



**San Francisco Art Institute Celebrates Commencement on May 22, 2021  
Including Virtual BFA and MFA/MA Shows**

**As Part of SFAI's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
the Nation's Oldest and Only School of Higher Education Dedicated to Contemporary Art Will  
Honor Leading Artists Dr. Deborah Willis, Hank Willis Thomas, and  
Patrisse Cullors**

**San Francisco (May 20, 2021)** – San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) will host its 143rd Commencement virtually on Saturday, May 22, 2021, at 2PM and celebrate new Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), and dual-degree Master of Arts/MFA alumni. The commencement is followed by openings of BFA and MFA interactive virtual exhibitions featuring contemporary installations, painting, sound, video, sculpture, photography, printmaking, performance, and more.

At this year's commencement, as part of SFAI's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, SFAI will recognize artists **Dr. Deborah Willis** and **Hank Willis Thomas** with a Doctor of Fine Arts, honoris causa, for inspiring contributions to our society and demonstrating how an aesthetically astute, investigative mind can impact the world for the better. As an artist, author and curator, Dr. Willis has focused her art and research on cultural histories envisioning the black body, women and gender. She is a celebrated photographer and acclaimed historian of photography, authoring dozens of books that contribute to and advance the field of photography. Hank Willis Thomas has established a clever and witty context for dialogue through the course of his artistic practice. His work as a sculptor, photographer, installation artist, and cultural activist in works such as the Question Bridge and more recently the establishment of the political action committee known as the For Freedoms initiative continue to raise awareness around sensitive social issues.

Artist and activist **Patrisse Cullors** will be awarded the Douglas G. MacAgy Distinguished Achievement Award. Established in 1996, the Award is bestowed on a person or organization that has made a singularly compelling societal contribution, especially concerning the public awareness of issues and ideas through the visual arts. The Award is named for the Director of the California School of Fine Arts (now SFAI) from 1945 to 1950, one of the most innovative and inspiring leaders in SFAI's long history. Cullors' practice and commitment to social activism has ignited a global movement that relates to social standing, racism, and classism in the world by co-founding the Black Lives Matter movement.

SFAI Board Chair Lonnie Graham (SFAI MFA '84) says the Art Institute is privileged to honor these role models for this year's graduates. "Through the course of their practice, these artists demonstrate the integral role the artist plays in society. Beset with the challenges of human endeavor, these individuals have imagined innovative ways to increase our understanding, gain insight through dialogue, and ultimately identify and face our problems head on," says Graham. "SFAI is pleased to honor these artists as they demonstrate the elegant confluence, incisive articulation, and the sublime and brutal power of the arts. We also offer our congratulations and best wishes to this year's graduates."

**About the 2021 BFA and MFA/MA Online Exhibitions**



***Wave Tossed but Never Sunk***, 2021 BFA exhibition, Saturday, May 22, 2:00 pm, [sfai.edu/neversunk](https://sfai.edu/neversunk)

*Wave Tossed but Never Sunk* is an online exhibition showcasing the works of SFAI's 2021 Bachelor of Fine Arts graduates, highlighting the resilience and perseverance of the artists during a year of turmoil.

In an excerpt from exhibition text, Gisselle Immormino, BFA 2021, writes: "I like to think all the times I sat at the fountain, watching the turtles, and feeling the direct sunlight on my skin, made me flourish. Forever ingrained into my body. I miss you, but forever grateful. You taught me so much more than I was expecting, maybe even more than I wanted or welcomed at times. Thank you for your magic, confidence, laughter, opportunity, tears, late nights, sunshine, life. Everything." Graduating artists include: Rora Blue, Zeming "Alex" Dai, Camila de Andrade Bianchi, Emily Golla, Gisselle Immormino, and Diane Vadino.

***here, and yet—***, 2021 MFA and MA exhibition, Saturday, May 22, 2:00 pm, [sfai.edu/here-and-yet](https://sfai.edu/here-and-yet)

*here, and yet—* In describing the show, the students write: "The hereness is abstract. Subjective momentary hereness. There is no anchor - there is no meeting point, there is only the continuous forward motion. Disjointed perfections. There is only the question. Of which we participate. Of which there is."

The online exhibition showcases the works of SFAI's 2021 Master of Fine Arts and Master of Arts graduates. Work has been installed throughout SFAI's Chestnut Campus and documented by the graduates to be viewed only online — a commentary on the past year of remote learning, lack of access to campus and the distance felt within the community during the time of the pandemic.

Artists include: Dominique Birdsong, Lexygius Calip, Qian Song, Colette Standish, Christian Tan, Kit Radford Marisa Weissman, and Flora Wilds.

### **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 fine 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. SFAI is currently accepting MFA applications for summer 2021 and BFA, MFA, and MA/MFA applications for fall 2021. For more information about admissions, visit [sfai.edu/admissions/apply-now](https://sfai.edu/admissions/apply-now).

### **General Information**

For general information, the public may visit [sfai.edu](https://sfai.edu) or call (415) 749-4563. SFAI is located at 800 Chestnut St., San Francisco, CA.

### **MEDIA CONTACT**

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