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Former mayor loans sculpture celebrating joy of reading for display at Balboa Branch Library

“A Novel Idea,” by Florida artist Craig Gray, will appear at the Balboa Branch Library after its remodel is completed. (Courtesy of the city of Newport Beach)

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A former mayor of Newport Beach who acquired a sculpture celebrating the joy of reading agreed to loan it last week for display at the city’s Balboa Branch Library once the remodel of the public building is complete. “A Novel Idea” is one of a series of granite benches that resemble a pile of books created by Craig Gray. The binding of the tome-shaped block that serves as its seat bears the title and surname “Their Eyes Were Watching



God — Hurston.” One of its legs is a representation of Tolkien’s “The Hobbit.” Other classics referenced in the piece include “Catch 22,” “Dune,” “Fahrenheit 451” and “Green Eggs and Ham.” The piece had previously been on display at the Newport Beach Civic Center Park. It later came into the possession of former Mayor Nancy Gardner. She offered to loan it to the city for a period of 20 years. The City Council unanimously agreed to accept her offer as part of the consent calendar at their meeting Tuesday, Nov. 19.

“In the last eight years that I’ve been on council, this was one of my favorite pieces,” current Mayor Will O’Neill said. “...And the fact that this one is being preserved with the idea of putting it over at the library on Balboa is really cool, and it’s one that I really look forward to seeing. So, I just wanted to say thank you.” Officials plan on placing the sculpture in the renovated library’s entry plaza. The city plans to break ground on that building as well as an adjacent fire station in 2025. Those facilities were built in 1929 and 1962, respectively.