

DIEGO RIVERA’S LARGEST PORTABLE MURAL, PAN AMERICAN UNITY, OPENS AT SFMOMA ON JUNE 28, 2021

TEN-PANEL HISTORIC FRESCO CREATED AT THE 1940 GOLDEN GATE INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION WILL BE DISPLAYED IN MUSEUM’S FREE-TO-VISIT GALLERY

VISITORS CAN OBSERVE CONSERVATION OF THE MURAL THROUGH JULY

MINI MURALS FESTIVAL LAUNCHES JULY 31, 2021

PRESS PREVIEW: MONDAY, JUNE 28, 2021, 9:30 AM–NOON. RSVP TO press@sfmoma.org



“I have seen it and believe it is a really great work — technically beyond anything Rivera had previously done.... In intensity of symbolic images, complexity and depth of thought he is of course here going into something much more profound than anything he has previously attempted.” **Dr. Grace McCann Morley, founding director, San Francisco Museum of Art, in a letter to *Art Digest*, December 1940**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (JUNE 24, 2021) — A project four years in the making, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) today announced the public opening of Diego Rivera’s largest portable fresco mural, *Pan American*

Unity, on June 28, 2021, at 1 p.m. On loan from City College of San Francisco (CCSF) and one of the most important works of public art the city, the mural will be displayed in the museum’s free-to-visit street-level Roberts Family Gallery. This exhibition is the culmination of four years of extensive investigation, research and preparation that brought together SFMOMA, CCSF, scientists at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), an international team of conservators, Diego Rivera scholars, and Atthowe Fine Art Services, a local expert on art moving and rigging. These teams explored the engineering, conservation and scientific requirements for moving such a monumental, historic and fragile work of art. A comprehensive program of on-site conservation, public education and talks will accompany the mural as well as the upcoming exhibition *Diego Rivera’s America*, which will open in summer 2022. Generous funding for these initiatives has been provided in part by Bank of America, the Koret Foundation and numerous individual donors.

Diego Rivera’s *The Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on the Continent*, more commonly known as *Pan American Unity*, was created in 1940 as part of the *Art in Action* exhibition at the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE) on San Francisco’s Treasure Island, where local and international artists created works of painting, sculpture, mosaic, textiles, ceramics, prints, metalwork and woodcarving before a rapt audience. The mural, measuring 22 feet high by 74 feet wide and comprised of ten fresco panels, is the largest portable mural created by Rivera, and his last made in the United States. Rich in symbolism and imagery from across the North American continent, including Mexico, the United States and Canada, *Pan American Unity* has been on view in the Diego Rivera Theater on the main campus of CCSF since 1961. In 2023, the mural will return to CCSF to be installed in a new Performing Arts Center on its main campus.



“With its themes of collaboration and commonality between Mexico and the United States, the celebration of the creative spirit, and as a visual gift to San Francisco as we emerge from the pandemic, I could not be prouder to



bring *Pan American Unity* to our free-of-charge Roberts Family Gallery at SFOMA,” said Neal Benezra, Helen and Charles Schwab Director of SFMOMA. “I am so grateful to City College for loaning us this historic artwork. This would not have been possible without the passionate work of our museum staff and the local and international teams that worked diligently and brilliantly for years to realize this project. We have also had very generous support from the many sponsors and friends of the mural who have made the project possible. I have long thought of *Pan American Unity* as the greatest work of public art in San Francisco that very few people have had the opportunity to experience. Now visitors to SFMOMA will have a chance to linger in our gallery, drink in Rivera’s amazing vision, and engage deeply with themes and images that still resonate strongly today.”

“Today symbolizes a true institutional partnership, and a commitment to equity,” said Shanell Williams, President of City College’s Board of Trustees. “SFMOMA and CCSF are two of the city’s most enduring institutions in the public interest, and the transformative power of art and education will come together in this visionary presentation of Diego Rivera’s *Pan American Unity*. “The sharing and display of this mural for all to experience represents City College’s historical actions to continue working towards a more just and equitable society.”

MOVING PAN AMERICAN UNITY TO SFMOMA

The *Pan American Unity* partnership between SFMOMA and CCSF was announced in 2017. In early 2018, an international consortium of fresco experts, Rivera scholars, SFMOMA and CCSF staff, and scientists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) convened in Mexico City to study existing Rivera murals and to formulate an approach to move the 10-panel fresco, which weighs over 60,000 pounds and covers nearly 1,800 square feet. As the mural was embedded in a 12-inch-thick concrete wall in the Diego Rivera Theater at CCSF since 1961, the project came with unique challenges and constraints.

It took the museum and an international team of experts three years to do the research, testing and preparation necessary to move such a fragile and historic object, including a year lost to the COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place mandate. In summer 2019, scientists from UNAM and experts in fresco conservation, led by Kiernan Graves of Sight & Studio Conservation, came to San Francisco to begin preliminary research on the mural. These investigations included ultraviolet and high magnification photography and surface condition mapping of the mural, as well as removal of core samples of concrete from the wall in which the mural was embedded. Since there were no “as-built” plans for the mural installation in 1961, these holes enabled the teams to study how the mural was attached to the wall. The teams were greatly aided by two images of the mural created by Cultural Heritage Imaging (CHI). CHI used photogrammetry to transform almost 2,500 50-megapixel photographs of the mural's surface into a 3D model of the fresco. Using the same technology as aerial map makers, CHI used the 3D model to produce a 2D orthomosaic picture of the mural’s color, and a Digital Elevation Model to show the shape of the relief impressions on the mural’s surface. In addition to tracking condition issues on the mural, the map helped conservators track Rivera’s *giornata*—the boundary lines of the wet plaster area Rivera was able to paint in one day—and the progression of his work across the mural. The team could also track *pentimento*, where Rivera repainted an area on top of an added layer of fresh plaster.

With this baseline information, SFMOMA partnered with Prof. Alejandro Ramirez and the Center for Mechanical Design and Technological Innovation at UNAM to develop the best strategies to safely move the mural. They

created two full-sized replica panels and subjected them to vibration and torque testing in their lab to generate a database of stress impact on the mural. Using this data, they created a system of sensors affixed to the mural's surface, which allowed the UNAM team to monitor the panels in real time during the extraction and movement across San Francisco and to ensure they were subjected to as little stress as possible.

Extraction of the first panel by Atthowe Fine Art Services and Sheedy Drayage began in April 2021 and the first panel arrived at the museum May 2. After each panel was extracted from the 12-inch-thick concrete wall, it was mounted in a new steel frame and encased in a protective travel frame featuring custom wire rope isolators for further reduction of vibration and jolting. Each panel was then trucked across San Francisco at 5 MPH at 4 a.m. on a series of Sunday mornings. The last two panels arrived on Sunday, June 20.

In the Roberts Family Gallery at SFMOMA, the mural panels are attached to a steel structure that offers both stability and a versatile mounting system, allowing *Pan American Unity* to be safely moved and displayed again in the future. This system will be replicated when the mural is displayed at the new Performing Arts Center at CCSF.



HISTORY OF PAN AMERICAN UNITY

At the invitation of noted architect Timothy Pflueger, Diego Rivera journeyed to San Francisco to participate in the *Art in Action* program in the Palace of Fine Arts during the 1940 season of the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island. Fairgoers were invited to watch artists create work in a Pan Am Clipper airplane hangar converted into a working studio and gallery. Rivera and his assistants began in June 1940 and completed the mural in December, two months after the close of the Exposition. Over 30,000 visitors viewed the mural during a preview and a public viewing.

At the same time, Pflueger was working to build the campus of San Francisco Junior College (now City College of San Francisco). Together he and Rivera agreed the mural would be permanently displayed in a new Grand Library on the campus. But because of the ban on nonessential construction during World War II and Pflueger's unexpected death, the Grand Library was never constructed. Controversy regarding Rivera's communist politics during the McCarthy era further delayed the fresco's installation at the college. For 20 years it languished in storage until Milton Pflueger, Timothy's brother, proposed to the San Francisco School Board that the mural be

installed in the foyer of the college’s new theater. He redesigned the lobby and installed the mural, making it accessible to the public in 1961. The building was renamed the Diego Rivera Theater in honor of the artist in 1993.

SFMOMA’s history with Rivera includes 17 solo and group exhibitions. His work *The Flower Carrier* was one of the first paintings to enter the collection in 1935 as a gift from founding trustee Albert Bender, and SFMOMA’s collection of 76 works by the artist includes paintings, drawings and sketches. Through his friendship with Bender, Rivera obtained a visa to journey to San Francisco to paint murals at the San Francisco Stock Exchange (now City Club) and the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). SFMOMA’s founding director Dr. Grace McCann Morley helped with Rivera’s return to create *Pan American Unity*. Next year, *Pan American Unity* will serve as the concluding chapter of SFMOMA’s exhibition *Diego Rivera’s America*, opening summer 2022.

MURAL CONTENT AND THEMES

“For years I have felt that the real art of the Americas must come as a result of the fusion of the machinism and new creative power of the north with the tradition rooted in the soil of the south, the Toltecs, Tarascans, Mayas, Incas, etc., and would like to choose that as the subject of my mural.”

Diego Rivera in a letter to Timothy Pflueger, April 1940

Using fresco techniques in the manner of Italian Renaissance painters, but updating its themes and reimagining its social function, Rivera created a mural consisting of ten steel-framed panels that allowed individual sections to be transported and relocated after the close of the GGIE. Four panels on the lower row are discrete scenes, with the top five panels and the lower center panel forming a continuous view featuring one of Rivera’s most dynamic montage narratives.

“My mural will picture the fusion between the great past of the Latin American lands, as it is deeply rooted in the soil, and the high mechanical developments of the United States,” described Rivera. *Pan American Unity* features a sweeping panorama of the Bay Area, which connects idealized scenes of pre-Conquest cities of the Valley of Mexico City (left side) with depictions of the development of Northern California (right side). Rivera’s imagery extends from ancient civilizations (Toltec, Aztec) to Bay Area architectural icons (the Golden Gate Bridge, 450 Sutter, 140 Montgomery, Alcatraz). Rivera also incorporated current events, as well as references to his previous murals and artworks. In a lower panel, Rivera references scenes from Hollywood movies such as *The Great Dictator* and *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* to bring awareness to the rising threat of fascism and encourage the United States to join World War II.

The mural centers on a towering figure that combines a sculpture of the Aztec earth goddess Coatlicue with modern machinery. Around this syncretic symbol, he depicts many notable contemporary and historical figures from across the continent and across time: inventors and their inventions (the 15th-century ruler of Texcoco Nezahualcoyotl as well as Samuel Morse, Robert Fulton, Henry Ford), political figures both heroic and villainous (Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Simón Bolívar, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler), artists and architects (Frida Kahlo, sculptors Mardonio Magaña and Dudley Carter, Timothy Pflueger, and Rivera himself) and actors (Paulette Goddard, Charlie Chaplin and Edward G. Robinson). The mural also features a cross section of the creative pursuits of everyday people, including athletes, scientists, artisans and



Rivera's assistants and visitors he met at the GGIE.

Visit www.riveramural.org for additional information on *Pan American Unity* from CCSF.

MURAL CONSERVATION ON WEEKDAYS

Offering a special behind-the-scenes opportunity to visitors, conservators from SFMOMA and Site & Studio Conservation will continue surface conservation on the mural on weekdays during the month of July, and the public is welcome to observe. The schedule of daily conservator talks will be posted in the Roberts Family Gallery.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS FOR PAN AMERICAN UNITY

Mini Mural Festival

In 1940, more than 65 artists including Diego Rivera made their creative processes public when they participated in *Art in Action* as part of the Golden Gate International Exposition. Taking inspiration from this historical connection, the Mini Mural Festival invites local organizations to commission artists to paint small-scale murals live in the outdoor corridor adjacent to the Roberts Family Gallery. Each weekend will be hosted by festival partners with music, movement and other activities that celebrate each of the organizations' communities. The three murals—eight square feet each—will be displayed at the museum through the fall then returned to our festival partners.

July 31–August 1: Acción Latina

DJ Agana and Josué Rojas

August 14–15: NIAD Art Center

Andres Cisneros-Galindo, Nan Collymore, Christian Vassell, Miguel Chacon, Julio Del Rio, Luis Estrada, Deatra Colbert and Esmeralda Silva

August 28–29: SOMA Pilipinas

Franceska Gamez and Malaya Tuyay

About the Mini Mural Partners

Acción Latina builds healthy and empowered Latinx communities in the San Francisco Bay Area through cultural arts, community media and civic engagement. They document and celebrate the diverse cultural history of Latinx communities by publishing the award-winning bilingual newspaper *El Tecolote* and producing rich cultural arts programs such as the annual social justice concert Encuentro del Canto Popular, the community-curated arts experience Paseo Artístico and the Juan R. Fuentes Gallery.

For nearly forty years, **NIAD Art Center** has provided a contemporary visual arts program in their downtown Richmond studio and galleries for a community of seventy studio artists with intellectual and developmental



disabilities and twenty-two staff members. NIAD's visual arts programs provide participating artists the time and space to make work, material and art marketing resources and teaching and learning opportunities they need to maintain thriving contemporary practices.

SOMA Pilipinas is San Francisco's Filipino Cultural Heritage District. Spanning 1.5 square miles, it honors the 120+ year history of Filipinos in San Francisco, and celebrates the community's living legacy of making home, celebrating culture, building community and fighting for economic and racial justice in the rapidly gentrifying South of Market neighborhood. It connects the broader community to their stories as Filipinos in America and a living culture and community that's conscious of history, yet embraces progress, working together and moving forward in unity and vision.

Other Public Programs for Pan American Unity

New Territory: Beyond the US/Mexico Border

A border is a line of separation, an edge and a boundary that divides countries, land, and people. The line is imaginary, drawn and redrawn by history and conflict. This public program series explores the relationship between art, design and the US/Mexico border as a new territory, a region onto itself, with its own communities and connections. Including artists and designers from several exhibitions on view at the museum this fall, this talk series will explore Rivera's vision and the impact of Pan Americanism on art and culture today; the art and politics behind the work of artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, including his large-scale participatory art installation *Border Tuner* (2019); an expansive conversation about the *Two Sides of the Border* project by Tatiana Bilbao and Rael San Fratello's *Teeter Totter Wall*; a reexamination of Californian and Mexican landscape photography; and a roundtable of contemporary artists from Tijuana.

Pan Americanism: Past and Present

September 9, 2021, 4 p.m. PST online

Free and open to the public

Participants:

Maria Castro, assistant curator of painting and sculpture, SFMOMA

Claire F. Fox, associate professor in the departments of English and of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Iowa and author of *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War*

Eamon Ore-Giron, visual artist

Juana Alicia, visual artist, muralist, educator, activist and painter

Artist Talk: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

September 30, 2021, 6 p.m. PST, Phyllis Wattis Theater and online

Free and open to the public

Architecture and Design at the Border: Tatiana Bilbao and Ron Rael with Ersela Kripa

November 4, 2021, 6 p.m. PST, Phyllis Wattis Theater and online

Free and open to the public



New California Landscape

Date and time to be announced

Free and open to the public

Contemporary Artists from Tijuana

Date and time to be announced

Free and open to the public

CCSF Partnership

SFMOMA's Public Engagement department has partnered with City College of San Francisco to promote greater understanding and appreciation of the *Pan American Unity* mural through a faculty-led curriculum development group and a lecture series. A multidisciplinary group of CCSF instructors will design and present lesson plans related to the mural, providing a shareable evergreen resource for college and university instructors. In addition, SFMOMA and CCSF are co-hosting twice-yearly lectures, geared towards students but open to the public, featuring contemporary artists inspired by Diego Rivera. Select CCSF students will also participate in hands-on workshops with the artists.

AUDIO GUIDE

In the exhibition's audio guide, muralist Juana Alicia Araiza, scholar Monica Bravo, artist and activist Sarah Biscarra Dilley and historian Will Maynez reflect on Diego Rivera's iconic mural *Pan American Unity*. Available on the free SFMOMA App and online at sfmoma.org

MURAL AND EXHIBITION SPONSORS

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SFMOMA is grateful to the following sponsors who have lent their support to the overall project of *Diego Rivera's America*, including the upcoming exhibition.



The presenting sponsors are Bank of America and the Evelyn D. Haas Exhibition Fund

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ABOUT CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO

For more than 86 years, City College of San Francisco (CCSF) has been the region's premiere public, two-year community college. The college was one of the first in the nation to offer free tuition, providing San Franciscans with the opportunity to access an exceptional college education. Since its founding in 1935, City College has evolved into a multicultural, multi-campus community college serving the educational needs of a diversity of learners. CCSF offers more than 300 degrees and certificates and an award-winning athletics program.

www.ccsf.edu

ABOUT SFMOMA

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design and media arts is housed in an LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA offers 45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space open to all.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Jill Lynch/SFMOMA, jlynch@sfmoma.org, 415.680.8352

Rosie Zepeda/CCSF, rzepeda@ccsf.edu, 408.460.4282

IMAGE CREDITS:

Mounting two panels of *Pan American Unity* on the display structure in the Roberts Family Gallery at SFMOMA. Image: Katherine Du Tiel/ SFMOMA.

A large panel of *Pan American Unity* awaits craning into SFMOMA. Image: Katherine Du Tiel/ SFMOMA.

Artwork Image Credit: Diego Rivera, *The Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on this Continent (Pan American Unity)*, 1940; © Banco de México Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico D.F. / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York; image: courtesy City College of San Francisco