

Sitka Center for Art and Ecology Think Tank  
**Core Programs: Workshop and Residency**  
Feb. 8, 2007

SUMMARY NOTES

*The mission of the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology is to expand the relationships between art, nature and humanity through workshops, presentations, and individual research projects, and to maintain a facility appropriate to its needs that is in harmony with the inspirational coastal environment of Cascade Head.*

### **Think Tank Process**

As part of the Sitka Center 2020 Planning Process, the Sitka Center convened a series of five generative conversations in February 2007 to gain insights into promising practices and opportunities for the future. The *Core Programs: Workshop and Residency* think tank brought together a group of individuals with diverse knowledge and perspectives to think together about (1) the distinctiveness of the Sitka Center's programs, (2) the larger forces or trends that will influence programs in the future, and (3) which opportunities and practices hold particular promise for the Sitka Center in evolving its programming for the next generation. Findings from all five think tanks will be synthesized to feed into a future focused vision and plan for the Sitka Center, to be completed in the spring of 2007.

### **Attendees**

- Bob Gamblin (Convener), Sitka Center Board President, Founder of Gamblin Artists Colors Company
- David Cohen, Executive Director, Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery
- Jack Doyle, Former Sitka Center Board Member, Sitka Center Residency Committee, and Board President of the Audubon Society of Lincoln City
- Miriam Feuerle, Partner, Lyceum Agency (representing artists, authors and academics)
- Billie Fisher, Board President, Oregon Society of Artists
- Judy Schwartz-Sorrel, Artist and Tillamook County Arts Network
- Marlana Stoddard-Hayes, Artist, Former Sitka Center Artist-in-Residence and Current Instructor
- Margot Thompson, Artist, Co-Founder of Neskowin Valley School, Former Sitka Center Board Member and Instructor
- Christopher Zinn, Writer, Teacher, Former Director of Oregon Council for the Humanities
- Douglas Beauchamp, Sitka Center Executive Director
- Laura Young, Sitka Center Program Manager
- Paula Manley, Facilitator

## Reflections on the Core of the Sitka Center's Programs

Participants responded to the question, *“From your unique perspective, what is special or distinctive about the Sitka Center’s programming?”* They identified the following areas program distinctiveness:

- **Art and Interaction with the Environment.** The Cascade Head environment is unique as place of “edge and cusp” due to the interplay of land and water. The Sitka Center is a place of liminality. The opportunity to interact with the environment provides both context and inspiration—a unique “classroom.” The place is a direct influence and actor on those involved in art making and teaching.
- **Inclusiveness.** Sitka Center workshops serve students at many levels of experience and proficiency. There is an attitude of acceptance. The emphasis is on learning to make, at all levels.
- **Honoring and Opening the Heart – Personal Growth.** Through a mix of diverse offerings (from traditional to more experimental), programs invite participants to open themselves to new experiences, grow their skills, and expand their horizons: “You see things differently here.”
- **A Natural and Human Artistic Refuge.** At the Sitka Center, contemplation is part of education in a retreat-like setting that is rustic and rural. It is a place to think about what nature means, as well as to experience it. Workshop participants and residents experience separation from everyday life as a source of renewal: “People who come here gain inspiration that sustains them for the rest of the year.”
- **Supportive Connections.** In its approach to programs, the Sitka Center has respect for art making and artists (including “the artist within every person”). The workshop experience fosters strong personal bonds among participants. Faculty and residents value the relationships they develop during their time at Sitka.
- **Stewardship.** The Sitka Center has a history as a steward of the local Cascade Head environment and of artists: “People and places need to be restored.”

## External Trends and Implications

Participants created a “mind map” of trends in response to the question, *“What forces or trends in the external environment will influence the evolution of the Sitka Center’s programs?”* The following clusters of trends stood out as being particularly significant for the future of programming:

- The **population growth** trend is significant, with more people moving to Oregon and the coast. As urban areas become more densely populated, **unique natural areas take on greater significance** as sites of refuge and renewal. A related trend is the projected **increase in the number of retiring baby boomers**, many with discretionary income; these individuals are potential Sitka Center program participants and donors.
- **Appreciation of the environment** is growing. People are becoming more aware of environmental challenges and the detrimental impact of humans on the natural world.

Although there is a danger of Cascade Head being “loved to death,” the trend of growing environmental consciousness could translate into expanded interest in the Sitka Center’s mission and programs.

- **Our culture is increasingly digital, globally connected, and reliant on technology.** At the same time, there is a **return to crafts and hands-on making.** In particular, “younger people want to make things,” and there is an explosion of DIY culture. These trends present interesting opportunities for engaging younger audiences in future Sitka Center programs.

For a list of all the trends identified by participants in the mind mapping exercise, see page 4.

### Synthesis Dialogue

For the final part of the think tank dialogue participants focused on the question, *“Thinking back on what we’ve discussed today, what do you see as promising practices or opportunities for the Sitka Center in evolving its programming for the next generation?”* Participants identified several interrelated opportunities involving growing the Sitka Center’s programming and visibility through partnerships and off-site activities, renewing the Sitka Center’s emphasis on integrating the ecology side of the mission, and cultivating ties with local communities by involving youth. Ideas included the following:

- **Model stewardship for the next generation.** The Cascade Head area has not historically been “pristine.” At one time the area was home to a theme park attraction (Pixiland). Active land management and restoration have played important roles. One participant commented, “The idea of stewardship is hopeful message to share with kids.” A specific suggestion was to provide field trips (day trips) for area youth from Lincoln City and other coastal communities.
- **Partner to create off-site programming.** Preserve the intimate setting and small scale of the Sitka Center, but recognize that what Sitka represents has resonance beyond the immediate place. As one attendee said, “If the brand is solid, it can be transported off-site.” The Audubon Society, historical society and land trusts were mentioned as potential partners (The new Audubon chapter in Lincoln City has more than 400 members). Potential partner organizations have networks and supporters already in place; these are potential Sitka Center supporters.
- **Increase the Sitka Center’s visibility.** Visibility is key to funding; being a “well kept secret” is a liability. The residency program is not well understood and its visibility could be enhanced by including profiles of artists in the local press and on the website. As one participant said, “The more you’re out there, the more people will want to help the Sitka Center.”
- **Renew the Sitka Center’s ecology orientation.** As public awareness and concern for the natural world continue to grow, the Sitka Center is well positioned to tap this energy in its programming. Participants highlighted the huge appeal of the edible shellfish class the Sitka Center once offered, which culminated with a feast. Ecology-oriented offerings could be integrated within existing programs (workshops and residencies) or through new initiatives co-created with partners.

## Attachment

### Sitka Center for Art and Ecology Think Tank Core Programs: Workshop and Residency

#### EXTERNAL TRENDS FROM MIND MAP

*“What trends in the external environment will influence the evolution of the Sitka Center’s programs?”* Think tank participants identified the following trends and then “voted” (with dots) for those likely to have the greatest impact:

- Baby boomers retiring in large numbers, many with discretionary income (7 dots)
- People more interested in getting out in nature (7)
- Culture is increasingly focused on technology, digital environment (6)
- Growing public awareness, concern re: environmental challenges (5)
- Increasing level of distraction in our culture (5)
- “Younger people want to make things,” DIY culture, resurgence of hands on crafts (5)
- More people moving to Oregon and the coast (3)
- Increasing number of nonprofits, limited foundation funding (3)
- There is a bigger push for nonprofits to stay relevant (2)
- Intergenerational transfer of wealth (2)
- Continuing decline in arts programming and funding in public schools (2)
- Globally connected marketplace (2)
- More artists working across disciplines, collaborating (1)
- Economic stratification of society: haves and have nots
- Federal government offloading public services to the nonprofit sector
- Growing need for ways to support individual artists
- Growth of the cultural creatives, creative economies in Portland
- Younger group of philanthropists is emerging, with more interest in technology
- Downward trend in season ticket subscribers
- Artists are becoming more knowledgeable about copyright issues