

# IN VOGUE

EDITED BY RACHEL LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY

## Portraits of a lady

**ROHIT CHAWLA's** new calendar features models, actors, dancers and writers. But it's artist Frida Kahlo who shines through.  
By RACHEL LOPEZ

**F**eisty feminist, Communist, bisexual revolutionary artist Frida Kahlo wasn't one for second acts. Her last diary entry—she died in her sleep in 1954—read, “I hope the end is joyful—and I hope to never come back.” But almost 60 years later, in a country far removed from her native Mexico, Kahlo has returned. For a year, at least.

Delhi photographer Rohit Chawla, who has been shooting art calendars for the last 10 years and has devoted 12-page spreads to Raja Ravi Varma and Gustav Klimt, draws on Kahlo's deeply autobiographical self-portraits for this year's Bird Group calendar. But he hasn't simply reproduced the works. With the help of designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee, he has styled and costumed 12 Indian women to mimic the iconic images. Model Lisa Haydon, artist Mithu Sen, actor Konkona Sen Sharma, publisher Chiki Sarkar, dancer and writer Tishani Doshi and >

Model Lisa Haydon stands in for the Mexican artist in *Frida On Bench*





Clockwise from right: Tishani Doshi as *The Two Fridas*; Saloni Puri recreates *Itzcuintli Dog With Me*; Konkona Sen Sharma in a Frida self-portrait



“With *Free-da!* we wanted an Indo-Mexican sensibility in the pictures while keeping the essence of Frida”  
—Rohit Chawla

others sport the braid, thick eyebrows, heavy skirt and loaded scowl to turn Frida into Chawla’s *Free-da!*. “The word represents freedom,” Chawla says. “We wanted to bring an Indo-Mexican sensibility to the pictures but still keep the essence of Frida in there.”

Kahlo’s essence is complemented by Chawla’s wit. Sonal Mansingh, who defied doctors and built a career in dance, echoes the artist’s struggles with polio and an accident in which she injured her leg and pelvis. Artist Anjolie Ela Menon appears in a shot that also features an exposed heart—a theme she herself has painted often. Painter Mithu Sen nods to Kahlo’s political leanings with a T-shirt bearing the Communist Party symbol. Chawla says the tricky part was not setting up the scenes, but getting the women to be part of them. Their reluctance, however, was not out of vanity. “The women all had their favourite portraits and didn’t want to model for any others,” he explains.

Though the calendar offers no pointers to the names of the works they reference or the women they feature, the photos resonate as easily as Kahlo’s own images have over the last few dec-

ades. “Frida’s work is simple. It doesn’t confound you,” Chawla says, and he sees his work as a way of democratising art. “Calendar art is not just about pin-ups, and six MF Husain prints with the date does not an art calendar make,” he says. “Something like this goes into thousands of homes and you get to look at it in your own time.” ■





CASA, TASTE, TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

# VOGUE

*living*

EDITED BY MANJU SARA RAJAN

## STREET CAR

A street scene in Havana is like being in a 1940s period film. It has all the props: cobbled streets, clouds of diesel smoke and vintage cars. In fact, you see so many classic models that you'd be forgiven for thinking there's a permanent vintage car rally on.



TRAVEL

## PAST PERFECT

Distressed walls, Spanish colonial architecture and classic cars—in Havana, vintage is a way of life, says photographer and Cubophile ROHIT CHAWLA





Punit Modgil, Saloni Puri Chawla, Rohit Chawla and Gita Bhatt



Alakananda Saha, Tahira-Tara Chawla and Kalyani Saha Chawla



Shivani Yazir and Ferdinand Maultaschi



Anup Pegu and Amit Ranjan

### PICTURE PERFECT

**WHAT:** The Bird Group and Rohit Chawla's launch of Klimt—The Sequel

**WHERE:** Visual Arts Gallery, Habitat Centre, New Delhi  
After his reinterpretations of the art of Raja Ravi Varma, photographer Rohit Chawla decided to venture into the symbolism of Austrian artist Gustav Klimt. The event drew Chawla's lovely muses and Delhi's artsy crowd.



Sabina Singh and Bianca Peralta



Ayesha Thapar



Ankur Bhatia, Rohit Chawla and Smriti Bhatia



Tarun Tahliani and Saloni Puri Chawla



Suneet Varma and Koel Purie



Sheena Sharma and AD Singh



Bish Moitra, Iris Moitra, Naina de Bois and Thomas Ellis



Naina de Bois and Simer Motiani



Shreya Singh and Punit Juneja