

**C E N T E R I N G**

***Centering* is Headlands Center for the Arts' anthology, compiled by 2020 Program Intern Ali Vaughan, of staff and artist interviews in response to the turbulent events of 2020.**



## Editor's Letter

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a year of great uncertainty. With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and subsequent lockdowns in early March came the urgent uprooting of our daily routines and the cancellation of any comforting assumptions about the future. Instead, our individual and collective worlds were spontaneously thrown off of their axes, as our health, security, and livelihoods all hung in an ominous limbo.

At first, we didn't know where we stood in the midst of all that was happening; it hardly felt like there was any stable ground to stand upon. To withstand being totally overcome by each new blow that the year brought upon us required finding, or perhaps willing into existence, our own sense of internal stability.

*Centering*, the theme of this anthology, refers to the process of coping and introspection necessitated by the events of this year. Whether we were considering our central values as individuals and artists, rethinking the purpose of our roles at work, or reevaluating and rebuilding the core tenets of Headlands and other institutions, each of the nine individuals included in this collection provides unique insight gleaned from a thoughtful response to re-centering.

Their voices come together here to document a distinct moment in time for Headlands, and for the world.

## Table of Contents

The “chapters” in this anthology are organized according to the questions and themes that arose in the interview process.

Where were you when lockdowns began?

How has your role at work changed?

How is Headlands changing?

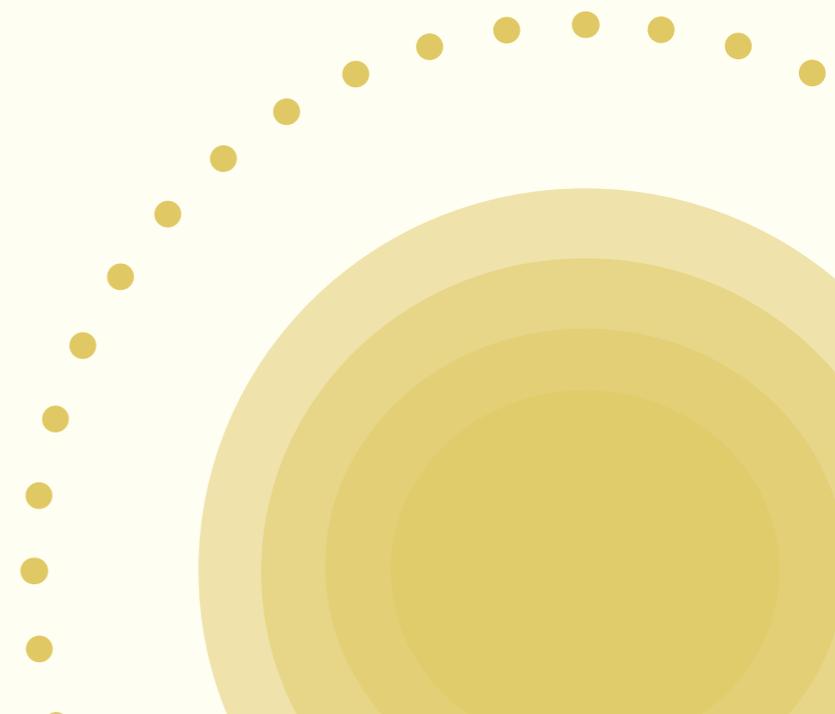
How has your practice changed?

How have you responded to social justice movements?

Has this changed your relationship to nature?

How are you documenting this moment?

Contributors



# WHERE WERE YOU WHEN LOCKDOWNS BEGAN?

*My partner, and I moved up from Southern California in January of this year to move to Headlands; I was starting as Director of Facilities here. The way in which I was set to start in this position was very different from how it took shape. The organization was already going through a good amount of changes shortly after my arrival in terms of internal shifts and staffing. When COVID came about, it was not long after I had arrived.*

**-Dany Naierman, Director of Facilities**

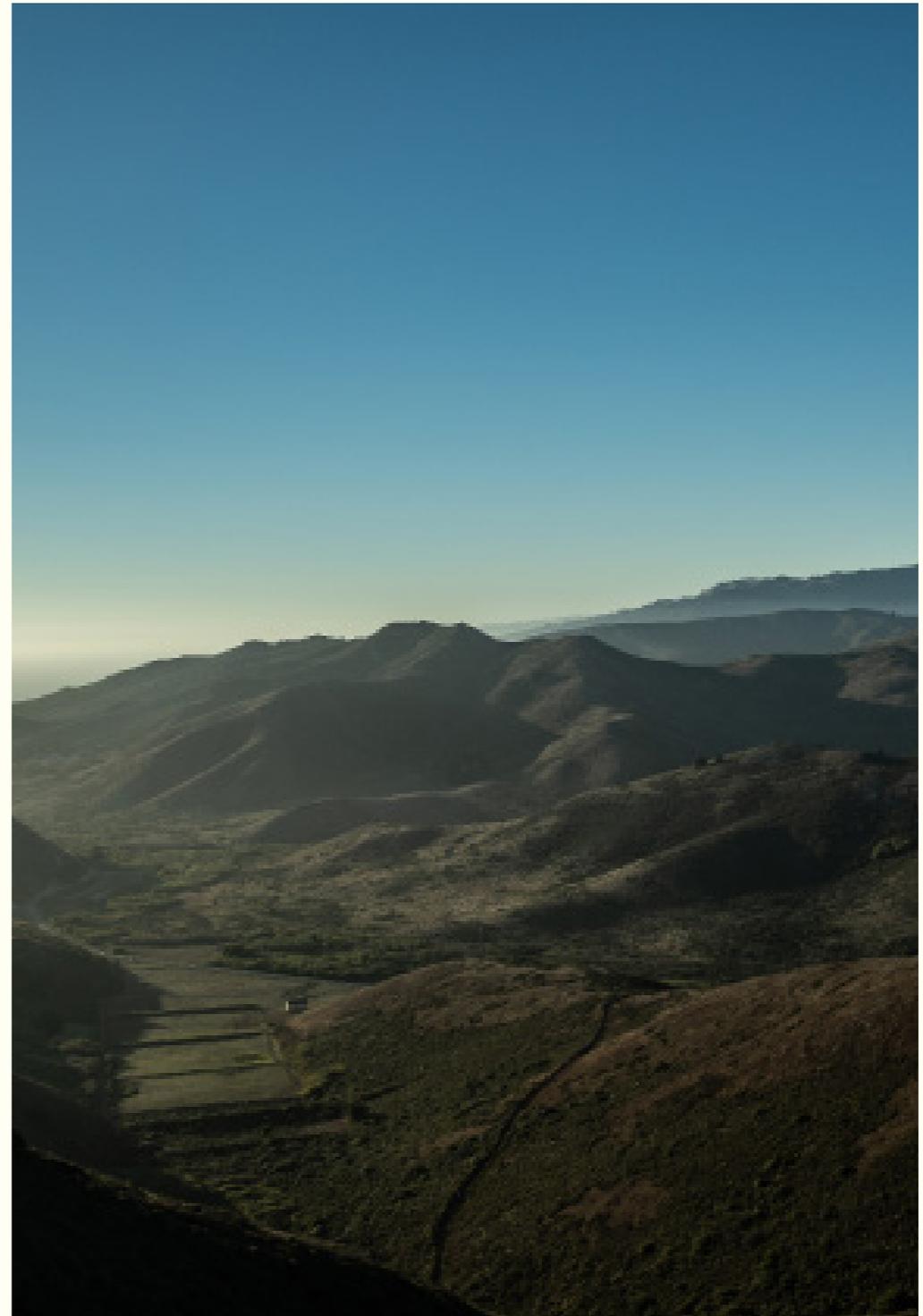
*When lockdown started, I was making a transition from Yaddo in Saratoga Springs. I was actually preparing to leave for Headlands. I was in this space in between travel. I found myself in Syracuse, New York, when our residency was postponed. The borders in my country were closed as well. So, there was no going back home, it wasn't an option.*

**-Mmakgosi Anita Tau,  
2020 Artist In Residence**

# WHERE WERE YOU WHEN LOCKDOWNS BEGAN?

*I was probably at work at Headlands. I don't remember specifically because it felt like there was this kind of anticipation of those things coming. If I remember correctly, I feel like we had a few days to reorient work life towards that. But it also felt like there wasn't really a way to truly prepare. I remember pulling some files from the computer, but then being like, "I don't really know. I don't know what to do."*

**-Daniel Glendening,  
Communication & Outreach  
Coordinator**



*Image courtesy of Tom Ide*

# WHERE WERE YOU WHEN LOCKDOWNS BEGAN?

*It definitely feels like an arc. COVID was surging in China before it became a real fear here. Since my mom lives in China and my Dad, who lives in the US, was visiting her and all my relatives then, I was really, really freaked out and felt very helpless. I really wanted to be with them, but I didn't know when that was going to be. And actually, I still don't know exactly when that's going to be, but I would say that I became most aware of COVID during that time: before it got to the US.*

**-Livien Yin, 2019-20 Graduate Fellow**

# WHERE WERE YOU WHEN LOCKDOWNS BEGAN?

*I manage our onsite rentals, including weddings, so a big part of the job since March 16th, when we entered into shelter-in-place, was to have conversations with couples whose weddings were the next week or the next month. We had to call a force majeure, so we weren't able to hold weddings. It was a very strange time, because people were feeling differently; on the spectrum of "this will be done in a week" all the way to "oh gosh, 2020 is ruined." A big part of my job in April and May was just being on the phone with the couples and event planners, and Katie Powers, our caterer. I was basically a therapist for most of the brides. There were brides that totally broke down and cried hysterically to me, and couples asking me what they were supposed to do. It was a very confusing time.*

**-Ally Zimmerman, Operations Manager**

*We were starting to cancel some programs and it was right before the spring session was supposed to start. It was shocking to me that the programs got canceled. I guess because of my frame of reference, I just didn't think it would be that extreme. I was like, "Oh, this is going to be like SARS or something." It didn't blow over necessarily, but we've never had to like shut down the country for anything before.*

**-Aay Preston-Myint,  
2020 Artist In Residence**

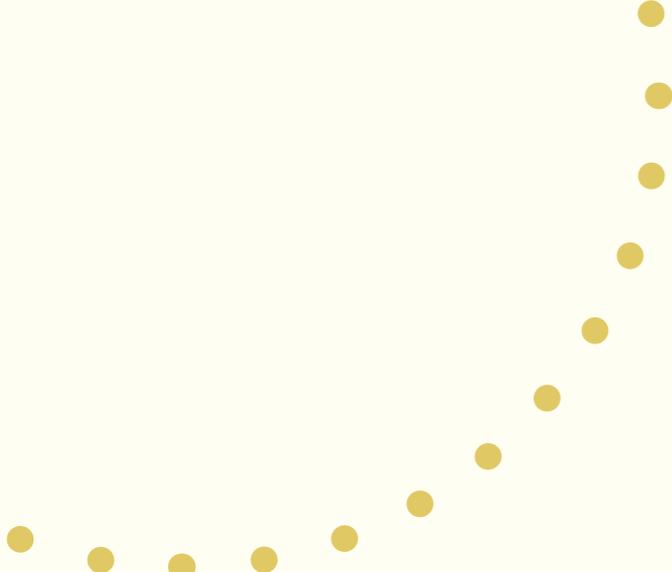
# HOW HAS YOUR ROLE AT WORK CHANGED?

*My role specifically hasn't changed as far as my job description, but we're constantly revisiting our work plans. In March I revisited it because I figured the goals that I set for the year in January were no longer relevant. We're just speaking in an entirely new language.*

**- MJ Brown,  
Development Manager**

*I definitely have had time to be more creative in my role. A big part of my role was to be a front facing piece of Headlands, and connecting with people and doing tours. In the absence of that I've been thinking about how to connect people with Headlands so that they feel connected to this place. It's important for me, personally, to connect people with place.*

**- Ally Zimmerman,  
Operations Manager**



# HOW HAS YOUR ROLE AT WORK CHANGED?

*I think for the first few months it was really trying to figure out what to do, how to communicate with the artists. I had to immediately think of the artists who were supposed to show up the next week. And then you had to communicate with the ones further on. I think it was pretty clear from the start that we wouldn't be able to have anybody on site for the year.*

*I was still working like 50 hours a week. I was planning out emails, and that hasn't stopped. I mean, I wouldn't say 50 hours a week, but I'm kept busy every day by various emails from artists who are writing me, wanting to know how Headlands is, telling me how they are. I think a lot of them have more time on their hands. This was more true a couple months ago when they were writing me really long emails. It wasn't like you could just churn out some little two sentence reply. That's not cutting it. It takes a sort of emotional toll because you've got to really respond. Really respond. That's actually pretty amazing.*

**-Holly Blake,  
Residency Manager**



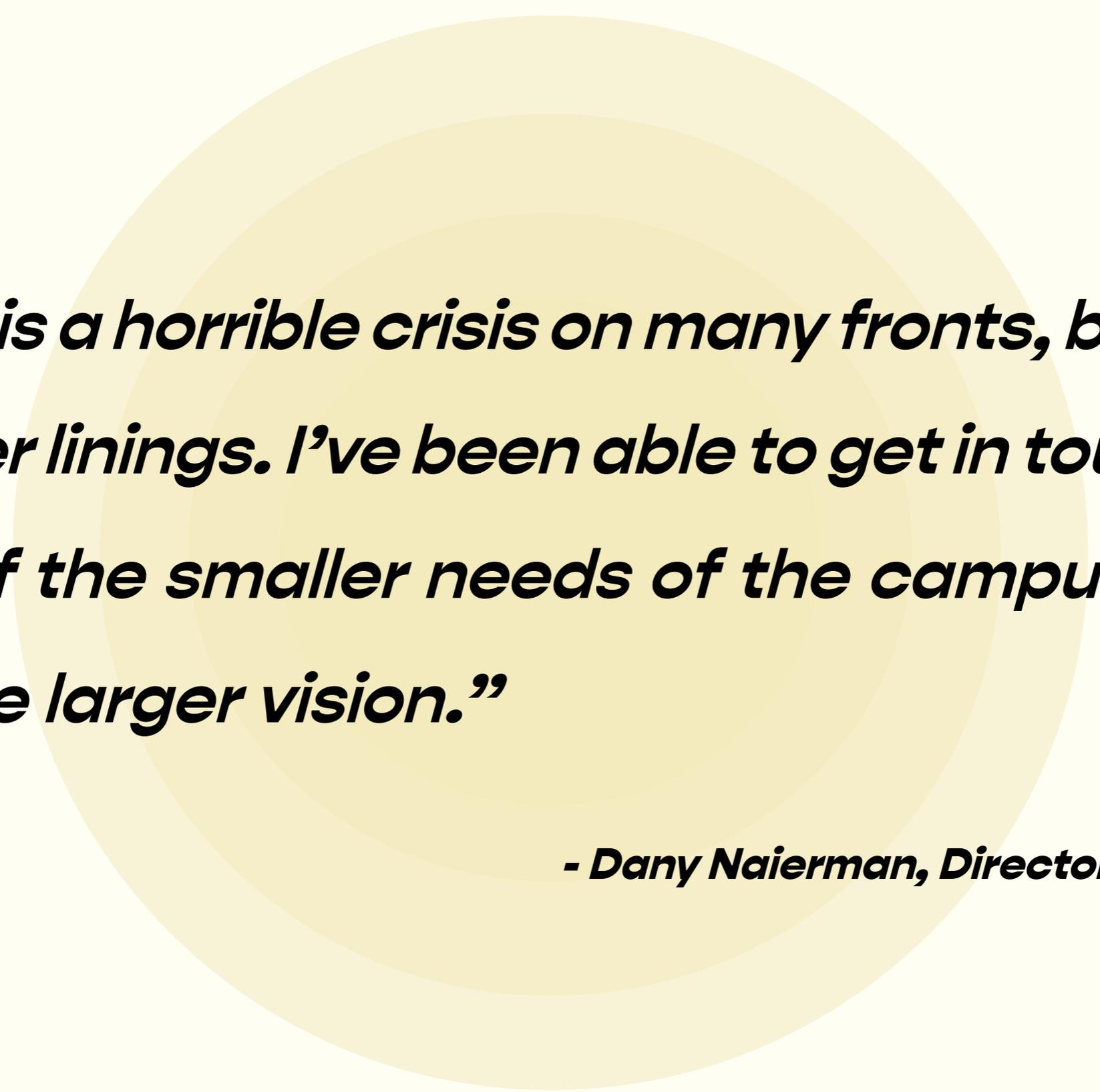
# HOW HAS YOUR ROLE AT WORK CHANGED?

*My previous title as Program Manager changed in terms of intensity and distribution. The actual substance of work was mostly the same. I manage resources for the artists here, scheduling and distributing them. But there's a lot of emotional management that comes with that. That work multiplied a great deal and it was actually really stressful to manage that level of heightened emotion for so many people.*

**- Aay Preston-Myint  
Programs & Outreach  
Coordinator**

*The way I've thought differently about my job has a lot to do with how the world is changing. I think right now the economic situation is so confusing because a lot of people are out of work and they're suffering. And that's really trying, but on the other hand there's this huge class of people that have become much richer since the shelter in place began. What the pandemic in general is doing is exposing a lot of pressure points and tensions in our culture and in our society. I think that's something that has changed a lot of the ways that I think about what I'm doing.*

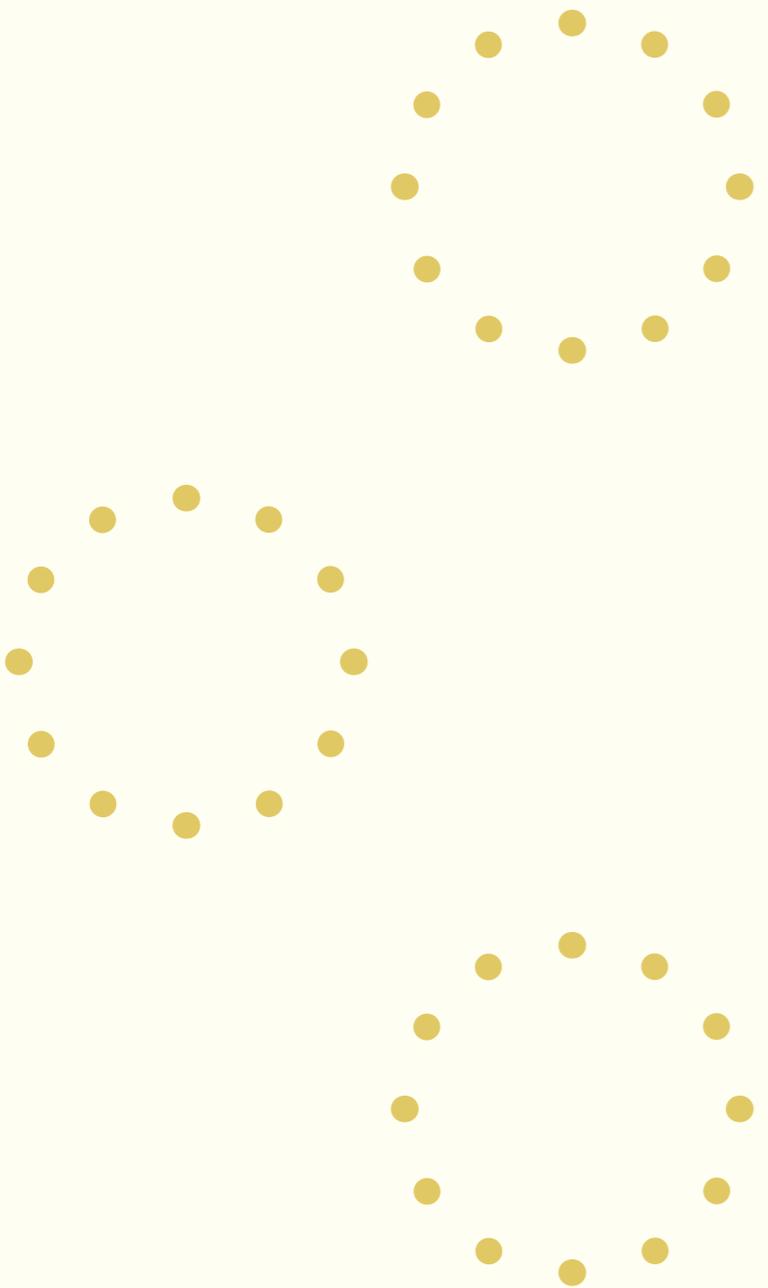
**- Sean Uyehara,  
Programs Director**



***“COVID is a horrible crisis on many fronts, but there are silver linings. I’ve been able to get in touch with many of the smaller needs of the campus (along with) the larger vision.”***

***- Dany Naierman, Director of Facilities***

# HOW IS HEADLANDS CHANGING?



*Part of it is just like more flexibility around the way we work. I always go back to what we provide our artists as the inspiration. We're trying to create these structures for artists to be their best selves, do their best work, to affect positive change in the outside world. Like free time, like resources, like care. And also the room to experiment and learn from failure, the things that we've decided that artists need to do their best work.*

*But in terms of the way people at the organization actually work, we just copy what everyone else is doing, which is this nonprofit grind. Why do we do that? Why do we not think that the thing that works for art would also work for us as people who are motivated to support and affect positive change? And I think part of it is how we talk about what that change is. I think it's becoming clear that what that is is equity. We were having these conversations before March, but now it's a national conversation.*

**-Aay Preston Myint,  
Public Events and Outreach Manager**

# HOW IS HEADLANDS CHANGING?

*There are fundamental aspects of Headlands and every organization that operate according to capital. That fundamental issue imbues everything we do with the reproductive requirements of capitalism as a system. And it's just a totally brutal system. And so I think what then happens is as we're doing this equity work, we have to continuously remind ourselves that this is a very long-term project and we should celebrate small victories as we obtain them.*

*It can be frustrating though. There's a grass is greener kind of thing that happens where you look at other organizations that are very good at communicating anti-racist or anti-oppressive politics in their communications. Then one imagines that when you're there, everything is running according to this more idealized function. But even if you just reality check it, those organizations are also having to make hard decisions about how they get their money, who they let in.*

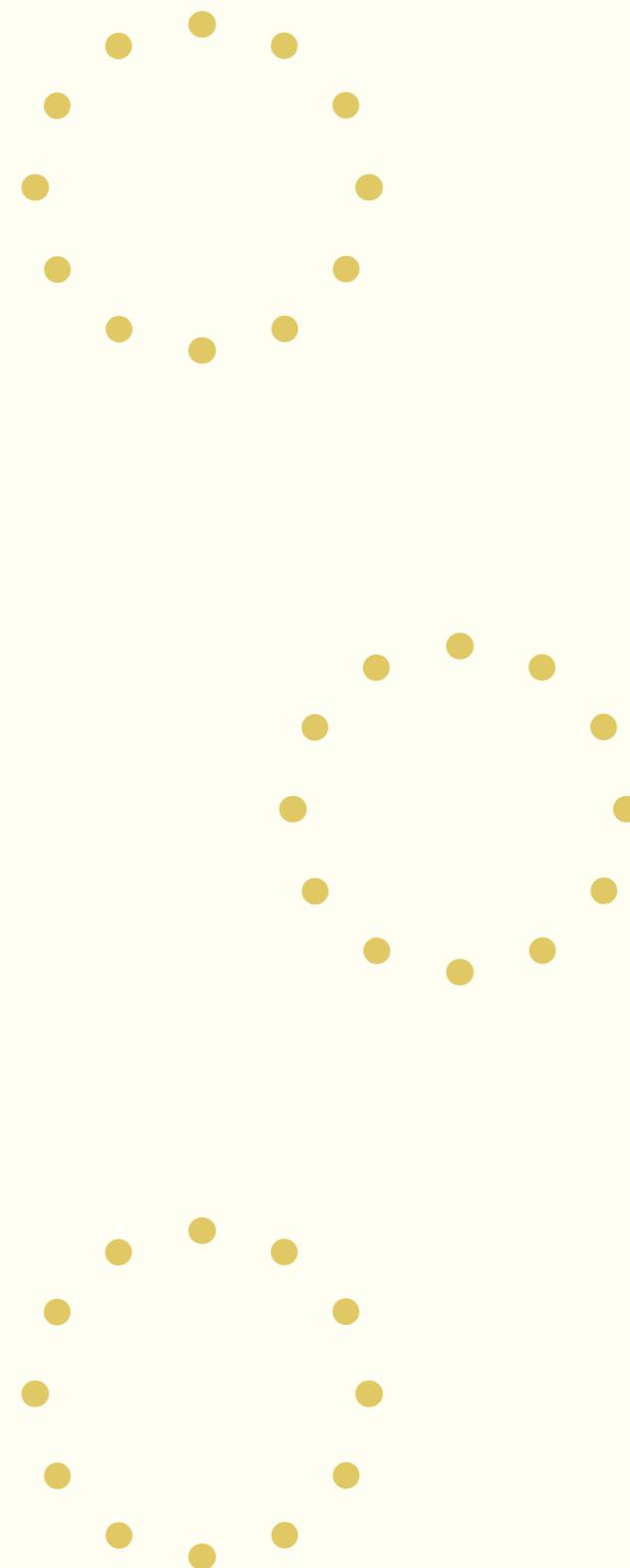
**-Sean Uyehara, Director of Programs**

# HOW IS HEADLANDS CHANGING?

*There's been a lot more conversation about what Headlands' role is, or could be in relation to ongoing social justice work. But we're still an arts organization and we support artists. And I think it's a little bit too generous to think of ourselves as a social justice organization. Because that's not what we do. And while we support artists that work in those realms, I think that we also need to be honest about what we are. We're not those organizations that are providing that kind of support to on the ground movements. Which isn't to say that we couldn't be. But that would be a radically different organization, I think, from what we are.*

*I do think that conversations have come to the forefront. Things like the community rapid response fund that are responsive to the moment are hopefully things that can continue. Some of the new programs might also lend themselves to longer term support for artists working in those intersections. I also think that from a communication standpoint this is forcing clarification of what our values are as an organization and how to communicate and work in such a way to support those values more explicitly.*

**Daniel Glendening,  
Communication & Outreach  
Coordinator**



# HOW IS HEADLANDS CHANGING?

**How do people see Headlands Center for the Arts during this time? They want to see us as a resource and a support for helping to connect people with this place. Because that's ultimately what we do for the artists who come to this place and who express or are inspired by that.**

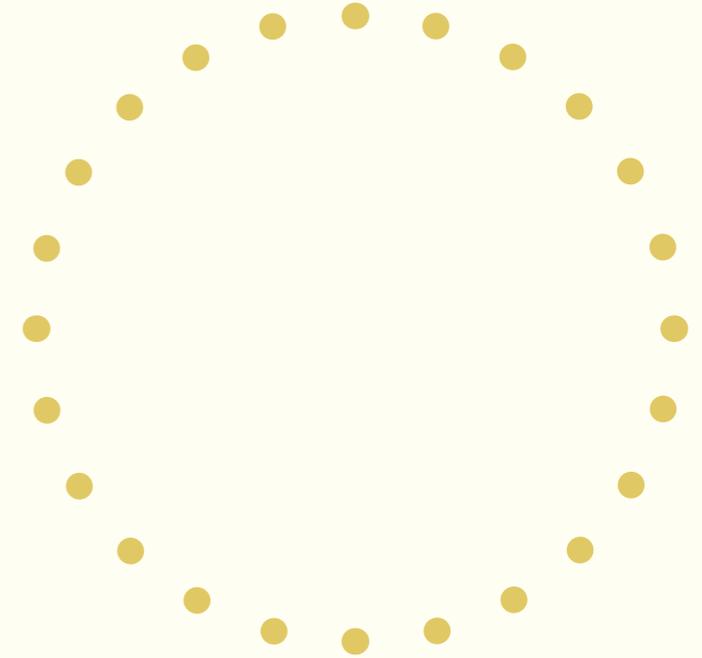
**-Ally Zimmerman  
Operations Manager**

**The Development Department has instated like weekly or bi-weekly discussions about what it would mean for us to switch our model from a donor centric fundraising model, which is what most nonprofits operate with, to a community centric fundraising model. Having those conversations has been helping us to really figure out what we are certain of that our department does do well, or doesn't, or who we don't agree with as individuals or as an organization.**

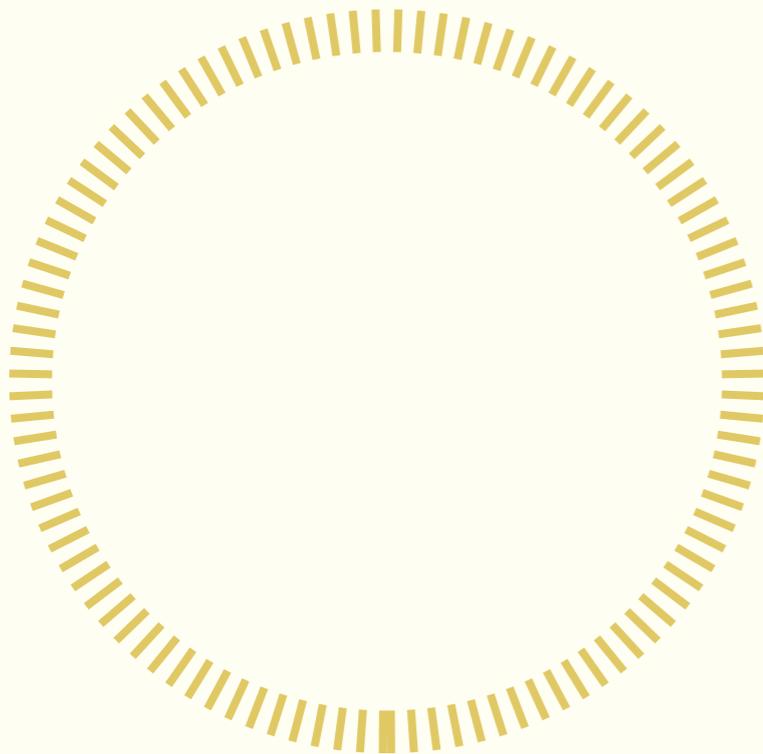
**-MJ Brown, Development Manager**

*There's a lot of anxiety around performance in the art world. One of my friends did a workshop on things you can do with very few materials in short periods of time at home. I teach my students this kind of thinking all the time, but I'm not using it for myself. You're just here to experience and learn something. This is a time for you, or this could just be a time for research.*

**-Aay Preston Myint**  
**Public Events and Outreach Manager**



## HOW HAS THIS TIME CHANGED YOUR PRACTICE?



*Over the last few months, I think one thing that has shifted is a renewed appreciation for storytelling and narrative. That's been the thrust of what I've been trying to work on in painting and drawing: creating a story that I find to be nourishing and that is maybe outlandish or impossible, but that looks beautiful to me.*

**- Livien Yin, 2019-20 Graduate Fellow**

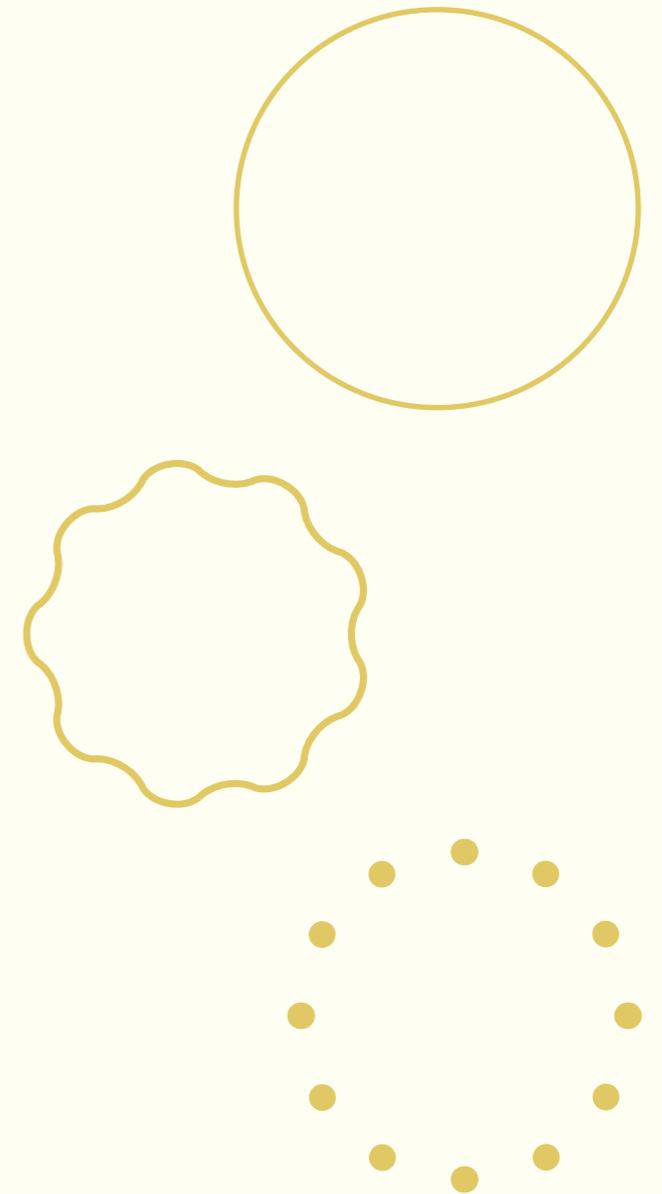
***I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE ART THAT I'M CARRYING. AT SOME POINT,  
I WAS JUST LIKE, IF I DON'T SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC, HOW IS THE ART  
INSIDE OF ME GOING TO LIVE? I HAVE SO MANY STORIES TO TELL.  
ARTISTS ARE VESSELS, AND WHEN THE VESSEL BREAKS, THE ART POURS  
OUT AND IT DOESN'T LIVE. BUT IF THE VESSEL IS ABLE TO SURVIVE,  
IT'S GOING TO BE THE ONE POURING OUT THE ART AND DIRECTING IT  
TOWARD SOMETHING SUSTAINABLE, SOMETHING THAT THE FUTURE  
GENERATIONS CAN LOOK BACK TO AND REFERENCE.***

***- MMAKGOSI ANITA TAU***

# HOW HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS?

*Arts organizations in particular will speak to social justice issues through an artist's work. And by sharing an artist's work, they are addressing those concerns, in a way, themselves. I think that it's a fine line between instrumentalizing an artist of color or a Black artist to talk about what the organization itself feels and can't say, and uplifting that artist's voice. It's something that I think about a lot in relation to the idea that those in power systemically shouldn't rely on the oppressed to teach them about their oppression. In this scenario, the arts organization is the power holder. In terms of publicly addressing those murders (of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery) and subsequent uprisings, it's really challenging to do, and I don't think that I did it entirely as well as I would like. I think in part, because it's hard understand what the line is of what you can or can't say. The main strategy was trying to amplify voices and also make concrete statements when we can, and establishing an anti-racist working group for ongoing education for the staff.*

**-Daniel Glendening,  
Communications and Outreach Coordinator**



# HOW HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS?

*Following the killing of George Floyd there were tons of protests locally. At first I went to a couple a week, more than I had in my life before now. There were a lot of conversations going on about how change will happen in the long-term, because these protests won't go on indefinitely and there are also more mundane ways to contribute.*

*Since I'm working in conservation, I thought this was an area where I could be more involved. It's a small community and the conservation world is conservative in a lot of ways. To be a conservator it's expected that you go to graduate programs that require tons of unpaid internships and tons of course requirements, which is prohibitive.*

*At the NYU program, they have French, German, or Italian language requirements. When I first learned about that, I thought it was ridiculous that they require such Eurocentric languages for students to come in with.*

*When I asked about it, they were like, "Oh, that can't be changed." But I think the silver lining to these past several months is becoming a little bit more emboldened to communicate with these institutions and to not accept that legacy or inertia is a reason to hold on to anything.*

*So, I gathered signatures for a letter to eliminate this language requirement. Now, changes are being made and the three or four graduate programs for conservation are now revising altered mission requirements.*

*That's a very niche area to discuss, but this time has made me think about smaller ways to protest and who your network is that you can work with to get these things done.*

**- Livien Yin, 2019-20 Graduate Fellow**

# HOW DOES THIS CHANGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE?

*At the beginning of all of this, I found enormous gratitude for the natural world and felt really calm being outside in nature. I live by a restored marsh, and I remember seeing the egrets there, and thinking “oh, nature is still moving forward. The natural world is still operating.*



*Image courtesy of Tom Ide*



*Image courtesy of Andria Lo*

*I think that one thing I really appreciate is that our national parks are gigantic, and that open space is gigantic. The parks feel like a safe place to be instead of at Costco or in a mall. You can fit a lot of people out in the Marin Headlands, and everyone still has a safe distance from each other. I have definitely seen the Headlands used a lot more.*

**Ally Zimmerman,  
Operations Manager**

# HOW DOES THIS CHANGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE?

*I've lived in cities all my life, big cities. I grew up in Caracas, Venezuela. I lived in New York City for ten years and Los Angeles for five years. Definitely something that I wouldn't change in terms of the place where I find myself now. It was really intriguing because I was both quickly taking responsibility of the organization's facilities and physical campus, but also experiencing nature mostly without humans. Seeing the park re-set itself was fascinating; there was a lot more wildlife and the beaches were taking the shape of the air and wind. There was very little human presence in the areas that are normally visited. So seeing that was incredible. But at the same time, I was both missing the days when there are people but also accepting the beauty and the special moment to see nature in that way.*

**-Dany Naierman,  
Facilities Director**

# HOW ARE YOU DOCUMENTING THIS MOMENT?

Documentation to me is another way of storytelling. Because it's another way of storytelling, it sheds light on the state of mind or perspective at that time. And I think it's important to track how that's changing for oneself. Just a couple of days ago, my friend wrote me in an email. He said something like, "if there's any hope for healing in the world, we have to first find healing within ourselves." You have to be able to help yourself. As one example, you have to be able to let go of internalized white supremacy as a starting place before being able to help heal the rest of the world.

And so I think in document and documentation, we can see how that healing happens. What that friend wrote is something that I think will really stick with me.

In terms of documentation in my life, I haven't set out to do this with a plan, but I've noticed on my phone that since adopting Busca, my dog, the only photos on my phone are of her. I'm just really obsessed. So, I guess that this is a documentation of the kind of mundane joys and delights that that we have every day, which revolves around us. I love that documentation.

- Livien Yin  
2019 Graduate Fellow

# HOW ARE YOU DOCUMENTING THIS MOMENT?

***I believe that if we can document it, we are affecting the narrative of tomorrow. So our children and our children's children will be able to better prepare themselves for whatever will come. And they will hear of hope in our stories.***

***No matter how difficult the seasons have been, or this particular season has been, one of the things that people keep doing is reading texts that speak to hope and watching films that show the stories that were never told. We now have the power to be those storytellers that we never got to see in history. So I feel like this is the time to write. This is the time to create, and this is the time to serve humanity with our work.***

**- Mmakgosi Anita Tau  
2020 Artist in Residence**

# CONTRIBUTORS



**Holly Blake,  
Residency Manager**



**MJ Brown,  
Development Manager**



**Daniel Glendening,  
Communication &  
Outreach Coordinator**



**Dany Naierman,  
Director of Facilities**



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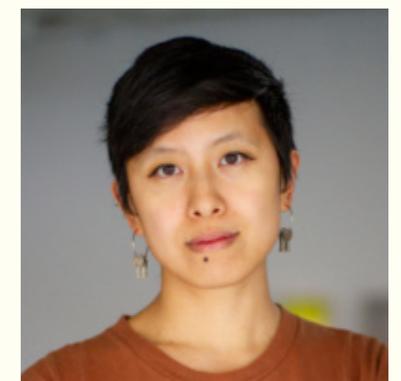
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