

MIT Museum

It is gratifying to observe that the MIT Museum continues to grow: the record attendance of 127,286 in FY2015, a 2.85% increase over FY2014, was achieved in spite of an exceptionally snowy winter that saw virtually all cultural attractions in New England lose significant numbers of visitors in January and February. This strong showing was due in part to the popularity of the Museum's special exhibitions 5000 Moving Parts (2014) and Images of Discovery (2015). The latter exhibition features closely coupled artifacts (e.g., original photographs) and interactive displays designed to allow visitors to experiment with innovative photographic techniques and technologies. FY2015 also saw the further establishment of the MIT Museum Studio, which spearheads the Museum's work with MIT students, and the continued development of the Museum's educational and general visitor programs. Finally, it should be noted that in FY2015 the Museum secured the first endowment gift specifically made in support of an existing staff position. The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Directorship of the MIT Museum raised the bar for personal giving to the MIT Museum, and it provided great encouragement to staff as we continued to explore the opportunity to relocate the Museum to a new, purpose-built facility in Kendall Square. Sad to say, the year was also marked by the passing of Claude Brenner (Class of 1947), a Life Member of the MIT Museum Advisory Board, a long-serving chair of the Collections Committee, and the generous donor of an endowed fund in support of work with the collections.

Collections

Some highlights of the Collections team's accomplishments during the past year include:

- Curating or contributing to the installation of several exhibitions, including: Images of Discovery; Photographing Places: The Photographers of Places Journal, 1987-2009; First in the Field: 100 Years of Aerospace Engineering Education; and Holography's Enthusiasts
- Initiating the digitization and cataloging of two major archival collections, the Martin Klein Collection and the Imre Halasz Collection, both supported by major grants from the donors
- Completing the initial restoration of Richard Leacock's unfinished 1968 documentary "November Actions" and hosting a preliminary screening for the Class of 1970 for their 45th reunion
- Making several key acquisitions, especially for the museum's Holography Collection; overseeing major international loans; renewing the Collections database, <http://webmuseum.mit.edu>; establishing a new large-format imaging facility; and initiating a major planning effort for reconfiguring our collections research and study facility
- Extensive effort in planning a major new initiative, the Herreshoff Legacy Project, and a special exhibition for MIT's Cambridge campus centennial in 2016
- Responding to 1,000 inquiries drawing on the five collections

- Staff supported eight interns, as well as numerous museum programs and workshops, and all of the team participated in international conferences, symposia, and other collaborative professional endeavors with museums, scholars, journalists, and researchers from around the world.
- Deborah Douglas, director of collections and curator of science and technology, taught STS.050 History of MIT.

MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery

The MIT Museum Studio in 10-150 supports students from across campus who explore technologies as instruments of communication, applied within the Museum's multi-sensory learning environment. Students experiment with presentation technologies and methods in the adjacent Compton Gallery and at the Museum, where feedback from members of the MIT community and the visiting public is a core part of the learning experience.

In summer 2014, the Studio and Compton Gallery were renovated to make the space more fit for purpose. It now houses a central workspace, flanked by a teaching area and a glass-walled gallery showcase that is visible from the Infinite Corridor. Currently the Studio is used by 50 students participating in courses (STS.035 Exhibiting Science, and STS.454 Science and Technology in the Museum Environment), Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP), senior thesis projects, and student clubs. Students also develop works for the Museum's ongoing Process and Prototypes exhibition.

Several exhibitions of student work were presented in Compton Gallery during the academic year. Clubs were represented, including the Engineering Design Group for Exhibitions, the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Team, and the Solar Electric Vehicle Team. Student projects from the HackMIT, MakeMIT, and ATHack (assistive technologies) hackathons were displayed. The IAP workshop Working With Light resulted in an art installation in Compton, and Studio staff worked with students of 4.s32 One-Person Gestures (taught through the Arts, Culture and Technology program) to develop an exhibition of their works.

Students enrolled in STS.035 Exhibiting Science mounted a special exhibit for Commencement 2015. Working through the spring semester and beyond, the class completed an ambitious kinetic sculpture, Tech Life, reflecting highlights of their experiences at MIT. The 30-foot long sculpture featured steel balls (one for each student) rolling on the rails of a roller coaster woven through an allegorical MIT landscape, complete with historical hacks. Exhibited in the Compton Gallery, it was highly visible and an exciting addition to the commencement celebrations, especially for the three STS.035 seniors.

Exhibitions

The year saw continuing momentum towards enhancing the quality of the visitor experience, with the incorporation of more interactive exhibits into the galleries and increasing involvement with the MIT student body. Substantial progress has been made

in achieving these strategic goals through new exhibitions now open on the museum floor, as well as those in the planning stages.

Images of Discovery, an exhibition that explores the art and science of Felice Frankel, Harold Edgerton, and Berenice Abbott, whose work provided new insights into scientific phenomena through imaging techniques, opened in February 2015 in the Peterson Gallery. In addition to displays of their renowned imagery, the exhibition includes a series of interactive experiences that allow visitors to manipulate strobes, magnification, and other light-capturing strategies to reveal the hidden patterns in everyday



Aero Astro graduate student and friend engaged in interactive activity in Images of Discovery exhibition. Photo by Lisa Abitbol.

objects. Active prototyping with visitors in the gallery and formative evaluations throughout the development process have assured the robustness of the exhibits as well as the effective communication of the underlying science. An additional integrated, participatory experience allows visitors to capture and save images created using the techniques of the artists, and 19,500 images have been posted to date in an online gallery located on Flickr.

Holography's Enthusiasts opened in May 2015, showcasing new aspects of one of the Museum's signature collections in this popular gallery. Phase Two, which opened in October 2015, expanded the gallery with a series of interactive experiences that explore how light carries information and the techniques of the holography process.

The MIT student showcase *Projects and Prototypes* opened in September 2015. An open call for proposals resulted in the acceptance of four additional projects for inclusion in an installation that engages current students and communicates their innovations and experimental thinking. As additions to the base exhibition, the projects range widely in topic and department of origin, representing graduate and undergraduate work; team efforts and individual visions; thesis and course projects; and projects inspired by personal interest. Working with the Exhibitions team and the Museum Studio, students further develop their projects for visitor engagement in the museum setting.

Other exhibition openings included *Photographing Places: The Photographers of Places Journal, 1987–2009*, January 22–August 16, 2015, shown in the Kurtz Gallery for Photography.

Education and Public Programs

The Programs team continued to expand offerings for the public with almost 600 programs for more than 24,000 visitors. During public school holiday periods (e.g. winter and spring vacation weeks, summer, etc.), programming increased to include multiple daily offerings to provide engineering challenges, art and science explorations, interactions with members of the MIT community, tours of Museum galleries, and more, for almost 7,000 visitors.



Drop-in activities during Free Fun Friday at the MIT Museum, June 26, 2015. Photo by Samara Vise

Our dedicated volunteers, including current MIT graduate students and alumni, provided weekend demonstrations and gallery conversations throughout the year to almost 3,000 visitors. The community-friendly Second Fridays series enabled many collaborations with MIT groups including the Media Lab, the Center for Art, Science & Technology, Beaver Works, the Mechanical Engineering Department, and the Glass Lab. In addition, the Museum hosted events with MIT student groups including the undergraduate “Trashion Show,” two Grad Nights (for the Energy and Transportation Clubs), SciEx’s extreme science film festival, and the MIT Can Talk IAP oratory competition. The Museum also co-hosted a well-received fall series of public Soap Box conversations entitled “How to Make Life and Influence Planets” with MIT’s Foundations of Complex Life team.

The Programs team continued to reach an ever-widening audience, teaching 221 workshops for more than 5,100 middle and high school students. To accommodate the increasing demand, we have expanded our group of trained part-time instructors, and several are MIT graduate students eager for classroom teaching experience. Museum workshops—now on nine different subjects—continue to be popular with international student groups. To attract local students, we earmarked funds to offset workshop fees for ten underserved school groups and were able to provide educational programs for students from Hyde Park, East Boston, Everett, and Dorchester. Full Museum tours continue to be of interest to many groups, and this year the Programs team was able to explore the galleries with more than 900 adults and students.

The Idea Hub continues to be a popular space in the Museum, with more than 2,200 visitors spending extended periods of time on creative technology explorations and returning on future weekends to learn about additional topics.

Designing, testing, and building through the lens of chain reactions remains a theme in programming. We hosted multiple mini-builds throughout the year, and on November 28 we successfully produced the 17th annual Friday After Thanksgiving Chain Reaction in Rockwell Cage for 1,350 enthusiastic participants and spectators. In addition, the biannual Girls Day programs—which showcase the work of women excelling in fields of STEM and art and provide visitors with opportunities to talk with female role models—attracted 600 people of all ages.

Cambridge Science Festival and Science Festival Alliance

The Cambridge Science Festival and Science on the Street expanded significantly in FY 2015. The ninth annual festival featured “Celebrating Einstein”, a series of events and activities that took place before and during the Cambridge Science Festival to mark the 100th anniversary of Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity. Designed to celebrate and teach the general public about Einstein’s science and the revolution in physics that he launched, the festival collaborated with MIT’s Physics Department, School of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, School of Science, and Office of the Provost to produce panel discussions, interviews, an interactive video-art installation, and interpretations of some aspects of general relativity expressed in dance, music, and film as well as outreach into local classrooms.

Along with “Celebrating Einstein”, the Cambridge Science Festival presented a record number of events, hosted a record number of people, and was supported by a record number of sponsors and funding. The 10-day festival produced a total of 178 presentations (11 presentations more than in FY14), including 153 events, 10 exhibits, 13 workshops for the general public, and two workshops for science educators. Our estimated attendance was 59,762, nearly 9,000 more than FY14. The festival raised \$545,000 from 36 sponsors, compared to 29 sponsors and \$525,000 raised in FY14.

Thanks to our multi-year funding commitment with the Biogen Foundation, our statewide, year-round outreach initiative Science on the Street served 136,243 people at 69 community events during FY15, roughly doubling last year’s number of events. In addition, the MIT Science of Baseball welcomed 19 deserving middle school students for the month-long program presenting math and science education in the context of baseball, and joined forces with the MIT Baseball team to create the MIT Hot Stove Club pairing the middle school students with MIT’s baseball players for tutoring and mentoring during the school year.

The Science Festival Alliance (SFA) raised more than \$440,000 in FY15. A gift from the Simons Foundation provided the Just Add Science program, supporting new festival activity throughout North America that “reaches people where they are.” A grant from the Wellcome Trust launched phase one of Science Live, a project bridging practice and research related to live public science events in the US and UK. A total of 41 SFA member festivals celebrated in 2014 (11 more than in 2013), and these cumulatively reached more than 1.7 million people at almost 3,000 events. In addition to launching a [new website](#), the SFA organized the fourth International Public Science Events Conference in June 2015, drawing more than 160 attendees to MIT.

Administration

Development

Working in partnership with Erin Genereux, arts development officer, as well as colleagues in Resource Development, the Museum has achieved a fundraising milestone. The position of director has been generously endowed by Mark Epstein ’63, a longtime supporter of the Museum and member of the Advisory Board. The Mark R. Epstein

(Class of 1963) Director of the MIT Museum is the first endowed position in the Museum, and advances our goal to establish endowments for key positions.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council through its Cultural Facilities Fund has made a \$500,000 commitment to the Museum for our capital initiative, and we currently are working out related details.

We launched a new funding program, the MIT Museum Studio Circle, to invite engineering, technology, and design companies to engage with the Studio, and have raised \$20,000. Two companies, Continuum and Cooper Perkins, have become charter donors. They are joined by our generous Patrons who have given a total of \$735,000 this year. They are Steven Cherny '87, Brit d'Arbeloff '61, Mark Epstein '63, Elizabeth Goldring, Daniel Grunberg '82, the Halasz Trust, Martin Klein '62, F. Thomson Leighton '81, Philip and Ann Sharp, Harvey Steinberg '54, and Anne Street '69. We are grateful for the additional support that our Friends provide through their annual giving. Forty-one Friends gave a total of \$34,052, some for unrestricted use, and other gifts designated for the Richard Leacock "November Actions" film restoration project, the Hart Nautical Collection, education and public programs, and exhibitions. The Council for the Arts at MIT has continued its annual support for new exhibitions, and we are most grateful for the generosity and friendship they have provided over many years.

Retail and Functions

The MIT Museum Store continues to operate as a highly successful business at 265 Massachusetts Avenue with gross revenues from in-store and online sales exceeding our FY14 performance.

The MIT Hatch'd designation was launched in fall 2014 to identify consumer products that have been developed by MIT alumni, students or staff. This designation is shown on the [MIT Museum Store website](#), as well as on the sales floor. Products include building kits, puzzles, home goods, life style products, and jewelry.

The Functions business served 71 clients this year, 77% of them MIT-affiliated and 23% external, generating the second highest income from Functions to date.

Public Relations and Marketing

The Marketing team worked this year to further the Museum's goal to enhance the visitor experience. They upgraded digital communications by improving the Museum's website and adding a social media presence.

As always, the Marketing team strives to ensure that advertising for all exhibitions, programs, and collections is interesting and that our exterior is appealing. We want people to feel welcome at the Museum, and to encourage exploration of the ideas and education that take place at MIT. We also want the MIT community to know about the many resources we provide.

To meet these goals, we hired a new photographer with a retail background whose imagery improved our advertising; we developed a new look for the exterior of the building by placing brightly painted yellow chairs outside, evoking Arthur Ganson's *Cory's Yellow Chair*, a popular sculpture displayed inside the Museum; and we oversaw a new system of graphic display materials created by our graphic designer. Throughout the year the team also managed media relations for new exhibitions as well as for the major family events and ongoing programs produced by the Museum.

Personnel

Ulrike Heine joined the Collections team in January 2015 as curatorial associate for the Architecture and Design Collection, following excellent work as an intern and project assistant working with this collection. Alexander Goldowsky, director of exhibitions, resigned in November to become senior vice president of programs and exhibits at the Boston Children's Museum. Alexander increased the number of interactive experiences on offer in the galleries and conceived the idea for our very successful Images of Discovery exhibition. Ann Neumann was hired in April for the expanded position of director of galleries and exhibitions. Ann comes to the Museum from Liberty Science Center in New Jersey, where she led museum planning and exhibition design services. Jenny Novotney is the new public programs coordinator, succeeding Andrew Hong, who resigned in December 2014 to join a start-up. Jenny has just completed a PhD in chemistry at Cornell University. We thank Andrew for his 1.5 years of creative programming.

John Durant
Director