

**From:** [Adrian Card](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Diego Rivera Mural  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 10:49:28 AM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Ms. Major,

I'm writing to you as an alumnus of the San Francisco Art Institute, and I wanted to voice my support for landmarking the Diego Rivera mural at 800 Chestnut Street.

Thank you,  
Adrian Card

--

Adrian Card  
Harpichord decoration, murals  
& historically-based decorative painting  
[www.adriancard.com](http://www.adriancard.com)  
707-894-9210  
[www.artisticlicense.org](http://www.artisticlicense.org)

**From:** [Christopher Sabre](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [sfartistsalumni@gmail.com](mailto:sfartistsalumni@gmail.com)  
**Subject:** 210016[Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City"  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 12:25:30 PM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Members of the Committee:

Please consider designating the Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City" a landmark. It would not be an exaggeration to call the mural part of the soul of the San Francisco Art Institute and City's North Beach neighborhood. My mother, Marjorie Eakin, and other fresco artists of the 1930's whose work can still be seen at the Institute were inspired by Diego's mural. The Rivera mural must remain in place under the ownership of the San Francisco Art Institute.

Sincerely,

Christopher Sabre

**From:** [Maggie Bradley](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** 210016- [Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City"]  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 12:29:43 PM  
**Attachments:** [Diego Mural 210016.pdf](#)

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

To The City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors,

I think Diego's mural is very clear about who he sees himself, the artist, wanting to highlight. We artists are workers among workers, those who have a long history building the foundation of this city. The importance of the gigantic laborer in the middle cannot be overlooked. Imagine the image without the figure in the middle and without all the laborers depicted. You would be left with business men and a group of what appears to be architects. In fact, Diego himself, or his backside, would not be part of the narrative either. This story of erasure will be the same for the city of San Francisco if we continue to allow art to be sold off and artists to be priced out. I came to this city because I believed in its willingness to put progressive ideas to the test. I come from a town in Georgia where strict religious views and conservatism reigned supreme. There was little room for trying alternative methods and supporting diversity in many forms, so I rebelled. Following this upbringing, I experienced years of addiction and poverty which lead me to see the value of structure, handwork and discipline. When I made it to San Francisco to attend SFAI, I thought I had been given a chance of a lifetime. I worked extremely hard to make ends meet all while attending this school and maintaining a 3.8 GPA. I am not unique. Many artists who worked at the school as teachers and staff, as well as the students, worked extremely hard to be there. Since March 2020 when the consequences of the SFAI Board of Trustees members and administration's gross mismanagement combined with the high cost of living/operating in San Francisco, came to an impasse, I went to every "agency" in place to protect students. This includes, calling the DA's office, WASC the accreditation agency, The BPPE, The Department of Education, Private Lawyers and finally local media. Not one agency stepped in and removed this Board and the people responsible. This left students scrambling, teachers out of work, staff losing healthcare and much more damage created all during a global pandemic. I hear once you hit the top, class/power wise, there is a lot of hand shaking and deals made between friends of friends of friends. Seems Diego was able to represent those as well, featured in well dressed clothes, backs facing the laborers, looking at new plans they have, ignoring the laborers building the city. I cannot help but feel the magnitude of the expression on this lone giant laborers face. Diego was trying to show you, I am trying to tell you and the community who showed up today are trying to speak up for the forgotten community of diverse artists who are workers. May San Francisco use the WPA model as an example of funding artists who are workers directly, so that as we all recover from this pandemic and the consequences of poor financial decisions and oversight, we may progress forward with change and preserve a core part of The City of San Francisco's foundation built by everyday artists and workers.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Marguerite Bradley, Maggie Bacon  
Artist, In favor of Landmark Status  
SFAI 2020

--

**Maggie Bacon**

*Artist/Oil Painter*

Typos are common errors and sure signs of a human touch.

210016- [Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City"] Sponsor: Peskin  
Resolution initiating a landmark designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code for Diego Rivera's fresco, titled "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City," painted in 1931 and located at 800 Chestnut Street.

To The City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors,

I think Diego's mural is very clear about who he sees himself, the artist, wanting to highlight. We artists are workers among workers, those who have a long history building the foundation of this city. The importance of the gigantic laborer in the middle cannot be overlooked. Imagine the image without the figure in the middle and without all the laborers depicted. You would be left with business men and a group of what appears to be architects. In fact, Diego himself, or his backside, would not be part of the narrative either. This story of erasure will be the same for the city of San Francisco if we continue to allow art to be sold off and artists to be priced out.

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Thank you for your time and consideration,

Marguerite Bradley, Maggie Bacon  
Artist, In favor of Landmark Status  
SFAI 2020

**From:** [Monica Bravo](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Statement for meeting of 1-11-21  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 2:07:40 PM  
**Attachments:** [Bravo BoS meeting 1-11-21.pdf](#)

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Erica Major,

Please find attached my remarks pursuant to agenda number 210016: Initiating Landmark Designation—800 Chestnut Street—Diego Rivera’s Mural *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of the City*," sponsored by Aaron Peskin.

Best,

Monica Bravo, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
History of Art and Visual Culture  
California College of the Arts

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*CCA is situated on the unceded territories of the Ohlone peoples.*

## **The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City**

**Board of Supervisors meeting, 1-11-21**

**Agenda number 210016**

Initiating Landmark Designation—800 Chestnut Street—Diego Rivera's Mural *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of the City*

Sponsored by Aaron Peskin

Statement:

Hello, I'm Dr. Monica Bravo, I am an art historian and assistant professor at California College of the Arts. I'm a specialist in the modern art of the Americas, having written a book on U.S. photographers in dialog with modern Mexican artists including Diego Rivera forthcoming from Yale University Press, as well as teaching courses on the Mexican Cultural Renaissance at Yale University and Mexican Modernism and Murals from Museums to the Street at CCA.

My concern is that the mural will be removed from its site. Although I understand that Rivera made this fresco on a steel framework, such that it may physically be removed from the site without damage to the painting, the imagery of this work is so entirely self-referential to the dimensions and context of the site that to remove it, in my professional opinion, would be to destroy it.

First, many do not realize that what looks like wooden scaffolding, upon which Rivera's bottom is perched, is actually a painted part of the mural, which then three-dimensionally extends below the fresco. Rivera has depicted himself and his assistants as artists, yes, but more importantly as workers contributing to the building of the city, as are the other individuals you see in the various sections of the mural. This is an invaluable message for art students, that they have a crucial function in society, and was one of the reasons why Rivera chose this subject for this site.

Second, Rivera has organized the composition such that it is legible from any position within what is now known as the Rivera gallery. There is one source of natural overhead light in the gallery's skylight, with another set of clerestory windows facing the courtyard, and Rivera *designed* the work such that areas of more detail and brighter color are closer to our eye levels. The upper regions are allowed to fall off, giving the impression of those areas receding into space. The space itself is chapel-like, and with his mural Rivera, consecrates its sacred use to one of active art making; the area's current use as a student gallery is entirely consistent with this.

Third, this mural, more than the *Allegory of California* at the Stock Exchange or private residential paintings he made in San Francisco and at Berkeley in 1930, launched the mural movement in the Bay Area. The Mexican Cultural Renaissance was the basis for the New Deal Works Progress Administration; many of SF's muralists trained or worked with Rivera at the SFAI site. Their works could once be seen across the city, and many still are, including at the nearby Coit Tower. These developments further paved the way for the Chicana mural movement that began in the Mission in the 1970s. Both for its historical significance and continued social utility to a next generation of artmakers, the mural should receive landmark designation.

Finally, many of you will be familiar with the destruction of Rivera's mural *Man at the Crossroads* at Rockefeller Center in 1934, primarily for the artist's inclusion of a portrait of Vladimir Lenin. Fortunately, he was able to re-create the mural according to his personal vision in Mexico City at the Museo de Bellas Artes. On other occasions, Rivera made relatively small frescos on steel frames which were specifically designed to travel as portable frescoes. This was not the case in *Making of a Fresco*. This is a site-specific work that depends on its current (permanent) site and function—as a student gallery at an art school, within the architectural space, and location at 800 Chestnut Street in North Beach—for its meaning. To remove the mural would be to destroy the work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Monica Bravo', written in a cursive style.

Monica Bravo, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
History of Art and Visual Culture  
California College of the Arts

**From:** [Elizabeth Travelslight](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Public comment: Agenda Item 210016 [Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City"]  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 2:49:46 PM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

My name is Elizabeth Travelslight, I'm a lifelong San Francisco resident and the proud parent of an SFUSD 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. I am an artist, an adjunct professor of mathematics and science, former president of SFAI's Adjunct Faculty Union, and I have taught courses that examine SFAI's history and the economics of art. Since 2014, I witnessed first-hand how the board of trustees' arrogance and incompetence caused SFAI to become a fiscally-unsafe organization that created precarious teaching and learning conditions for students and faculty of color.

We are here because of careless philanthropists who failed to follow through on a public promise to raise **\$19M** for SFAI's campus expansion to Fort Mason Center. These trustees gambled ambitious fundraising goals on a loan leveraged against the school's Chestnut Street campus—the buildings, the artworks, the livelihoods of its community members, and the future of the school itself. Their failure to follow through on this promise first left students and faculty to shoulder the burden, now they want to remove and sell a landmark work of art to compensate for their shortfall. This reckless so called "philanthropy" needs to be stopped and this site-specific mural must be protected from their negligence.

Rivera's mural makes a very simple point: The role of the artist in the building of San Francisco is to center and uplift our city's workers. To remind us of who actually brings our great city to life. Persistent race and wealth inequalities have allowed death and disease to rain down upon our most vulnerable communities and our essential workers. If our city is going to recover from this devastating pandemic, we need to heed Rivera's message—not let incompetent "philanthropists" cart it off to cover for their broken promises or take further risks with additional loans against it.

Students paid the price for this debt by covering high tuition and costs of living with student loans and their facilities suffered from inadequate investment. Faculty paid the price by enduring stagnant salaries and the indignity of part-time, precarious adjunct positions year after year. SFAI's inability to support and retain significant representation of faculty and staff of color has been an unacknowledged loss for San Francisco's entire arts community and for students of color in particular who need mentors to help them navigate an art world shaped by colonialism, Eurocentrism, and white privilege.

These so called "trustees" left a gaping multi-million-dollar hole in a deeply important institution of learning—gutting a community that has served San Francisco and the creation of art around the world for 150 years. Only they know why they abandoned and now try to obscure this fiduciary-responsibilities. Mistake? Malfeasance? I don't know. Someone should really investigate that. 70 adjuncts laid-off, 300 students forced out. And now the removal and sale of this monumental work of art? These are considerable costs for philanthropic hubris.

The Making of a Fresco showing the Building of a City is a testament to the purpose of art by one of the world's most celebrated artist of color—to use it to cover and compensate for ongoing derelictions of duty by SFAI's trustees is unethical and an unforgiveable slap in the face to every artist of color that has ever called San Francisco home. We cannot allow the incompetent wealthy to run roughshod over our city's cultural legacy. Now more than ever we need to remember who



we really are.

I affirm Supervisor Peskin's resolution and respectfully ask that you do the same.

Thank you.

Best wishes,  
Elizabeth

\*\*\* \*\* \*

Elizabeth Travelslight

[elizabethtravelslight.com](http://elizabethtravelslight.com)

[i-a-f-s.org](http://i-a-f-s.org)

[artandactivism.org](http://artandactivism.org)

**From:** [SoCaliForeign](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** DIEGO RIVERA IS SACRED  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 2:12:40 PM

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

MAKE IT A HISTORICAL LANDMARK  
I STUDIED AT SFAI AND THAT MURAL HELPED ME SEE MYSELF WHEN I WASNT  
REPRESENTED IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA  
I REFUSE TO LET GEORGE LUCAS HAVE PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF THIS  
MASTERPIECE

WITH CONVICTION,

IZZY DIER

**From:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Hepner, Lee \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Professional support from an art historian regarding Landmark Designation of Rivera mural  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 7:03:22 PM

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Please include in the file for today's item no. 3.  
Aaron

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**From:** Peskin, Aaron (BOS) <aaron.peskin@sfgov.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 7:02:19 PM  
**To:** Monica Bravo <bravo@cca.edu>  
**Subject:** Re: Professional support from an art historian regarding Landmark Designation of Rivera mural

Thanks so much!  
Aaron

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**From:** Monica Bravo <bravo@cca.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 2:17:19 PM  
**To:** Peskin, Aaron (BOS) <aaron.peskin@sfgov.org>  
**Subject:** Professional support from an art historian regarding Landmark Designation of Rivera mural

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Supervisor Peskin,

I am an art historian and assistant professor at California College of the Arts, as well as an expert on the work of the Mexican muralists, especially Diego Rivera. I have attached a statement I wrote in support of your landmark designation proposal, which I planned to potentially remark upon at today's Board of Supervisors meeting (I submitted the document to Erica Major as well). I would like to simply emphasize my support and offer my expertise on the issue. I could offer testimony as to the site's importance or write an op-ed for the *SF Chronicle*, for example, if this would be of use in securing landmark designation.

Best,

Monica Bravo, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
History of Art and Visual Culture  
California College of the Arts

<https://www.monicabravo.info/>

--

*CCA is situated on the unceded territories of the Ohlone peoples.*

**From:** [Lindsey White](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#); [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** A message from SFAI Faculty about Initiating Landmark Designation 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 5:17:02 PM  
**Attachments:** [Catherine Opie Letter.pdf](#)  
[Faculty Senate Diego Rivera Mural.pdf](#)  
[Reimagine Committee Letter to the Board on the Diego Mural 12.16.20 \(2\).pdf](#)

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Supervisor Aaron Peskin and Erica Major,

I'm writing to share three documents for your records that oppose the sale or removal of Diego Rivera's mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City".

1. A letter is from a well respected artist and SFAI Alumni, Catherine Opie to the SFAI Board
2. A letter from SFAI's Faculty Senate to the SFAI Board
3. A letter from SFAI's Reimagine Committee.

Thank you,  
Lindsey White

--

**Lindsey White**  
Assistant Professor // Photography Department Chair

**SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE**  
800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, CA 94133  
[www.sfai.edu](http://www.sfai.edu)

My open letter to the trustees of SFAI.

January 7, 2021

An Open Letter to the Board of Trustees of the San Francisco Art Institute:

I am writing this letter with a great amount of sadness, not only during what has been happening throughout our country; a global pandemic, a coup by the president, but for the uncertainty for the future of art for educators and students.

These are not normal times and a great amount of reflection and action is needed among all of us. I am shocked and saddened that SFAI has put Diego Rivera's 1931 mural, The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City, up for sale.

This is an incredibly unconscionable decision. Solely the fact that the Diego Rivera mural has become a monetary asset in the minds of the trustees; an asset thought to help the institution survive. Of course, I want SFAI to survive, but not by gutting one of the most important artworks in the history of the institution. The Diego Rivera mural has lived and inspired many generations of artists at 800 Chestnut. Quite frankly this is sickening and I am profoundly against the sale of the Diego Rivera mural, thus making my letter public.

I am a proud SFAI alum, BFA, Class of 1985. My teachers were the best of the best - instilling the drive and passion I needed to be an artist, especially an artist who bears witness with a camera documenting America. I have continued on with their inspiration in teaching for the past 30 years, 24 of them at UCLA. I have also had the honor of serving as a trustee and board member at The Hammer Museum, MOCA, The Andy Warhol Foundation, and The Mike Kelley Foundation. With this experience of being a trustee, I understand how hard decisions are to make when an institution free falls into financial crisis after financial crisis.

It is the Board of Trustees responsibility for the fiscal health of the institution. In other situations, I have seen board members reach deep into their pockets to fulfill the health of the institution and their responsibilities as trustees. It is not something that I have heard or I am aware of among the trustees of SFAI and there have been no news articles declaring the generosity of a large gift to stabilize the institution.

The strategic plan of selling the Rivera is unacceptable and this has led me to the decision to pull my piece from the upcoming auction for SFAI of Alumni artist works. The piece is a unique Surfer photograph that I was proud to give to help the institution. I can no longer be a part of a legacy that will sell off an essential unique piece of history, especially one of the importance of the site specific of a Diego Rivera mural. Artists are asked to be philanthropists; it is truly important that my work can create an ability of helping organizations with their future. The Board of Trustees has abused this in not making the gesture of donations themselves. The time is now, generosity is met with generosity. The fact that UC Regents has stepped in to pay the note and we have lost 800 Chestnut Street is a travesty. San Francisco has more millionaires and billionaires geographically than most cities in America.

I ask the board to reconsider their decision to sell the Diego Rivera mural. I also ask the board to dig deep in your own pockets in raising an endowment for the preservation of SFAI that is

truly reflective of the community of philanthropists of the Bay Area. This cannot be figured out by selling such an important site-specific artwork such as Diego Rivera's mural.

Sincerely, Catherine Opie

From: Faculty Senate of the San Francisco Art Institute  
To: The San Francisco Art Institute Board of Trustees  
Subject: Sale of the Diego Rivera mural

12/16/2020

Dear Board of Trustees:

The Faculty Senate has voted against the sale and removal of the Diego Rivera mural. There has been a lack of serious deliberations with the faculty and staff over such a consequential decision.

- The cultural significance of the Diego Rivera mural requires that it remain in place, given its subject matter and site specificity, its inestimable place in the history of SFAI and art history, as well as its status as a San Francisco city landmark.
- A decision to proceed with a sale will be on an accelerated timetable without substantial input from SFAI's community stakeholders, leading arts professionals, and San Francisco city leaders.
- Deliberations related to the future of the mural must include BIPOC scholars in addition to organizations recommended by the faculty:

Chon Noriega, Director UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center  
<https://www.chicano.ucla.edu/about/director>

C. Ondine Chavoya, Ph.D, Chair of Latina/o Studies Program, Associate Professor of Contemporary Art, Williams College  
<https://latino-studies.williams.edu/profile/ochavoya/>

Tatiana Flores, Ph.D. Professor Art History and LCS(Latino, Caribbean art; contemporary art; socially conscious art forms)  
<https://latcar.rutgers.edu/people/core-faculty/48-tatiana-flores>

Barbara Haskell, Art historian and museum curator, curator Whitney Museum of American Art.  
Currently on view- Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925,Äì1945  
<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/vida-americana>

Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager of the City of Oakland  
[rbedoya@oaklandca.gov](mailto:rbedoya@oaklandca.gov)

National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures  
[nalac.org](http://nalac.org)



The National Hispanic Cultural Center Foundation.  
[nhccfoundation.org](http://nhccfoundation.org)

The Consulate General of Mexico in San Francisco and San Jose  
[consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanfrancisco/](http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanfrancisco/)  
[consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanjose/](http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanjose/)

Coalition to Protect Public Art  
<https://www.protectpublicart.org/>

- Faculty Senate has been given neither an accounting of SFAI's current financials nor a financial plan concerning the future.
- There haven't been sufficient explorations into creative alternatives to an outright sale/removal of the mural that may also enable SFAI to continue under a sustainable model.

The Faculty Senate welcomes an expanded discussion with the Board about the Diego Rivera mural. As we enter our 150<sup>th</sup> year, the mural represents the iconic, symbolic heart of SFAI. It signifies the fundamental bridge between our historic past and collective goals for the future.

Sincerely,

Brett Reichman, Faculty Senate President  
Lindsey White, Faculty Senate Vice President  
Claire Daigle, Faculty Senate Secretary

From: Faculty Senate of the San Francisco Art Institute  
To: The San Francisco Art Institute Board of Trustees  
Subject: Sale of the Diego Rivera mural

12/16/2020

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Tatiana Flores, Ph.D. Professor Art History and LCS(Latino, Caribbean art; contemporary art; socially conscious art forms)  
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<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/vida-americana>

Roberto Bedoya, Cultural Affairs Manager of the City of Oakland  
[rbedoya@oaklandca.gov](mailto:rbedoya@oaklandca.gov)

National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures  
[nalac.org](http://nalac.org)

The National Hispanic Cultural Center Foundation.  
[nhccfoundation.org](http://nhccfoundation.org)

The Consulate General of Mexico in San Francisco and San Jose  
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[consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanjose/](http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/sanjose/)

Coalition to Protect Public Art  
<https://www.protectpublicart.org/>

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Sincerely,

Brett Reichman, Faculty Senate President  
Lindsey White, Faculty Senate Vice President  
Claire Daigle, Faculty Senate Secretary

## LETTER OF APPEAL TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AT SFAI DECEMBER 15, 2020

As SFAI prepares to celebrate its 150th anniversary, we, the Reimagine Committee, are tasked by the SFAI Board of Trustees to recommend a comprehensive vision that renews our ability and commitment to prepare emerging artists to meet the increasing challenges they will undoubtedly face in the future. The Reimagine Committee is organized to include the wider SFAI community, experts in related fields, and most importantly a wide range of alumni across the world. As promised, the Reimagine Committee has developed a comprehensive and innovative proposal for the relaunching of SFAI by: setting aside the assumptions that have driven our institutional decision making for the last several decades; taking a fresh look at our mission and values; producing and analyzing a comprehensive set of financial models; proposing a dynamic system of pedagogy; refocusing our efforts to champion racial, social, and environmental justice; and establishing a non-hierarchical structure of governance.

We appreciate the board dialoguing with us and taking a first step in extending the conversation to the community about our joint responsibilities at SFAI, like the Diego Rivera Mural.

In alignment with our models for re-imagining SFAI, the Reimagine Committee strongly disagrees with the idea that the sale and removal of the Diego Rivera mural will save SFAI. Contrary to our knowledge and recommendations, such actions by the SFAI Board of Trustees will cause irreparable harm to the ethical, moral, cultural, social, political, civic, domestic, and international standing of our institution. We are confident that SFAI will cease to exist as the public memory we all wish to be our legacy should the institution fail to understand the power of art in this particular context and matter. Considering all that we have imagined together as a Re-imagine Committee, we feel it is our duty to advise the SFAI Board of Trustees in good faith and partnership. We present this letter to you with the intention to collaboratively promote the success of our beloved institution. Together we must seek to better maintain Rivera's scaffold, and jointly use it for depicting a more desirable future for SFAI and citizens of San Francisco.

### ETHICAL REASONS

- **Place:** We urge the Board to move away from its ideas to sell and remove the Diego Rivera mural to a private donor since it is a work in which place matters.
  - To pursue such a sale constitutes and evokes forced removal, and the ongoing displacement, erasure and ghosting of BIPOC narratives and histories. As art institutions, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, work diligently to acquire works by people of color, SFAI is considering the sale and removal of its mural by Diego Rivera.
  - Unless proven otherwise, nowhere within the study of Diego Rivera's work is there evidence that his portable mural technology signifies his intention or

permission for the mural to be relocated away from the San Francisco Art Institute or the City of San Francisco.

- **Labor:** The implications of SFAI's proposal to sell the Diego Rivera Mural suggest that, at this moment, it must rely on the labor of an artist of color to lift it from its financial crisis. The labor, depicted in the mural by a Mexican Artist, leads us to reflect on what was once made public by the Chicano movement led by the late and honorable Cesar Chavez with regards to the U.S. exploitation of indigenous labor from south of the U.S. Mexico Border. For example, in light of a sale, the public may inquire about whether SFAI is offering a large number of scholarships to prospective students of color such as Dreamers in the State of California. Such a course of action can only be brokered with the assistance of large Latinx, Xicanx, and Hispanic organizations such as foundations, associations, and government entities.
- **Consultation:** It is a colonial practice to assume that one individual speaks for or represents entire races of people. One individual—whether an artist, student, expert, or person of a particular cultural background—cannot speak for or represent entire races of people in justifying a large cultural decision. Any determinations concerning the stewardship of the mural can only be ethically accomplished through the involvement of powerful organizations that best represent the people whose heritages are embedded within the mural, and organized communities of the people themselves. In this case Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, Xicanx, and Indigenous Americans that are in relationship to the mural. Furthermore, the context of international relations between the United States and Mexico must be accounted for.
- **Commodification of culture:** By selling the mural, SFAI would be commodifying and erasing a vital history of the institution. The power of mural art is derivative of the collective and co-determined, publicly-imbued, meanings. Removing such an iconic generator of imagination from SFAI without public input constitutes another example of disaster capitalism at the expense of people of color.
  - The mural is the property of the People at large, including but not limited to the people of The United States, Mexico, and the city of San Francisco. Removing the mural from its original context is equal to defacing a historical asset, and while the board may not view its protection in place as a legal obligation, any plan to remove or sell it should be approved by diverse publics at large.
- **Impact for SFAI:** Selling the mural places people of color who are adamantly opposed to its sale in a vulnerable political position. Internally speaking, the conversation about the mural has to engage the shared governance bylaws at SFAI. From the students' perspective, having the opportunity to share their work with Diego Rivera is unmatched.

- **Theme:** Diego Rivera's gesture at SFAI is in opposition to the nature of its sale. A communist Mexican artist made a painting about the building of San Francisco, while the SFAI Board of Trustees may authorize its sale to be removed and relocated to another city. To destroy the place-specific semiotic power (or the site-specific meaning) of the mural is akin to reducing it to a necrotized anthropological artifact (a dead cultural object whose meaning is no longer determined by practice, but through the colonial gaze of western science, art theory, and tourism). Currently the Diego Rivera Mural is one of SFAI's most valuable teaching tools. It's alive because it is practiced in pedagogy for the transference, recovery, and creation of knowledge within an environment of praxis.

## **CURRENT FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

- It is our understanding that the board has been proceeding without a multi-year financial forecast. We also note that the board lacks a treasurer, in violation of California non-profit law, and does not have a standing finance committee, which is a violation of its own bylaws. We urge the board not to make weighty financial decisions without more careful research into their likely implications.
- Every financial model we have seen for SFAI includes millions of dollars of deficit spending every year. Our financial model derived from current financial data anticipates on the order of \$20 million in deficit spending over the next four years, even with significant enrollment growth. This deficit spending does not include buying back our rights to Chestnut Street, and is in addition to any debt service obligations the board might take on in the meantime.
- Every plan we have heard for SFAI operations involves paying for those operating deficits by selling or borrowing against the mural. When this multi-million dollar line of credit comes due in 2-3 years it seemingly would trigger the sale of the mural for repayment, so it is not clear there is a meaningful difference between selling the mural now or using it as the basis for a loan.
- According to Reimagine team financial forecasts, a sale of the mural for \$50 million dollars would not guarantee SFAI's financial future. Between debt obligations, operating deficits, and infrastructure spending needs, SFAI would likely spend all of that money on the Chestnut Street real estate. The best case scenario we can see is that SFAI will be unable to cut tuition, raise salaries, improve acceptance rates, or invest in new physical or intellectual infrastructure.
- The worst case scenario we can see is that SFAI would sell the mural and then run out of money before it can get to break-even operations. We ask whether SFAI wants to begin a headlong multi-year drive towards enrollment of 600 knowing that it might fail on the way there. Will our recruiting materials include a warning that we might fail to make payroll before students are able to complete their degree program?

- We are not prepared to assume that SFAI would realize \$50 million from a sale of the mural. It is our understanding that no prospective buyer has committed to a price, and we don't feel that we understand what SFAI's costs might be associated with the sale, such as legal representation, financial fees, permitting requirements, PR expenses, and the cost of removal and delivery.
- We have no reason to believe that a capital campaign would be able to bring in substantial funding to offset these financial challenges. We urge the board to base its fundraising expectations on SFAI's track record over the past five years.
- We have heard mentioned that a benefactor might wish to endow the mural in place. If this is a possibility, it bears further discussion. We caution the board not to assume that a line of credit secured against the mural will be paid off by such a donor. Furthermore, before the board imagines new artwork or programs that could be funded in this way, it must take a realistic look at the existing expenses it will have to cover with those funds.

## **PRACTICAL REASONS**

- Representative cultural foundations and organizations may suggest that any proceeds earned from the mural should include a plan to allocate a largely significant portion of those funds to support the community in which this work originates, namely Latinx and Indigenous communities. The goal of leveraging the labor and vision of a Mexican artist to save a historically and currently white institution does not serve our communal goals to bring anti-racist practices to the operations across the institution.
- The sale could potentially damage the reputation of SFAI as having committed an unforgivable act. This damage may be reflected throughout the art world, and with publics throughout San Francisco, the State of California, the United States, and Mexico.
- The sale of the mural is a short term financial situation and does not guarantee the long term engagement of the Mexican and Latinx Indigenous stewardship of the mural. The root of the problem is the school's unsustainable business model and underdeveloped fundraising pathways.
- SFAI did not shut down in March 2020. We are still standing, and there are other alternatives that can be explored financially before relying on what some might perceive the "easy way out." There are numerous alternatives that have not yet been explored or exhausted, including expanding online public ed; new degrees that may generate revenue; external sponsorships; partnerships with other institutions; making the Chestnut campus more of a cultural and tourist destination.
- The SFAI Board has not exhausted all avenues to funding the mural by consulting with the Bay Area art community and/or consulting with city and state officials to help find or contribute funds to keep the mural in place. It would be a profound loss if the Bay Area

art community did not prioritize securing the mural. Losing our iconic fresco would diminish the significance of San Francisco's culture locally to globally.

- A decision like this shouldn't be made before the Reimagine Committee has shared their report. A decision like this is harmful to the reimagine process. While we are all clear that time is short, and finances are pressing, this action can be detrimental to the validity of SFAI to exist as a cultural institution.

**Signed by the Reimagine Committee:**

Tom Loughlin  
Karen Topakian  
Cristóbal Martínez  
Lindsey White  
Matt Borruso  
Jennifer Locke  
Orit Ben-Shitrit  
Irene Carvajal

Ana Suek  
Zeina Barakeh  
Kat Trataris  
Kavenamua Hambira  
Oscar Lopez Guerrero  
Annie Reiniger  
Emily Reynolds  
Rye Purvis



**From:** [Chris Manfield](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Diego Rivera mural at the San Francisco Art Institute a landmark  
**Date:** Monday, January 11, 2021 3:33:15 PM

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To whom it may concern,

This mural is a fresco, painted for the specific space, and for the city and workers of San Francisco. This mural holds the legacy of Diego Rivera's presence in San Francisco and a direct line, through Coit Tower to muralists today, especially in the community of artists in the Mission. The importance of Diego Rivera for the community has been enormous. Latinx artists have fought for recognition for generations, and Diego Rivera's murals and the history of his presence in the city with Frida Kahlo has been an inspiration on that long history. An artwork's value is not limited to its market price. The mural "**The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City**" should therefore be recognized as a historical landmark.

Sincerely,  
Christian Tan

**From:** [Juana Alicia Araiza](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Diego Rivera Mural Preservation at the San Francisco Art Institute Site  
**Date:** Sunday, January 10, 2021 6:55:26 PM

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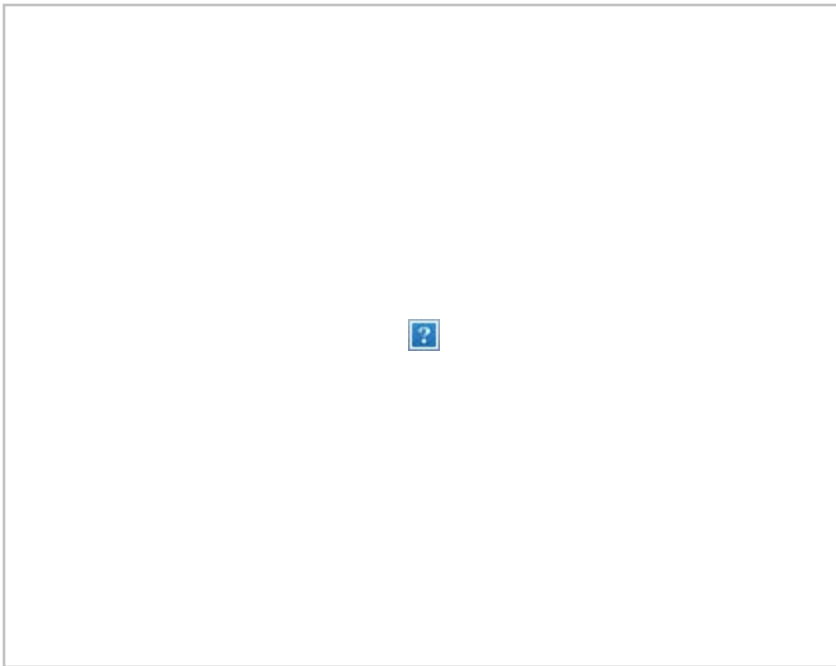
Dear Ms. Major and Other Concerned Parties,

I am writing to express my opposition to the removal of Diego Rivera's fresco, **The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City**, currently located at the San Francisco Art Institute, where it was created as a site-specific work of art. The disgraceful proposition by SFAI to sell the iconic San Francisco legacy work in order to pay for the art school's financial bungling, is unacceptable to me, as a public artist and beneficiary of the legacy of that mural. As a Masters of Fine Art graduate of SFAI, I did my thesis in fresco painting under the tutelage of Rivera's painting assistants and restorers of that fresco, Lucienne Bloch and Stephen Dimitroff. These two artists trained a generation or two of Bay Area muralists in the fresco technique, which the Dimitroffs had mastered while assisting Rivera in Detroit, New York and San Francisco. They widened the circle of politically aware artists who learned from the Mexican Mural Movement, and these generations went on to create a potent and internationally recognized mural movement in the Bay Area. The Rivera mural played a key role in the formation of many artists that attended or taught at the Art Institute over many generations. Among those artists were members of Las Mujeres Muralistas, Dewey Crumpler, Luis and Susan Cervantes, Lucia Ippolito and many more. **The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City** is part of our community's cultural heritage and an important signifier for the history of San Francisco's labor movement as well.

As a muralist and art professor, I have taken many students to draw, critique and reinterpret the mural. It is one of the several fresco jewels in the City's crown of WPA and [Public Works of Art Project](#), and part of a tour that includes the San Francisco Stock Exchange and Coit Tower. Rivera and his colleagues' murals in Mexico were the inspiration for putting artists to work on the government payroll during the Great Depression, and could not be more relevant than they are today, as we face another catastrophic economic and social depression in the United States, complicated by the

corona virus pandemic. I urge the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to exercise their leadership in favor of preserving this monumental testimony to the power of an artist's vision to shape their world. San Francisco has traditionally been a beacon for human rights and progressive voices, and a vanguard in the arts. It is essential that the Rivera fresco at the SFAI be made a permanent part of the City's history landmarks for the benefit of future generations.

Thank you for your consideration,



GET OUT!•¡FUERA! Drawing on scratchboard, Juana Alicia ©2020

[Juana Alicia](https://www.juanaalicia.com)

<https://www.juanaalicia.com>