



### SFAI Update by Marian Wallace, mid-January, 2023

Who isn't heart-broken, in some sense, about the art institute?... those who had been there at least... Even through your tenable and justified anger, frustration, or hurt, don't you wish the dream could have continued? Was it too utopian? or too naïve? crooked? A perfect storm? The commonly-used wrap-up of mismanagement?

It doesn't seem conceivable that such a beautiful piece of property with so much love and history could possibly fail—irrevocably— And it's hard for many to imagine why there's no salvation.

Someone summed it up, “No one in San Francisco wants to give SFAI a *penny*.”

Another offered, “Art schools are outdated—colonialistic—”

Many have chimed in, “All colleges and universities are suffering now, esp. fine-arts schools.”

All seem to ask, “Why isn't the city doing anything?” or “What about UC (who own the property)?”

And of course there's the typical disbelief that this could happen with so much money in our general vicinity.

Somehow the school bumbled along for decades on reputation and the many mostly-foreign students who paid full tuition. BUT then, money that could have/ should have/ been better spent on the old campus was sunk into the new graduate center at Fort Mason. It was purportedly “borrowed” from another funding pot, but was never “paid back”—raised to refill that pot—and the old campus continued to disintegrate via deferred maintenance, while generally struggling financially.

Granted, that graduate center is a fine accomplishment. It's a light and airy environment with room for creativity and all of the tools needed for it. But as Marcel Duchamp pointed out, “The work (of art) is completed by the viewer.” Or in this case, the school (the work) would have been completed by the students (viewers) attending—but not nearly enough came. The blame for SFAI going down always seems to come back around and land squarely on the Fort Mason graduate center. This has got to be at least part of its demise. It's a fabulous-looking build-out of what was an empty pier building. There must be room for a hundred graduate students to work there simultaneously! But apparently there were not enough enrollees to fill the slots. What happened?!? As usual, it's someone else's fault, if not just the vagaries of life on earth.

Now apparently, a Fort Mason subleasing idea has finally been quashed—by Fort Mason. This after years ago allegedly convincing the SFAI board to “sign on” and “do the deal”—that is, to take on the creation of a graduate center at Fort Mason. Fort Mason *wanted* SFAI. The idea didn't pan out for SFAI, but the money has been spent and Fort Mason administration is not sympathetic to SFAI's failure to make the new campus work/ worth it/ pay the rent. They have not approved any sub-leasers that SFAI has trotted out for consideration.

There's been lots of finger pointing as the various hopes and dreams turn into nightmares one by one. Merging with USF turned into being subsumed by USF, but then in the end SFAI was jilted. Fundraising with the Diego Rivera mural had a go at it, but that caused such a ruckus and show of righteous indignation that it was abandoned. Previously, a sanctioned community group spent at least a year brainstorming paths and solutions, but that all went up in fiery smoke between what had turned into “factions.” Now, developers are trying to come up with a palatable way to build condos or other residences in the “new” building, while trying to let SFAI continue as an art institute – co-habitator of the property. This seems to be the plan of the hour, with many hurdles still to be vaulted, of course.

Meanwhile, the librarians are packing up the SFAI archive materials in preparation of moving “somewhere” as of yet to be determined—maybe. They are working on getting all the paperwork done to transfer their archiving grant to be administered by the new SFAI Legacy Foundation so they can begin work in earnest, i.e. start getting paid for *real* from the funding they've been granted by NEH. There is, however, a chance that they won't have to move! The possibilities are head-spinning.

The librarians would be willing and able to work on the archive *in situ*—and it could start being available to researchers by appointment *almost right away*. Could that happen? Be the beginning of a “Renaissance” along with the Diego Rivera and all of the other murals? Who's in charge around here anyway?

What do YOU think? Are you celebrating that the old dinosaur has laid down and will be pulled off life support any minute now? to finally die? Or are you hopeful-against-hope for an 12<sup>th</sup>-hour bail out? Believe it or not, the entity of SFAI still exists. A possible future is a puzzle that seems to have no answer. Do you have tens of millions of dollars to throw at it? YOU could plan the usage of this amazing piece of property. If only the fiscal blocks could be melted and our imaginations could overcome the stasis. That's asking quite a bit. What can be done with no money? Could we start with one art class?? Why not? It *could* happen. (Couldn't it?)

—Marian Wallace, alumna, SFAA board member, former SFAI adjunct faculty member, SFAI neighbor