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**Re: Land Marking of SFai's Diego Rivera Mural,
*The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City***

Dear Fellow San Franciscans, Art Lovers, and Esteemed Supervisors,

As Board Chair of the San Francisco Art Institute, I want to thank Supervisor Aaron Peskin for recently bringing Diego Rivera's mural, *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, to the public's attention. We the Board of SFai agree that it is a work of historic significance and that it is worthy of landmark status.

However, as land marking the mural will put into motion some unintended financial consequences that will put our school's financial status in immediate and possibly irreversible jeopardy, **we request the Committee continue this item for at least a month, until we can work collaboratively with you on a plan to preserve and protect the mural in place**; as well as preserve the institution that houses it, the 150-year-old San Francisco Art Institute, which owns the mural and has served as its diligent and sole caretaker since 1931.

To cite just one example, land marking the mural now will prevent us from using it – SFai's only significant asset – to secure the \$7 million bridge loan we need to make it through the pandemic and rebuild our enrollment over the next two years. SFai's Board of Trustees is willing to consider supporting the land marking of the mural, but as fiduciaries of the institution we can only do that if you can help us address both the immediate and long-term financial consequences of that action for the institution as a whole. This could include helping us secure a loan or a loan guarantee or an outright grant from the City in the amount of \$7 million, which would help us get back on our feet financially and remain in a position to protect and preserve the mural. Longer term, we would like to explore with you a transaction in which the City could help us pay off our debt to UC and in exchange, receive a financial interest in the mural – one that will ensure it remains in San Francisco forever.

Work with us now to save SFai, and we can promise you: we will preserve the mural in-situ together.

The SFai board is unanimous in its desire to keep the mural where Rivera originally painted it, in the city it reflects and the institution that recognized Rivera's importance and gave him a 'canvas' on which to express himself.

However, we ask that the Board of Supervisors consider the needs and mission of SFai more broadly and defer further action until SFai is able to secure its financial future. Land marking the mural right now, without sufficient consideration of SFai's financial position, would deprive SFai of the value of its primary asset, with immediate consequences for SFai, its students, and employees.

SFai – the last remaining independent college dedicated exclusively to the education of contemporary artists – is one of a kind, just like the City of San Francisco. In fact, SFai is at the very heart of our identity as a city. We think differently today because 150 years ago – long before the technology industry took root here – our city's founders established SFai as an institution that nurtured creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and radical enquiry. Since then, the artists of SFai – students, faculty, and alumni – have pioneered countless new art forms and means of expression. Eadweard Muybridge in film; Ansel Adams in photography; Jay DeFeo, Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still in painting; Alicia McCarthy, Barry McGee, and Ruby Neri in the Mission School; and Paul Kos on the frontiers of conceptual art. Annie Leibovitz took her first cover photos as a student at SFai, former faculty hosted the Beat poets in their coffee shop, and students and alumni set fire to the first Burning Man on Baker Beach. The list of movements and artists who were shaped by SFai is as lengthy as it is illustrious.

But that tradition of creative disruption – 150 years strong and so closely linked with our rise as a city synonymous with disruptive innovation – is in danger of being lost forever.

And the mural's fate is inextricably linked to the fate of the San Francisco Art Institute. If we cannot raise the funds and public support necessary to rebuild our programs, faculty, and enrollment post-pandemic, we cannot continue to safeguard the mural, as we have for the last 90 years.

Like other small colleges and arts institutions across our country, we face formidable challenges. Much has been said in the press about the missteps of SFAI leadership in the last decade, particularly our expansion to Fort Mason and the debt we took on to do that project; but our current financial woes are shared by small colleges and arts institutions across the country. Over the last five years, twenty percent of arts colleges in the U.S. were forced to close or merge with larger universities.

Last summer SFAI came very close to closing its doors forever, losing both the campus and the mural in foreclosure to a bank that was already shopping the mural to prospective buyers.

Thanks to our longtime partners and supporters at the University of California, we escaped that fate and now have six years to pay off our long-term debt, which totals \$19.7 million plus interest. If we cannot pay that back, ownership of the campus will cede to the University of California, which has held a remainder interest in the property since the 1800s. And if we can't afford to take the mural with us when we vacate the campus, the mural will go to UC as well, a state agency not bound by local land mark restrictions.

Therefore, land marking the mural will not accomplish your goal of safeguarding it in place in perpetuity, in the event that SFAI defaults on its debt and the mural becomes the property of UC.

As fiduciaries of SFAI, the Trustees are obligated to consider and pursue all options for putting our assets to work – including the mural – so that we can continue to uphold the mission we have pursued for 150 years: the education of students in the fine arts.

But we are unanimous that our first choice would be to find partners or patrons who will help us make it through a period of rebuilding post-pandemic and ultimately endow the mural, building programs in the arts of the Americas, public art, curatorial practice, and conservation, and expanding the audience for the mural exponentially, while at the same time providing a much-needed cash infusion for SFAI to survive, rebuild, and ultimately thrive.

Our dream is that every school child in San Francisco will have an opportunity to visit our mural and learn from it. That the thousands of visitors who wander past our front door on their way from Lombard to Fisherman's Wharf are invited in to discover important lessons about how artists define our times, representing us and our values through their works.

Supervisor Peskin, we thank you for bringing these issues to the public's attention. We are here to ask you to help us save the mural *and* SFAI, the institution *and* the hundreds of people – students, faculty, and staff – whose lives and livelihoods would be deeply impacted by our closure.

On behalf of the SFAI Board of Trustees, with gratitude and respect,

Pam Rorke Levy
Chair, Board of Trustees
San Francisco Art Institute