Grimberg.
biography, this is particularly significant.\textsuperscript{2} The
uncovering of her life and art has brought with it a
hunger for her work that is difficult to explain. As
the demand to satiate this hunger increases, so does
the production of fakes — seemingly by the day.

The Frida Kahlo Museum in Baden-Baden was cre-
tated just to house a permanent collection of replicas
of her paintings, while a factory in Vietnam pro-
duces an oil painting copy of any work by Kahlo for
a mere thirty dollars. As this phenomenon grows, it
has become natural for dealers in Latin American
art and auction house specialists to assume that, at
any moment, a new Frida fake will come through
the door, brought in by someone who unquestion-
ingly believes it to be an original. These works are
often accompanied by a “certificate of authenticity”
provided by persons and/or institutions with no
real knowledge of the artist, making things more
difficult for the art world and scholarship. Yet,
increasingly, people are eager to trust these docu-
ments. Even educated essays on the controvers-
sial subject, such as Jason Edward Kaufman’s “Finding
Frida Kahlo: Controversy Calls into Question the

\textsuperscript{2} The publication that broke ground is Hayden Herrera, \textit{Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo} (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

Authenticity of the Renowned Artist’s Work” in the
\textit{IFAR Journal}, have done little to open the eyes of
those who cling to the belief that what is in front of
them is the genuine item.\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{FRIDA}

Kahlo’s status as a cult figure and a phenomenon
makes her among the most famous artists of the
twentieth century, and possibly the most popular.
Her operatic life: from her exotic looks and the
accident that nearly killed her in adolescence, to her
more than thirty surgeries, her abortions, her nar-
cissistic self-absorption, the many love affairs, and
her volatile marriage to philanderer Diego Rivera,
whom she dramatically referred to as her “second
accident,”\textsuperscript{4} make her a magnet for the curious.
Added to these, her autobiographical art, which


illustrates many of these events and consolidates her iconic image, is mesmerizing. Both art and artist have crossed over from being labeled Mexican to Surrealist to Modernist.

“The uncovering of [Kahlo’s] life and art has brought with it a hunger for her work that is difficult to explain. As the demand to satiate this hunger increases, so does the production of fakes — seemingly by the day.”

Kahlo is idolized by anyone who has felt abandoned or rejected, by those who struggle with their sense of self, by feminists, by the handicapped, by the neglected and the outsider. That encompasses a lot of people. In Mexico, she is referred to as “the heroine of pain.” People who know nothing about art and have no interest in it know her paintings and the details of her life. In 2012 and 2013 alone, discounting countless commercial gallery shows that include personal memorabilia and photographs, museum exhibitions devoted to Kahlo’s work were organized at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, the Arken Museum in Copenhagen, and the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris. A recent Mexican exhibition, “In Praise of the Body,” in Biarritz, was advertised throughout the city with banners sporting a Kahlo self-portrait, while a second Kahlo self-portrait graced the cover of the catalogue. Upcoming is a major retrospective at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome, and the Detroit Institute of Arts has plans for a show on the year that Kahlo and Rivera spent in that city. Anything Kahlo might have touched is akin to a sliver from the True Cross. Mexicans refer to this phenomenon as “Fridamania.”

Frida Kahlo das Gesamtwerk, the catalogue raisonné of Kahlo’s work published in 1988, documents 271 works, of which 146 are paintings. Of the nine paintings that have surfaced since its publication, four had been documented in the publication but were recorded as lost, and five were then unknown. One of the benefits of preparing the catalogue raisonné some thirty years after Kahlo’s death was that many persons who had known Kahlo were still living and could provide valuable information on the whereabouts of works; some owned works, and some who had once owned works were able to provide information that led us to the new owners. Others knew names of collectors or ex-collectors. This helped make a relatively comprehensive document, even though there was no known list by Kahlo of the works she had produced. Her personal archive, held at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City, has yet to be opened to the public.

In 2008, twenty years after the publication of the catalogue raisonné, the interview of October 1950, mentioned above, surfaced. The closest thing to a list by Kahlo, it provided a windfall of new information about lost and unknown works. The Portrait of Miriam Penansky was among the five works that were unknown to the authors of the catalogue raisonné (Helga Prignitz-Poda, Salomon Grimberg, Andrea Kettenmann), until July 12, 2012, when, out of the blue, a request was received by one of the authors of the catalogue raisonné to confirm its authenticity. The work had actually surfaced briefly in 2006 when the current owners of the Portrait had shown a photograph of the work to a specialist whose name they could not recall, at Sotheby’s Latin American Painting Department, New York and were told that the work, without any documentation to support its authenticity, was, in


6 The term was coined in 1991 when the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera opened an exhibition, “Pasion por Frida,” which originally was to be called “Fridamania,” but Mrs. Dolores Olmedo, President of the Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Trust, changed the name, believing it sounded disrespectful. But by then, Blanca Garduño Pulido, the Museum Director, had already titled her text in the catalog “In Search of Fridamania.” The word stuck and continues to be used.

7 Helga Prignitz-Poda, Salomon Grimberg, Andrea Kettenmann, Frida Kahlo das Gesamtwerk (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1988).

Known and previously documented works considered lost that have surfaced are: Portrait of a Girl with Necklace, c.1928; Portrait of a Woman, 1938; Portrait of a Girl with a Hound, 1941; Portrait of M. A. Cuellar, 1945 (Kahlo’s last painting) Cat. 144. The unknown paintings that have surfaced are: Still Life, 1925 (Kahlo’s first painting); Portrait of Alejandro Gómez Arias, 1926; Portrait of Miriam Penansky, 1929; Portrait of a Woman in Polka Dotted Dress, c.1929; and Self-Portrait (miniature), 1938; all in private collections.
their opinion, not genuine. The opinion was given by telephone; no paper trail was left behind. At the time, this information was unbeknownst to the authors of the catalogue raisonné.

**MIRIAM PENANSKY**

Miriam Penansky, born November 22, 1908, in Chicago, was the youngest child of Polish immigrants, Eva Ginzburg and Charles Penansky (FIG. 4). After her father’s death in 1920, her mother married Morris Bromberg. Miriam, who never married, died November 26, 1944, at age 36, from cerebral edema, consequence of a brain tumor, in Mexico City, where she is interred in the Jewish Cemetery. Her older sister, Anna (b. September 1904, Chicago, d. c. 1979, Mexico City), married Salomón Hale of Mexico City, and their first child, Rosalee, was born in 1929. That year, Miriam traveled to Mexico, staying in the Hale household. Eventually, she moved there permanently and taught at Mexico’s Music Conservatory. At the time of her death, her portrait by Kahlo went to her youngest maternal aunt, Thelma Jacobson Schwartz, who in 1989 bequeathed it to her daughter, Marsha H. Schwartz, of Joliet, IL, from whom the present owners inherited it.

Salomón Hale was born in Lipno, Poland, in 1897, immigrated to Mexico as a young man, and quickly became an active member and a welcome presence in the Mexican Jewish community. Within the context of this article, he was reputedly the first foreign collector of Modern Mexican Art. Inés Amor, Director of the prestigious Galería de Arte Mexicano, the first modern art gallery in Mexico, remembered Hale in her *Memorias* as an early collector with an uncanny eye for quality:

> It was surprising to me to find in those early times two sympathizing voices. [One was] Engineer Marte R. Gómez, Minister of Agriculture under [President] Cárdenas. … The only other man in 1935 who visited the Gallery to buy was a Polish immigrant who had been living years in Mexico, Salomón Hale, leather importer, with a small office on Uruguay street [who] had an extraordinary endowment to perceive art in its best phases. … He was among the few who acquired foreign art. He owned a magnificent cubist oil by Picasso, a painting by Miró, and graphics by French artists. But the strength of his collection was paintings by Diego, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Tamayo; he also had magnificent things by Zalce, Guerrero Galván, Leopoldo Méndez and others. He came to like Gerzso and Mérida, which shows that he was a man well prepared to understand. … Aside from what I sold him, I knew he

“*The Portrait of Miriam Penansky* was among the five works that were unknown to the authors of the catalogue raisonné (Helga Prignitz-Poda, Salomon Grimberg, Andrea Kettenmann), until July 12, 2012, when, out of the blue, a request was received by one of the authors of the catalogue to confirm its authenticity.”

8 Salomon Grimberg.

9 We are deeply indebted to Roberto Eduardo (“Beto”) Hale, a musician and composer, the sole grandchild and heir of Salomón Hale and great-nephew of Miriam Penansky, for generously opening his family archives and sharing with us vital family history, including the photograph of his great aunt that confirms the identity of the sitter.

10 That Miriam Penansky had no intention of staying when she initially traveled to Mexico is suggested by the 1930 U.S. Census, which lists her as a stepdaughter and member of the household of Morris Bromberg.
bought directly from various artists such as María Izquierdo, Tamayo, and others. …

Kahlo’s own recollection of Hale was of his fine-tuned eye when he acquired a painting she had given to her older sister, Matilde. Kahlo recalled: “The portrait of Rosita that Mati [Matilde] sold to an old clothes dealer, Mr. Hale found in the Lagunilla flea market and bought for 8 pesos.”

When the work was bought by Hale at the flea market, it was unsigned and undated; the original signature and date, 1928, had been removed. A photograph of the signed and dated painting, made shortly after it was painted, is reproduced in Das Gesammtwerk on page 90, for comparison, next to the portrait sans signature and date. In 1981, the work for which Hale had paid roughly 64 cents in U.S. currency, sold in New York for $33,000 (with premium).

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Hale introduced his sister-in-law, Miriam, to Frida Kahlo within one year of Miriam’s move to Mexico. Kahlo painted her portrait shortly thereafter. It is worth comparing the Portrait of Miriam Penansky, 1929 (FIG. 2), with Kahlo’s Portrait of Alejandro Gómez Arias, 1928 (FIG. 5), and the Self-Portrait, 1930 (FIG. 6) — two paintings produced a year earlier and a year later, respectively. Although her talent was already evident, Kahlo had been painting only four years (since 1925) when she painted the Penansky portrait, and she was still learning her craft. It would be another three years (1932) before she reached the characteristic freedom of her mature work, where, in her compositions, she surprises by introducing or juxtaposing unexpected elements to make a statement. In the portraits painted in 1929 and 1930, Kahlo still seemed far from achieving that freedom, although her painting is significantly better and more natural than in the Gómez Arias portrait of 1928. In the latter, in which her boyfriend Alejandro’s suit appears to be made of stiff cardboard, and he, too, seems cut out and pasted in rather than integrated into the background, Kahlo is still cautious. She is even relying on characteristic poses Rivera had used many times before: “I painted two or three things, which are around the house, that to me seem very influenced…"

12 Jorge Alberto Manrique Teresa del Conde, Una mujer en el arte mexicano, Memorias de Inés Amor (México: Universidad Autonoma de México, 1987), pp. 236-37 (Translation, S. Grimberg.).

13 Grimberg, Frida Kahlo Song of Herself, p. 74.


15 This portrait came to light in 1990 following the death of Gómez Arias, through his heirs. Critic Raquel Tibol declared it an unequivocal fake but thanks to the Kahlo interview by Olga Campos, in which she described the painting, its authenticity was confirmed. See Grimberg, Song of Herself, p. 73 and 81 (ill.)
immediate attention already speak of her rapidly evolving style.

Although neither of the better-known portraits was available for technical comparison with the new-found portrait of Miriam Penansky, we did have the unfinished Portrait of a Woman in White available for comparative study (FIG. 3). It is dated c.1929 because of its similarity to Kahlo’s Self-Portrait, Time Flies of that year (FIG. 10).17 When the catalogue raisonné authors first saw it in the 1980s while preparing the catalogue, the unfinished work belonged to Kahlo’s friend, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Mexico’s pre-eminent woman photographer, whose son was selling it for her. Although the painting was essentially unknown, it was included in the catalogue because all three catalogue raisonné authors were certain it was right, despite its authenticity having been rejected by Raquel Tibol, a critic who had known Kahlo. In a review of the catalogue raisonné, Tibol wrote, “In the catalogue of the genuine [works], one [fake] slipped through. I am referring to number 19, Portrait of a Lady in White . . . .”18

by him,” she explained.16 Yet, in all three portraits (1928–30), she carries over “fingerprint” constants, details that would likely escape a forger, such as the careful contrasts between the dark brown pupils and the perfectly white sclera of the eyes, with a precise, thin white line left between the suspended pupil and the lower lid (FIGS. 7–9). In all three portraits, the emphatic black eyebrows she uses to frame the eyes, and the jet-black hair that contrasts with the light skinned faces to draw the viewer’s instant involvement. Behind each sitter, in both portraits, is a window open to a clear blue sky and a wrought iron balcony between two heavy curtains tied with thick ropes. In the Self-Portrait, Kahlo has an airplane flying overhead and to her left a Solomonic column where an alarm clock rests, airplane and clock creating the pun “Time Flies.” As Portrait of a Woman in White is unfinished, it is difficult to say how Kahlo might have intended to complete the work.
Although the catalogue raisonné authors believed in the work, there remained the gnawing questions: why did Lola Álvarez Bravo not exhibit it? Or did she? At 77 years of age, she could not remember if she had; files of her defunct gallery were lost; and there was apparently no record of the painting ever having existed. In the end, the authors agreed that if she did not exhibit it, it was likely because it was unfinished. A year after the catalogue raisonné was published, the authors received a welcome surprise that confirmed their belief in the *Woman in White’s* authenticity and that it had, indeed, belonged to Lola Álvarez Bravo. Mariana Amor, the new Director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, brought to their attention a catalogue, obviously unknown to them, from a collective exhibition presented at Mexico’s Universidad Autónoma de México in 1955, the year after Kahlo’s death. The catalogue checklist, for which Diego Rivera wrote the introduction, read, “No. 5, Portrait, oil on canvas, Col. Lola Álvarez Bravo.”

It was interesting for the purpose of this study to compare the *Woman in White* with the Penansky portrait, so that once and for all any doubt about either work could be discarded (FIGS. 11A and B). The comparison proved fruitful, as we were not only able to discover technical similarities shared by both portraits, but also similar “fingerprint” details, which confirmed our belief in the authenticity of both works.

Information gleaned from the restoration of the two works allowed close comparison. *Woman in White* was restored in New York in 1989 and the Penansky portrait in 2013 in Amsterdam. Neither painting had ever been varnished, and both were cleaned to remove only superficial dirt and grime (FIG. 12). However, *Miriam* was covered with an exceptionally thick, dark dirt layer indicating it had been kept in a very polluted environment for some time.

The Penansky portrait is on a cotton duck canvas support with a Panama weave that has a double warp and double twisted weft threads; warp count 13–14 cm, weft count 9–10. The left tacking edge of the canvas is selvedge, stretched and tacked onto a...
Information gleaned from the restoration of the Woman in White, which was restored in New York in 1969 and the Penansky portrait in 2013 in Amsterdam. Neither painting had ever been varnished, and both were cleaned to remove only surface dirt and grime. The Penansky portrait is on a cotton duck canvas that confirmed our belief in the Woman in White's authenticity and that it had belonged to Frida Kahlo. The catalogue check list, or catalogue check list, for which Diego Rivera wrote the introduction, was prepared with an exceptionally thick, dark dirt layer indicating it had been kept in a very polluted environment for some time. The catalogue check list includes information about the authenticity and that it had belonged to Frida Kahlo. The catalogue check list, or catalogue check list, for which Diego Rivera wrote the introduction, was prepared with an exceptionally thick, dark dirt layer indicating it had been kept in a very polluted environment for some time.

The Penansky portrait is on a cotton duck canvas support with Panama weave that has a double warp and double twisted weft threads; warp count 13–14 cm, weft count 9–10. The left tacking edge of the canvas is selvedge, stretched and tacked onto a modern stretcher, cracks in the paint indicate that may at first be confused with the Penansky portrait. However, the Penansky portrait, over the first of two quarter-length portraits of a woman. In relation to the Penansky portrait, it is upside down, rotated 180 degrees, and the eyes are painted with similar short dabs; the eyebrows are painted with similar short dabs; and the colored paint that defines the final contours. The Penansky portrait is on a cotton duck canvas that may at first be confused with the Penansky portrait. However, the Penansky portrait, over the first of two quarter-length portraits of a woman. In relation to the Penansky portrait, it is upside down, rotated 180 degrees, and the eyes are painted with similar short dabs; the eyebrows are painted with similar short dabs; and the colored paint that defines the final contours.

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by radiography, infrared reflectography (IRR) and transmitted infrared digital photography (IRD) exposes various aspects of the underlying portrait suggesting that the underlying portrait was also finished. As opposed to Miriam Penansky, who wears purple and white, cross-sections of paint samples and colors seen in open cracks and at the edges of the canvas suggest that the first sitter is wearing a predominantly green colored blouse with lace trim and short puffed sleeves. She also wears a necklace with large beads or stones. An inscription with the dimensions of the painting and an indecipherable word, upside down on the back of the lower rail of the stretcher, undoubtedly relates to the concealed portrait. A second white ground, applied to cover the underlying portrait, reduces our reading of it with IRR, but, conversely, it helps our IRR reading by revealing a second surprise, sketched and partially painted motifs that may have been intended as part of the Penansky portrait. Behind Miriam Penansky, there was once a small shelf, and part of its horizontal plank was changed into the top rail of the yellow chair (FIG. 15). On the left side of the shelf had stood a slender vase containing a single flower, and to the left and right of the portrait, partially behind Penansky, are shapes that may indicate other objects also sitting on the shelf. Once seen via IRR imaging, the impasto and color of these motifs becomes slightly recognizable with the naked eye. From the colors visible in paint cracks, it appears that the vase with the flower was actually completed. It is more difficult to say whether the shelf and other compositional elements were fully painted as well or only sketched. It is also difficult to know whether the shelf and vase were originally behind the sitter or if they belonged, with other unidentifiable motifs, to yet another independent composition, also abandoned in favor of the Penansky portrait. However, in the IRR it is clear that the chair stiles are painted directly over the shelf. There is also brushwork and a color shift in the background to the left and right of both stiles that indicate it may have been a change of mind by Kahlo as she painted Miriam Penansky, simplifying the composition by removing the shelf and vase and adding the chair after the portrait was completed. One day, we may discover the answers to these new questions.

Every work of art is a universe, and as with every universe, it has things that are obvious, things that are less clear, and many more that will remain a mystery. In this brief essay we have pieced together a puzzle where each component adds to our knowledge about the Portrait of Miriam Penansky and the Portrait of a Woman in White, and, ultimately, the oeuvre of Frida Kahlo. The provenance of each of these works and the technical and stylistic analysis – the physical properties and materials and the handling of line and paint – confirm their authenticity. What we were unable to do, however — something no one can do — is convey the emotional charge that Kahlo left in each painting, which initially drew us in the first place. This is the essence of what is always genuine and unique, that which cannot be forged.

“The Penansky portrait is signed and dated, ‘FrieDA KAHOLO. AGOSTO 1929.’ all upper case except for the ‘i’. Kahlo’s signature varied over the years. Although her given name was spelled Frieda, in the original German, into her young adult years, she wrote it interchangeably with Frida, the Spanish version.”

FIGURE 15. Infra-red reflectogram of the Portrait of Miriam Penansky showing a shelf and vase with a flower not visible in the original composition.
TWO KAHLO PORTRAITS—ONE FOUND; ONE CONFIRMED

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