

**From:** [Peskin, Aaron \(BOS\)](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Statement in Support of Rivera Landmark  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 4:19:07 PM  
**Attachments:** [Potter - Board of Supervisors - Rivera Mural Statement .pdf](#)

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**From:** Berit N Potter <Berit.Potter@humboldt.edu>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 4:17:47 PM  
**To:** Peskin, Aaron (BOS) <aaron.peskin@sfgov.org>  
**Subject:** Statement in Support of Rivera Landmark

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Dear Supervisor Peskin,

I prepared a short statement for the Board of Supervisors meeting today, but I will not read it as I had planned since the Board voted to make the mural a landmark. I am not sure if it will be of use, but I have attached the long version of my statement to this email, so that it can be added to the documentation for the landmark case if needed.

Thank you so much for your work toward saving the mural. As an art historian who spent many hours teaching in front of *The Making of a Fresco* and so many other murals in San Francisco, I am incredibly grateful and relieved that the city has chosen to demonstrate its support. San Francisco's murals are a unique and powerful representation of more than a century of public art, and they should be safeguarded.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Kindly,

Berit

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Berit Potter, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, Art History/Museum & Gallery Practices  
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She/Her/Hers

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Good afternoon, My name is Berit Potter and I am a professor at Humboldt State University. I formerly taught courses related to San Francisco's murals and art history at the San Francisco Art Institute, California College of the Arts, Mills College and University of San Francisco. I had the privilege of teaching many classes in front of Rivera's *The Making of a Fresco*.

As others have noted, *The Making of a Fresco* represents a significant moment in San Francisco's art history. Rivera's San Francisco murals are his first in the US and they foreshadow those he would later create in Detroit and New York. It is important to recognize how removed San Francisco was from modern art movements when Rivera painted *The Making of a Fresco*. Local artists had experienced very few opportunities to witness modern art and participate in modern movements since the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915. For many local artists, Rivera and his style of muralism, which he taught them, singularly represented modern art.

For that reason, when Grace McCann Morley, the first director of the San Francisco Museum of Art (now SFMOMA), opened the museum in the Veterans Building in 1935 she deliberately showcased Rivera and muralism writing, "If I had to name the art in which California leads in the moment ... I believe I should say fresco." She later proudly told the director of New York's Museum of Modern Art "we out here in San Francisco where so much of Rivera's work has stayed in collections and on walls are, outside of Mexico, those most intimately familiar with his work and anything in common with his."

Rivera's *The Making of a Fresco* represents his local influence and *it is site specific*. Notably his mural, featuring scenes of the construction of San Francisco, and specifically his self-portrait, does not show him in the act of *making* a fresco, as the title suggests, but rather sitting on scaffolding overseeing his assistants as they work. On the wall of the art school he is *teaching*, joined by many notable San Francisco figures including other teachers, such as Geraldine Colby Fricke, a design instructor at SFAI at the time.

Indeed, he did teach from scaffolding while working on *The Making of a Fresco*. As Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath, artist of the Mother's House mural at the San Francisco Zoo recalled in her oral history, "I learned about mural technique from Diego Rivera, which is why all these WPA murals look rather Rivera-ish. I think we all learned about fresco from watching Rivera do the mural at the Art School ... We just watched him. I didn't work with him at all. As a matter of fact, quite a number of the artists, including myself, had never seen any murals until we started doing them. The first we saw were Diego Rivera's murals at the art school ... We watched him like hawks and observed all the steps of making a mural by a very good technician and then we did likewise, as much as we could."

I think it can be argued that Rivera and *The Making of a Fresco* inspired the birth of modern art in San Francisco and both continue to inspire artists today. Cravath and countless San Francisco artists were greatly influenced by Rivera, including those who trained with him like Miné Okubo, Thelma Johnson Streat and Maxine Albro, and future artists such as Las Mujeres Muralistas. Rivera and his many followers changed (and are still changing) the landscape of San Francisco and the removal of *The Making of a Fresco*, the catalyst for that inspiration, from its site would be a devastating loss of San Francisco's history and culture.

**From:** [Thomas M. Houston](#)  
**To:** [Major, Erica \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** SFAI/Diego Rivera mural  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 12:20:50 PM

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Hi Erica,  
My name is Thomas M. Houston and I'm an SFAI alum, BFA, 1984.  
I am also the alumni liaison for the state of Oregon.  
I'm writing to express my support for keeping the Diego Rivera mural intact and inside of the school. I strongly feel that the mural should be landmarked as a historical piece of San Francisco's rich history as well as the entire SFAI building.  
I feel that to remove the mural is a terrible idea on every level.  
The value of the mural is much more than monetary; it is along with the physical SFAI building is a global cultural icon.  
Thank you so much,  
Sincerely,  
Thomas M. Houston

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Houston's Custom Framing and Fine Art  
Thomas M. Houston, BFA, MCPF  
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Ashland, OR 97520  
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**From:** [Hepner, Lee \(BOS\)](#)  
**To:** [BOS Legislation, \(BOS\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Concern for Diego Rivera Mural and Public Discourse  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 12, 2021 2:17:52 PM

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Please include in the public file for Board File No. 210016.

Thanks,

Lee Hepner  
*Legislative Aide*  
Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
(415) 554-7419 | *pronouns: he, him, his*

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**From:** Cristobal Martinez <cmartinez@sfa.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 11, 2021 10:34 PM  
**Subject:** Concern for Diego Rivera Mural and Public Discourse

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

Dear SFAI Colleagues and Supervisor Peskin,

In early July 2020, I recommended to the San Francisco Art Institute Board of Trustees that it reach out specifically to Xicanx and Indigenous stakeholders regarding its interests in leveraging the mural as a financial asset. This has been a constant refrain of mine ever since. I initially made this recommendation after observing discourse at SFAI about the mural that was all too often culturally insensitive. It is difficult for a person like me to witness discussions about a cultural landmark, by which aspects of my heritage are mediated, as a pure commodity. My testimony is that I have indisputably witnessed this during certain meetings at SFAI.

The racism I witness concerning the mural manifests as the lack of participation by groups that might otherwise call for an acknowledgment of and deeper respect for the cultural heritage and public art of: San Franciscans; Citizens of Mexico, the United States, and all of the Americas; Mexican Immigrants to the United States, Mexican Americans; and diverse Indigenous, Xicanx, and Latinx peoples.

Because of racism, our country is in a crisis of identity on the issue of what is moral, beautiful, and true about it's diverse potential. To combat racism, Diego Rivera's *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City* must be landmarked, and provided with greater support so that it can be more

effectively leveraged as one of the greatest engines of future-oriented imagination within the Bay Area — a future not just for white people and the affluent, but for all peoples. This is one of many site-specific narratives contained by the mural.

This evening, I attended the Land Use and Transportation Committee Meeting that successfully initiated landmark designation for the SFAI Diego Rivera mural under Article 10 of the Planning Code. Proving my concern about the lack of involvement of organized publics that represent people of color, I am deeply disappointed that civic discourse is well underway, and without efforts by either the San Francisco Art Institute or the City of San Francisco to structure occasions that specifically encourage diverse publics of color — not just individuals, but organized, self-determined group perspectives — to participate in debates and conversations that will ultimately lead to the mural's fate. In my opinion, it is the responsibility of civic and academic institutions at the very least to include, for example, the Mexican Consulate General and organizations such as the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures as entities that can assist in advocating for the self-determination of all the diverse peoples I have mentioned above.

Thank you for considering my experiences, expertise, and opinions on matters concerning the Diego Rivera Mural and systemic racism.

Sincerely,  
-Cristóbal

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**Cristóbal Martínez, PhD**  
Chair of Art and Technology Program  
Associate Professor of Art and Technology

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