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SFAI 150 | A Spirit of Disruption

The San Francisco Art Institute celebrates its 150th anniversary with an exhibition and podcast series reflecting on the school's extraordinary and diverse legacy

Exhibition on view: March 19—July 3, 2021

Are you listening? Podcast and web series begins March 19, 2021

Curated by Margaret Tedesco and Leila Weefur

San Francisco, CA, February 4, 2021 — The San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2021 with *A Spirit of Disruption*, an exhibition that reflects on the school's profound and sustained influence on contemporary art and highlights the contributions of generations of diverse artists and individuals often overlooked in the historical narrative of SFAI. *A Spirit of Disruption* includes the work of more than thirty alumni and faculty from the 1960s to the present; a dynamic media installation drawn from SFAI's vast archive; and a section dedicated to artist model Florence "Flo" Wysinger Allen, the subject of countless paintings, sculptures, and drawings made at the school from 1933-1997.

Also launching in conjunction with the March 19th exhibition opening and anniversary day is a 10-episode podcast and web series, created by the exhibition's curators, that reveals new stories and old gleaned from the archive.

Founded in 1871, generations of important artists, scholars, and thinkers from around the world have been educated and have taught at SFAI, formerly the California School of Fine Arts. This spirited and often unruly community established SFAI as a microcosm of the Bay Area art world—a place dedicated to the interdisciplinary, where ideas and education reach beyond formal boundaries. This radical creativity played a central role in many influential contemporary art movements, including Abstract Expressionism, Bay Area Figuration, Color Field, California Funk, and the Mission School, affirming the school's long-standing impact on the international art world.

A Spirit of Disruption features a selection of artworks and archival materials that celebrate the ethos and expansive ecosystem of the institution. Curated by longtime SFAI employee and educator Margaret Tedesco together with recent faculty member Leila Weefur, whose first curatorial project for SFAI was bringing the work of contemporary Black artists into a 2019 exhibition about the Black Panthers, *A Spirit of Disruption* both embraces and takes a departure from the school's wide-ranging history, advancing a new breadth of perspectives past, present, and future.

"The underpinning of the exhibition is to spotlight artists who have not been included in the larger historical narrative of SFAI, which has primarily been cisgender, white men," says Weefur. "We took special care to make sure the majority of the works included in the exhibition are by BIPOC / LGBTQ+ artists and vary in career length and exposure, pairing young and emerging artists with mid-career and established artists. The *Spirit of Disruption* is the conceptual force behind this curatorial method, which is to disrupt the history and bring forth the diverse approach that best represents SFAI's legacy."

"This exhibition at 150 years, is a re-examination of the constantly changing complexion of art history—an invitation to no longer read between the lines," adds Tedesco.

Among the artists highlighted is Filipino-American painter Leo Valledor (1936–1989, BFA in Painting, 1955) whose shaped canvas *Ghost Ring* (1968) was a part of Valledor's *East-West Series* exhibited at SFMOMA in 1971 and at SFAI the same year. Valledor, who received a scholarship to study at SFAI at just 17 years old, was active with the Six Gallery on Fillmore Street and went on to co-found the historic Park Place Gallery in New York.

A more recent graduate, Cathy Lu (MFA in Sculpture, 2010), whose ceramic-based works manipulate traditional Chinese art objects and symbols, will contribute a large-scale hanging installation entitled *Customs Declaration* (2019).

Also included is an installation *Pantalla Hypnotica* (2018) by Mexican artist Miguel Calderón (BFA in Film, 1994) who became a key figure in the development of a young alternative art scene in Mexico, associated with the art space he co-founded La Pandería, after graduating.

Twenty graphite drawings by Frederick Hayes (MFA in Painting, 1985) illustrate the artist's ongoing exploration of African-American portraiture. Hayes, who was also awarded SFAI's Richard R. Diebenkorn Teaching Fellowship, has work in the collections of SFMOMA, The Studio Museum of Harlem, and more.

The exhibition, on view in SFAI's Walter and McBean Galleries, also features work by Alice Shaw, Ana Teresa Fernandez, Bill Jenkins, Brett Reichman, Cathy Lu, Christopher Burch, Conrad Guevara, David Johnson, Dewey Crumpler, Ebitenyefa Baralaye, Florence Allen, Fred Hayes, Haein Kang, Hayward King, Ileana Tejada, Jacqueline Kiyomi Gork, Jay DeFeo, Jenny Odell, Joshua Pavlick, Juan Luis Matos, Julio César Morales, Kezia Harrell, Leo Valledor, Lexygius Sanchez Calip, Lindsey White, Luis Recoder & Sandra Gibson, Miguel Calderón, Mildred Howard, M Lamar, Modou Dieng, N8 Devivo, Nicki Green, Pablo Guardiola, Xylor Jane, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Also included are select pieces of ephemera such as Jay DeFeo's Polaroids, and a coffee cup homage to Father Guido Sarducci (comedian Don Novello), who filmed a 1982 promotion for SFAI explaining the advantages of being an artist, which included 'sitting around all day long drinking espresso coffee with your friends.'

Among the stories woven into *A Spirit of Disruption* are those that shed light on some of the seminal, but often overlooked figures of the Bay Area arts scene. Florence "Flo" Wysinger Allen was a beloved and esteemed artist model and the subject and inspiration for countless paintings, sculptures, and drawings made at the school from 1933-1997. Founder of the Bay Area Models' Guild in 1945 and also a civil rights activist, her status at the school was such that her signature can still be found in the concrete in front of Studio 8 at the historic Chestnut Street campus. Ten sketches and paintings of Allen will be shown together in the Diego Rivera Gallery.

A Spirit of Disruption also includes a dynamic media installation drawn from SFAI's Anne Bremer Library archive featuring artists Rigo 89, Karen Finley, Cliff Hengst, Doug Hall, Debora Iyall, Jun Jalbuena, Jennifer Locke, Paula Levine, Cecilia Dougherty; and George Kuchar in collaboration with Tim Sullivan, among many others.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Tedesco and Weefur have produced an interactive multimedia web program titled *Are you listening?*, a 10-episode podcast series with accompanying short videos and digital images from the SFAI archive. Each episode considers the histories of SFAI's various departments and will include original music by alumni. A special episode will be dedicated to Flo Allen. Episodes will be released on Fridays beginning March 19, 2021 at sfai.edu or wherever listeners get their podcasts.

Tedesco, who spent 20 years working at SFAI and has been developing the exhibition with Weefur since 2019, is thrilled to give the public this window into the school's unique history and community. She states, "My SFAI tenure was a gift of proximity—the privilege to be the constant observer in the ever-revolving community of artists, whose presence gave generously

to the larger context, defining a spirit and a mood—a zeitgeist if you will, spilling into the Bay Area and beyond, marking place.”

SFAI 150 / A Spirit of Disruption is made possible with the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Winifred Johnson Clive Foundation, Grants for the Arts, and the Koret Foundation.

About the Curators

Artist and independent curator Margaret Tedesco works across performance, installation, photography, and video. She has presented and collaborated with visual and performance artists, writers, and filmmakers for more than twenty-five years. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally including SFMOMA, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, The LAB, SF Cinematheque, SF Camerawork, New Langton Arts, and with Small Press Traffic. For seven years, Tedesco was a curatorial member of the now historic New Langton Arts in San Francisco. In 2007, she established [2nd floor projects], an artist run exhibition and publishing space in San Francisco which received the Southern Exposure Alternative Exposure Award. She worked at SFAI as a staff member and educator for over 20 years beginning in the early 90s.

Leila Weefur (They/He/She) is a trans-gender-nonconforming artist, writer, and curator based in Oakland, CA. Through video and installation, they examine the performativity intrinsic to systems of belonging present in our lived experiences. The work brings together concepts of the sensorial memory, abject Blackness, hyper surveillance, and the erotic. Weefur is a recipient of the Hung Liu award, the MSP Foundation’s Black Voices Grant, and the Walter & Elise Haas Creative Work Fund. Weefur has worked with local and national institutions including McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, SFMOMA, The Wattis Institute, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, and Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, New York. Their writing has been published by Sming Sming Books and Objects, Baest Journal, Berkeley Poetry Review, and more. Weefur is a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, and California College of the Arts.

About San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, SFAI is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education committed to the practice and study of contemporary art. SFAI fosters creativity and original thinking in an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context, and has played a central role in many contemporary art movements including Abstract Expressionism, Bay Area Figuration, Color Field, California Funk, and the Mission School. Celebrated artists and thinkers who have studied or taught at SFAI include Angela Davis, Bruce Conner, Carlos Villa, Ansel

Adams, Mark Rothko, David Park, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Mildred Howard, George Kuchar, Richard Diebenkorn, Jay DeFeo, Catherine Opie, Joan Brown, Cristobal Martinez, Toba Khedoori, Mike Henderson, Barry McGee, Alicia McCarthy, and Kehinde Wiley. Other notable alumni include the photographer Annie Liebovitz and Academy Award-winning director Kathryn Bigelow.

General Information

If allowed at the time of the exhibition's March 19, 2021 opening, in person visits will be by appointment to ensure the public's safety. Guests can make a free appointment through the website at sfai.edu. City and State guidelines will be observed. Visitors will be required to wear masks and maintain social distancing.

SFAI's Galleries are open to the public Tuesday 11 AM – 7 PM and Wednesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM and are free to the public. For general information and updates on gallery access, the public may visit sfai.edu or call (415) 749-4563. SFAI is located at 800 Chestnut St., San Francisco, CA.

A virtual version of the exhibition will be available at sfai.edu as well.

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