

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

April 19, 2023

Guillermo Cabrera, Board Chair
San Diego County Regional Airport Authority
PO Box 82776
San Diego, California 92107

Sent via email to clerk@san.org

Dear Mr. Cabrera,

As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry, the National Coalition Against Censorship is alarmed by the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority's decision to remove Evan Apodaca's artwork from its exhibition *Necessary Departures*. It is our understanding that the work was installed in February 2023 and was to remain on display until August. However, the artwork was removed from the exhibition in March, allegedly because it "did not match the proposal."

Mr. Apodaca's proposal had been reviewed and selected by Arts Program staff and a jury panel for its "creativity, cultural significance, educational value and/or artistic merit, unique use of media and relevance to the [exhibition] theme." The proposal stated the work would "explore monuments and the story of the military as part of the fabric of San Diego's development and growth as an industrial city" and "address the gaps in San Diego's diverse stories about military development and culture."

As part of the application, artists are required to submit "representative images that are demonstrative of style of work for proposed installation" or links to video files. Mr. Apodaca submitted the latter: a "work list" with three excerpts from what would be his final video, which he labeled as "shortened cuts" of the full work. Following the acceptance of the proposal, Mr. Apodaca was asked to provide a transcript of the videos, at which point it was clear the artist was finalizing the narrative in the videos that would be combined into a singular loop for the airport installation.

The final version of the artwork is consistent with the aesthetics presented in the application's sample videos, and its content is aligned with Mr. Apodaca's description. While minor additions and subtractions to its narratives do offer a more overtly critical depiction of the military's history and presence within the city, the resulting video still falls squarely within the parameters of the accepted proposal.

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

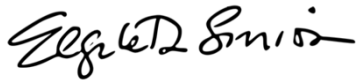
Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Professors
American Association of University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Association of Art Critics United States (AICA-USA)
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The News Guild-CWA
PEN America
People for the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Poets & Writers
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Office of Communication
United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

However, it is our understanding that the day of the work's installation, an airport volunteer declared to Mr. Apodaca that his work was "woke bullshit." A few weeks later in March, Mr. Apodaca received email notification that his work would be removed from the exhibition. Mr. Apodaca later met with Airport Authority staff, who indicated that the sentiments of the volunteer, and perhaps of other viewers, had risen to Airport Management, prompting the curatorial team to review and decide on the removal of the work.

Because the samples and description Mr. Apodaca submitted early on accurately reflect the substance of the work, it appears that the San Diego County Airport Authority is discriminating against the artist for his critical views of the U.S. military. Though the contract signed by both parties indicates that either can cancel the agreement at any time for any reason, the artwork's viewpoint is not sufficient reason to remove it from the exhibition, and its removal for these reasons goes against First Amendment principles.

According to the request-for-proposals for *Necessary Departures*, the premise for the exhibition is the "necessary re-examination of the way we live and connect with the world around us." Evan Apodaca's work does just this by examining San Diego's military history through commentary from naval captains, immigrant laborers, shipyard union workers, academics, veterans, and city officials, and in re-examining popular sites of military significance. For these reasons, we call on the San Diego County Airport Authority to reinstate Apodaca's work within its *Necessary Departures* exhibition as originally planned through August 2023.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Larison
Director, Arts and Culture Advocacy Program
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Kimberly J. Becker, CEO/President, San Diego County Regional Airport Authority
Jana Vargas, Vice President, San Diego County Regional Airport Authority
Daniel Dennert, Curator, Arts Program | Marketing, Arts & Air Service Development
Christopher Chalupsky, Airport Arts Program Senior Manager