MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) is an academic and research center that facilitates artist-thinkers' exploration of art's broad, complex, global history in conjunction with culture, science, technology, and design via rigorous critical artistic practice and practice-driven theory.

Academic Program

ACT is one of the five discipline groups in the Department of Architecture; Architecture oversees the graduate program and faculty appointments and promotions.

Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology offers a highly selective, two-year Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology (SMACT) degree. There were seven students enrolled in the graduate program at the beginning of the academic year and three graduated in June. Four students will enter their second year of study in fall 2015. Ten of the 68 applicants to the graduate program for the 2015–2016 academic year were offered admission and one was waitlisted. All 10 of the candidates offered admission accepted.

ACT hosted its fourth open house for prospective applicants on November 13. More than 115 people registered for the event and 55 attended, an increase of 28% over the prior year. The open house included faculty research presentations, an overview of the application process, a presentation on financial aid by Student Financial Services, a tour of the ACT facilities, a presentation by the List Visual Arts Center, and a reception. The Department of Architecture's open house for admitted graduate students was held April 9. In addition to presentations organized by Architecture, ACT hosted a conversation with current ACT graduate students and offered a facilities and resources tour. Of 10 admitted students, three were able to attend the open house in person and six participated in the graduate student conversation via Webex video conferencing, resulting in a 90% participation rate among students admitted for fall 2015.

ACT Academic Program

In addition to its core graduate program, ACT offers electives for MIT undergraduates, Master of Architecture (MArch) students, and graduate students from other disciplines.

At the undergraduate level, ACT offers a HASS concentration and minor. In the 2014–2015 academic year, 31 students were ACT HASS concentrators and three students were HASS minors. Among senior concentrators, the single major most represented was Course 2 (Mechanical Engineering); junior concentrators were split among Course 4 (Architecture), Course 6-2 (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science), and Course 7 (Biology).

Of the 174 students enrolled in 18 ACT subjects in AY2015, 81 (47%) were graduate students and 93 (53%) were undergraduates; 43% of students taking ACT subjects were majors within the School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P). After SA+P, the single major most represented in ACT classes was Mechanical Engineering (Course 2), at 13%.

International travel was an integral component of 4.368/4.369 Seminar in Public Art. Thirteen students, the teaching assistant, and Associate Professor and ACT Director Gediminas Urbonas traveled to Reykjavík, Iceland, to conduct research related to the creation of a public intervention for a decommissioned United States Naval Air Station at Asbru, Iceland. Travel was also an important part of 4.390 ACT Studio. Six ACT graduate students, Professor Urbonas, and two members of the ACT staff traveled to Venice, Italy, to the 56th Venice Biennale. The trip offered the opportunity for our international student group to experience a global contemporary art event early in their careers and to benefit from the presence of ACT alumni and from MIT's role as artist, curator, and commissioner. The introductory and advanced photography classes took field trips to New York City. ACT funded all of the class travel.

ACT offered two special courses. 4.S32 One-Person Gestures: Prototyping Gustav Metzger's Dome(s) on Extinction was taught by Lecturer Gabriel Kahan and offered during the fall and spring terms. 4.S33 Unmanageability: Pathless Realities and Approaches was co-taught by Kahan and Lecturer Howard Chen and was offered during the spring term; the course will be published on OpenCourseWare by the Department of Architecture.

ACT graduate students met with Professor Hashim Sarkis, who became dean of the School of Architecture and Planning in January. In addition, the MIT Visiting Committee met with ACT students during its visit in April.

Research

Gediminas Urbonas is involved in a number of projects focused on understanding the impact of ecological change and the relationships between species. For example, Zooetics is a research program exploring "new ways to engage human knowledge and research with other life forms." His work has led to projects in Tasmania, Stockholm, Reykjavík, and in Kaunas, Lithuania. Additional research interests include: network and participatory technologies; sensorial media and public space; and alternative planning design integration. These interests have prompted research in Sierra Maestra, Cuba; Stockholm; and Milan.

Class of 1922 Career Development Assistant Professor Azra Akšamija continued her research on contemporary art and architecture; history and the theory of art and architecture; and Islamic art and architecture. Akšamija collaborated on the group project *Yarn-dez-vous*, an interactive textile performance designed to map identities and foster cross-cultural encounters; and the Future Heritage Lab, which uses technology to promote and encourage cross-cultural understanding.

Research Affiliates

During AY2015 Research Affiliate Javier Anguera continued the development of the Contemporary Culture Index (ccindex.info), "an online, open-access bibliographical database indexing international journals and periodicals." With a database of 18,363 records, the index includes art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and social science. As a free agent media archivist, Anguera coordinated Professor Renée Green's solo exhibition at Schindler House in Los Angeles and group exhibitions at the Museum der Moderne (Salzburg), Centre Pompidou (Paris), and The Studio Museum in Harlem (New York City).

Florian Hecker was a research affiliate during the spring semester. In September he was appointed as a Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Edinburgh and over the year, Mr. Hecker performed *Reformation* in South Korea, *Formulation* in Paris, *Chimerization* and *Hinge* in Minneapolis, *A Script for Machine Synthesis* in Amsterdam, as well as *3 Channel Chronics* and *Hecker Leckey Sound Voice Chimera* in Berlin. In addition, he presented work in Germany, Italy, and Austria. Hecker received an artistic residency at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris. Hecker continues to collaborate with MIT professors Renée Green, Stefan Helmreich, Antonio Torralba, Josh McDermott, and Gerald Kidd.

Neil Leonard was a research affiliate during both terms of the academic year. He continued to develop contributions to the website associated with his collaboration with Gediminas Urbonas, *Resonating MIT*. His work involved recordings in the atrium of the Department of Mechanical Engineering's Pratt School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, Wright Brothers Wind Tunnel, and Stata Center. Leonard also held a concert and sound installation in ACT's Bartos Theatre in the fall.

Daanish Masood's appointment as research affiliate was for the spring term. Masood's work focused on his activities as a principal in BeAnotherLab. He organized the Empathic Technology Workshop, a convention of "practitioners and researchers from the field of neuroscience, physics, dramaturgy, storytelling, virtual reality and peace building" to develop new methodologies for developing empathy across cultures. Masood participated in MAS.826J /21M.581J Projects in Music & Media: Empathy, 8th Art, and the Future of Experience; he presented *Embodied Narratives* at the Tribeca Film Festival; and is part of the team creating UN Live, an online museum.

Peter Schmitt was a research affiliate for the academic year and worked closely with Professor Akšamija. Schmitt participated in the *CULTURUNNERS* workshop in October, was a consultant for the recording and video technology related to the creation of storyteller hats in Akšamija's class, helped develop the "artistic concept" for the mobile seating that was a part of the *CULTURUNNERS* exhibit at the Armory Show in New York City, acted as fabrication consultant for the 3D printed lace project, and was a guest critic in 4.314/4.315 Culture Fabric.

Gloria Sutton was appointed as a research affiliate for the academic year. She is an assistant professor at Northeastern University, a curator, and an art historian. In the spring the MIT Press published *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek's Move-Drome and Expanded Cinema*. Professor Sutton participated in the international conference, Labor in a Single Shot, which was organized by Boston University and the Goethe Institute. She also provided studio critiques to ACT graduate students and served as a thesis reader.

Nomeda Urboniene continued her research affiliation. During the year she created the *Levanger Kino Project* exhibition, a series of interventions in Norway; curated the *Women Faculty* exhibition for SA+P; continued her research projects Levanger-Kino and Zooetics; taught courses at the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Italy and at the Oslo and Akershus University College in Norway; and delivered presentations in London, Vilnius, and Stockholm.

Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection

Jeremy Grubman, the Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection (CAVSSC) project archivist, has worked diligently to identify funding, process the collection, create a finding aid, digitize a number of collection pieces, and respond to research requests. Key accomplishments include:

- Over 5,000 folders, 110 boxes, and 120,000 to 150,000 individual documents were reviewed to produce the CAVSSC Finding Aid, which allows patrons to explore collection contents more easily and provides visitors with some historical context

- Managing the digitization of 247 posters, prints, and original works on paper, five portfolios, and the preparation and delivery of 235 videotapes to Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, for digitization

- A diverse range of funding activities that led to the submission of two grant proposals to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Dedalus Foundation, the cultivation of a high-net-worth private donor, and outreach to former Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) fellows. While the grant proposals were not funded, ACT received encouraging feedback and will be re-submitting a proposal to NEA for funding.

- The CAVSSC archivist responds to an average of three to five reference requests per week and over the year has provided research or materials to a number of publications and exhibitions, including:

  - *Tacet, or Cochlear Vertigo*, e-exhibition/essay for Council, January 2015

  - *Dissolve into Comprehension: Works and Writings*, Jack Burnham (ed. Melissa Ragain), MIT Press, March 2015

  - Numerous obituaries and tribute articles for Otto Piene, including MIT News and ACT's Otto Piene Memorial page, July 2014

  - Gyorgy Kepes Prize website, Council for the Arts at MIT, August 2014; and "The New Landscape: Experiments in Light" (pamphlet for Gyorgy Kepes exhibition at the Cantor Center), Stanford University Libraries, October 2014

  - ACT contributed to the exhibitions *Otto Piene: More Sky* at Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, July 2014; the MIT Otto Piene Memorial, November 2015; *Experiences of Seeing* at Groton School's Brodigan Gallery, December 2014; *Otto Piene: Between Fire and Sky* at Ralph Goertz and Institut fur Kunstdokumentation, Dusseldorf, January 2015 (documentary film); *Otto Piene and Electronic Art in New England* at the Boston CyberArts Gallery, February 2015; and *The Center in Print: Tracing the History of CAVS Events and Exhibitions Through Its Poster Art* at the MIT Rotch Library Gallery, June 2015

ACT Lecture Series and Public Events

The Monday Night Lecture Series continued for its 10th year. The lectures are open to the general public and attract a broad range of speakers and sizable audiences. The director shapes the content of the lecture series, and during AY2015, the directorship transitioned

from Professor Green in the fall to Professor Urbonas in the spring. During the fall, the lecture series was part of Professor Green's Cinematic Migrations research project and in the spring, the lecture series was developed as a component of Professor Urbonas's Toward Civic Art research program. ACT hosted a total of 13 lectures and 25 speakers from MIT, Harvard, and other colleges and universities within the US and abroad.

Fall 2014: Cinematic Migrations

During the fall term, the topics explored included: unmanned aircraft systems, their hundred-year history and rediscovery; cultural collaborations between artists and scientists from the United States and the Middle East; discussion of an Islamic cemetery in Austria and the importance of co-existence with multiple cultures; performance work referencing photographer Ansel Adams's invention, the Zone System; new approaches to citizen media, instigated by an intersection of modern social dynamics and rapid multiscreen content consumption; and contemplations on extinction and auto-destructive/creative processes related to the work of Gustav Metzger:

- Marko Peljhan, artist, professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at UC Santa Barbara, and director of Systemics Lab, MAT/ART, UC Santa Barbara: "Dronological: the Art and Science of Unmanned Systems," (September 22)

- Azra Akšamija, ACT; Ava Ansari: artist and Edge of Arabia associate curator; Carol Huh, curator of contemporary art, Freer & Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution; Daanish Masood, advisor, political affairs and media, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; Ahmed Mater, artist, medical doctor, and Edge of Arabia co-founder; Matthew Mazzotta, SMVisS '09, artist; Regina Möller, artist, author, and founding editor of *Regina*; Stephen Stapleton: artist, curator, and Edge of Arabia co-founder: "CULTURUNNERS@MIT" (October 6)

- Azra Akšamija, ACT; Bernardo Bader, architect and principal of bernardo bader architekten, Dornbirn, Austria; Eva Grabherr, director, Center for Immigration and Integration in Vorarlberg, Austria; Nasser Rabbat, Aga Khan Professor and director, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT; "Homecoming After Death: An Islamic Cemetery In Austria" (October 20)

- Kelly Nipper, artist and lecturer, ACT: "Tessa Pattern Takes a Picture" (November 17)

- Gabriel Kahan, filmmaker, producer, and lecturer, ACT: "Regenarratives" (November 24)

- Patrick Charpenel, director, Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico; Daniela Pérez: independent curator, Mexico: "Gustav Metzger's Dome(s) Project" (December 8)

Spring 2015: Toward Civic Art

Toward Civic Art investigated the critical spatial practices that claim the many definitions of public art through a diverse array of visual forms argued by key practitioners across the disciplines of art, pedagogy, architecture, and urban studies to identify the tools, tactics, and consequences of actively reclaiming public space.

Investigations included a critical assessment of how the role of art as critical instigator of change has been subverted, presentations of ways to involve citizens as change agents altering the shape of their environment, and an analysis of art and the natural environment:

- Doris Sommer, founder of Cultural Agents, Harvard University; and Ira Jewell Williams, professor of romance languages and literatures, and director of graduate studies in Spanish, Harvard University: "The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities" (March 2)

- Jeanne van Heeswijk, Keith Haring Fellow in Art and Activism, Bard College, and visual artist: "Fields of Interactions" (March 4)

- Constantin Pecou, architect and co-founder, atelier d'architecture autogérée, Paris; Doina Petrescu, professor of architecture and design activism, University of Sheffield, and co-founder, atelier d'architecture autogérée: "Co-Producing the City" (March 9)

- Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol, advisors, Jan van Eyck Academy at the School of Missing Studies, Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam: "Proposition for Reclaiming a Space" (March 16)

- Rikke Luther, Learning Site, Copenhagen: "Public Place in its Meltdown Area" (April 6)

- Claire Pentecost, professor and chair, Department of Photography, School of the Art Institute of Chicago: "The Quick and the Dirty" (April 13)

- Michael Rakowitz, SMVisS '98, associate professor, Department of Art Theory & Practice, Northwestern University: "On Redirective Practice, Problem-Solving and Trouble-Making" (April 27)

Public Programming

ACT hosted several events that free and open to the public:

- *CULTURUNNERS* (October 1–6). *CULTURUNNERS* was a week of workshops and public events at MIT that represented a multidisciplinary gathering of artists, designers, filmmakers, scientists, curators, and scholars with novel approaches to cross-cultural exchanges between the United States and the Middle East. Applied workshops were held October 1–3, a Storytelling Symposium was held October 5, and the organizers participated in ACT's Monday Night Lecture Series on October 6.

- Otto Piene Memorial (November 8). The School of Architecture and Planning, the Program in Art, Culture and Technology, MIT Museum Studio, and fellows and alumni of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies hosted and organized a memorial service for Professor Emeritus and CAVS Director Otto Piene. Piene who died in Berlin on July 17, 2014, directed CAVS from 1974 to 1994. The memorial included a service in Kresge Auditorium, installations of Piene's work in Lobbies 7 and 10, a repast in the Bush Room, and audio recollections by friends and family.

- Neil Leonard *True Bread* Sound Installation and *For Kounellis* Concert (November 19). *TrueBread* is a 10-channel sound installation based on Leonard's collaboration with Cuban street vendors. *For Kounellis* is an electronic work featuring samples from Jannis Kounellis's sculpture, voice, live electronics and soprano saxophone. The installation and concert were held in Bartos Theatre.

- Prototyping Gustav Metzger's Dome(s) on Extinction (December 9). Members of the extended MIT community were invited to participate in the design of a temporary and self-destructive learning space focused on extinction.

- Empathic Technology Workshop (March 1–2). Research Affiliate Daanish Masood and BeAnotherLab held a workshop designed to explore and develop methodologies for creating empathy across cultures and communities.

Faculty Accomplishments

Exhibitions, Performances, and Commissions

Joan Jonas was selected as the U.S. representative to the 56th Venice Biennale, "the world's most prestigious contemporary art event." Jonas's exhibition, *They Come to Us Without a Word*, received a "Special Mention" award. The installation was commissioned by the List Visual Arts Center and co-curated by List director Paul Ha, and former Architecture faculty member Ute Meta Bauer, currently director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Singapore.

Renée Green's solo exhibition *Begin Again, Begin Again* was presented at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House in Los Angeles. She also participated in the following group exhibitions: *Une histoire: art, architecture, design. Des annes 1980 a nos jours.* (Centre Pompidou, Paris); *Art/Histories* (Museum der Moderne, Salzburg); *Under Another Name* (The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York); and *Beyond the Monument* (Le Commun, Bâtiment d'art contemporain, Geneva). Two of her films were screened: *Endless Dreams and Water Between* (Politics of Attachment, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) and *Begin Again, Begin Again* (Ooga Booga #2, Los Angeles).

Gediminas Urbonas had multiple group exhibitions, including *Vegetation as a Political Agent* (PAV/Parco Arte Vivente, Turin, Italy), *Nouvelle Génération* (FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque, France), *(re)Construction of Friendship* (European Capital of Culture, Riga, Latvia), and *Disobedience Archive (The Park)* (SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul, Turkey).

Azra Akšamija's solo exhibition, *Future Heritage Collection,* was presented at the JAVA Gallery within the International Theatre Festival MESS in Sarajevo, Bosnia. She also participated in the group exhibitions *CULTURUNNERS* (Armory Show, New York); *Islamopolitan* (Superstudio, Milan; Istanbul Design Week, Istanbul); *Yarn-dez-vous* (*CULTURUNNERS*, MIT Storytelling Symposium); *New Hamburg Kunstgalerie* (New Hamburg, Veddel/Hamburg, Germany); *Sammlungsalphabet* (Gallery for Contemporary Art, Leipzig, Germany); *Kunst ist Leben, The Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2013* (Vorarlberg Museum, Bregenz, Austria); *FACK MSUV—Performing the Museum as a Common* (Museum of Contemporary Art of Voivodina/Ex-Museum of Revolution, Novi Sad, Voivodina, Serbia).

Lecturer Kelly Nipper had an exhibition at the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, California (*The Avant-Garde Collection)* and at the Queensland University of Technology Art Museum in Brisbane, Australia (*Performance Now: The First Decade of the New Century).*

Lectures and Symposia

Faculty lectured widely in Austria, Bosnia, Colombia, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Publications

Duke University Press published Renée Green's book *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings*, which was also the subject of an Artforum.com "500 Words" column; and *Wire* published Green's article "Getting Closer While Waiting: Epiphanies."

Gediminas Urbonas published *Uto-Pia*, which charts the methods of artistic research projects and the use of experimental media and communication techniques to address and respond to the environmental damage left by industrial and military interventions in the Turku archipelago of the Baltic Sea. *Uto-Pia* was published by the Contemporary Art Archipelago in Finland.

Azra Akšamija published "Identity Edits: Flagging Territories with Religious Architecture" in *Archithese* and "Mosque Manifesto—Propositions for Spaces of Coexistence," an invited paper at the international symposium Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century: Global Perspectives at the American University of Sharjah, UAE. The Sharjah Museums Department organized the symposium in collaboration with the American University of Sharjah.

Student Awards, Exhibitions, and Publications

The students enrolled in 4.S32 One-Person Gestures exhibited their final projects in the MIT Museum Studio in May.

ACT provided funding for student, faculty, and staff exhibitions as part of the continuation of its pilot grant program: Akšamija's *Yarn-dez-vous,* Kelly Nipper's performance piece *Spatial Presentation and Performance Art,* and staff member Seth Avecilla's IAP course MetaPiano. The ACT pilot program also supported the end-of-year graduate exhibition, *It Could Be an Algorithm*, which consisted of Ursula August's *Empathy & Public Policy;* Gedney Barclay and Anne Macmillan's performance piece *Of Of Of*; Adi Hollander's installation *Karaka;* Alan Kwan's *Dancing Umbrella*; Ian Soroka's film, *A Dry Country*; and Bjorn Sparrman's *Twin Trajectories*.

ACT graduate student Alan Kwan won the first place award for the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize for the Visual Arts for his installation entitled "Shadow Donation." Second-year student Anne Macmillan won the Laya and Jerome B. Wiesner Award for Achievement in and Contributions to the Arts at MIT.

Resource Development

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology has been actively seeking funding for the CAVSSC and submitted grants to the NEA and the Dedalus Foundation.

In addition, ACT worked with the assistant dean for resource development to cultivate several high-net-worth individuals to support the collection and other ACT research programs.

Communications

ACT has been aggressively developing its social media presence. During the academic year, our number of Facebook "likes" grew from 1,700 in September to 3,000 at year-end, a 76.5% increase; and Instagram grew from two posts and 22 followers in July to 104 posts and 197 followers in June. We initiated a Storify in July with the death of former CAVS Director, Otto Piene. The initial story had 733 views. In May, Storify was re-ignited in conjunction with the Venice Biennale. Since May, three stories have been posted and received 120 to 257 views. The heightened integration of social media into ACT's email announcements has led to increased engagement by readers as "opens" have remained 30% or higher, but click-throughs have gone from about 5% to a range of 7–13%.

To increase ACT's visibility in the Media Lab complex, we launched the "Visibility Project." In June, 10 banners displaying projects created in the Mars Lab's fabrication area went on exhibit. ACT and the Center for Bits and Atoms jointly curated the exhibition.

Facilities

ACT's use of the Venus Lab was reduced to the common area and four faculty studios. The balance of the space is used by the Center for Advanced Urbanism.

A new ceramics facility was created in the Mars Lab and the electronics lab was moved from the Cube to the Mars Lab.

The Cube is one of ACT's primary classroom, presentation, and work spaces. In the fall, all seven graduate student studios were moved into the Cube, increasing the intensity of the Cube's use.

Personnel

Gediminas Urbonas was on paid professional leave in the fall.

Professor Green ended her term as ACT director January 15, and Professor Urbonas began his three-year term as director on January 16.

Kelly Nipper joined ACT as lecturer in September. She taught 4.361/4.362 Performance Art Workshop and 4.354/4.355 Introduction to Video and Related Media in the fall; and during the spring term she taught 4.301 Introduction to Artistic Experimentation and 4.373/4.374 Plan by Eye: Video Dance. Gabriel Kahan continued as a lecturer for the

2014–2015 academic year, teaching two seminars; and Howard Chen co-taught a class with Mr. Kahan during the spring term.

Laura Chichisan resigned as Communications and Public Programming staff member and was replaced during the fall by Ilse Damkoehler and permanently by ACT alumna Amanda Moore, SMVisS '11, in February. Val Grimm resigned as academic assistant and was replaced by Jessica Anderson.

Gediminas Urbonas
Director, Program in Art, Culture and Technology
Associate Professor of Architecture