DEPARTMENT OF
IMAGINARY AFFAIRS

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



IN SOLIDARITY & RESISTANCE

The Department of Imaginary Affairs is situated on the land and waterways of the Mississaugas of the Credit, part of the Anishnabeg, alongside the Chippewa, Wyandot, Haudenosaunee Confederacy of Six Nations, and many other Nations, recorded and unrecorded. This territory exists within the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant — an agreement made before European contact between the Anishnabeg and Haudenosaunee to live in peaceful coexistence with each other, the land, and its resources.

We also recognize the contributions and enduring legacies of people of African descent, especially those forcibly brought here through the transatlantic slave trade.

As an organization committed to dismantling systems of oppression, we continue to deepen our understanding of the histories of this land, the lands we come from, and how we can act in alignment with our ancestors and future generations. For us, each land acknowledgment is an invitation: to reflect on where we are in our reconciliation journeys and to live our commitment to being the change we want to see.

With each year that passes, we prioritize deepening our knowledge and relationships in solidarity with Indigenous and Black communities, and alongside our peers in their actions toward reconciliation, decolonization, and being in right relationship with the land. In 2025, this looked like co-presenting on equitable futures from a decolonized lens, hosting a DIA Day of Learning for Truth and Reconciliation Day within our community of practitioners, developing new partnerships around Indigenous Systems Knowledge and public education, and designing a gathering around the patterns of migration that have always been completely natural to these lands. It also meant something smaller and more constant: taking time in every workshop to ground ourselves in our interconnected relationships to land, to each other, to our ancestors, and to our future generations.

Our work is rooted in continually unraveling the threads of colonization woven through our very existence — and that unraveling is part of why we keep moving toward collective liberation.

We've been sitting with a thought from Marina Gorbis, drawing on Margaret Mead, who wrote about times of profound change:

> ***"After all, we are all immigrants to the future; none of us is a native in that land."***

All around us, the world seems to be consistently changing while also staying exactly the same. There is a strange texture to this moment. It is hard to pinpoint whether we are in the before, during, or after of profound change — especially when it feels like all of it is happening simultaneously. If none of us are native to the futures we're building toward, then the work isn't to arrive with certainty. It's to keep practicing how to be good travelers together.

We choose solidarity and resistance alongside Indigenous and Black communities.

> ***"Where there is oppression, there will be resistance."***
>
> *Assata Shakur*

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed.”

Maya Angelou



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LETTER FROM THE CEO



JENN CHAN **she/her**
Co-Founder and CEO

Hi again,

I started out feeling like 2025 was going to be our most triumphant year. I was feeling more rooted in where we were going, more confident that we were headed for brighter times. I wasn't nearly prepared for the challenges that lay ahead.

There is a particular wisdom that comes from thinking you have it all figured out, only to be thrown new curveballs and have to fumble through what to do next. 2024 was DIA's 10-year anniversary, and something about that milestone made me feel like we had to have everything figured out by now.

That feeling has been deflating at times. I was so wrong in thinking the goal was to have it all figured out — and so 2025 became about learning to stay with the not knowing. Instead of certainty, the practice became curiosity.

This has been a particularly hard practice for me. I like to think I'm good at not having the answers, but I also know I can easily sink into despair when I don't. There is a specific kind of vulnerability that comes from wanting to look like you're totally okay being in the goo of not knowing, only to discover that when it actually happens, you want to say very loudly that you don't want to hold this work alone. It's easier to look at what I don't have figured out and to doubt myself — and that was a natural state for much of this year.

Relationships changed in 2025. Some of the ones we started the year with were over by the end of it. Others transitioned into something more meaningful. Many new ones emerged. We are a relational organization and we know that relationships have their seasons and their reasons — but knowing that doesn't make it easier to say goodbye, even when it's the right thing to do. There were moments this year where we had to

pause longer than expected, sitting with the question of what the right next step was, even when — especially when — we had no idea if it truly was. We had to learn when to protect ourselves and when to show up with more curiosity. That line isn't always clear, and we didn't always get it right.

We have also entered a season of scarcity and austerity that DIA has never really lived through before. When we started ten years ago, there was more innovation funding and more appetite for program redesign. Five years ago, there was more equity-based funding and genuine desire to move differently. We had been learning to navigate these ecosystems. But 2025 taught us that the equitable practices we've built — the ones we can no longer see as nice-to-have — weren't as widespread as we'd hoped. The pendulum swung back toward maintaining the status quo. And while we never compromised our values, we also never hid them. We know that can feel threatening when everyone around you is trying not to lose what they have.
As a team, we have had to ask ourselves the hardest question: can we truly be values-aligned and financially sustainable at the same time, in these conditions? We don't have a clean answer yet. 2025 was a year of deep inquiry without the resolution we wanted.

But I also need to acknowledge something: 2025 was my 5-year anniversary as solo-CEO of this organization — one that has accomplished so much more than I could have ever imagined. I know this work isn't done perfectly. But it is being done. I have learned so much from the people around me: those who have come and gone, and those I have yet to meet. This was the year we named the skills we want to build, so that we don't just imagine better worlds — we practice them too.

Moving into 2026, I'm carrying more questions than answers. About our duration. About what we're capable of. About whether we can be louder and prouder about what we do while also asking for what we actually need. About whether radical imagination and practicality can genuinely live together in one organization.
I'm choosing to stay curious about all of it. Not because I have it figured out, but because curiosity — as it turns out — is the practice.

Take (self) care,
Jenn



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear Friends and Supporters of DIA,

Last time around the sun in our 2024 Annual Report, I wrote that if you asked a room full of Canadian nonprofit leaders to describe the year in one word, you would get a long and uncomfortable pause... the kind that comes when everything happens at once.

This year, the pause hit differently. It was the pause of a nation tentatively evolving its options for transformation in a time of rupture. The pause of a sector unsure of how to invest past the current climate, and the pause of an organization checking whether the ground it was standing on is still there.

In 2025, a multi-year funding commitment that had underwritten a meaningful share of DIA's work came to an end before it was meant to. We were not alone in that experience, and in October, twenty-eight organizations signed an open letter tied to the specific event warning what happens when funders withdraw confirmed commitments in the middle of a cycle: communities begin to crumble, and small organizations must absorb more responsibility. DIA was extremely fortunate in terms of being able to recoup much of the projected funding through to end of program, and has spent the time since this event working to rebuild.

I want to be straightforward with you: we have not yet replaced what was lost, not in fundraising and not in earned revenue. But with new offerings and engagements spanning the foundation landscape, fee-for-service facilitation, and consulting we are doubling down on imagining more equitable futures. Our work continues, and as always we are taking the dual opportunity to grow, and also to reflect critically on our existence within systems much larger than ourselves.

As a result of this uncertainty, our Board spent parts of the year watching the financials closely... sometimes what felt like too closely. A scarcity mindset can be very good at disguising itself as fiscal responsibility, even with the best of intentions!

Months spent in co-creation with our bookkeeper Janey Law on new fiscal practices and reporting dashboards opened a new approach to fiduciary responsibility that balanced caution, care, and creativity anew.

The work we have put into the organization's values over the years prepared us well for these days defined by uncertainty, and in 2025 Jenn and the Board decided that the right way to use the year was to re-lay some of DIA's foundations:

We rewrote the corporation's purpose — the first change since DIA incorporated in 2017. The objects of the corporation are now aligned with the work we do: building just, equitable, and sustainable futures: working with individual and collective stories to create artifacts about identity, inclusion and belonging; supporting implementation through reciprocal partnerships with social impact organizations and service providers; and elevating perspectives in order to dismantle systems of oppression. The Board approved the amendment on May 1 and filed it with Corporations Canada on May 23. We wrote it broadly on purpose, so that it can hold whatever DIA becomes as the organization continues to evolve.

Though DIA spent part of the year helping other teams do strategic planning, the Board also adopted an internal Strategic Plan: 2025-2028. We approved the 2024 audit, which our auditor returned without issue. We restructured the annual budget to separate Programs, work with established traction, from Prototypes, the one-of-a-kind experiments that may never happen twice. This way, if a year arrives with no contracts and no grants, we can decide our operational reaction with clarity instead of cutting evenly across everything we have in motion. We also decided not to renew the lease on the DIA office, an expense that no longer matched how the organization actually works.

The Board reconvened an executive compensation committee, which spent its meetings over the year comparing evolving standards across the nonprofit sector against DIA's own operating model and incentives. That inquiry widened, as deep inquiries often do here, into a question we have not yet answered: whether and how board members themselves should be compensated: not as a perk, but as a matter of enabling access to participation in governance by addressing an affordability challenge. We expect to keep working on that in 2026 and beyond.

This was also a year of significant change in the people who carry DIA's work:

Alexandra Tamiko Da Dalt stepped down at our June Annual General Meeting, after years of service to DIA as a volunteer, a Board Chair, and a legal mind who shaped how this organization understands itself. It is hard to picture this Board without her, but since her departure Alex remained close as an advisor. Thank you, Alex!

We welcomed Hanifa Kassam, who joined the Board in the summer, bringing experience in municipal policy, arts governance, restorative justice, and social finance. Hanifa joins Mia George (Director), Alicia Richins (Treasurer), Jenn Chan (CEO and Director), and myself on the Board, and she arrived with a firm insistence that we build our fiscal and operational decision-making framework early in 2026 rather than waiting for later unpredictable future pressures to make the decisions for us.

Our inaugural Director of Operations departed in the same season, and rather than backfill the role as it was structured, we took the opportunity to re-examine what operations at DIA should actually mean at this size and in this season. That reconsideration led us to a deep collaboration with Morgan Bath, who officially joined as Chief Operating Officer in November, and who had already been deeply connected into this work before the title existed. We are glad she is here!



DIA Board at APF Conference

In August, several of us attended a professional futurists' conference at OCADU; an institution where Jenn, Mia, and I were all trained in strategic foresight and innovation. It was illuminating to be back and it was also frustrating... there were moments where our team's voices felt marginalized in a room built for exactly this kind of imagination and thinking.

You can follow Jenn's commitment to explore the experience in a Letter to the Editor of Compass and in an open letter to foresight

practitioners titled "We Are Building Futures We May Never See. The Least We Can Do Is Be Honest About the Present Room."

The title of that letter is, as far as I am concerned, the thesis of this entire report and DIA's profile at this point in time. We cannot promise full realization of the futures we are working toward, but we can be honest about the rooms we are in as we do the work.

This Board is not going to tell you 2025 was an easy year, or a triumph. It was a year of tending, of naming things lost, and of building up new structures that are intended to empower our small organization to stay itself under pressure and in times of scarcity. With your continued support, and the shared wisdom of our community, we remain fuelled by creativity and committed to the long work of change.

With deep gratitude,
Trevor Haldenby Chair,
Board of Directors Department of Imaginary Affairs



Our story and our mission

OUR STORY

Department of Imaginary Affairs (DIA) is a movement-rooted consultancy and learning lab. We work with communities, organizations, and systems to imagine and practice more just, caring, and abundant ways of living today.

VISION

We imagine worlds where people are able to tell the truth about their lived experiences, remain in relationship across difference, and practice care without collapsing into performance, extraction, or domination.

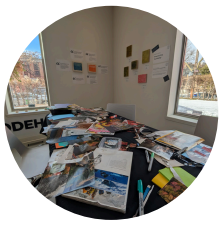
We believe better worlds are not abstract futures to be designed from a distance. They are practiced, moment by moment, through how we listen, gather, tell stories, and make meaning together.

MISSION

We are a storytelling organization and movement-rooted lab that creates Invitations to Better Worlds.

Through stories, installations, gatherings, research, and learning experiences, we help individuals, communities, and institutions build the skills needed to stay present, honest, and connected within complexity, especially in moments where existing systems are breaking down.

Our values



STORY

We believe in the power for stories to change our perceptions of reality and seek to create space for stories to be told and shared in pursuit of collective liberation.



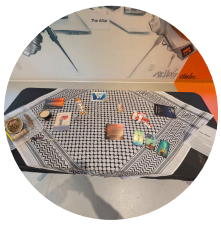
CARE

We believe how we connect and respond to one another is the greatest way to build and maintain the trust needed to dismantle systems of oppression.



HUMILITY

We believe that we are stronger together than apart and that no easy answer is going to solve the problems we are facing towards building equitable futures.



RISK

We believe that we must challenge perceptions of safety and security and push beyond our comfort to secure belonging and inclusion for everyone.



ABUNDANCE

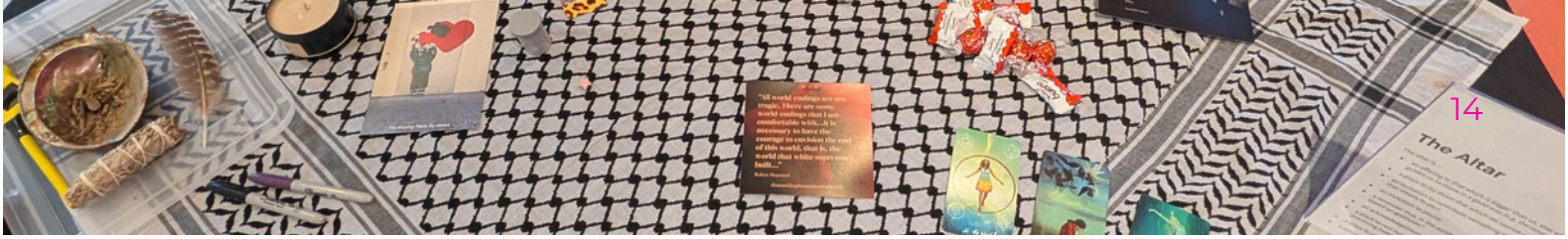
We believe that scarcity mindsets cause us to operate out of fear rather than love, and we need to complicate colonial structures that reinforce competition.

We continue to practice our five core values — Story, Care, Humility, Risk, and Abundance — in how we run our organization, how we show up for partners, and how we hold ourselves accountable when we fall short. They have never been the values that come easiest to us. They're the ones we have to keep choosing, especially when the conditions make choosing them feel costly.

In 2025, we added another dimension to how we practice what we do.
We also revisited who we are at the very core — going all the way back to the beginning. When we incorporated in 2017, this is what we were approved to do:
The objects of the corporation are to advance levels of imaginary arts in relation to citizen-building through:

a) providing educational workshops on citizenship, and
b) working with social service providers to do program development and evaluation.

In many ways, we were a really different organization then — like, seriously, what are imaginary arts? But no matter how much has changed, this will always be part of our origin story, and we are not shedding it. We are evolving from it.



In 2025, we revised our purpose to: The objects of the corporation are to build just, equitable, and sustainable futures:

1) Working with individual and collective stories to create artifacts about identity, inclusion and belonging;

2) Supporting implementation through reciprocal partnerships with social impact organizations and service providers; and

3) Elevating perspectives in order to dismantle systems of oppression.

Revising our purpose this year was one way of making sure that, even without seeing the destination, we're honest about the direction we're walking in.

It was also the year we named four skills that we believe are essential to the worlds we're building — and existential threats to the worlds we're letting go of:

- Telling the Truth
- Weaving the Micro and Macro
- Holding & Metabolizing Contradictions
- Practicing Curiosity

These skills emerged over months of emergent design and were tested with practitioners in December. 2025 was the year that birthed the conditions for them — and that meant we had to practice them ourselves, often before we felt ready. Each skill brought its own challenges: what it asks of us, why we resist it, and what it offers us when we stay with it. It is vital to our work that we never ask anyone else to do something we are not willing to do ourselves. This is what it means to be practitioners — working, living, learning, and loving alongside other practitioners.

No matter how many times we remind ourselves that these are not the values or skills that come easiest to us, it never stops stinging when we fumble. But the work of picking ourselves back up — over and over — is the work that keeps us grounded. Collective liberation is not work that happens overnight. It happens between projects, over thousands of small conversations, and across millions of moments of believing something else is possible than what we have right now.

Our community

The futures we imagine don't come from nowhere. They come from communities — from the people willing to sit in a room, show up on a Friday, and believe that something else is possible. This year, we learned alongside them. We built with them. And we are, as always, humbled to find partners who are willing to share in the work. #thisisimaginationatwork

PARTNERS

- Jane Finch Centre
- Flaunt-It
- Community Foundations of Canada
- OCASI
- East Scarborough Storefront
- OCADU
- Association of Professional Futurists
- Relating Systems Design
- DiverseWorksCo
- The Ethiopian Association of Surrounding GTA
- It’s Ok* World
- Eras Foresight & Consulting Corporation
- World Education Services Foundation
- Future of Good
- Toronto Foundation
- TEQLIP
- McConnell Foundation
- 7Gen
- Laidlaw Foundation
- Impact United Academy
- Greater Good Studios
- Shingwauk Teaching Lodge
- Policing-Free Schools
- Compass Magazine
- Mount Royal University
- World Education Services
- ClimateVerse
- Philanthropic Foundations of Canada
- United Way
- University of Calgary
- IONS
- Community Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador
- C-Space
- OnTask

Imagination is not a solo act. It never has been.

Planting Seeds and Tending Roots

2025 would have been an easy year to choose pure survival mode. For many nonprofits across the sector, funding dwindled, aspirations of equity subsided, momentum for change shifted gears. And we felt all of it.

We have entered a season of scarcity and austerity that DIA has never really lived through before. Survival mode can make sacrifice seductive — it becomes easy to tell yourself that going after easier wins is just being practical, that softening your edges is strategic, that staying quiet about what you believe is a form of protection. Each time we came back to our values, though, we knew that story needed to be released. Going after easy wins would not be sustaining, and it would not be us.

So instead of only focusing on what was right in front of us, we chose to focus our attention on the seeds we had already planted and to tend those roots. That meant investing in existing relationships, existing projects, existing opportunities. At times this felt like it might be the wrong path — like we were missing out on what else was out there. But we chose to invest in the people and places that already knew us, and to grow from within.

In 2025, we deepened and seeded relationships within the philanthropic sector — not specifically to get funding, but to understand what conversations were ripe within the ecosystem and which ones required more tending. We learned a great deal through these conversations, including a harder lesson: that because we are not funders, we are not always welcome or encouraged to make change in this space. So we are learning who our people are, and how we can grow our own capacity and our own roots in the work.

We also had to sit with change in our closest relationships. Some partnerships that began the year with us were over by its end. Others deepened into something more meaningful than we expected. New ones arrived that we hadn't anticipated. Each of these had its season and its reason — but knowing that doesn't always make the transitions easier. We had to learn when to let go and when to stay. We didn't always know which was which in the moment.

As we continue to witness violence escalate across Turtle Island — toward freedom of speech, toward immigrants, toward the working class, the environment, education, healthcare, stories, the list goes on — we keep asking ourselves what futures we are creating, and what futures we are already living in. It is easy to feel lost in what power we have to make a difference.

So we made the difference we could, in the places we already were, with the people already beside us.

If 2024 was the year we committed to right relations, 2025 was the year we felt what that commitment actually costs — and chose it anyway.

An annual report carries an invitation to be honest about where you have been, and sometimes encourages the shiniest stories to surface. But our work is not our work without the hard parts. We cannot pretend we have not learned from mistakes, or that we have it all figured out. We don't. What we have is each other, the practices we keep returning to, and the stubborn belief that something else is possible.
That has to be enough to keep going. And for now, it is.

Our Work

Not every seed we planted bore visible fruit, and not every project landed the way we hoped. But across all of it — the conferences and classrooms, the dinner tables and park benches, the grant applications that succeeded and the one that didn't — we were practicing the same thing: showing up for the work and the people already in relationship with us, and trusting that was enough.

A year of tending looked like many things.

It looked like gathering 20 people at Wildseed Collective and asking what it means to migrate toward better worlds — not as metaphor, but as practice. It looked like three artists from Jane and Finch making their own invitations, and a community dinner where people moved slowly between them. It looked like a living room built inside a systems design conference, where strangers sat on couches and left reflections for people they would never meet. And 16 cards hidden across a futurists' conference that most people never found — a reminder that not every experiment works the way you hope.

It looked like Design Labs on summer Fridays with Youth co-designing a next phase without confirmed funding yet, grounding governance work in oral storytelling and Indigenous ways of knowing. It looked like Youth Researchers giving more than a year to research that is personally meaningful to them, demonstrating that lived experience belongs at the centre of systems change work.

It looked like returning to work that once belonged to me in a different way — sitting with the Black Creek Fair Economies team to map the next chapter of local economies work, looking honestly at the roots, the fruits that were ready and ripe, and the ones still green.

It looked like conversations in the philanthropic sector not to ask for money, but to understand what questions were ripening. It looked like speaking in front of Queen's Park, presenting in Halifax and Chicago, submitting writing to spaces we may not always be welcomed back into, and applying for a fellowship we didn't get — and naming that plainly, because the vision hasn't gone away.
Underneath all of it ran a question we kept returning to: what does it look like to practice a better world right here, right now, with the people already beside us? The projects that follow are our best attempts at an answer.

Invitations to Better Worlds

Being awarded a Vital Signs grant from Toronto Foundation and Cultural Hotspots funding from the City of Toronto gave us something rare and necessary this year: permission to slow down. Together, these grants allowed us to spend real time asking what IBW actually is, where it fits within the rest of our work, and what we truly want it to become.

IBW started out feeling like self-indulgence — like finding community was a luxury we were allowing ourselves amid a hard season in the sector. The longer we sat with that question, the clearer it became: all of our work has always been invitations to better worlds. It always has been. Naming that, and building toward it intentionally, has changed how we understand everything else we do.

Artist-in-Residency Program

In 2025, we hosted our first-ever Artist-in-Residency program, working with three artists from the Jane and Finch community — Taejah Trinidad Daniel (Coach Milly), Vanna Nguyen, and Rod Osei-Nuako (Reezy) — to develop their own interpretations of Invitations to Better Worlds. The residency culminated in a Community Storytelling Dinner at Flaunt-It Studios, where 15 guests moved through art-based storytelling stations, spending time with each artist's vision of what better worlds could look like.

This project also planted seeds for what comes next: a new partnership with The Village at Black Creek to extend this work further, supported by funding from the Toronto Arts Council.



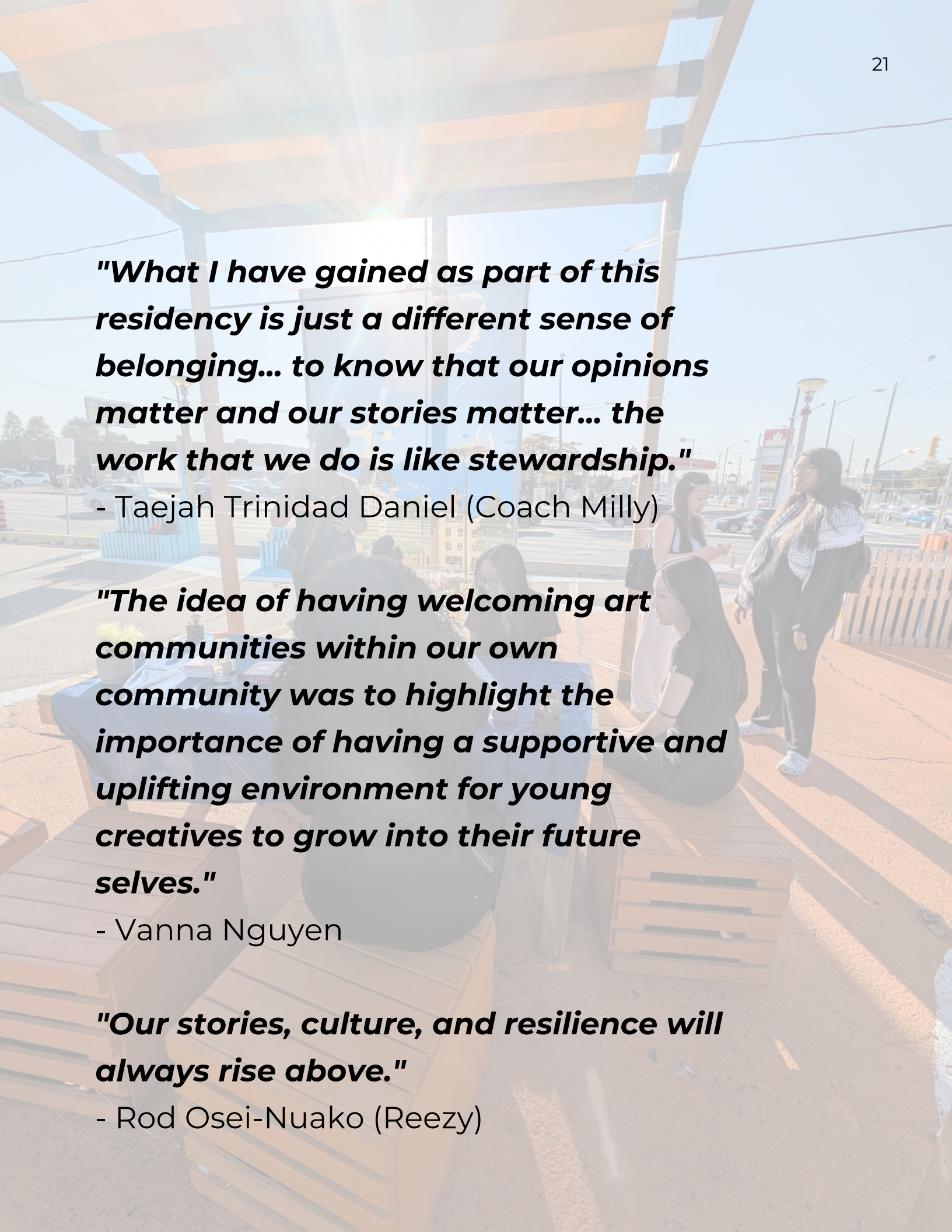


IBW Artist-in-Residency, 2025


THE MAGICIAN


CANVAS





"What I have gained as part of this residency is just a different sense of belonging... to know that our opinions matter and our stories matter... the work that we do is like stewardship."
- Taejah Trinidad Daniel (Coach Milly)

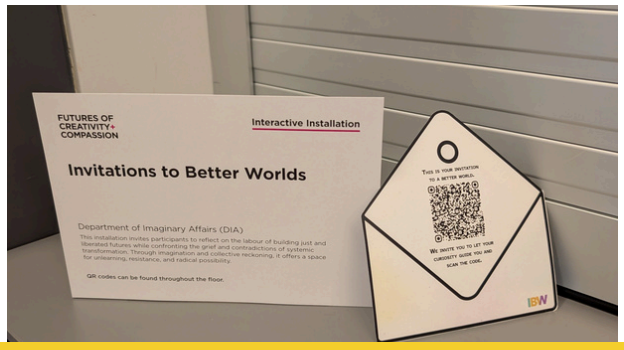
"The idea of having welcoming art communities within our own community was to highlight the importance of having a supportive and uplifting environment for young creatives to grow into their future selves."
- Vanna Nguyen

"Our stories, culture, and resilience will always rise above."
- Rod Osei-Nuako (Reezy)

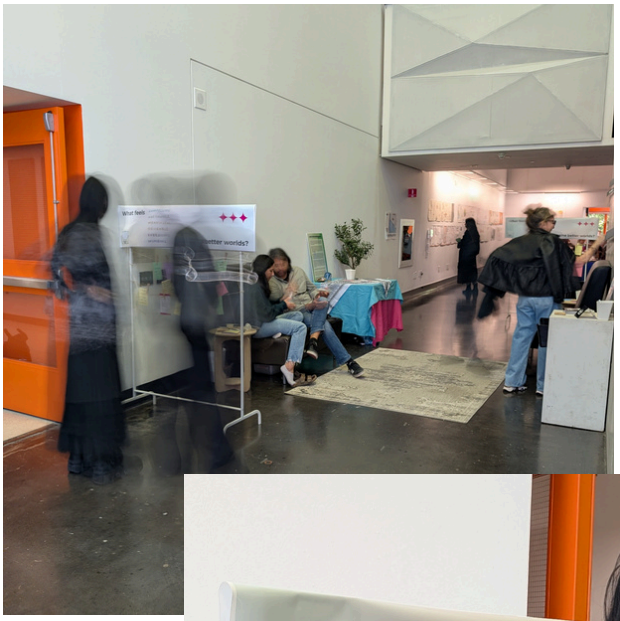
IBW Installations

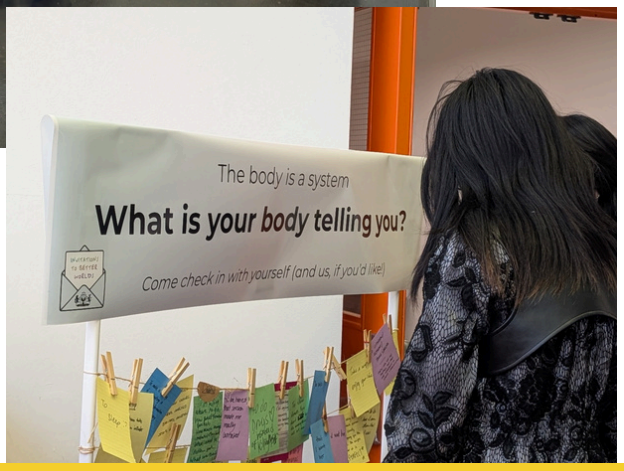
August — Association of Professional Futurists Conference, OCADU

We spread 16 hand-designed invitation cards across the conference space, intended as a self-discovery scavenger hunt — small invitations to deepen individual experience amid a busy conference program. A few were found. Most weren't. We had hoped the mystery would spark more curiosity than it did. It taught us something important: subtle design doesn't fare well in contexts of overstimulation. We filed that lesson and kept going.



IBW Installation @ APF, 2025



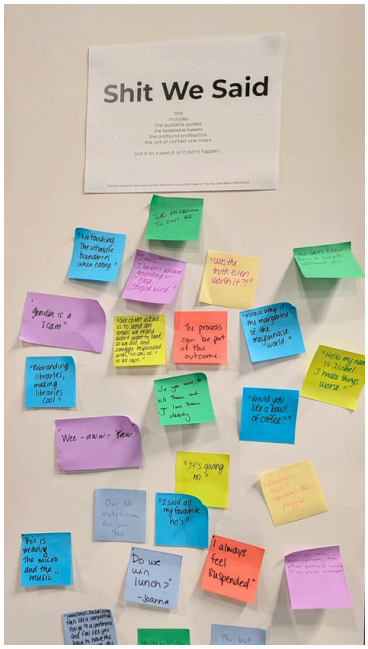


IBW Installation @ RSD, 2025

October — Relating Systems Design Conference, OCADU

We tried something different at RSD: a living room. Couches, a rug, tables with reflection prompts and interactive installations — a deliberate pause built into the middle of a three-day conference. We invited participants to notice their own nervous systems within the context of systems design work. Over the three days, people stopped, read what others had written, and left their own reflections behind. The room held something. That felt like enough.

Gatherings & Convenings



Migration as Practice — IBW Gathering
December | Wildseed Collective

Our most significant gathering of 2025 began with a definition that stopped us in our tracks:

"Migration is the movement of people, animals, or things from one place to another. It can mean humans moving across borders, animals changing habitats by season, or software and data moving to a new system."

We began to recognize how vital it is that we are all able to migrate from the worlds we know toward new and potentially better ones. That requires imagination, grief, and care — and it brought us back to the roots of our organization, which has always valued and honoured migration stories.





Migration as Practice was an invitation-only gathering of 20 people, each invited by someone they knew and trusted, who was invited by us. Held at Wildseed Collective, it was the first gathering designed explicitly to introduce and practice the four IBW skills — Telling the Truth, Weaving the Micro and Macro, Holding & Metabolizing Contradictions, and Practicing Curiosity — in the context of this particular moment: immigration across Turtle Island, and what it means to cross thresholds toward better worlds together. Partially funded by our Vital Signs grant from Toronto Foundation, this gathering was both a culmination of a year of design and a beginning of something we're still unfolding.

Migration as Practice, 2025

Learning, Facilitating and Coaching

Invitations to Better Worlds

We started 2025 thinking we might hold a large-scale IBW conference. We held co-design sessions in January and March to begin shaping what that could look like — and through that process, we realized the gathering we truly wanted wasn't one we could produce at that scale, not yet. So we shifted.

We focused on finding different, more intentional ways to anchor IBW in our work. Migration as Practice, the Artist-in-Residency, the installations — all of it grew from that pivot.



IBW Co-Design Sessions, 2025

Day of Learning, 2025





Day of Learning — Truth and Reconciliation Day

September | Biidaasige Park

We held our third annual Day of Learning for Truth and Reconciliation Day, this time in the newly opened Biidaasige Park. Biidaasige — pronounced "bee-daw-si-geh," meaning "sunlight shining toward us" in Anishinaabemowin — is located near Cherry Street on the island of Ookwemin Minising, meaning "place of the black cherry trees." The park celebrates waterway restoration and reconciliation, and spending the day there with our community of practitioners felt like the right place to be.

More Learning, Facilitating and Coaching

Black Creek Fair Economies (BCFE) — Strategic Planning
Jane Finch Centre

This work carries a particular kind of weight. Black Creek Fair Economies is a local economies initiative rooted in the Jane and Finch community — and work that Jenn helped build in an earlier chapter of her practice. Returning to it as a facilitator asked something different: to hold what we knew about its history while making space for where it needed to go next.

We facilitated a strategic planning process grounded in community and existing stories — looking at the roots of the work, the fruits that were ready and ripe, and the ones still green. Not every piece of work has to be new to be meaningful. Sometimes the most generative thing you can do is help something that already exists find its own next form.



BCFE, 2025



Food for Good Project, 2025

Food for Good Project
Strategy Session
February | East Scarborough Storefront

We facilitated a strategy session to help potential partners identify the ground they were ready to work and move forward on together. Rooted in understanding different roles and perspectives, we used the Three Sisters — the Indigenous growing practice of planting corn, beans, and squash together — as a metaphor for how partnerships grow when each element supports the others. It was a reminder that the conditions for collaboration matter as much as the intent.

Even More Learning, Facilitating and Coaching

Jane Finch Bridging Education and Employment (JFBEE)
Jane Finch Centre

Our relationship with the Jane Finch Centre is one of the longest-running in DIA's history, and 2025 deepened it in ways we hadn't fully anticipated.
Over the summer, we held a series of Design Labs on Fridays and Saturdays with Youth who have been part of JFBEE and are now actively co-designing its next phase — even without confirmed funding for implementation yet. Rather than spending time talking about governance models and theories of change in the abstract, we practiced being in relationship with one another. That meant grounding the work in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, bringing in art-based practices and oral storytelling, and honoring when and how contradictions showed up — rather than smoothing them over. The contradictions were part of the material.

This is what it looks like to practice the futures we want rather than just plan for them: showing up on a Friday with young people who are giving their time to something that doesn't yet have a guaranteed outcome, and trusting that the process itself is the point.

Alongside the Design Labs, we provided direct coaching to Youth Researchers who have each dedicated more than a year to a piece of research that is personally meaningful to them. These young people are doing something that many institutions still resist naming clearly: demonstrating that lived experience is not just a welcome addition to systems change research — it is a vital, irreplaceable part of it. Watching them hold that truth, and build on it, was one of the most grounding parts of our year.



JFBEE, 2025

Speaking & Storytelling



Conference Presentations & Public Talks

In May, Jenn co-presented on equitable futures alongside Tanya Chung-Fook at the bi-annual Community Foundations of Canada conference in Halifax. In October, Jenn spoke in front of Queen's Park as part of a police-free schools rally. In November, Jenn attended LIVID Con hosted by Greater Good Studios in Chicago, participating in a panel on the state of design.

Writing & Publications

Jenn contributed a piece to Compass Magazine and submitted a chapter to an academic systems change book, to be published in 2027. Both pieces extend DIA's thinking into spaces beyond our immediate community of practice — planting seeds in rooms and conversations that we may never know the impact of.





The Stories of Us — Digital Archive
thestoriesofus.ca

We redesigned The Stories of Us website into a proper digital archive of the work we began in 2018 — over 150 stories, in more than 20 languages, by Newcomers for Newcomers. It lives now as a record of where we came from, and a reminder that storytelling has always been the root of everything else.

Our individual & collective responsibility to equitable futures

In 2025, we were reminded — more than once, more than we wanted to be — that imagining equitable futures is not a project with a timeline. It is a practice with no guaranteed return.

The world did not get easier. Across Turtle Island and beyond, we watched systems of oppression tighten their grip: on immigrants, on education, on healthcare, on the freedom to name what is true. The ongoing genocide in Palestine continued to shape our understanding of how colonization operates — not as history, but as present tense. We cannot unsee how settler colonialism has impacted these lands and continues to block collective liberation. We will not pretend otherwise.

Closer to home, we witnessed the sector that has held much of this equity work begin to retreat. Funding dried up. Language softened. Organizations that had committed to transformation found themselves negotiating survival. We understand that tension — we lived inside it ourselves this year. And we hold compassion for the impossible positions that scarcity creates.
But we also have to be honest: the retreat from equity is not neutral. When institutions step back from this work, it is communities who bear the cost. And when organizations like ours are asked — implicitly or explicitly — to soften what we believe in order to remain welcome in certain rooms, that is a form of harm too.

So we keep returning to the question of what our responsibility actually is.

Our work brings us to the discomfort of knowing hard truths and choosing not to look away. It requires us to reflect on our own power, privilege, and positionality — and to invite others to do the same. We do this imperfectly but consistently. We would never ask anyone else to go somewhere we are not willing to go ourselves.

Imagination work remains, as we named last year, a recurring loop of care and grief. When we care enough to imagine something different, we must also grieve that we don't yet have it — and may never see it in our lifetimes. That grief did not get lighter in 2025. If anything, we felt it more acutely. And we're learning that feeling it more acutely might not be a sign that something is wrong. It might be a sign that we are paying attention.

As an organization working toward collective liberation and systems change, we may never see the full results of what we are building. We are planting for futures we won't live to inhabit. That has always been true. What 2025 added was the question of whether we could keep planting even when the ground felt harder, the resources thinner, and the welcome less certain.

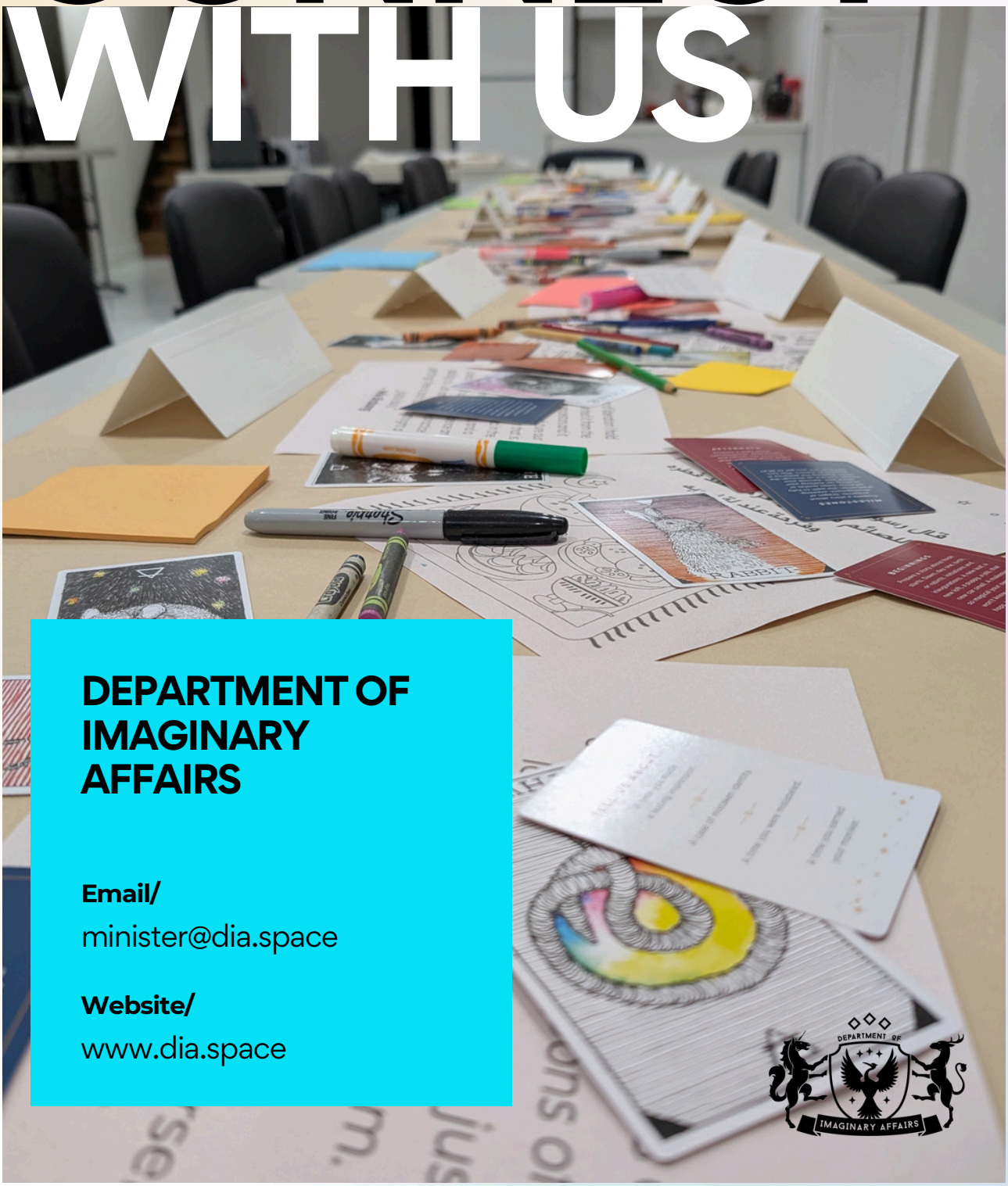
Our answer, imperfect and ongoing, is yes.

Not because we have it figured out. Not because we are certain it will work. But because we know that equitable futures are not waiting to be discovered somewhere out there — they are practiced, moment by moment, in how we show up, how we tell the truth, how we tend our relationships, and how we choose, again and again, to believe that something else is possible.

That practice is our responsibility. Individual and collective. In every season, including the hard ones.

Especially in the hard ones.

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