

BOARD of SUPERVISORS



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## MEMORANDUM

### LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

### SAN FRANCISCO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

TO: Supervisor Myrna Melgar, Chair, Land Use and Transportation Committee

FROM: Erica Major, Assistant Clerk, Land Use and Transportation Committee

DATE: January 12, 2021

SUBJECT: **COMMITTEE REPORT, BOARD MEETING**  
Tuesday, January 12, 2021

The following file should be presented as a **COMMITTEE REPORT** at the Board meeting, Tuesday, January 12, 2021. This item was acted upon at the Committee Meeting on Monday, January 11, 2021, at 1:30 p.m., by the votes indicated.

**Item No. 14**                      **File No. 210016**

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.

#### RECOMMENDED AS A COMMITTEE REPORT

Vote: Supervisor Myrna Melgar - Aye  
Supervisor Dean Preston - Aye  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin - Aye

c: Board of Supervisors  
Angela Calvillo, Clerk of the Board  
Alisa Somera, Legislative Deputy  
Anne Pearson, Deputy City Attorney  
Kristen Jensen, Deputy City Attorney

File No. 210016 Committee Item No. 3  
Board Item No. 14

**COMMITTEE/BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**  
AGENDA PACKET CONTENTS LIST

Committee: Land Use and Transportation Committee Date January 11, 2021

Board of Supervisors Meeting Date January 12, 2021

**Cmte Board**

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| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Legislative Digest                           |
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**OTHER (Use back side if additional space is needed)**

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <u>BOS Ord No. 208-77 053177</u>                                 |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <u>Landmark Preservation Advisory Bd - Final Case Rpt 121775</u> |
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Completed by: Erica Major Date January 7, 2021  
Completed by: Erica Major Date January 12, 2021

1 [Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural “The Making of a  
2 Fresco Showing the Building of a City”]

3 **Resolution initiating a landmark designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code for**  
4 **Diego Rivera’s fresco, titled “The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City,”**  
5 **painted in 1931 and located at 800 Chestnut Street.**

6  
7 WHEREAS, Diego Rivera remains one of the most important and famous Mexican  
8 artists of all time, whose fresco work helped to establish the thriving Mexican Mural Art  
9 Movement in the 1920s, and who painted his first murals in the United States in San  
10 Francisco; and

11 WHEREAS, San Francisco is home to three of Rivera’s masterpieces, including the  
12 second Diego Rivera fresco completed in the United States entitled “The Making of a Fresco  
13 Showing the Building of a City” (the “Mural”), which was painted in 1931 and remains in its  
14 original home at the Diego Rivera Gallery inside the San Francisco Art Institute at 800  
15 Chestnut Street; and

16 WHEREAS, The mural was commissioned by then-San Francisco Art Institute  
17 President William Gerstle and took a month to complete, and depicts a fresco within a fresco  
18 in which various real life figures, including Rivera himself, general designers, builders,  
19 painters, architects and laborers construct a building, and, at its center, a gigantic worker –  
20 the colossal proletarian – symbolizing the entire international working class, powerfully  
21 demonstrating a familiar theme in Rivera’s work of the critical importance of labor in the  
22 artistic and creative process; and

23 WHEREAS, The mural also includes depictions of real-life figures including Timothy  
24 Pfleuger (designer of the San Francisco Stock Exchange), William Gerstle (banker,  
25 philanthropist, and president of the San Francisco Art Institute who commissioned the mural),

1 Arthur Brown (architect who designed Coit Tower, the San Francisco Opera House, and San  
2 Francisco City Hall), and Marion Simpson (mosaic artist in Berkeley who designed murals for  
3 the Alameda County courthouse); and

4 WHEREAS, As with his immediately-preceding fresco in San Francisco, the Allegory of  
5 California, the Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City attracted immediate criticism  
6 and harsh reactions to Rivera's Marxist political leanings, and quickly became one Rivera's  
7 most significant and well-known works; and

8 WHEREAS, In 1977, the City and County of San Francisco designated pursuant to  
9 Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code the San Francisco Art Institute at 800 Chestnut  
10 Street as Landmark Number 85; and

11 WHEREAS, The official case report for Landmark No. 85 makes extensive reference to  
12 and describes the Rivera Mural, and can be read as intending that Article 10 protections  
13 extend to any alteration, removal, or demolition of the Mural itself; and

14 WHEREAS, Since its creation, the Mural has been made available for free, public  
15 viewing, has inspired generations of artists, including alumni of the San Francisco Art Institute,  
16 and countless members of the public, alike; now, therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, That the Board hereby initiates separate landmark designation of Diego  
18 Rivera's masterpiece fresco "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City," created  
19 in 1931 at its sole and current location at the San Francisco Art Institute building at 800  
20 Chestnut Street (Landmark No. 85); and, be it

21 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board requests that the Planning Department  
22 prepare a Landmark Designation Report to submit to the Historic Preservation Commission  
23 for its consideration of the special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value of  
24 the Mural; and, be it

25

1           FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board requests that the Historic Preservation  
2 Commission consider whether the Mural warrants landmark designation and submit its  
3 recommendation to the Board according to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

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FILE NO. 90-774

ORDINANCE NO. 20877

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DESIGNATING THE SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE

Be it Ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street, a portion of Lot 1 in Assessor's Block 49 has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and the standards set forth therein.

(a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the San Francisco Art Institute is hereby designated as a Landmark, this designation having been duly approved by Resolution No. 7569 of the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No. 90-77-4.

(b) Required Data. This designation is applicable only to that portion of Lot 1 in Assessor's Block 49 which is occupied by the portion of the San Francisco Art Institute which was built in 1926. The descriptions of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation; and of the particular features that should be preserved; as included in the said Resolution, are hereby incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though fully set forth.

APPROVED AS TO FORM

RECOMMENDED

THOMAS M. O'CONNOR  
CITY ATTORNEY

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

By Robert A. Kenealey  
Deputy City Attorney

By Rai Y. Okamoto *MS*  
Rai Y. Okamoto  
Director of Planning

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

LM # 85

Passed for Second Reading  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

MAY 23 1977

Ayes: Supervisors Barbagelata, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, ~~Kopp~~, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors ~~KOPP~~

*[Signature]* Clerk

90-77-4  
File No.

JUN 9 1977  
Approved

Read Second Time and Finally Passed  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

MAY 31 1977

Ayes: Supervisors ~~Barbagelata~~, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, Kopp, ~~Mendelsohn~~, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisors ~~BARBAGELATA~~ MENDELSON

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

*[Signature]* Clerk

*[Signature]*  
Mayor

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 7569

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the 1926 structure designed by Bakewell & Brown for the San Francisco Art Institute at 800 Chestnut Street as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on January 8, 1976, and said Advisory Board, after due consideration has recommended approval of this proposal; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held public hearings on February 5, and October 7, 1976, to consider the proposed designation and the report of said Advisory Board; and

WHEREAS, The Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value; and that the proposed designation would be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes and standards of the said Article 10;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, the proposal to designate the aforementioned structure of the San Francisco Art Institute at 800 Chestnut Street as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the precise location and boundaries of the Landmark site being those of the 1926 structure designed by Bakewell and Brown fronting on Chestnut Street, said structure being situated on Lot 1, in Assessor's Block 49;

Second, That the special character and special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are set forth in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board Resolution No. 137 as adopted on January 8, 1976, which Resolution is incorporated herein and made a part thereof as though fully set forth;

Third, That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning Docket LM76.1;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commission hereby directs its Secretary to transmit the proposal for designation, with a copy of this Resolution, to the Board of Supervisors for appropriate action.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission at its regular meeting of October 7, 1976.

*Robert H. Feldman*

Robert H. Feldman  
Acting Secretary

AYES: Biernan, Dearman, Finn, Lau, Miller, Starbuck.

NOES: None

ABSENT: Rosenblatt

PASSED: October 7, 1976



**OWNER:** The Regents of the University of California

**LOCATION:** 800 Chestnut Street, northeast corner of Jones; the parcel is square with frontages of 275 feet on Chestnut, Jones and Francisco, Being Lot 1 in Assessor's Block 49.

**HISTORY:** Designed by the architectural firm of Bakewell and Brown, this building was erected for the San Francisco Art Association to house the California School of Fine Arts (now known as the San Francisco Art Institute). It was built in 1926, and dedicated January 15, 1927.

The San Francisco Art Association was organized in March of 1871 for the "promotion of Painting, Sculpture and Fine Arts akin thereto, the diffusion of a cultivated taste for art in the community at large, and the establishment of an Academy or School of Design."

The membership was drawn both from artist and lay groups. The first Board of Directors consisted of Juan B. Wandesforde, Samuel Marsden Brookes, Frederick Whympier, Edward Bosqui, William L. Marple, Benjamin P. Avery, Gideon J. Denny and Noah Brooks. Others that served on the Board during the early years of the Art Association were William Alvord, Andrew S. Halladie, Pietro Mezzara, Darius Odgen Mills, Thomas Hill, Joseph Charles Duncan (the father of Isadora), William C. Ralston, William Hahn, Julian Rix, Norton Bush, Jules Tavernier, Charles F. Crocker, William Keith and James D. Phelan.

During the first year of its existence, the Art Association met in the Museum Room of the Mercantile Library. Later it occupied quarters at 313 Pine Street and in 1876, moved to 430 Pine Street, sharing space with the Bohemian Club. Meanwhile the Art Association opened the California School of Design in 1874, making it the oldest art school west of the Mississippi and the fourth oldest in the nation.

Amelia Ransome Neville remembered the rooms "over the California Market, of all places, where art was pervaded with the aroma of fish and the sound of the butcher's cleaver was heard. Mingled with my memories of Private Views that opened Spring Exhibitions in the old rooms are scents of the Market."

Virgil Williams was hired as the school's first Director. He had previously been in charge of the gallery in Woodward's Gardens. When Williams died in 1886, Thomas Hill took charge of the school until a new Director could be found. In 1887, Emil Carlsen came out from New York to take the position, which he held until 1889. Raymond Yelland ran the school for a year, then Arthur Mathews was placed in charge. It was while teaching at the school that Mathews met Lucia Kleinhans, a student, who later became his wife. Mathews was Director until 1906.

HISTORY:  
(Continued)

Other students during the school's early years were Fanny Osborne (later, Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson) and her daughter Isobel. The novelist Frank Norris, Matilda Lotz (who also studied in Paris with Rosa Bonheur), Christian Jorgensen, Ernest Peixotto and Theodore Wores attended the school during this period. When Oscar Wilde visited San Francisco in 1882, Wores painted his portrait.

The San Francisco Art Association was incorporated in 1889. After the death of Mark Hopkins in 1878, his widow married Edward F. Searles from Methuen, Massachusetts and moved east leaving empty the mansion at the top of Nob Hill. When the former Mrs. Hopkins died, Mr. Searles gave the mansion for the use of the Art Association, to be known as the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art. This transfer was made in February of 1893, by deed to the Regents of the University of California, "for the exclusive uses and purposes of instruction and illustration of Fine Arts, Music and Literature, or any of them, including the maintenance of galleries and reading rooms, and other suitable means of such instruction and illustration." In March of this same year, the move was made to the mansion.

The Candian painter, Emily Carr, who was a student at this time, describes the move in her autobiography Growing Pains. Also attending at that time were painters James Swinnerton, Joseph Raphael, Xavier Martinez and sculptor Earl Cummings.

From 1895 to about 1897, a class in drawing for apprentice architects who were working in local architectural offices was conducted with Bernard Maybeck in charge. It seems likely that Willis Polk was one of the students of this class since he was the chairman of a committee of apprentices that petitioned for the class.

The fire of 1906 destroyed the mansion, gallery and the school rooms together with nearly all their contents: pictures, statuary, library, and school equipment.

In spite of the lack of funds, the Art Association managed to erect a building on the foundation of the ruined mansion and classes resumed in 1907, while much of the city still lay in ruins. Loring P. Rixford was the architect for this simple, frame building which was intended as a temporary structure. In 1910, Rixford designed a gallery addition built of steel and concrete to house the Emanuel Walter Collection of art work that was left to the Art Association.

With the opening of the School in 1907, Capt. Robert Howe Fletcher was appointed the director of the San Francisco Institute of Art, as it was then called, and Theodore Wores was hired as dean of the faculty, which position he held until 1913.

HISTORY:  
(Continued)

Among the board members were John I. Walter, John Galen Howard and Charles Templeton Crocker. Some of the instructors during this time were Eugen Neuhaus, Earl Cummings, Pedro Lemos, Frank Van Sloun and Agatha Van Erp. It is said that Maurice Logan was the first student to enroll in the school after the fire.

The school's exhibition in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 was awarded a gold and a silver medal for its excellence. Members of the faculty, ex-faculty and ex-students were well represented in the Exposition's art exhibit, many of them winning awards.

Faculty and students alone contributed some thirty works: thirteen murals and seventeen sculptures. Included were the murals of Antonio Sotomayer, Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli, Squire Knowles, Armin Hansen, Helen Forbes, Maynard Dixon, While Jacque Schnier, Michael Von Meyer, Clara Huntington, Adeline Kent, Frederick Olmsted, Helen Phillips and Haig Patigian exhibited sculptures.

After the Exposition, the Art Association maintained the Palace of Fine Arts building as a museum, opening May 1, 1916. J. Nilsen Laurvik, director of the museum, felt that "almost from its inception the Museum in the Palace of Fine Arts has taken its place as one of the most active cultural influences that San Francisco has ever had. It has become in a very real sense the center of the cultural activities of our city, a rallying-place for all the arts, a sort of forum where the exponents of the Seven Arts may meet and have their say on a basis of their common interest in Art...." The upkeep on the building forced the Art Association to abandon the structure in 1924. In 1925, the Forty-eighth Annual Exhibition of the Art Association was held in the newly opened California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

In 1920, the Art Association obtained the permission of Edward Searles to sell the property on Nob Hill. After several offers, it was finally agreed to accept \$350,000 for the lot. This sale was consummated in 1923. A search was then begun for a new site for the Art Association and the Chestnut Street property was purchased in 1924, for \$50,000, along with the gore at Francisco, Jones and Columbus, which was later sold. During this time, classes were held at 15 California Street in the Glenwood Building.

The firm of Bakewell and Brown was chosen to design the new building. Arthur Brown, Jr. was a member of the Board of Directors of the Art Association from at least 1919 through 1950, during which time he served as first vice-president in 1919, 1922 and 1927, and president of the Board in 1920-21, 1928-29 and 1937-39. The following resolution was adopted by the Board, March 14, 1935. "Resolved unanimously by the President and Board of Directors of the San Francisco Art Association that Arthur Brown, Jr. is eminently entitled to our gratitude and praise for his invaluable services in preparing for permanent exhibitions the galleries of the San Francisco Museum of Art.

HISTORY:  
(Continued)

"They desire also, at this time, to express their high sense of appreciation for his inestimable contributions to the development and beauty of our City and to wish him long life and health to continue to shed lustre on the profession of architecture and to enjoy the honorable rewards of his genius, industry, and artistry."

It is possible that Willis Polk would have been the architect rather than Brown. On January 15, 1923, Polk submitted "a suggested scheme to provide a new and adequate building for the Art School. The Plan provides for the disposal of the present property and purchasing of the Tobin Lot on the southeast corner of California and Taylor Streets. To erect thereon a new fire-proof construction building meeting the present needs of the School with provision made for future growth. In connection therewith to build an apartment house containing ten apartments deluxe, the income from which, in excess of interest, sinking funds and other expenses will leave a fund of \$18,500 yearly which can be devoted to School purposes." The scheme contains a plot plan and a financial statement. Whatever possibilities the scheme held were terminated when the Tobin property was sold, and the following year, Willis Polk died.

The new building was erected in 1926 at a cost of about \$250,000, and formal dedication was held January 15, 1927.

James D. Phelan left a bequest of \$100,000 to the Art Association for the establishment of a museum at the California School of Fine Arts. However, this additional wing on the new building was not added, instead the money was used as a scholarship fund, following the dictates of the will. He also left his estate in Saratoga, Montalvo Villa, in trust to the Art Association. Phelan was a member of the Art Association from 1884 until his death in 1930. In 1885, at the age of 24, he was elected to the Board.

Conceived by the Art Association as a unit of the cultural group in the Civic Center, the San Francisco Museum of Art was opened in 1935, as a continuation of the Association's operation of the galleries in the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art and in the Palace of Fine Arts Museum. In later years, the Museum became an independent organization but retains a relationship of friendly cooperation.

In the 1920s, the revival of interest in mural painting quickly spread across the nation. As early as 1918, the California School of Fine Arts' catalogue stated: "Mural painting is fast coming to the front as the leading mode of expression of the painter's art and practice work in this important subject will be given advanced students." Instruction was offered until World War II, covering such techniques as fresco, lime-casein; egg, glue tempera; and wax emulsion.

Ray Boynton, who is said to have introduced mosaic in the 1920s "in a manner which met contemporary aesthetic criteria," (Jean Goodwin, "California Mosaics," Art for the Millions, edited by

## HISTORY:

(Continued)

Francis V. O'Connor, 1973) was instructor in mural painting at the school for many years. Other members of the faculty during this period were Victor Arnautoff, Jose Moya del Pino, Gottardo Piazzoni, Lee Randolph (director), Gertrude Partington Albright, Marian Hartwell, Ruth Cravath, Rudolph Schaeffer, Spencer Macky, Otis Oldfield, Lucien Labaudt, Ray Bertrand, Nelson Poole, Edgar Walter and Ralph Stackpole.

Many murals, as well as sculptures, plaques, and the like were done in both public and private buildings in the Bay Area by faculty and students of the school. With aid furnished by the WPA, many more were added to the Bay Area's collection. Of the 25 works in Coit Tower listed in the Art Commission's A Survey of Art Work in the City and County of San Francisco (1975), 20 were done by faculty and students, a project of the WPA. These include, as well as many of those already listed, Edith Hamlin, George Harris, Clifford Wight, Mallette Dean, Ben Cunningham and Jame Berlandina (Howard).

Diego Rivera painted his first murals in the United States in San Francisco. In 1930, he executed a fresco in the Stock Exchange Lunch Club followed by one in the California School of Fine Arts. He was again invited to do a work for the city, this time for the Golden Gate International Exposition, which was held on Treasure Island in 1939. He worked on this mural, which was part of the Art in Action project, during the fair and for three months after it closed, creating a portable work some 22 X 73 feet, divided into ten sections. At this time, he accepted an invitation to teach at the school but other commitments took him elsewhere.

After World War II, under the able direction of Douglas MacAgy, the school became the West Coast birthplace of Abstract Expressionism at about the same time of its development in New York. "It can be said," wrote Terry St. John, Associate Curator of Art, Oakland Museum, "that during the years 1947-1953, the high point of Abstract Expressionism in the Bay Area produced an intensity of activity combined with an interchange of dialogues that at times anticipated developments in the East." Probably the most influential teacher was Clyfford Still. Other faculty members were Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, Jean Varda and Hassel Smith, and among their many students who have since become noted artists were Frank Lobdell, John Hultberg, Deborah Remington, Jeremy Anderson and James Weeks, all of whom later taught at the school.

In 1946, Ansel Adams started a photography program as the first course in photography as a fine art to be offered in an American college. This department was taken over and run by Minor White until the early 1950s. Visiting instructors included Imogen Cunningham, Edward Weston and Dorothea Lange.

Timothy Pflueger died in 1946. He had been a member of the Art Association since 1929, President of the Board from 1932 to 1937, and a member of the Board from 1930 until his death. "By his constant active interest in the Association and its School he contributed greatly to their development and progress."

HISTORY:  
(Continued)

In the 1950s, with Diebenkorn, Weeks, Bishoff, Nathan Oliveira and David Park on the faculty, the school became known as the center of the new style of San Francisco figurative painting.

In the fall of 1953, a BFA degree program was established in all departments with the first class graduating in 1955; thirteen students received the BFA degree. The MFA degree program was added in the Fall of 1958.

On the 15th of February, 1961, the San Francisco Art Association and the California School of Fine Arts became known as the San Francisco Art Institute. It was felt "that the name California was too vague, but that San Francisco had, in addition to specificity, a strong emotional appeal throughout the country; that School is a word completely without meaning now and that 'college' had little more, but that 'institute' carries a high prestige factor now and for the foreseeable future; and, finally, the Fine Arts made it difficult to understand how photography, teacher training, advertising design, etc., could be taught."

By 1959, the need was felt for expansion of the school. John Bolles, who was president of the Board, presented plans for the addition of a studio wing and a gallery, to be done in a style similar to that of the original building. A lack of funds delayed this project and when the time finally arrived when the project could be done, a new architect and a new plan were chosen. In 1965, Paffard Keatinge Clay was selected as architect, and plans were soon under way. By 1969, the new building wing was completed, at a cost of \$1.8 million. Writing in the January - February 1970 issue of Architectural Forum, Roger Montgomery stated: "The building section Clay invented responds directly to the site to produce a sequence of architectural experiences unmatched elsewhere in this city of stunning sites and spaces."

The enrollment for Fall 1974 and Spring 1975 was about 900 for each semester, which includes part time students. In May of 1975, 168 BFA degrees were awarded and 43 MFA degrees. This is in contrast to the 60 students who enrolled in 1874.

To attempt listing all the major students and faculty members who have been associated with the school would be impossible but a few that have not elsewhere been mentioned are Maynard Dixon, John Gutzon Borglum (of Mount Rushmore fame), Edgar Walter, Beniamino Bufano, Adeline Kent, Robert Motherwell, Ronald Bladen, Roy De Forrest, Robert Morris, Chryssa, Joan Brown, William Wiley, and Bruce Nauman.

INTERIOR  
MURALS:

Ralph Stackpole returned from Mexico in 1926 with two pictures by Diego Rivera. William Gerstle, president of the Art Association, was very excited about the work and commissioned Rivera to do a small wall, 120 feet square, in the school. Rivera arrived in San Francisco in 1930. When he saw the original wall he said it was too small and selected the largest wall in the school without asking for more than the \$1,500 Gerstle had donated for the mural. The was completed in 1931.

INTERIOR  
MURALS:  
(Continued)

A fresco panel 40' x 30', it depicts a cross-section of the modern American city. Dominating the painting is a 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 different aspects of construction, labor and planning.

The lower central panel of the mural shows the figures of Timothy Pflueger, Arthur Brown, Jr. and William Gerstle. Ralph Stackpole can be seen in the left central panel. According to Bertram Wolfe, Rivera's biographer, the following assistants are also represented: Viscount John Hastings, Clifford Wight, Matthew Barnes, Michael Baltekal-Goodman, Mrs. Marion Simpson and Albert Barrows.

In 1936, eleven lunettes were painted in the Reading Room of the Anne Bremer Memorial Library. These murals were commissioned by Albert Bender. The artists are Victor Arnautoff, Ray Boynton, William Hesthal, Gordon Langdon, Frederick Olmsted, and Ralph Stackpole. A dedicatory plaque was executed by Jacques Schnier. Of the many murals that were done around the school by students only two remain. One shows Spencer Macky and his class at work, and the other, Gottardo Piazzoni, with a group of students out of doors. The patio mural done by Ray Boynton depicts the Board of Trustees at the time the school was built.

## ARCHITECTURE:

On the 15th of January, 1927, "...the beautiful new building of the California School of Fine Arts officially opened its high, green doors leading to the stone-framed pool in the wide, arch-framed patio." About 3500 people attended the opening ceremonies. Among the speakers on this occasion was E. Spencer Macky, secretary of the San Francisco Art Association. "The appropriate simplicity and commanding beauty of the architecture of this building will emphasize the importance and dignity of living art in our midst today."

The building (really a series of buildings or spaces) is done in a modified version of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. The walls are stripped concrete dyed a soft adobe-ochre under red tile roofs that are many-leveled with skylights rising above to give northlight to the various studios. A bell tower rises above the patio in the style of the Spanish missions. The building covers the entire Chestnut Street side of the property, and about one third of the Jones Street side. It consists of three floors with a ground floor and basement below, and three more floors rising above in the tower, all built on many levels. Originally, a six-foot wall with concrete capping enclosed the remainder of the property, but sections of this wall were removed when the new building wing was added in the late 1960s.

## ARCHITECTURE:

The entrance archway on Chestnut Street is done in a modified Churrigueresque manner with additional ornamentation above the doorway on Jones Street. Other ornamentation was originally planned for both the exterior and interior of the building but was omitted, apparently because of a lack of funds. A museum/sculpture wing was omitted as well. The sculpture wing was finally completed by December of 1929 and a ceramics room added to this wing in 1934. An arched porch opening on the Francisco Street side of the building was removed when the new building wing was added.

The cloistered court, or patio, is the central area of the School surrounded on three sides by studio, office and gallery space, and on the fourth by a high wall that effectively screens the area from street noises. In the center of the patio is a tiled fountain in the Moorish style raised to seat level. Bricks are laid across the patio in a pattern often used in Spain.

The tower rises 99' 6" from the northwest corner of the patio (195' 6" above sea level).

ZONING AND  
SURROUNDING  
LAND USE:

The property is zoned R-3 (Low-Medium Density Multiple Residential) with a height and bulk limit of 40-X. The surrounding land uses are largely residential ranging from single-family dwellings to low-rise apartment structures except for commercial establishments on Columbus Avenue.



Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

**AARON PESKIN**

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DATE: January 7, 2021

TO: Angela Calvillo  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

FROM: Supervisor Aaron Peskin, Chair, Land Use and Transportation  
Committee

RE: Land Use and Transportation Committee  
COMMITTEE REPORTS

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Pursuant to Board Rule 4.20, as Chair of the Land Use and Transportation Committee, I have deemed the following matters are of an urgent nature and request they be considered by the full Board on Tuesday, January 12, 2021, as Committee Reports:

**201370 Interim Zoning Controls - Large Residential Projects in RC, RM and RTO Districts**

**Resolution imposing interim zoning controls for an 18-month period for parcels in Residential-Commercial Combined (RC), Residential - Mixed (RM) and Residential - Transit Oriented (RTO) districts, requiring Conditional Use Authorization for any residential development that does not maximize the number of units allowed by applicable density restrictions; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section, 101.1.**

**[TBD] Urging California Regents to Consider the Proposed UCSF Parnassus Expansion Plan EIR at their March 2021 Meeting**

**Resolution urging the California Regents to move consideration of the proposed University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) Parnassus Expansion Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) from their January 2021 meeting to their March 2021 meeting.**

**COMMITTEE REPORT MEMORANDUM**

Land Use and Transportation Committee

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**[TBD] Initiating Landmark Designation - 800 Chestnut Street - Diego Rivera Mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City"**

**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.**

These matters will be heard in the Land Use and Transportation Committee at a Regular Meeting on Monday, January 11, 2020, at 1:30 p.m.

*/s/ Aaron Peskin*

**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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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

**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

--

*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

---

**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

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

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

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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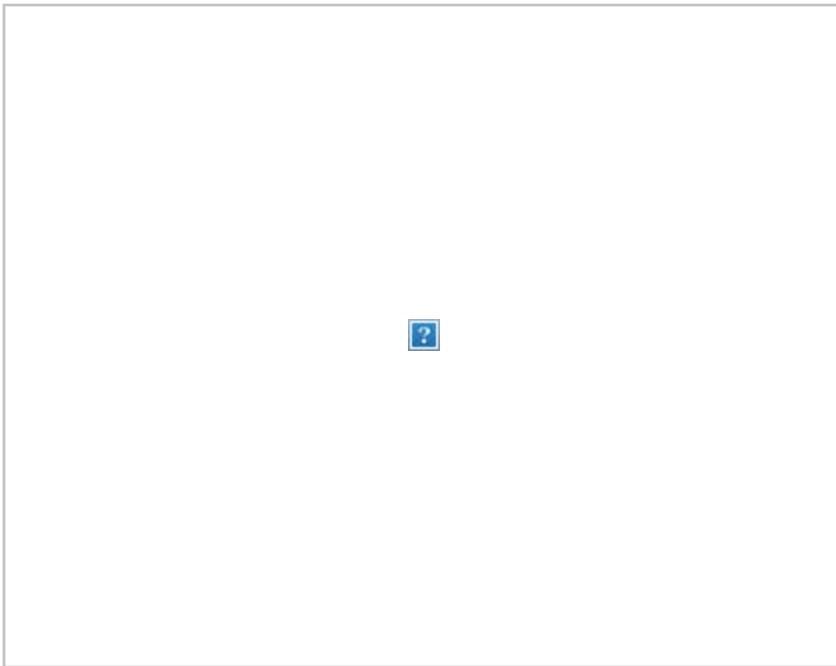
Dear Ms. Major and Other Concerned Parties,

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>

**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  
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**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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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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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.

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

**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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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

--

*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 'M. 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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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

---

**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

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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

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To: The San Francisco Art Institute Board of Trustees  
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<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)  
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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.  
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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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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

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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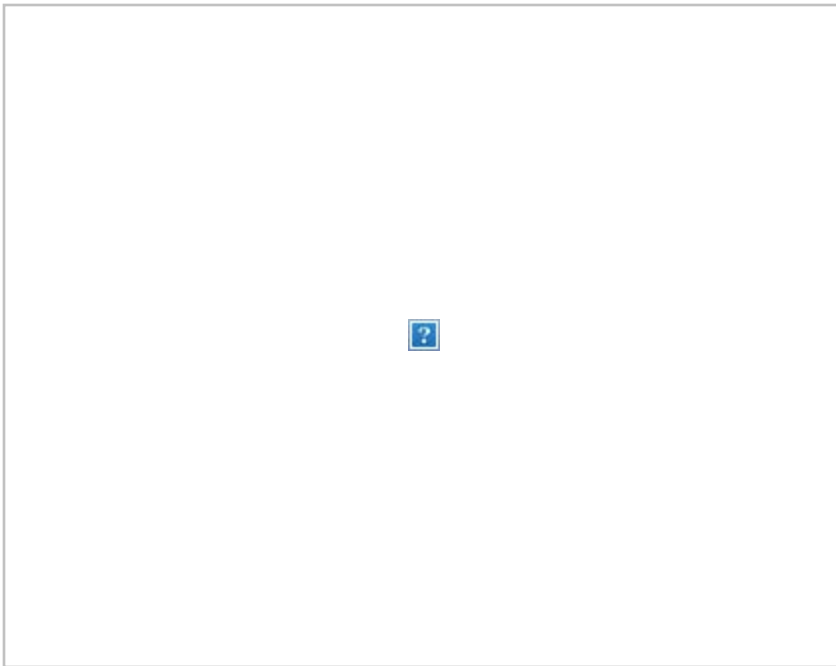
Dear Ms. Major and Other Concerned Parties,

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>



**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

--

*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

---

**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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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)  
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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/>

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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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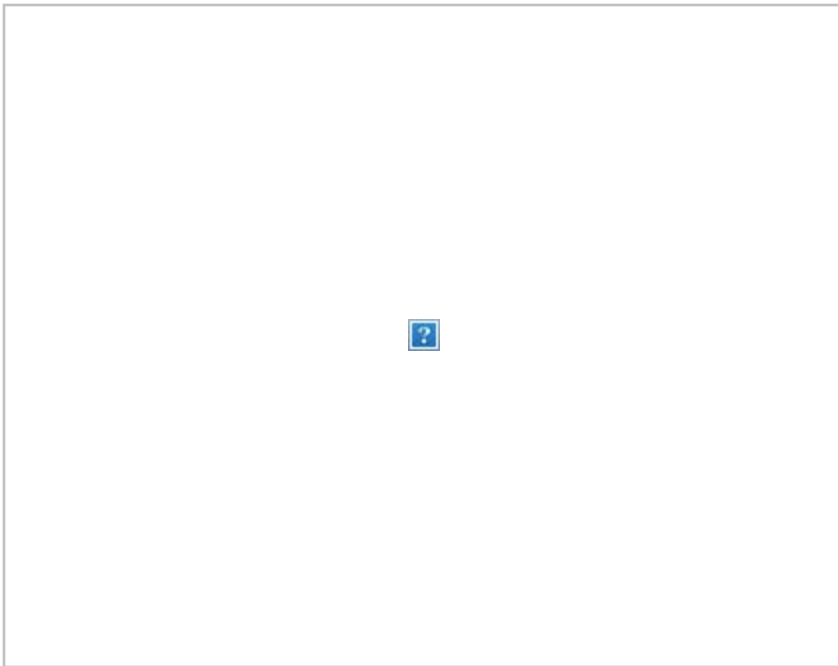
Dear Ms. Major and Other Concerned Parties,

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>

# Introduction Form

By a Member of the Board of Supervisors or Mayor

Time stamp  
or meeting date

I hereby submit the following item for introduction (select only one):

- 1. For reference to Committee. (An Ordinance, Resolution, Motion or Charter Amendment).
- 2. Request for next printed agenda Without Reference to Committee.
- 3. Request for hearing on a subject matter at Committee.
- 4. Request for letter beginning : "Supervisor  inquiries"
- 5. City Attorney Request.
- 6. Call File No.  from Committee.
- 7. Budget Analyst request (attached written motion).
- 8. Substitute Legislation File No.
- 9. Reactivate File No.
- 10. Topic submitted for Mayoral Appearance before the BOS on

Please check the appropriate boxes. The proposed legislation should be forwarded to the following:

- Small Business Commission
- Youth Commission
- Ethics Commission
- Planning Commission
- Building Inspection Commission

**Note: For the Imperative Agenda (a resolution not on the printed agenda), use the Imperative Form.**

Sponsor(s):

Subject:

The text is listed:

Signature of Sponsoring Supervisor:

For Clerk's Use Only