

UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art

Deputy Director and Chief Curator
University of California, Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art
Costa Mesa, California

THE SEARCH

The UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art seeks an accomplished and visionary museum leader to serve as its inaugural deputy director and chief curator, overseeing both the curatorial and education teams. This is a rare opportunity to help shape the future of a newly unified museum at a defining moment in its evolution. As a key member of the senior leadership team, the deputy director and chief curator will play a central role in advancing the museum's intellectual, curatorial, and programmatic direction within the context of a world-class R1 research university. Anchored by one of the nation's leading public universities, the museum brings together multiple artistic legacies to tell an expansive story of California and its global connections.

Reporting to the new director, [Kathryn Kanjo](#), who began in early 2026, the deputy director and chief curator will provide strategic leadership across collections, exhibitions, scholarship, and public engagement, helping to build an institution that is both academically distinguished and broadly accessible. Leveraging the museum's significant collections, university partnerships, and public platform, this leader will advance new scholarship, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and create dynamic experiences that connect artists, students, scholars, and diverse communities.

The ideal candidate will bring distinguished curatorial expertise, a record of scholarly achievement, and exceptional leadership skills, along with the ability to translate ambitious ideas into impactful programs and initiatives. Working in close partnership with the director, the deputy director and chief curator will help guide the museum through an exciting period of growth while enhancing its visibility and influence across UC Irvine, throughout California, and within the national and international cultural landscape.

The UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in identifying its deputy director and chief curator. Applications, nominations, and inquiries should be directed as outlined at the end of this description.

UC IRVINE LANGSON ORANGE COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

In 2025, UC Irvine acquired the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA), merging it with the Jack & Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art to create the UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art. The newly expanded institution brings together the academic depth of a research university with the civic presence of a major regional art museum. The merger united two respected organizations under a shared vision of artistic excellence, cultural engagement, and scholarly rigor, while strengthening opportunities for students, scholars, artists, and the broader community. Following the transition, exhibitions, programming, and community gathering were consolidated at the former OCMA facility, bringing together education, research, and public engagement under one roof. The 53,000-square-foot building, designed by Morphosis, opened in 2022 within Orange County's arts hub in Costa Mesa. The museum cares for a [collection of more than 9,000](#) works from California Impressionism to contemporary art. The collection reflects the region's history of innovation, migration, and exchange, with global touchpoints that situate California within a broader cultural context. The Langson Institute continues to advance research, education, and the study of California art within the university.

As part of the University of California, the UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art connects artists, students, scholars, and the public through exhibitions, programs, and collaborations that spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and inspire connection. The museum is entering an exciting new chapter, guided by a vision of curatorial excellence, accessibility, and service to the region's vibrant cultural landscape.

ROLE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF CURATOR

The deputy director and chief curator will work to define curatorial programming inclusive of collection and exhibition development, as well as learning and engagement efforts. They serve as a leading scholarly voice for the museum, contributing to publications, catalogues, public programs, and academic discourse. The deputy director and chief curator will lead efforts to develop and implement comprehensive exhibitions and integrated programming that advance the museum's visibility and reputation throughout UC Irvine, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The deputy director and chief curator will possess the necessary knowledge, experience, and networks to maximize the potential of the collections and academic resources at the new UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art. On behalf of the director, the deputy director will contribute to museum-wide strategic planning, operations, and decision-making and represent the director as needed.

This position will direct and motivate a talented and dedicated team of ten professionals who manage and oversee a broad range of mission-critical projects, programs, and activities. The museum has a total annual operating budget of \$12 million and the deputy director and chief curator will oversee a budget of \$1.5 million.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

As the museum looks to its future, the deputy director and chief curator will address the following interrelated opportunities and challenges as key priorities:

Serve as an innovative thought partner to the director as UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art embarks on a strategic planning process

The deputy director and chief curator will collaborate closely with the director to shape the artistic vision for the museum and translate goals into operational plans. As a newly formed museum, a unified approach and long-term strategies are actively being formulated. This role will support the director and other stakeholders in creating and executing a new strategic plan and setting up foundational elements for eventual accreditation. The deputy director and chief curator will be informed on best practices and able to provide recommendations and engage in collaborative conversation for short- and long-term planning to help guide potential visioning and goals.

Establish an innovative curatorial vision and increase programmatic integration

The deputy director and chief curator provides strategic leadership for the museum's curatorial program by guiding collection development, shaping programmatic priorities, and ensuring the long-term growth, care, and stewardship of the permanent collection. This role oversees institutional collections management, policy development, and curatorial planning while leading the conception, development, and execution of exhibitions, including original, traveling, and collection-based presentations.

In alignment with the museum's mission, scholarship, and available resources, the deputy director and chief curator establishes and advances acquisition strategies that strengthen and enhance the collection. The position also ensures that educational and public engagement initiatives are meaningfully integrated and aligned with the museum's collections and exhibitions, fostering accessibility, serving diverse audiences, and deepening community connection and participation.

Collaborate effectively across UC Irvine and the greater community

The deputy director and chief curator advances the museum's role as a university art museum by fostering meaningful partnerships across UC Irvine and cultivating strong connections with the broader cultural community. Working closely with faculty, students, and academic departments, this role promotes the integration of the museum into teaching, learning, research, and public engagement initiatives. The deputy director and chief curator supports the development, implementation, and assessment of programs that align with the museum's strategic objectives and the University of California's commitment to public engagement and research. As a visible ambassador for the institution, the position also represents the museum in regional, national, and international professional networks, strengthening relationships with peer museums, artists, scholars, and cultural organizations to expand collaboration, visibility, and impact. The deputy director and chief curator will help to raise the institution's profile within UC Irvine, the regional community, and the greater art world.

Broadcast, promote, and champion the museum to current and future supporters

The deputy director and chief curator will advocate for the programmatic efforts at the heart of museum. They will work closely with the director and development colleagues to connect with current and potential supporters of the museum, compellingly communicate impact and demonstrate the value of the museum to the university and the broader community. The deputy director and chief curator will work closely with an Advisory Board as the museum's closest and most invested supporters. They will steward long-term relationships and discover new avenues for external support of curatorial and engagement-based initiatives.

Lead, support, and develop a dedicated museum staff

The museum is supported by an invested team of professionals that are vital to its operational success. The deputy director will motivate, build, and mentor the staff at varying levels of seniority and areas of expertise. They will communicate across all levels and promote a collegial, supportive, transparent, and respectful climate where the entire team can flourish in a collaborative and intellectually rigorous environment while prioritizing across institutional demands. The deputy director and chief curator will have an appreciation and understanding of the work across the departments, including both curatorial and learning and engagement and will be a seasoned leader and manager who will promote best practices in the field and set staff expectations.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate is a creative and strategic thinker who contributes to innovative ideas, while possessing strong operational and project management abilities that ensure accountability, staff longevity, and reinforce professional standards. They will have led respected institutional initiatives and be able to move fluidly between big-picture strategic thinking and pragmatic delivery with an understanding of best practices. Ideal professional experience and personal attributes will include:

- An understanding of and passion for the UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art mission and potential.
- Significant curatorial experience, including organizing major art exhibitions with scholarly rigor and public impact.
- Deep knowledge of art history and demonstrated expertise in 20th-century American art.
- Experience integrating learning and engagement programming for a variety of audiences as a critical component of the museum's accessibility.
- Knowledge and appreciation of museum best practices, particularly in areas of curation, education, and collections care.
- Ability to balance strategic vision with hands-on execution of exhibitions and programs.
- Demonstrated record of progressive leadership and supervisory experience in a museum or comparable cultural institution of similar scale, with increasing levels of responsibility over time.

- Strong leadership skills with experience building, managing, and mentoring teams, and ability to support a dynamic and positive institutional culture.
- Proven ability to work collaboratively across departments and with external partners and communities.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills, including experience in public speaking, publishing, and grant writing.
- Master's degree in art history, curatorial studies, or related field required; PhD or equivalent experience preferred.

COMPENSATION

This role has a targeted starting salary range of \$185,000 - \$208,000 commensurate with experience.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-california-irvine-langson-orange-county-museum-art/deputy-director-and>.

Courtney Wilk-Mandel, Ryan Leichenauer, Cara Meyers
Isaacson, Miller

The University of California, Irvine is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, age, protected veteran status, or other protected categories covered by the [UC anti-discrimination policy](#).

As a condition of employment, the finalist will be required to disclose if they are subject to any final administrative or judicial decisions within the last seven years determining that they committed any misconduct.

- “Misconduct” means any violation of the policies or laws governing conduct at the applicant’s previous place of employment, including, but not limited to, violations of policies or laws prohibiting sexual harassment, sexual assault, or other forms of harassment or discrimination, as defined by the employer.
- [UC Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy](#)
- [UC Anti-Discrimination Policy for Employees, Students and Third Parties](#)
- [APM - 035: Affirmative Action and Nondiscrimination in Employment](#).

As a University employee, you will be required to comply with all applicable University policies and/or collective bargaining agreements, as may be amended from time to time. Federal, state, or local government directives may impose additional requirements.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by University of California, Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by University of California, Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art would supersede any conflicting information in this document.