

## San Francisco Art Institute Uncovers Lost History through Multiple Historic Preservation Grants

*Storied art school awarded \$75,000 for historic preservation including the recovery of several 'lost frescos' and the preservation of murals depicting key cultural moments in San Francisco history*



Archival image of the recently rediscovered 'lost mural' *Marble Workers* by Frederick E. Olmsted, Jr.

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**San Francisco, Calif. (July 16, 2015)** – San Francisco Art Institute has been awarded multiple grants totaling \$75,000 for the preservation and maintenance of its historic campus, including several murals that capture key moments in the history of the iconic art school and San Francisco. The grants, from San Francisco Heritage's newly launched **Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund**, the **Mary A. Crocker Trust 2015 Award**, and the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development's **Historic Preservation Fund Committee**, will support efforts to uncover several recently rediscovered 'lost frescos'; to conserve significant works by two important female painters at the school's 800 Chestnut Street campus; and to guide preservation of SFAI's important historic buildings.

### **Uncovering the ‘Lost Frescos’**

In fall 2013, SFAI’s Director of Operations Heather Hickman Holland noticed what she thought were spider webs in the corner of a hallway inside the school’s 1927 building. Upon closer examination of the campus, along with archival research support from librarian Jeff Gunderson, SFAI discovered several ‘lost frescos’ dating back to the early 1930s. To date, the team has identified one overpainted fresco as *Marble Workers* by Frederick E. Olmsted, Jr., which depicts men working in a marble factory near Fisherman’s Wharf. The discovery of the Olmsted mural is significant to San Francisco’s history and community – Olmsted was among a group of artists, including Victor Arnautoff, Ray Boynton, and Ralph Stackpole, that was influential in the socially conscious West Coast muralist movement and received numerous commissions through the Works Progress Administration, including the iconic murals at Coit Tower.

Through a grant from the Historic Preservation Fund Committee, SFAI will assess the current state of the ‘lost frescos’, and develop a preservation plan as a critical first step to possible future rehabilitation and conservation. The school hopes that the recovery of these ‘lost frescos’ will provide a broader picture of the West Coast muralist movement and a more complete sense of the role SFAI played as an incubator for this art movement.

These grants will also help conserve three extant murals: *Ray Boynton Dedication Courtyard Mural* (1927) by Ray Boynton, which was painted upon completion of the 800 Chestnut Street building; Spencer Mackey’s *Life Drawing Class* by Eleanor Bates Strelhoff (1936); and *Gottardo Piazzoni’s Plein Air Class at Baker Beach* (1936 - 37) by Marjorie Eakin Sabre. The murals by Bates Strelhoff and Eakin Sabre are of particular historical interest – both paintings were completed by female artists during a time when most art commissions went to their male counterparts.

### **Preserving a Landmark**

A second project funded by the grant from the Historic Preservation Fund Committee is dedicated to developing a maintenance and preservation plan that will guide SFAI’s treatment and stewardship of its historic buildings.

The original building at 800 Chestnut Street, opened in 1927, was designed by Arthur Brown, Jr. (architect of San Francisco City Hall and Coit Tower) and is a designated San Francisco Landmark (#85). It also features a 1931 mural by legendary artist Diego Rivera, *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*. The 1969 addition, designed by Paffard Keatinge-Clay, is considered one of the most striking examples of Brutalist architecture in California. Both buildings are open to the public, and welcome thousands of visitors each year.

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### **About San Francisco’s Historic Preservation Fund Committee**

With input from the Historic Preservation Fund Committee, San Francisco’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development provides historic preservation grants for preservation-related works in San Francisco, including education, feasibility studies, research and documentation, and the nomination of properties to state and federal registers. The HPFC is comprised of a single representative appointed by the following entities: San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission, San Francisco Architectural Heritage, San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Office of the Mayor, San Francisco Beautiful, San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Franciscans for Preservation Planning.

### **About SF Heritage's Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund**

San Francisco Heritage recently launched the Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund, a new grant program to help document, preserve, and celebrate the diverse historic places and cultural assets that define San Francisco. Through the grant, San Francisco Heritage will provide small grants for planning, outreach, capital improvement, and interpretive programs or projects. By providing tangible financial assistance to small-scale, community-based preservation projects, the new grant program will be a powerful tool to advance San Francisco Heritage's advocacy and education work in neighborhoods throughout San Francisco.

### **About the Mary A. Crocker Trust**

The Mary A. Crocker Trust was established in 1889 by the four children of Mary Crocker, making it the oldest family foundation west of the Mississippi. Five family members now serve as Trustees. The Trust is primarily interested in Bay Area educational and environmental programs. The Trust is especially interested in pre-college educational projects that encourage academic excellence, aid schools in meeting the special demands facing the Bay Area, and programs that provide alternative approaches to traditional education. The Trust also seeks to fund advocacy projects that promote solutions to environmental problems and boost awareness and participation.

### **About San Francisco Art Institute**

San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), founded in 1871, 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.

### **Media Contact: *Cinch PR & Branding Group***

Michael Radlick  
415.392.2212  
317.439.0303 (cell)  
[michaelr@cinchpr.com](mailto:michaelr@cinchpr.com)