

JOHN WAYNE AIRPORT ARTS COMMISSION
Airport Commission Room
3160 Airway Avenue
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Minutes of the Special Meeting

January 7, 2026

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Kim Le called the meeting to order at 9:44 a.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Commissioner Winn led the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Kim Le, Vice Chair Victor Payan, Commissioner Daniel Winn

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT BY TELECONFERENCE: N/A

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Mary-Christine Sungaila

STAFF PRESENT: Joel Aguilar, Eric Freed, Michelle Lai

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Le motioned to approve the minutes, with all in favor, and the minutes of the regular November 5, 2025 Monthly Meeting of the JWA Arts Commission were approved.

2. COMMISSION UPDATES

A. COMMISSION GOALS MOVING FORWARD

Joel agreed that the goals and their statuses from the last meeting are looking good. Especially regarding staffing concerns, Michelle will be returning as an Extra Help Office Assistant. In the meantime, the Arts Program Curator application is open until January 19, located on the governmentjobs website. Vice Chair Payan acknowledged and thanked Joel for organizing an email with all the necessary documents and parameters in preparation for the previously proposed Commissioner's Collection.

3. PROGRAM UPDATES

A. ONGOING PROJECTS AND REPAIRS

Chair Le requested an update on the status of the display cases and repairs. Joel answered that the main concern now is Terminal A's Vi Smith Gallery, which is currently preoccupied by the Paths of Departure exhibition, scheduled to be deinstalled by February 23. While Terminal C's Vi Smith gallery has fewer issues to address, staff intends to assess both galleries before moving forward with exhibition proposals. Commissioner Winn asked for the time of completion for these repairs to which Joel explained that it should take a month, as internal hardware (the tracks) have quicker turnarounds while the glass from vendors may take more time. Commissioner Winn proposed that with such a short turnaround time in repairs, if it was possible to have an exhibit in relation to the Tet festival happening in February, which will bring in increased visitors to OC. He advised proposing the exhibition in advance so that a collection can be prepared in time and give ample time to reach out to Vietnamese American artists that may help tie in the Little Saigon exhibit that has been in discussion. When asked if there could be enough artwork

to cover both galleries in Terminal A and C, Commissioner Winn reassured that the Pearl of Heart foundation would have more than enough art/artists; this was an organization working with Vietnamese artists who are disabled and celebrating their skills despite their adversities.

To follow up, Vice Chair Payan asked for updates on the Little Saigon exhibit and suggested adding a proposal for exhibition photos and artists as an agenda item for Commissioners to review at the next meeting. Commissioner Winn commented that he had suggestions for artists and galleries. Michelle also brought up Hyper SoCal as a potential collaborator, an initiative that raises awareness of nonprofit and municipal art venues supporting working artists in Southern California. She will provide information to the Commissioners in a follow-up email.

Public Comment: Brenda in the audience, unsure if this gets added to the official meeting as she's part of the public comments part of the meeting: Brenda suggested Operation Baby Lift as a topic to explore, with Dr. Stefan Bean, an author from Saigon, releasing his book in a month.

B. CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA MURAL INSTALLATION

Joel also shared with the Commissioners that the mural for the Children's Play Area has now officially been installed and showed a mockup of the final design. If the artist wants to come in for pictures, it will be organized accordingly based on her response and availability.

4. UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS/CONSIDERATIONS OF FUTURE EXHIBITIONS – AS TIME ALLOWS

Commissioner Winn suggested leaving the Pacific Symphony exhibit in the Destination Gallery up for now until future exhibits have been solidified. He also shared that in the next meeting, he would like to suggest a proposal/storyboard for the space revolving a movie that pertains to the Little Saigon exhibit, including an invite to the Arts Commission to a casual screening of the movie. If the Commission does not like his proposal, he has other options to share. Although the Little Saigon exhibit is a great idea, Commissioner Winn felt that, with too many moving parts and parties involved, its execution may not be cohesive. He suggested that the new curator create a cohesive exhibit or work with a museum, as the various elements did not feel representative of him both as a curator and as a Vietnamese American. He suggested that part be simplified. Commissioner Winn also warned the Commission to be careful not to be biased for the exhibit as sensitivity is advised for talking about the fall of Little Saigon, and that he can give insight about the sensitivities of the Vietnamese community.

Vice Chair Payan commented that the Little Saigon exhibit moved slowly to be careful about the contents of such a sensitive show; Joel also reiterated that Heather did state from the beginning that she did not feel she had the knowledge to take up the work of curating the show and was not the right person to speak on it. The target for this show should land somewhere around April, where it will now be the 51ST Anniversary of the Fall of Saigon.

Public Comment: Brenda asked here about everyone's representative district in order to identify the Commissioners. She also asked if Commissioner Winn had any connections to the Catholic Vietnamese American community, to which he responded that he was one of the major sponsors for an upcoming Catholic Vietnamese American event, and that he is not biased in religion, and wanted to support anyone who needs it.

A. VI SMITH GALLERIES

- a. **TERMINAL A: TBD**
Month XX, 2026 – Month XX, 2026
- b. **TERMINAL B: TBD GLASS EXHIBITION**
November 2025 – May 2026
- c. **TERMINAL C: TBD GROUP EXHIBITION**
December 2025 – June 2026

B. COMMUNITY FOCUS SPACE

- a. **MARISSA SAYER SOLO SHOW – ARTIST PREVIEW (TBD)**
TBD

C. DESTINATION GALLERY

- a. **A LITTLE SAIGON STORY EXHIBITION**
TBD

5. CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Nothing has changed from what’s shared on the agenda. All artwork has been returned to the artists for the Perceiving the Divine exhibition, which as a reminder to the Commissioners, was a mixed media show. Commissioner Winn asked if excess collector items for CFS could go into Terminal C so it doesn’t stay empty, but Joel emphasized that the reason why there were no follow up exhibitions scheduled was for maintenance and repairs, but that we must wait for Luciana’s show to close before proceeding with repairs. Michelle can work on temporary signage in the meantime, to which Commissioner Winn suggested using language such as “Welcome to 2026, exciting exhibitions coming soon!” Vice Chair Payan also suggested links to social media. Commissioner Winn agreed, saying QR codes moving forward should also redirect to JWA website instead of the direct artist so we can control what information is being shared. He recommended that the page for each artist gets added and updated as it comes up, and not to wait until the website has been completely updated to change the QR code to navigate to the JWA website.

Vice Chair Payan noted issues with visibility while trying to navigate to the Arts Program on the JWA website. He suggested putting the Arts Program under Services, while Eric said it was easiest to navigate via the search bar. Vice Chair Payan reiterated that when you try to navigate to the Arts Program page on the website, having to go through the dropdown for the “Dine Shop Relax” tab and then “Relax” page required too many clicks to navigate to. Chair Le also pointed out that the contact information needed to be updated to reflect the current curator vacancy.

Commissioner Winn expressed that he had not spoken on it when he was new to the Arts Commission, but that he felt there were issues with communication and possible tensions between individuals, Commissioners, and supervisors, to which Vice Chair Payan added that it was yet another reason why they should move slowly and methodically.

A. VI SMITH GALLERIES

- a. **Terminal A: Luciana Abait: Paths of Departure**
July 18, 2025 –February 23, 2025
- b. **Terminal A: Regolith, an abstract sculpture exhibition**

May 2025 – Ongoing

- c. Terminal C: Perceiving the Divine group exhibition
Deinstalled December 5, 2025**

B. COMMUNITY FOCUS SPACE

- a. The Curator’s Collection – rescheduled install
TBD**

C. DESTINATION GALLERY

- a. Pacific Symphony Exhibition
June 13, 2025 – Ongoing**

6. ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

A. OTHER BUSINESS - NONE

B. ITEMS OF INTEREST FROM THE PUBLIC

Public Comment: Brenda Lebsack, founder of Interfaith Statewide Coalition
She shared that the title for the artwork in Perceiving the Divine (“Enter Big God’s Bed-Man’s on His Knees Giving Big God Head”) was offensive, degrading, and irresponsible for a family space and gateway of every faith/background. She noted that the exhibition was up from August 8 to December 5, and wanted answers for where funding for the Arts Program came from, the curation and vetting process for artists and artwork, and touched upon issues with a lack of representation and visible exclusion.

Public Comment: Tamiko Anderson
Shared that as an African American educator and Christian that she is appalled at the title of the artwork in question, expressing that it not only degrades faith, but race as well. With only 12 days away from MLK, she feels that this artwork only morally degrades instead of uplifting. She also asks for answers on where funding for the exhibitions come from, how this happened, the motive behind the artwork, why it was on display for four months, a request for an open public discussion. She reiterates that artistic expression should uplift, while this piece reflected deceptive delivery, mockery, and harassment.

Public Comment: Bishop Oliver
Despite the artwork in question being removed on December 5, it remained on display for four months. He shared that the members of Interfaith were offended, expressing that boundaries of decency were crossed while being vulgar and degrading. How was this allowed by the staff? The name of the show also entered spiritual territory with the inclusion of the “divine” yet there was nothing with religious inclusion. He ended his comment with a prayer.

Commissioner Winn thanked the visitors for being here, noting that there were rarely any guests who attended the meetings, and expressed his disheartenment at how they felt, apologizing for what had transpired. He wanted to give his assessment at the time of becoming a new Commissioner, as he was not present during the installation of Perceiving the Divine, and

wanted to offer his assurance and address concerns. He was not aware of the previous curator's proposal and understood that the Commissioners did not deal with the specifics of artwork pieces/title/ information/synopsis to ensure they do not offend any faith/religion/race, and to prevent prejudice and racism. While he is unable to speak completely to how or why things transpired the way they did, Commissioner Winn shared that he noticed communication issues and that, now with the departure of the curator and one of the Commissioners, he feels we are in a better position. He assured the visitors that the Arts Commission and Staff will make a commitment to review Arts Program-related items with greater scrutiny moving forward. He expressed that he believes the curator did not intend to be malicious, but he cannot speak on their behalf.

Vice Chair Payan also expressed his thanks to the visitors for bringing this topic to the Commission's attention and noted that it did not reflect the will of the Airport/Commissioners. What was normally shared with the Commission was a representative sample of the proposed exhibition, and there needs to be an emphasis that this is a public gallery, not a private one. He shared that this was out of line with what the previous curator had done with prior exhibits, which were popular with families; he also emphasized that the artist of the piece in question is African American. Chair Le added that she works closely with children, so the title was also disturbing to her.

Brenda thanked the Commission for their responses and shared that she was under the impression that the Commissioner's role is to be responsible for the Arts Program. Commissioner Winn corrected her, stating that the Commissioners are unpaid volunteers who essentially serve as advisors to ensure things are on the right track. Moving forward, there will be no issues. Vice Chair Payan shared that they were detailed in their reviews and have rejected proposals in the past. Commissioner Winn said that for the future curator, guidelines should be established so that whatever was approved cannot be changed unless the Commissioners approve the update(s).

Joel shared that as the Customer Relations Manager, he oversaw programs at the Airport, as well as the selection process for the curator. There is a level of trust for the curator to make educated decisions for curation, and understands that there needs to be time taken to regroup and readjust processes that are stricter for the future curator. In the past, if someone took issue with artwork, it was usually taken down right away.

Bishop thanked the Commissioners for caring about the children. Brenda inquired if Heather's departure was related to the current issue, to which Joel clarified that they left to pursue opportunities that better suited their lifestyle and left rather abruptly. Brenda shared that she had seen the problem with the artwork title around December 1st but because it was busy season for the clergy during the holidays, she had to wait for clergy representation; otherwise, she wish she was able to propose the problem sooner. Joel shared that he had responded to the complaint on December 22 with an immediate follow-up, to which Brenda admitted she must have missed.

Commissioner Winn commented that everyone trusted Heather implicitly, and that Heather was young and wanted to try more Avante-garde work that may not have been appropriate for a public gallery, and agreed that no children should be exposed to work like that. Bishop shared that there was a perception of different religious practices based off the title and instead it was

degrading anything spiritually sacred. Commission Winn emphasized that their input and insight were valuable and that he hopes this next year will impress them.

Brenda briefly inquired about student artwork, to which Joel shared that there used to be a student art contests that were dismantled by COVID. Future ideas surrounding children's artwork can be discussed with the future curator.

The meeting concluded with Brenda concluding that the Interfaith Coalition will still attend the Supervisor's Board Meeting, but will let them know that this was a productive conversation.

C. ADJOURNMENT OF PUBLIC MEETING Chair Le adjourned the meeting at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel Aguilar