

EXHALE

A new welcome experience for the Headland Center for the Arts

Isabella Jimenez | LDA 184 | Senior Capstone 2020

Located 5 miles north of San Francisco's iconic Golden Gate Bridge lies the formidable Marin Headlands, a national recreation area of sublime views and terrain. With a history of military occupation, the Marin Headlands has transformed into a public open space with trails, camping sites, beaches, educational centers such as the Marine Mammal Center, and even extant battery infrastructure. A special metamorphosis has also found its place in the rolling hills of the headlands - The Headlands Center for the Arts (HCA). Founded in 1982 by local artists, activists, and civic leaders, the internationally recognized artist-in-residence program has made its home in the historic Fort Barry near Rodeo Beach on the western shore of the peninsula. The HCA facilitates interdisciplinary public programs and subsidized studio rentals for San Francisco Bay Area artists of all disciplines, encouraging opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and exchange that build understanding and appreciation for the role of art in society.

Fort Barry is nestled at the base of a large, forested hill and immediately offers relief to the eyes with panoramic views of the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean at its summit as well as a verdant, cleared open space at its base which the surrounding buildings are circled about. Upon coming across this unique, calm spot in the challenging landscape, one can't feel anything but a deep sigh of relief and repose. The word 'exhale' leads the concept of the site's design to preserve and enhance the site's inherent genius loci. To exhale presupposes a period of inhale to come before and after and so the land crescendos and diminuendos through sinuous walkways outlining sequentially larger and smaller spaces. The loop is effectively endless like the rhythm of the crashing tides upon the promontory to the south and west of the site, establishing a sense of process over final form or destination. Important to observe is HCA's mission "to engender an unparalleled environment for the creative process and the development of new work and ideas". Effectively, the purpose for the program is for artists to iterate upon their work and immerse themselves in the creative cycle. The form of the walkways creates an infinite loop for the mulling of ideas and provides multiple options for direction, thus embodying the creative process.

Crafting a powerful entry experience allows for users to enter the site with a preliminary awareness for their encounter with the HCA. The circular pathways intuit the cyclical nature of thought and refinement of action and their intersection suggests a crossing-over of ideas or states of mind. The trees that border the pathways are meant to evoke the feeling of being in a medieval cloister, a place of contemplation, enlightenment, and shelter from a chaotic world. Visitors entering from the Welcome Center will be guided through increasingly wider pathways that encourage their exploration throughout the entire site. A shaded plaza at the entry's center is open for gatherings, performances, or relaxation and grounds the entry with its mass of native, gray basalt amidst a golden field of undulating grass intended to mimic the crashing of the waves along the Headland's shores.



Jagged, rectilinear walkways intersect the graceful curves of the meditative path in the same way waves crash upon the Headland's shores. Vegetation is used in varying densities to evoke breathing patterns and create spaces of light and dark, wind and rest, and prospect and refuge. Vegetation is further used along the southern slopes of the site to strengthen the illusion of a crashing wave by using dark, native bushes at the crest of the elevation and a grand splash of rolling grasses that run into the jagged path. Not only do visitors enter with the feeling of exhalation, but they also leave through the same sequence allowing them to reflect upon the entry and their initial emotions after having engaged themselves with the rest of the HCA.

