



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Francisco Art Institute Receives \$94,000 Save America's Treasures Grant to Restore Recently Discovered New Deal-Era Frescoes

San Francisco, CA, September 23, 2019 — San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) was awarded a \$94,000 Save America's Treasures grant to restore and conserve two major New Deal-era frescoes on the walls of SFAI's historic campus in the North Beach neighborhood. The frescoes, which had been whitewashed and forgotten for decades, were rediscovered in late 2013 by SFAI's VP of Operations & Facilities, Heather Hickman Holland, who noticed ghostly, web-like traces along the walls of a corner hallway. Upon closer examination, she realized that these marks were in fact outlines of figures and buildings. Through careful research of SFAI's archives, Holland identified at least six of these "lost" frescoes throughout the building, with the positive identification of one of them—a delicate painting by Frederick Olmsted, Jr., titled *Marble Workers* (1935).

Marble Workers and a second fresco, known as *Lost Fresco #6* until conservation efforts can identify the painter, are the subjects of the mural restoration and access plan made possible in part by the Save America's Treasures grant, funded by the National Park Service, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Arts, and National Endowment for the Humanities.

"SFAI played a central role advancing the fresco as an art form in the United States in the 1930s," said SFAI President Gordon Knox. "SFAI faculty members brought Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo to San Francisco for Diego's first commission in the U.S., the incredible *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, which is open to the public seven days a week at our 800 Chestnut Street campus. Rivera's presence in San Francisco stimulated the West Coast muralist movement. SFAI began to offer courses in fresco painting and turned classrooms and walls over to the exploration of the form. Nearly all of the 26 artists who worked on Coit Tower were affiliated with SFAI."

"Making the 'lost frescoes' visible and accessible for the first time since the New Deal era will help further illuminate the stories, experiences and ethos of Bay Area public mural artists at an important time in our collective history," Knox says. "This extraordinary project will allow students, faculty and visitors from around the world to experience the work in the context of other Social Realist murals of the time."

Marble Workers, also called *Marble Workers at Fisherman's Wharf*, was painted in 1935 after Olmsted, Jr., a grand-nephew of Frederick Law Olmsted, had completed his mural titled *Power* at the landmark Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. The large, arched fresco, roughly ten feet high and nine feet wide, depicts a scene of everyday life in San Francisco, a group of nine men at work at the Musto Marble Works just blocks from SFAI. The fresco is located in a well-trafficked corridor adjacent to what is now SFAI's photography department. *Marble Workers* has been

hidden from sight for roughly seventy years, most likely whitewashed in the mid-1940s. Its restoration, which includes overpaint removal, in-painting and fills, was launched with additional, earlier grants from the Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation and the NEA.

SFAI staff and conservators believe there is a good chance *Lost Fresco #6* was painted by a woman, as were two other, extant SFAI frescoes by Marjorie Eakin (Sabre) and Eleanor Bates (Streloff). SFAI's archive records show that Suzanne Scheuer, Una McCann, Ann Rice O'Hanlon, Margaret O'Keefe and, likely, Hebe Daum (Stackpole) also painted frescoes in the hallways and cafeteria at SFAI. *Lost Fresco #6* is the largest fresco on campus other than the school's well-known Diego Rivera mural. Its location is exceptionally prominent, near what was previously the northern entrance to the campus, adjacent to the original cafeteria. This large painting (147" H x 142" W) was coated in urethane before being whitewashed, likely a misguided attempt to preserve the image.

SFAI's research to discover why the frescoes were painted over is ongoing, but the situation is not unusual. Sometimes, overpaint is the result of miscommunication; a work order might be created to paint the interior walls of a building but neglect to specify which areas *not* to paint—resulting in entire walls painted over even if there is artwork on the plaster. It is also possible that the frescoes had some damage, and painting over them seemed a cost-effective and efficient response. Cultural depreciation may also have been a culprit; SFAI researchers speculate that when the Social Realist style fell out of fashion in the 1940s in favor of Abstract Expressionism, the perceived value of the frescoes may have temporarily shifted.

Phase I of the project, a conservation assessment, was completed in 2015, providing testing, some treatment, and recommendations and cost estimates for restoration. These activities, along with the restoration of two additional murals in Phase II, were supported by the Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund, administered by San Francisco Heritage; the Mary A. Crocker Trust; and San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development's Historic Preservation Fund Committee.

About Save America's Treasures

The Federal Save America's Treasures program, a partnership of the NPS, IMLS, NEA, and NEH, was established in 1998 with the objective of preserving nationally significant historic properties and museum collections for future generations of Americans to experience, learn from, and enjoy.

From 1999 to 2017, more than 1,300 projects received \$328 million to provide preservation and conservation work on nationally significant collections, artifacts, structures, and sites. Requiring a dollar-for-dollar private match, these grants leveraged more than \$377 million in private investment and contributed more than 16,000 jobs to local and state economies.

In 2018, Congress appropriated funding for Save America's Treasures from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), which uses revenue from federal oil leases to provide assistance for a broad range of preservation assistance without expending tax dollars. The current disbursement of awards is from the 2018 appropriation and includes 41 preservation projects in 23 states.

About San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, SFAI is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in the practice and study of contemporary art. As a diverse community of working artists and scholars, SFAI provides students with a rigorous education in the arts and preparation for a life in the arts through an immersive studio environment, an integrated liberal arts and art history curriculum, and critical engagement with the world. Committed to educating artists who will shape the future of art, culture, and society, SFAI fosters creativity and original thinking in an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context.

SFAI offers BFA, BA, MFA, and MA degrees, a dual MA/MFA degree, a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate, and a range of exhibitions, public programs, and public education courses. Notable past faculty and alumni include Lance Acord, Ansel Adams, Kathryn Bigelow, Enrique Chagoya, Angela Davis, Richard Diebenkorn, Paul Kos, George Kuchar, Annie Leibovitz, Barry McGee, Manuel Neri, Catherine Opie, Peter Pau, Laura Poitras, Clyfford Still, and Kehinde Wiley.

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