

Member, Board of Supervisors

District 5



City and County of San Francisco

BILAL MAHMOOD

December 17, 2025

Visual Arts Committee
City and County of San Francisco
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
Room 416
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Members of the Visual Arts Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for *Into each other's eyes*, a proposed public art project by internationally recognized artist eL Seed. This project presents a rare and deeply meaningful opportunity to use public art as a bridge between communities that are too often separated, both physically and emotionally, by the realities of incarceration.

Into each other's eyes is built on a powerful and thoughtful concept: the creation of two identical murals, one painted by incarcerated individuals inside San Quentin and the other by people outside the prison walls, including family members and loved ones. Conceived as mirrored works, the murals symbolically place participants face to face, inviting empathy, recognition, and shared humanity. The project does not seek to diminish the gravity of incarceration, but rather to acknowledge the humanity of those living within it and to foster understanding across a profound social divide.

The artistic approach is both site-responsive and culturally resonant. eL Seed's use of Arabic calligraphy, woven with a quotation from Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, grounds the work firmly in San Francisco's literary, social, and historical context, while maintaining a universal message accessible to a wide public. The selected text, "The world changes in direct proportion to the number of people willing to be honest about their lives," reinforces the project's themes of vulnerability, truth, and connection, values that are deeply aligned with the city's cultural identity.

eL Seed brings exceptional artistic credibility and experience to this proposal. His work has been exhibited globally, from the pyramids of Giza to the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, and is held in major museum collections including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Importantly, his practice demonstrates a long-standing commitment to community engagement, collaboration, and ethical storytelling, qualities that are essential for a project of this sensitivity and scope.

Installed on a prominent urban site, such as the Orpheum Theater wall envisioned in the proposal, *Into each other's eyes* would serve not only as a visually compelling artwork, but also as a lasting civic gesture. It would invite passersby to pause, reflect, and consider the lives and stories that exist beyond the labels we often assign. In doing so, the project advances the role of public art as a catalyst for dialogue, compassion, and social awareness.

For these reasons, I strongly encourage the Visual Arts Committee to support *Into each other's eyes*. This project exemplifies the highest aspirations of public art: artistic excellence, community engagement, and meaningful social impact. I believe it would be a powerful and enduring contribution to San Francisco's cultural landscape.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bilal Mahmood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bilal" being more prominent than the last name "Mahmood".

Bilal Mahmood
Supervisor, District 5
San Francisco Board of Supervisors