



Peter Prato / Headlands Center for the Arts

Sharon Maidenberg is leaving the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County, where she has been director since 2010.

Headlands leader lands job in Texas

Maidenberg has presided over tripling of budget, doubling of staff at Marin County center

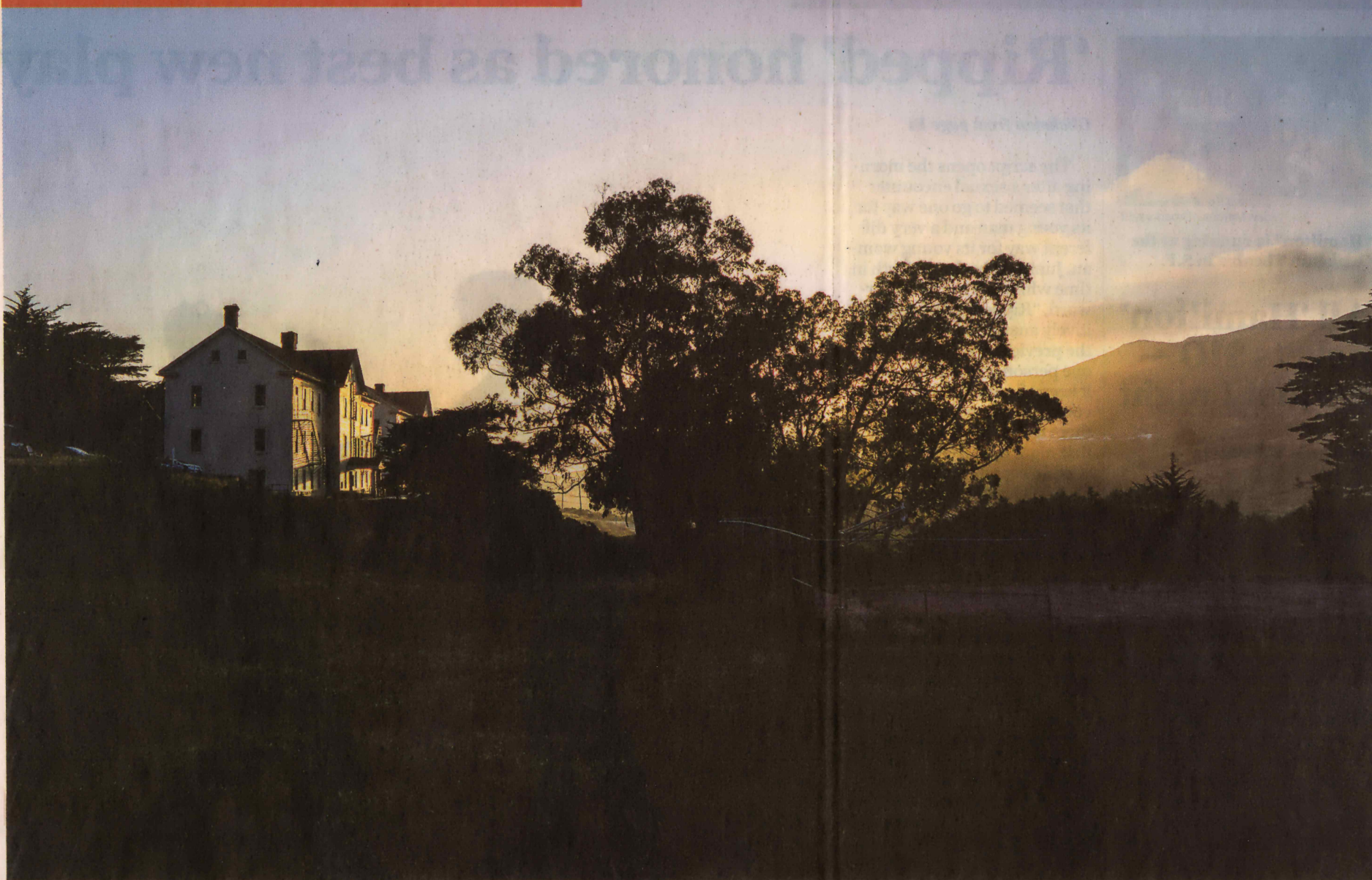
By Charles Desmarais

Sharon Maidenberg, for 10 years the administrative leader of Headlands Center for the Arts and its warmly welcoming public face, will leave the organization in June to become executive director and CEO of the Contemporary Austin, a non-collecting museum with two sites in the Texas city.

The Headlands Center is a beloved Bay Area institution, founded in 1982, that brings artists from around the world for creative residencies of four to 10 weeks or longer. It occupies romantic old Fort Barry military buildings, ingeniously altered by artists Ann Hamilton, David Ireland and others. It is located in the serene hills of the Marin Headlands, a

Maidenberg continues on E4

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Tom Ide / Headlands Center for the Arts

The Headlands Center for the Arts occupies renovated buildings that made up Fort Barry, which is now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Headlands leader leaving for Texas

Maidenberg from page E1

terrain managed by the National Park Service as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

The Contemporary comprises a downtown Austin exhibition center and a 14-acre campus on the shores of Lake Austin that provides an “art-in-nature experience” more formal than that of Headlands, with a sculpture park, art school, cafe and other amenities. Its annual budget of \$6.9 million is almost double that of Headlands Center, which spends \$3.5 million to \$4 million each year.

In a letter to supporters, Robin Strawbridge, chairwoman of the Headlands Center board, said she has enjoyed working with Maidenberry, “and seeing her energy and passion suffuse every corner of this organization, creatively pushing our bounds.” She credited Maidenberry with spearheading efforts to add a new entry

“I’m interested to really think about what role museums have played, can play.”

Sharon Maidenberry, who will leave the Headlands Center for the Arts to head the Contemporary Austin

plaza, the Commons, with site-specific works of art; tripling the annual operating budget and doubling the staff; and other achievements.

Maidenberg, 42, grew up in Israel until age 7, when her family moved to New Jersey. She came to San Francisco in 2000, shortly after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she focused on “African and Diasporic studies with focus on contemporary African Art,” she said in an email. With her husband, Jared Blum, a musician, she has lived in a home at the Headlands Center as part of her compensation. Consequently, she says, their 6-year-old son, Silas, has “been raised by the coyotes of the Headlands.”

In an interview with The Chronicle, she noted that her career in the arts has been spent entirely in the Bay Area. “A friend called within days of my arrival to say that [artists’ space] New Langton Arts had a desperate need for someone to sit and answer phones.” She had to moonlight at Chez Panisse restaurant to afford to work

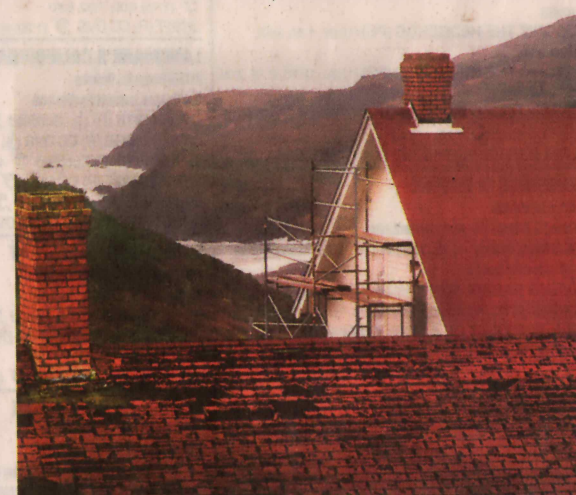


Andria Lo / Headlands Center for the Arts 2018

Yaloo works in a studio at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County, where she was an artist in residence in 2018. The center brings artists in from around the world for creative residencies of four to 10 weeks or longer.



Bowerbird Photography / Headlands Center for the Arts 2018



John O'Hara / The Chronicle 1998

Left: Sharon Maidenberry (right) chats with Dorlon Simonds at a 2018 dinner. Above: One of the renovated buildings (rear) at the center.

at New Langton, but she loved the place and learned from it.

Susan Miller, now executive director of the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, was the head of New Langton Arts at the time. “I credit Susan with a lot of what I think is important in an organization,” Maidenberry said.

She held a series of jobs at New Langton, eventually moving into development and finance, then on to other Bay Area nonprofits — Southern Exposure, where she served as interim associate director in 2005, and Yerba Buena

Center for the Arts, where she worked as development manager for two years — before joining the Headlands as associate director. She was appointed executive director there in 2010.

Maidenberg calls the Austin position “my first museum job,” and expressed excitement about the Contemporary’s “two-sided identity, one a rigorous art practice (at the downtown gallery), the other more accessible” with an art school serving young people. “I’m interested to really think about what role museums have played,

can play.”

Her new job will undoubtedly require a substantial adjustment. One memory of the Headlands Center she will keep with her, she said, is of a dinner one evening after a board meeting. “There isn’t a huge divide between board and the administration, between director and staff. We all sat together for a beautiful meal.” At the end, through a window to a hillside field, someone noticed that an artist resident had erected a work made of lights.

“The piece was up for no

more than two hours,” she remembered. “And then it was gone. That’s what Headlands is devoted to: enabling creative people to do their best work — it’s not about the spectacle of people coming to see it.

“You kind of have to be there to really experience the magic.”

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