MIT Museum

This has been a year without precedent in the life of the MIT Museum. Closed to the public as part of the Institute's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the MIT Museum has made substantial progress in two distinct areas: the provision of some existing and many new services online; and preparations for the unveiling of the new MIT Museum, which has now been constructed as part of the new gateway to campus in Kendall Square.

This report reflects these two priority areas. The first section covers ongoing museum activity, as we have continued to serve audiences remotely; we review ways in which we have improved our capacity to serve audiences remotely, often in ways that will be of lasting benefit long after the pandemic is over. The second section focuses on plans for the new MIT Museum in Kendall Square; we show how the new museum project has been advanced through new fundraising, the completion of the building at 314 Main Street, and ongoing work on the detailed museum contents—including an entirely new suite of galleries and exhibitions.

In spite of the pandemic, the MIT Museum is in good heart. Our staff is intact, several important new hires have been made, and we remain on track to launch the new MIT Museum in spring 2022.

Ongoing Museum Activity

Technology played a prominent role in the past year at the museum as its doors shuttered to the public and staff largely shifted to remote collaborative work. To facilitate this, teams across all museum departments pivoted to online collaborative tools to continue their work.

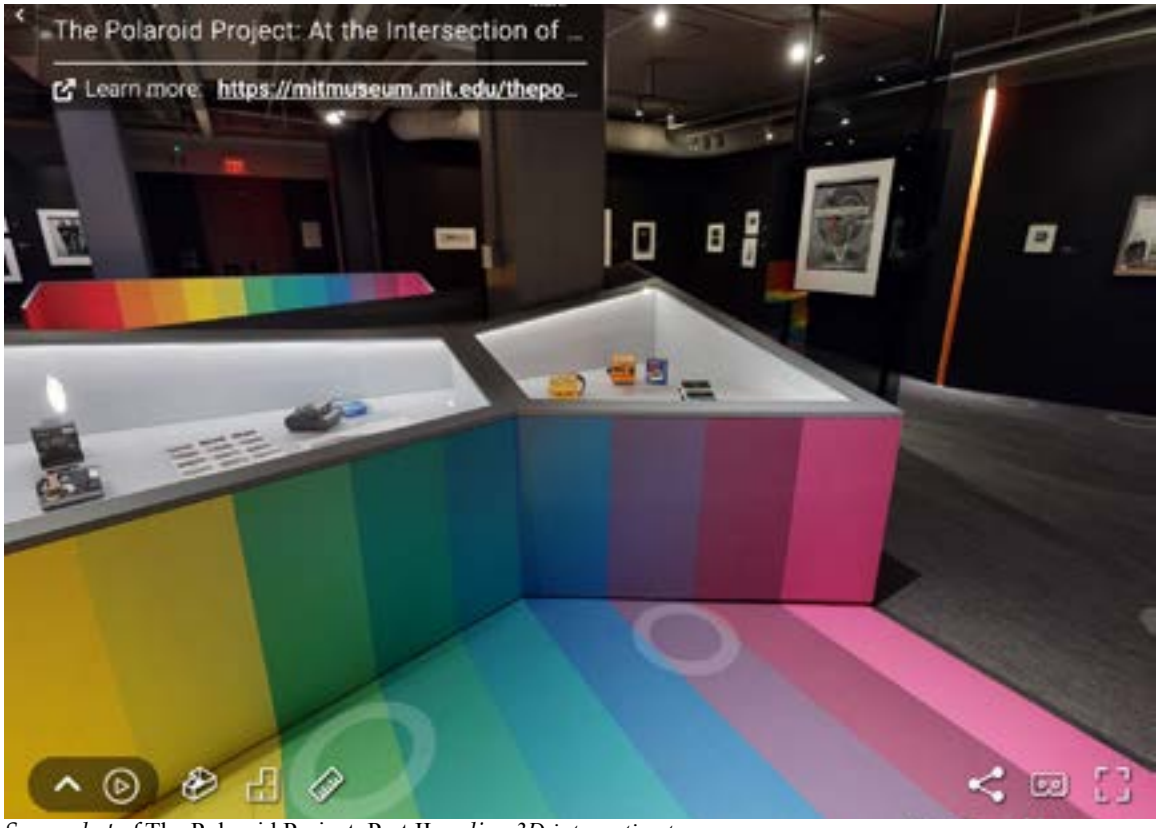
The museum made use of digital channels and tools to extend the museum experience for visitors online by offering video broadcasts, workshops, and a gallery walk-through. We relied on a variety of tools for these purposes, including Zoom, Twitter Live, Facebook Live, YouTube, and Instagram.

New rich content was developed and shared by repurposing recordings of online programs and events, while original content was also created to share through social media and other avenues. Overall, the museum's reach expanded worldwide as we exceeded expectations for engagement and were discovered by new audiences.

Exhibitions and Installations

Despite closed doors, the museum developed notable exhibitions and installations. These included an online 3D visualization of part two of *The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology* and a video installation projected onto the building's glass storefront windows, which featured images taken from the museum's Harold "Doc" Edgerton collection. A second installation included a series of posters developed by the Edgerton Lab and approved by MIT to urge passersby to vote in the November 2020 elections, extending the museum's role as an active participant in the local community and streetscape.

Several exhibitions were taken down, and 3D scans of the Herreshoff and Ganson galleries were completed in advance to document the content for archival purposes. Empty galleries were then transformed for the staging, photography, and conservation of hundreds of objects that will be needed for display in the new museum.



Screenshot of The Polaroid Project, Part II, *online 3D interactive tour.*

Design awards for exhibitions in the past year included:

- *Lighter, Stronger, Faster—The Herreshoff Legacy*: awarded the 2020 Global Futures Design award and the MUSE Silver Design Award
- *The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology*: announced as a finalist by *Interior Design Magazine* for Best Exhibition Design of 2020; awarded an honorable mention by the *Architects Newspaper* for design

Programs and Events

The museum offered numerous online programs, which ranged from a weekly maker series engaging youth and families in making, tinkering, and hands-on engineering activities to a collaboration with colleagues across campus who shared their work with an international audience. The pivot to virtual engagement allowed the museum's education staff to develop and evaluate new methods for bringing MIT's ethos of hands-on, minds-on learning and current research and scholarship to our audiences.

The museum also explored the use of a scanning electron microscope in live, remote programming with students from 49 schools in four countries. The museum produced and offered over 150 individual online events, which reached 4,500 program

participants. In addition to our public offerings, the museum supported over 150 teachers in 25 schools across the United States and 85 schools internationally through professional development programs and education initiatives. This included work with the Nord Anglia Education group of international schools and collaborations with MIT partners from the Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL, Open Learning) and the Scheller Teacher Education Program.

Through our work leading the Science Festival Alliance and our Experimental Practice group, we continued to support new science festivals across North America through capacity-building projects such as the Science Festival Accelerator, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The Science in Vivo project, funded by the Simons Foundation, is documenting outcomes of community science events.

The pandemic required the Cambridge Science Festival (CSF) to be 100% online this past year. The CSF team extended the length of the festival from 10 days to the entire month of April. The virtual festival was successful with more than 150 online events and 106 organizational partners. Events ranged from hands-on science activities led by a teen from Malden, Massachusetts, under the mentorship of an MIT Museum educator, to a live virtual tour of Boston's bridges over Zoom presented by the Boston Society of Engineers. Although the presence of a live festival experience was missed by all this past year, lessons learned on providing online programming to international audiences will be incorporated into future CSF events.

The MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery

The MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery was closed to students and the visiting public; these spaces were accessible only by staff for purposes of producing and streaming content for remote, hands-on teaching and learning. A live-stream studio was set up, which allowed physical demos to be captured and shared online with students. The fall course 9.72 Vision in Art and Neuroscience was fully remote, with 14 students and three teaching staff meeting twice weekly via Zoom for seminar and studio classes. Novel techniques for the use of computer and phone cameras were developed for the visual education of fundamental concepts in vision neuroscience, and kits of materials were shipped to students for at-home studio work.

Students produced and documented individual semester projects and designed a collective virtual exhibition called *Total Internal Reflection*, which was projected in the windows of the MIT Museum and on the glass front of the Compton Gallery.

Over the course of the year, the studio explored a variety of online workshops and programs for the student community and public audiences. Other online activities included project planning with the 2020–2021 MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST) visiting artist Carsten Höller ahead of his anticipated visits to campus fall 2021 and spring 2022, as well as a collaboration between MIT students and students of the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany, ahead of a joint exhibition planned for fall 2021 at the ZERO Foundation in Düsseldorf.

Collections

The Collections Team continued its adaptation by developing a new tracking system and loan program that allow for the temporary loan of archived materials, photograph

collections, and books to staff members. Home offices were equipped with scanners and other tools that allowed for significant progress to be made on several cataloging and digitization efforts.

Project Vannevar—the museum's ongoing effort to digitize and catalog its photographic print collection—completed all work on the biographical files of nearly 30,000 unique images and digitized an additional 20,000 images from its subject files. As a test of the technical capacities of the museum's Collections Portal, approximately 15,000 new images were made available to the public in May 2021. A second major digitization and cataloging effort has focused on the documents and images from the Creative Photography Laboratory collection, including more than 1,000 documents, 1,800 slides, and more than 500 student photographs. These digital collections will be featured in conjunction with an exhibition about the Creative Photography Laboratory in the new museum.

The museum accessioned 37 major gifts and made four deaccessions. Among the most notable acquisitions are the collection of oral history interview cassette tapes made by Dr. Clarence Williams for the MIT Black History Project; the digital collection created by Draper Laboratory for the "We Hack the Moon" website; and the photo archives of noted Cambridge photographer Elsa Dorfman.

Amid various government shutdowns, our robotics collection was featured in two international exhibitions in the Netherlands and England. The museum also loaned materials from the William Avery Baker Collection for a special *Mayflower* anniversary exhibition at The Box in Plymouth, England.

The New MIT Museum at Kendall

Fundraising was robust and our efforts proved highly successful. The museum met its capital and exhibitions goal of $55.5 million dollars, and more than 12 spaces will be named after donors, including galleries, educational spaces, and a function room. Gifts included five seven-figure commitments. Additionally, the museum fulfilled its $4.1 million dollar fit-out goal. The museum also made efforts to secure funds towards its endowment for long-term sustainability.

After the Commonwealth of Massachusetts lifted its halt to all construction projects, work resumed and significant progress was made; notably, Turner Construction finished their work on the museum space in April.

All staff offices and workspaces and public service areas are fully furnished, and in May the museum hired UG2, a third-party firm to handle facilities management, including cleaning and maintenance. Presently, the museum's project manager and a UG2 facilities manager are on site daily to monitor and become fully familiar with building systems and equipment.

The museum, along with selected design teams, continued remote, online collaborations to complete schematic gallery and exhibition design in December, then promptly began detail design. These intensive months of efforts resulted in rich design concepts and reconfirmation of the project budget.

A series of advisor meetings for gallery-specific workgroups were convened to gather feedback about exhibition plans, and the response of faculty and others was enthusiastic and helpful.

As part of the exhibition's team art and science initiative, the museum issued an open call to artists internationally for projects that engage with concepts surrounding the genomics revolution. After receiving more than 200 high-quality submissions, the museum and guest curator William Myers selected a short list of possible artists and projects to include in the *Gene Cultures* exhibition.

The collections team's focus continued to be on the development of the schematic and detailed designs for the Collections Gallery and Workshop and other exhibitions for the new Kendall museum, as well as ongoing planning for the relocation of all collections to a new to-be-identified off-site collections facility.

Planning for Kendall technology infrastructure continued as searches for customer relationship management, ticketing, and events management systems were conducted with the help of other MIT departments. Additionally, improvements were made to the Museum Collections and Content infrastructure in support of the development of new exhibitions and a reimagined online collections portal. Cogapp, a UK–based company with vast museum experience, has been engaged in helping the museum relaunch its website in conjunction with the opening at Kendall.

With the assistance of Pentagram, an industry leader, a revived brand identity was developed for the museum; the firm was subsequently engaged for ongoing work on interior wayfinding and other signage.

An internal cross-departmental working group was formed to oversee efforts to lead and develop an initiative for embedding inclusive design in all the museum's efforts. The working group held its first advisory meeting in August.

Lobby of the new MIT Museum in the MIT Kendall Gateway. Photo credit: MIT Museum Staff

Personnel

Anna Ijiri Oehlkers joined the staff in July 2020 as digital communications coordinator, succeeding Tina McCarthy.

Fatima Husain, one of the curiosity correspondents on the Museum/Nord Anglia Collaboration team, resigned in August to enroll at MIT as a PhD student. Jess Ahearn was hired in January as a curiosity correspondent on the Nord Anglia Team, succeeding Fatima Husain.

Amanda Figueroa was hired in October as coordinator of experimental practice on the engagement team, succeeding Julie Fooshee.

Two assistant curators joined the Collections team in January: Flori Pierri, assistant curator of science and technology, replacing Ariel Weinberg following her promotion; and Jon Duval, assistant curator or architecture and design, succeeding Daryl McCurdy.

John Durant
The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Director
MIT Museum