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University of San Francisco and San Francisco Art Institute to explore integration of academic art programs, operations

SAN FRANCISCO (Feb. 2, 2022) – The leadership of two renowned educational institutions, the University of San Francisco (USF) and the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), announced today they have signed a letter of intent to explore integrating operations and academic programs in the arts to elevate the next generation of artists.

The agreement approved by the trustees of each institution calls for a period of due diligence leading to USF acquiring SFAI and the integration of the undergraduate and graduate arts programs to benefit students through collaborative opportunities. The program would be known as the San Francisco Art Institute at the University of San Francisco (SFAI@USF). SFAI's historical buildings, art and film collections, and assets would be acquired by USF.

SFAI, founded in 1871, is among the nation's oldest and most prestigious schools of contemporary fine art. Celebrated artists who have studied or taught at SFAI

include Ansel Adams, Kathryn Bigelow, Joan Brown, Enrique Chagoya, Bruce Conner, Angela Davis, Jay DeFeo, Richard Diebenkorn, Mike Henderson, Mildred Howard, Toba Khedoori, George Kuchar, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Annie Leibovitz, Cristóbal Martínez, Alicia McCarthy, Barry McGee, Catherine Opie, David Park, Mark Rothko, Carlos Villa, and Kehinde Wiley.

USF — the city’s first university — was founded in 1855 by the Jesuit order of Catholic priests and brothers to provide educational opportunities for largely immigrant families in the Bay Area. Today, USF enrolls more than 10,000 students from around the world in 230 undergraduate, graduate, professional, and certificate programs in the arts and sciences, business, law, education, and nursing and health professions. Among USF alumni are San Francisco Mayor London Breed, NBA player and coach Bill Cartwright, cofounder and former CEO of BEA Systems Alfred Chuang, poet and musician Michael Franti, artist and philanthropist Gordon Getty, California Supreme Court Justice Martin Jenkins, NBC journalist Vicky Nguyen, and the late California historian Kevin Starr.

The two institutions have been in conversation about possible integration of operations and academic programs in the arts at various times over the past decade, and faculty have collaborated on exhibitions, programs, and initiatives in and beyond classrooms and studios.

With the signing of a letter of intent, SFAI and USF agree to explore an integration that recognizes the prestige and history of both institutions while opening new doors for future opportunities under a combined entity. The period of due diligence will include reviewing and assessing finances, the physical assets at SFAI’s Chestnut Street campus on Russian Hill, the process of academic accreditation for the newly created program, and other matters, including employment opportunities.

Current SFAI students who complete their degree programs at USF would receive the same academic and co-curricular services, opportunities, and support that USF students traditionally receive.

It is expected that the review would be completed before summer to allow for integrated operations beginning in the fall.

USF Board Chair John F. Nicolai said: “USF is delighted to join with SFAI and to work with the faculty, staff, and leadership to explore this exciting opportunity to create a distinctive program of arts education, unique in higher education. We

believe SFAI@USF would be a tremendous benefit to the Bay Area, the nation, and the world. Together, the two institutions would create a premier arts curriculum, with an intensive studio environment and a vital liberal arts education.”

SFAI Board Chair Lonnie Graham said: “We were foremost impressed by USF’s profound commitment to social justice and especially by its deep understanding of the power of the arts to be a significant pillar of change in the world. USF has shown the depth of its commitment to be a major force for change in legal systems, social programs, education, and technology. This union would create an innovative confluence of the arts and academics to advance a curriculum that reinforces the value of the arts in changing the world.”

The period of due diligence will include a collaborative process of curricular redesign and development by USF and SFAI faculty to ensure the new integrated academic unit would reflect the vision and mission of both institutions.

Pending comprehensive financial review, the letter of intent calls for USF to assume responsibility for SFAI’s property and assets on Chestnut Street. Those assets include the Anne Bremer Memorial Library; the Diego Rivera Gallery and the artist’s monumental mural; professional exhibition space; extensive digital, photo, and film labs and studio space; and a rooftop amphitheater.

Addressing the due diligence process, Rev. Paul J. Fitzgerald, S.J., president of USF, said: “We are committed to transparency and openness in our collaboration with faculty, staff, and students, and look forward to imagining the design of this new program with our communities. Additionally, we are very aware of how vital SFAI is to the Bay Area’s cultural, artistic, and philanthropic communities, and we anticipate productive conversations with these essential partners.”

About University of San Francisco usfca.edu:

The University of San Francisco is a private, Jesuit Catholic university that reflects the diversity, optimism, and opportunities of the city that surrounds it. Ranked by US News & World Report as No. 1 among the nation’s universities in ethnic diversity, USF enrolls students from across the country and around the world. Its main Hilltop campus is in the heart of San Francisco, between Golden Gate Park and the Golden Gate Bridge, and comprises 56 acres. Additional campus locations

are at 101 Howard Street in downtown San Francisco, and in Sacramento, Orange County, and Pleasanton.

About San Francisco Art Institute sfai.edu:

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 fine art. SFAI sustains a spirit of unfettered possibility and the role of an incubator of the novel, the unexpected, and often the provocative through an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary context. SFAI has played a central role in many contemporary art movements, including Fine Art Photography, Abstract Expressionism, Bay Area Figuration, Color Field, California Funk, and the Mission School. In addition, SFAI continues to lead by promoting awareness of the relevance of the arts in contemporary culture.

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