

Conversation between Christy LeMaster (Founding Director of the Nightingale) and Emily Eddy (Current Director of the Nightingale)

Christy: I thought it would be way less permanent thing than it was, right? Like... I was ready to close at year 5, and then I was ready to close at year 10, because I think like the thing being unsustainable was like always baked in.

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: And um, but my collaborators never wanted it to go away entirely. But the push pull about it, and you're living with this now, is that like, people want spaces but having the bandwidth to build them and having the bandwidth to sustain them is just like hard for anybody in late stage capitalism, unless they are just like made of money you know? And nobody that was involved in the Nightingale was ever made of money. Like nobody had money to burn. You know? Everybody was always like doing everything they were doing at the Nightingale on top of full-time jobs or multiple gigs or trying to be a working artist, and, so, the thing has always felt more akin to a family versus an institution, to me. You know?

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: But that family has broken up and reformed like 20 times over 10 years you know. Um, so yeah. I mean, I don't have any love for DIY spaces or that terminology, that terminology has felt really unfunctional to me since like a long, long, long time ago. But it's like the thing that everybody uses to talk about spaces like ours because critical lenses don't really care what spaces like ours are. You know?

Emily: Yeah, definitely. Well, and so I guess, um, because DIY definitely is like a label that put upon the Nightingale and spaces like that what do you feel like the main differences are, and like our space versus a DIY space.

Christy: I'm not sure. I mean I think DIY to me seems very much about like one person leading it. Really, like it feels very much akin to like a certain thing that has to do with like, bands, and dudes, you know? And like um, I think like um, Do It Yourself has never felt like a thing.... Do It Yourself doesn't seem to have like a consideration of like the structure of the thing? And for me, I tried to have a lot of consideration about the structure of the thing. And the politics inherent of the structure of the thing. You know? So I think that's the main difference. I think like DIY is like we're doing it for ourselves, but we're not really talking or thinking about how

we're doing it? And for me, I have always talked about the Nightingale as like a platform that's rough and ready and I tried really hard to instill collective leadership of that thing, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: And it was more successful than not over time. So to me, the words DIY are like: oh we're just doin' it! And I think like, the aims of the Nightingale were to have more structure and more like consideration than that.

Emily: Yeah. Like more kind of, um, like creating a system to sort of like do something together instead of....

Christy: Well trying to, sure, but more importantly than that just like not ignoring the fact that it like had a system whether we wanted it to or not, and that that system like had politics. Interpersonal, financial, structural to the organization itself.

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: So like, just trying to like not be thoughtless about that. Not just be like we'll get it done however we get it done. Not that we like didn't move fast, and like do things haphazardly sometimes, but that like, the how of what it is is as important as the what it is. You know?

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: Cuz like, if I didn't care, or if I hadn't cared about the how of what it was, like, I would have made us a non-profit, it would have been hierarchical, you know like it would have been so much easier to turn the Nightingale into a thing that functioned in like regular traditional arts organizations if it were just me running it. You know?

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: But, who wants to be a part of that? Like who wants to take something so small, and so changeable, and burden it with a non-profit financial structure that like really starts to make decisions for you in terms of like what non-profits want you to do. You know? One of the things that's really exciting to me about this time is that all these organizations that grant things and fund things, they really want you to like prove to them that you have like a business acumen, you know? And they really want to prove that the projects that they're funding are like

effective and worth while. But in the middle of the virus, everybody is like, we're just gonna make it need based.

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: That seems to me to be like where the real exciting shift in non-profit funding models lies.

Emily: Yeah.

Christy: Can we just shift away from this idea where like we're gonna make artists and arts organizations more like businesses, and can we start thinking about it in terms of like who needs this money, you know?

Emily: Yeah, totally.

Christy: But I always, but the writing strikes me Emily because it's like there's two paragraphs about like, there's a paragraph about what the Nightingale was to you, and there's a paragraph about like why like, your negative associations with the terms DIY, and then there's like one sentence about what the Nightingale is under your leadership. So like, what do you want to change? What do you want to make different or function better or like have more space for or less space for.