



LANDMARK DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: MAY 5, 2021

Record No.: 2021-001721DES

Project Address: 800 Chestnut Street (*The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*)

Zoning: RH-3 (Residential-House, Three Family)
40-X Height and Bulk District
San Francisco Landmark No. 85 (San Francisco Art Institute)

Block/Lot: 0049/001

Project Sponsor: SF Planning Department
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Property Owner: San Francisco Art Institute
800 Chestnut Street
San Francisco, CA 94133-2206

Staff Contact: Pilar LaValley (628-652-7372)
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Recommendation: Recommend Landmark Designation to the Board of Supervisors

Property Description

The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City is a *buon fresco* (true fresco) produced in-situ by Diego Rivera with his assistants John Viscount Hastings (Lord Hastings), Clifford Wight, and plasterer Matthew Barnes between May 1 and 31, 1931 at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), then known as the California School of Fine Arts. The fresco occupies the north wall of a studio and exhibit gallery, now known as Diego Rivera Gallery. The Diego Rivera Gallery is located to the west of the courtyard in the original 1926 building of the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI).

The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City, an approximately 40 foot by 30 foot painting, “covers the upper two-thirds of a pedimented interior wall”¹ of a large double-height room. Centered in the unpainted plaster wall below the fresco is an incised inscription about the history of the fresco. A *trompe l’oeil* scaffolding motif

¹ Stanton L. Catlin, “Mural Census: San Francisco Art Institute,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, ed. Cynthia Newman Helms (New York: Founders Society Detroit Institute of Arts, in association with W. W. Norton, 1986), 284.

divides the fresco into three sections vertically and includes painted post supports that extend down the lower third of the wall to nearly floor level. In a color scheme of blues, reds, ochres and greys, the fresco depicts a “cross-section of the modern American city” with a blue overalled and hard-hatted

...heroic figure of a workman, a painted scaffolding and a rear view of the artist seated on the scaffolding. Within this framework are various figures typifying aspects of construction, labor and planning.²

The San Francisco Art Institute was the first art school established west of the Mississippi River. This institution, which comprises two-thirds of a city block fronting on Francisco, Jones, and Chestnut streets, is in the Russian Hill neighborhood. The facility

...consists primarily of a 1926 building designed by architects Bakewell & Brown (the Original Building), and a 1969 addition designed by Paffard Keatinge-Clay (the Addition). ... A board form concrete wall approximately six feet tall encloses the property which includes an open, grassy area with trees (the Meadow) on the northeast corner of the lot. Surface parking lots are located between the Meadow and SFAI on Jones Street and at the northwest corner of the parcel on Francisco Street.³

The San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) is located in San Francisco’s Russian Hill neighborhood on the northwest corner of Chestnut and Jones streets. The streets adjacent to the campus are occupied by two- to three-story single-family and multi-family residences in a variety of architectural styles. Many of the surrounding residences were constructed in the early decades of the 1900s, but there are also examples from the 1920s, 1950s, and 2000s.

In 1977, the original 1926 building was designated as Landmark No. 85 through Ordinance No. 208-77. The Diego Rivera fresco, *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, was described and its significance was briefly discussed in this designation.⁴ The 1969 addition was not included in landmark designation. Both the original building and addition were surveyed as part of the Department of City Planning’s 1976 survey. The survey notes the original building and addition “are equally valid architectures, disparate styles, playful, human, and [have] visually creative spatial disproportions.”

The San Francisco Art Institute, at 800 Chestnut Street, was nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A (events) in 2016. The Historic Preservation Commission provided review and comment on a draft National Register nomination for the San Francisco Art Institute in 2015. The Commission concurred with the assessment of the nomination that SFAI was nationally significant under Criterion A (events) for its role in the development of American art and for its contributions to art education in the United States with a period of significance of 1927 through 1980. The Commission stated that they also believed that the property should be nominated under Criterion C (architecture/design) as a facility that possesses high artistic value and incorporates the distinctive characteristics of both Spanish Colonial Revival architecture (original building) and of

² San Francisco Planning Department, “San Francisco Art Institute, Final Case Report” for Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (December 17, 1975), 7.

³ National Register of Historic Places, San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) (800 Chestnut Street) Nomination, City and County of San Francisco, California, 2016, Section 7, pages 4-5. The property was determined eligible for listing but was not listed on the National Register due lack of support by owner.

⁴ San Francisco Planning Department, “San Francisco Art Institute, Final Case Report” for Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (December 17, 1975).

Brutalist architecture (addition). Further, the Commission recognized that both SFAI buildings were designed by master architects: Bakewell & Brown for the original building in 1926 and Paffard Keatinge-Clay for the addition in 1969. Neither the National Register nomination nor the Commission review and comment assess significance of *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*.

Project Description

The item before the HPC is consideration of a Resolution to Recommend Article 10 landmark designation of the Diego Rivera fresco titled *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* to the Board of Supervisors under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.2. The pending Landmark designation was initiated by the Board of Supervisors.

On January 5, 2021, Supervisor Peskin introduced a proposed Resolution under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File No. 210016 to initiate the Landmark designation process for the fresco titled *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* in the Diego Rivera Gallery of the San Francisco Art Institute at 800 Chestnut Street. At a hearing of the Land Use and Transportation Committee of the Board on January 11, 2021, the committee voted unanimously to Recommend to the full Board approval of the Resolution to initiate Landmark Designation. On January 12, 2021, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Resolution, and on January 22, 2021, with the Mayor's signature, Resolution No. 12-21 became effective.

Compliance With Planning Code

Article 10 of the Planning Code.

The executive summary and analysis under review was prepared by Department preservation staff, who meet the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualifications. The Department has determined that the fresco titled *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* meets the requirements for eligibility as an individual landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code. The justification for its inclusion is explained in detail in the attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, and briefly in this Executive Summary.

Significance: *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, which demonstrates familiar themes in Rivera's work on the critical importance of labor in the artistic and creative process, is culturally and historically significant as the work of preeminent Mexican artist, Diego Rivera. The fresco, designed and painted on a wall selected by the artist from amongst several options, reflects its immediate environment, physically and artistically, is also significant for its association with art education at SFAI, contributing to an expanded academic field of study in mural and fresco painting and influencing many generations of artists that have taught or attended SFAI. This artwork, and the academic program and artists that evolved from it, is also significant for its influence on the New Deal-era Works Project Administration mural program. The fresco is also significant for association with the Latinx and Chicana arts communities through its direct lineage with the Mission Mural movement (also known as community mural movement), a significant and vibrant part of San Francisco's cultural heritage. The period of significance is 1931 to 1974.

Underrepresented Landmark Types: The proposed landmark designation addresses two previously identified underrepresented landmark types: work of art property type and property associated with Latinx and Chicanx arts communities.

Integrity: *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* maintains a high level of integrity. See Pages 2-3 of attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet for further analysis.

Character-Defining Features: Character-defining features of *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* are identified in the attached Landmark Designation Fact Sheet on Page 3.

Boundaries of the Landmark: The proposed Landmark site encompasses the location of *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, which is on the north wall of the Diego Rivera Gallery, an exhibition hall in the San Francisco Art Institute at 800 Chestnut Street (Assessor's Block No. 0049, Lot 001).

General Plan.

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan contains the following relevant objectives and policies:

OBJECTIVE 2

CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE A SENSE OF NATURE, CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST, AND FREEDOM FROM OVERCROWDING.

Policy 4

Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

Designating significant historic resources as local landmarks will further continuity with the past because the buildings will be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Planning Code Section 101.1 – Eight Priority Policies establishes and requires review of permits for consistency with said policies. On balance, the proposed designation is consistent with the priority policies, and furthers Policy Number 7, which states that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved.

Landmark Designation Procedures

Action by Historic Preservation Commission.

The Historic Preservation Commission on February 4, 2009, by Resolution No. 001, adopted the National Register Criteria as its methodology for recommending landmark designation of historic resources. Under the National Register Criteria, the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, workmanship, and association, and that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or that are associated with the lives of persons

significant in our past; or that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or properties that have yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Article 10 of the Planning Code.

Section 1004 of the Planning Code authorizes the landmark designation of an individual structure or other feature or an integrated group of structures and features on a single lot or site, having special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, as a landmark. Section 1004.1 also outlines that landmark designation may be initiated by the Board of Supervisors or the Historic Preservation Commission and the initiation shall include findings in support. Section 1004.2 states that once initiated, the proposed designation is referred to the Historic Preservation Commission for a report and recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to approve, disapprove or modify the proposal.

Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, if the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors and without referral to the Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors shall hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation.

Section 1004(b) requires that the designating ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors shall include the location and boundaries of the landmark site, a description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation, and a description of the particular features that should be preserved.

If the Historic Preservation Commission approves the proposed designation recommendation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors, which holds a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation (Section 1004.4). If the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days (Section 1004.5).

Public / Neighborhood Input

Several emails and letters in support of the landmark designation were submitted to the Board of Supervisors during the Board review of the initiation to designate *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*. These letters are attached as part of the Board of Supervisors resolution package.

To date, staff has not received any communications regarding the landmark designation.

Issues & Other Considerations

- **Property owner input:** On April 15, 2021, the Department sent mailed notice to the property owner regarding the landmark designation recommendation hearing scheduled for May 5, 2021.
- **Period of Significance:** The period of significance for *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* fresco is 1931-1974. These dates encompass the painting of the fresco in Diego Rivera Gallery at San Francisco

Art Institute through its primary periods of influence and association with the New Deal Works Project Administration mural program in San Francisco (1934-1948) and the Mission Mural/community mural movement to 1974 when *Homage to Siquieros*, by Jesús “Chuy” Campusano, Luis Cortázar and Michael Rios, was painted at Bank of America branch at Mission and 16th streets. Since the Mission Mural or community mural movement is on-going and continues to develop and grow in San Francisco and internationally, identifying an appropriate end for the period of significance based on this historic association is complicated. 1974 was chosen as the end of the period of significance as this marks the date when *Homage to Siquieros* was painted. This artwork, an important piece in the Mission Mural and community mural movement in San Francisco, with its direct reference to the central figure in *The Making of a Fresco* and its direct connection to Rivera via Emmy Lou Packard, is representative of the influences of Rivera’s work in San Francisco. After 1974, the influence of Rivera becomes more difficult to define and there are many other artists and Mission-based organizations, such as Precita Eyes Muralists and Galería de la Raza, that are more representative of Mission or community muralism.

Environmental Review Status

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical).

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors landmark designation of *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* as it is individually eligible as the work of preeminent Mexican artist Diego Rivera. The fresco is also significant for its association with art education at SFAI, contributing to an expanded academic field of study in mural and fresco painting and influencing many generations of artists that have taught or attended SFAI. This artwork, and the academic program and artists that evolved from it, is also significant for its influence on the New Deal-era Works Project Administration mural program. The fresco is also significant for association with the Latinx and Chicanx arts communities through its direct lineage with the Mission Mural movement (also known as community mural movement), a significant and vibrant part of San Francisco’s cultural heritage.

ATTACHMENTS

- Draft Resolution Recommending Landmark designation
- Exhibit A – Landmark Designation Fact Sheet
- Exhibit B – Maps and Context Images
- Exhibit C – Draft Landmark Designation Ordinance
- Exhibit D – Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 12-21
- Exhibit E – Board of Supervisors January 12, 2021 initiation hearing packet