



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONLINE EXHIBITION

The Leonard Peltier Statue by Rigo 23

October 9, 2020 - March 28, 2021

San Francisco, CA, September 15, 2020 — Alumnus and former faculty member Rigo 23 brings his large-scale statue of Leonard Peltier to SFAI's rooftop terrace this fall to gaze across the bay to Alcatraz, a pivotal place for the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Indians of All Tribes. The 12-foot-high likeness of Peltier, a Native activist incarcerated since 1977, is based on a small hand painted self portrait that Peltier created in prison.

The statue has traveled around the United States and has, at times, met with an animosity all too familiar to Indigenous activists the world over. At the Katzen Art Center at the American University in Washington DC in 2016, it was censored and taken down after complaints from the president of the FBI Agents Association and subsequently disappeared for nearly a year until the artist was able to recover it. It was then exhibited at the Main Museum in downtown Los Angeles and greeted with an outpouring of community support.

The detachable feet of the statue have travelled Indian Country to many protest and ceremony sites including Standing Rock, Alcatraz Island, and Crow Dog's Paradise. On these journeys, Rigo 23 and collaborators invite people to stand on the feet to show their solidarity for Peltier. Hundreds have, including well-known activists like Angela Davis.

“It is a counter presence to the invisibility of Indigenous People in the USA and the continuous abuse they endure enshrined in the 'Cigar Store Chief' statues which can be found chained to cigar and liquor storefronts in most American cities still today,” says Rigo 23.

The public can experience the statue online at SFAI's website. The virtual exhibition includes footage of the unveiling ceremony that took place on October 9, 2020 with remarks from Kathy D. Peltier (daughter), Chauncey Peltier (son), and Anne Begay (AIM activist and mother of Kathy), as well as photographs from the statue's travels across the country, and more about Peltier and the artist.

The installation of the work at SFAI on October 9, 2020 places the statue in dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples Day Sunrise Ceremonies that have taken place on Alcatraz annually October 12 and November 26 since 1975 to honor the Indigenous Peoples of America,

promote their rights, and to commemorate the Native activists who occupied the island in protest in 1969.

Rigo 23 is a Portuguese-born American artist and has exhibited his work internationally for over 20 years, placing murals, paintings, sculptures, and tile work in public situations where viewers are encouraged to examine their relationship to their community, their role as unwitting advocates of public policy, or their place on a planet occupied by many other living things. Rigo's works live both as artworks and as thoughtful public interventions.

About the 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

The public can access the online exhibition at <https://sfai.edu/features/leonardpeltier/>

SFAI is located at 800 Chestnut St., San Francisco, CA. Its galleries are currently closed to the public.

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