Guadalupe Rivera and Marie-Pierre Colle (1994); Ignacio Urquiza, photographer *Frida's Fiestas: Recipes and Reminiscences of Life with Frida Kahlo*

New York: Clarkson Potter/Publishers
224 pages; 101 color and black and white photographs; 8 reproductions of paintings; ISBN: 0-517-59235-5 (hardcover) $35.00

Elizabeth Garber

SQUASH BLOSSOM BUDÍN
(12 servings)

CREPES
4 tablespoons/ 60g melted butter
6 eggs
3/4 cup/ 100 g flour
3/4 cup/ 180 ml milk
salt
2 tablespoons/ 30 g butter

FILLING
1 medium onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons/ 30 g butter
2 pounds/ 1 k squash blossoms, stems and pistils removed and discarded, blossoms chopped
salt and pepper
1 1/2 cups pureed and drained tomatoes

10 ounces/ 300 g panela or Oaxaca cheese, grated (or muenster)
1 1/2 cups/ 375 ml heavy cream

Frida's Fiestas is a cookbook and (as the subtitle names) a book of reminiscences that bears some resemblance to Laura Esquivel's recent best selling novel *Como agua para chocolate.* Both are books of stories that interweave with food, and both give recipes that enhance the sensory experience of their stories. In Frida's *Fiestas,* Guadalupe Rivera, daughter of muralist Diego Rivera and co-author of this book, has collected her memories of living for a period during her teen years with Frida Kahlo and her father. The memories form vignettes of an outing to Xochimilco, the floating gardens outside of Mexico City; of the celebration of Las Posadas, the reenactment of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem that is a yearly Christmas ritual in Mexico and the southwestern United States; of the Day of the Dead (All Souls Day in the United States and Europe, but much more elaborately celebrated), and so forth, one for each month of the year. Accompanying these vignettes of life with Frida and Diego are the recipes for the foods that were so much a part of the sensory experience of these occasions.

If you are among those who enjoy reading cookbooks, perhaps at bedtime but not meal-planning time, you will especially enjoy the format of this book. In addition to the stories and recipes, there are sumptuous pictures of the foods in traditional Mexican potteries that Kahlo loved, garnished with flowers, sensuous fruits and vegetables arranged as Kahlo arranged them in her still lifes. The Blue House in Coyoacán and other of Kahlo's frequented places are in the background. If you

wish to actually prepare some of the dishes, the recipes are traditional central Mexican cuisine and feature an abundance of fresh foods. Oddly, however, their presentation as recipes lacks the flourish and detail for which Kahlo was known and that is conveyed in the stories and the photographs. Directions are minimal. The table of contents is structured around events and not the food (you must turn the index or to each chapter to find what recipes are included). And if you don't know what huazontles (a wild green) are, or chorizo (sausage), or zapote (a winter fruit native to tropical America), it won't be explained in these pages (although, oddly, substitutes *are* offered for some ingredients such as plantains and Mexican cheeses). These factors suggest an economic venture by both publisher and authors (much as is Margaret Wood's *A Painter's Kitchen: Recipes from the Kitchen of Georgia O'Keeffe* published by Red Crane Books in 1991) more than an art or social treatise.

Then what *is* the social import of such a book for the pages of this journal? On first glance, we might compare Rivera's stories to those told around the fireside of yesteryear, and argue that their anecdotal nature has a kind of folk value. But although Kahlo surrounded herself with Mexican folk art and adopted many folk foods, wore folk dress, and paid homage to folkways, (as we all know by now) these were constructed. Still, some readers may enjoy *Frida's Fiestas* on this level and all the more so if they are already familiar with the famous painter's life and work.

Another level of understanding is that of food as women's domain. This is where Esquivel's novel comes back into focus. In each book, food is both art and gift and a means to bring people together. Frida's kitchen is very famous and she is known to have entertained extravagantly (indeed, Rivera recalls that for one of Frida's birthdays, she finished a commissioned painting in order to finance her party). Frida's love for life and her passion for her husband are evident in the lusciousness of the foods, photographs, painting reproductions, and stories on the pages of the book, much as they entwine in the novel *Como agua para chocolate.* This entwining of love and food, set within women's domain, might be interpreted by some readers as anti-feminist depending on the brand of feminism to which you

subscribe. Drawing on the work of Simone deBeauvoir, Georgia Collins has argued that the "immanent" domains of traditional women's work should not be discarded for the "transcendent" domains of the male world, but rather revalued. The daily tasks that are the least well paid are usually those that sustain us, that give life a sound argument, in my estimation, for their reevaluation. Lewis Hide argues in his book *The Gift* that art should be a gift, not a commodity. Food in the sense it is represented in *Frida's Fiestas* has the wrappings and thought of a gift. It shows attention to formal elements of art such as color, shape, and texture. Food also brings people together, creating community. In this aspect, the book brings forth some of the cultural aspects of folk tradition.

If we are more prone to social analysis, we might ask why Frida-mania has caught on now in the United States. It might be the mainstreaming of a select few women's accomplishments in the arts (the "sprinkle and stir" approach to women's issues) or the psychologically egocentric aspect of many of Kahlo's paintings that fits well with the continuing emphasis on self in this country. Certainly these two facets of Kahlo's life, her womanhood and her egocentricity, are conveyed in the text of the book. The interest might also be attributed to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). Why not? As a kind of 15 minutes of fame, media attention turns our focus to wherever in the world U.S. Americans become involved. It is unlikely that Frida-mania is rooted in communism and social activism even though these concerns were a continuing focus of Kahlo's and husband Rivera's lives together *and* subject of some of Kahlo's last paintings and diary entries.

If you want good, classical recipes of Mexican food, try one of Diana Kennedy's well known books. If you want art, try a gallery, the art section of your local library, or a friend's studio. But if you want a blend of food and art presented for leisurely consumption, this might be the book for you.