

MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology

The MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) is an academic program and hub of critical art practice and discourse within the School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P). ACT is headed by distinguished artist-professors and supported by a dynamic cast of practitioner graduate students and staff, visiting artist-lecturers, affiliates, and guests. Through an integrated approach to pedagogy, research, public programming, and publication, ACT builds a community of artist-thinkers around the exploration of art's complex conjunctions with culture and technology and the promotion of art as a vital means of experimenting with new registers of knowledge and value.

Academic Program

Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology

ACT offers a highly selective, two-year master of science degree in art, culture and technology (SMACT). There were 13 students enrolled in the graduate program at the beginning of the academic year; four were graduated in June. Nine students will enter their second year of studies in fall 2016. Eight of the 75 applicants to the graduate program for AY2017 were offered admission and six were wait-listed; seven candidates who were offered admission accepted.

ACT hosted its fifth open house for prospective students on November 16. Ninety-six people registered for the event and 60 attended. The open house included lunch, a tour of ACT facilities and student studios, a faculty review of the application process, a curriculum and financial aid overview by the staff, a tour of the List Visual Arts Center's exhibition *Rosa Barba: The Color Out of Space*, a reception, and ACT's Monday Night Lecture Series presentation, Pelin Tan's "Transversal Methodology: Labor, Love, Fear." The Department of Architecture's open house for admitted students was April 7. In addition to presentations organized by the department, ACT hosted a lunch and conversation with current ACT graduate students, offered a facilities and resources tour, and reviewed degree requirements. Of the eight admitted students, three were able to attend the spring Open House in person and five participated in the graduate student conversation via Skype, producing a 100% participation rate among students admitted for fall 2016.

In addition to its core graduate program, ACT offers electives for undergraduate and graduate students. ACT courses are topic-driven and change each semester, but all of them are Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) subjects that deal with themes of gender, race, foreign culture, and globalization/transnationalism

On the undergraduate level, ACT offers a HASS concentration and minor. In academic year 2016, 24 students concentrated and one student minored in ACT HASS. The distribution of concentrators among courses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Course Distribution of ACT Concentrators (June 30, 2016)

Course Number	Course Name	Number of ACT Concentrators
2	Mechanical Engineering	14
4	Architecture	2
6	Electrical Engineering and Computer Science	3
7	Biology	2
16	Aeronautics and Astronautics	1
18	Mathematics	1
20	Biological Engineering	1

Ten subjects were offered in fall 2015 with a total enrollment of 107; 13 subjects were offered in the spring with an enrollment of 130. Of the 237 students enrolled in ACT subjects in AY2016, 134 (57%) were graduate students and 103 (43%) were undergraduates; 54% of the students taking ACT subjects were majors within SA+P. Outside SA+P, the department most heavily represented was Course 2, Mechanical Engineering, with 11.8% of the enrollments.

In the fall, Lara Baladi joined ACT as a visiting lecturer; she taught 4.341/2 Introduction to Photography and 4.344/5 Advanced Photography. New lecturer Claudia Joskowicz taught 4.354/5 Introduction to Video and 4.352/3 Advanced Video. Lecturer Tobias Putrih co-taught 4.312/3 Advanced Studio on the Production of Space and 4.373/4 Advanced Projects in Visual Arts with ACT Director Gediminas Urbonas. In the spring, four visiting lecturers joined the ACT teaching community:

- Rosa Barba—4.S33 Setting a Performative Frame and Intersecting Fact and Fiction
- Liesbeth Bik and Johannes Van der Pol—4.368/9 Studio Seminar in Art and Public Sphere and 4.314/5 Advanced Workshop in Artistic Practice and Transdisciplinary Research
- Jan Werner—4.320/1 Introduction to Sound Creations

ACT had no special subjects in the fall and four special subjects in the spring:

- 4.314/5 Advanced Workshop in Artistic Practice and Transdisciplinary Research (Experimental Publishing and Archival Research), taught by Liesbeth Bik and Johannes Van der Pol;
- 4.373/4 Advanced Projects in Visual Arts (MIT Island: An Architectural Wet Lab), taught by Gediminas Urbonas and Tobias Putrih;
- 4.S32 No Edge, No Center, taught by Kelly Nipper; and
- 4.S33 Setting A Performative Frame and Intersecting Fact and Fiction, taught by Rosa Barba.

- Several classes included travel to New York City:
- In September, six students in 4.312/3 Advanced Studio in the Production of Space visited the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island. The municipality is transforming the landfill into a park.
- Three students from 4.361/2 Performance Art Workshop attended Performa15, a multi-site, multi-day program of visual art performance.
- During their visit to New York, nine students from 4.354/5 Introduction to Video attended gallery talks, toured exhibitions, and met with several artists and curators.
- In the spring, the nine first-year ACT students who were enrolled in 4.390 ACT Studio visited the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the New Museum, and the Guggenheim Museum. They also attended the live broadcast of *Democracy Now* and the premiere of the documentary about former Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) Fellow Yvonne Rainer.

In March, 11 students from 4.368/9 Studio Seminar in Art and Public Sphere traveled to São Paulo, Brazil, where they met artists and scholars connected with the 32nd São Paulo Biennial and proposed an intervention relevant to the site.

The Council for the Arts at MIT (CAMIT) funded the travel by the class in 4.354/5 Introduction to Video. ACT funded the remaining travel.

Public Programming

Lecture Series

The Monday Night Lecture Series continued for its 11th year, attracting a broad range of speakers and sizable audiences that ranged from 40 to 100 people. The ACT director shapes the content of the lecture series. In the fall of AY2016, the theme was Toward a Philosophy of the Act; the spring theme was Curation: Agencies + Urgencies. MIT faculty and SA+P graduate students were engaged as respondents and moderators as part of an interactive, intimate exchange between the speakers and the audience.

Fall 2015—Toward a Philosophy of the Act

- Maryam Jafri (October 5), “Between Storyboard and Grid, Some Recent Works”
- Rosa Barba (October 19), “On Objects as Ideas”
- Marjetica Potrč (October 26), “Public Space Is a Social Agreement”
- Wendelien van Oldenborgh (November 9), “Beauty and the Right to the Ugly”
- Pelin Tan (November 16), “Transversal Methodology: Labor, Love, Fear”
- Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (February 29), “Empathy and Artistic Relations”
- Alejandro de la Fuente, Magdalena Campos-Pons, Doris Sommer, Timothy Hyde (March 7), “Future Island: Cuba”
- Anna-Sophie Springer (March 28), “A Palimpsest of Species and Spaces”

- Corinne Diserens (April 25), “Historical Resonances”
- Lars Bang Larsen (May 2), “Mediated Entities”

Other Public Programming

Arts on the Radar

Arts on the Radar was a collaboration by ACT, the List Visual Arts Center, and Arts @MIT that showcased MIT arts-related organizations, resources, and activities for students arriving on campus. The September 4 event included a barbecue, the List Center’s Student Loan Art Program, art activities, student exhibitions, a dance party, and information about each of the sponsoring organizations.

Centennial Events

MIT celebrated the 100th anniversary of its move to Cambridge during the spring semester. ACT participated in the celebration with several exhibitions and programs:

- *Memory Matrix* was a temporary monument comprising border fences and Plexiglas “pixels” with images of vanished and threatened cultural heritage sites that revealed an image of the Palmyra Arch of Triumph. This project involved MIT students and the remote engagement of participants in the Maker Faire in Cairo and Syrian refugee camps in Jordan.
- *Sediments*, a running display of *Islands in the Making at MIT*, included a prototype of the island and a display of plans, sketches, and other ideational materials for the MIT Island, which engages with pressing environmental challenges. The island is one of ACT’s evolving special projects and the focus of this year’s 4.373/4 Advanced Projects in Visual Arts, as well as archival materials from the CAVS Special Collection (CAVSSC).
- *Time Creatures* was a project created by undergraduate students enrolled in 4.302 Foundations in Art, Design, and Spatial Practices. Students explored how different conceptions of time and memory are encoded in material culture. They worked on different versions of time creatures, using both group and individual design work. The creatures were exhibited on campus in the form of an installation and a fashion show during the Open House (April 23) and choreographed for a performance during the Moving Day pageant (May 7).
- *Parkour by Heart: Setting a Performative Frame* was a group show by the students of 4.S33 Setting a Performative Frame and Intersecting Fact and Fiction; they engaged in a “form of artistic parkour” that had the students moving from film to sculptural objects.
- *Kinetic Speakers* was the product of 4.320/1 Introduction to Sound Creations. Students presented the results of their research on kinetic sound objects and electroacoustic sound diffusion and created a 12-speaker display.
- *Infinite Footsteps* was conceptualized by Office of the Dean for Graduate Education Graduate Community Fellow Ron Martin. It focused on mentorship in the academy in the context of a racialized society and MIT.

Workshops

- On the Record: Broadcasting Practices (February 20)—ACT collaborated with the Architecture Department and the Center for Art, Science and Technology to host NODE & Bengler for a workshop exploring the CAVSSC and the ways in which the design experiments with changing technologies and methods of production. (NODE is a Berlin- and Oslo-based design firm.)
- Technology/Affect/Space (April 6)— Eric Kluitenberg, with Lara Baladi, Sasha Costanza-Chock, and Alessandra Renzi, introduced participants to Affect Space and its impact on art, activism, and civic engagement.
- Every Day Words Disappear: On Radical Ecology and Tender Gardening (April 13)— 4.352/3 Advanced Video sponsored a talk by artist and filmmaker Johan Grimonprez. The presentation included the screening of four of Grimonprez’s films.
- • Rethinking Collective Memory in the Age of Digital Archives (April 15)— Ina Blom led a workshop on memory and the archive and early electronic art practices.

Research Activities and Accomplishments

Faculty

Renée Green had two solo exhibitions, *Placing* (Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin) and *Spacing* (Lumiar Cité, Lisbon). Her group exhibitions included *Don’t Look Back: The 1990s at MoCA*, Los Angeles; *Récit d’un temps court*, Musee d’ Art Modern and Contemporaine, Geneva; *Less than One*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; *to expose, to show, to demonstrate, to inform, to offer: Artistic Practices Around 1990*, Mumok, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Lunwing, Vienna; and *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. The Video Data Bank started distributing Professor Green’s films in 2016.

Gediminas Urbonas had multiple commissions and solo and group exhibitions. New commissions include *Occupational Hazard* (Reykjavik, Iceland); *Habermassian Coffee Dock* (Cuba); and *Baltic Triennale*, Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius, 2015. His group exhibitions included *The Baltic Pavilion, 15th International Architecture Exhibition, Biennale di Venezia, Italy, 2016*; *The Money Show*, Contemporary Art Northampton, UK, 2016; *Inside-Out*, Belgrade City Museum, Serbia, 2016; *Another Crossroads of Epochs*, National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2016; and *A Million Lines*, Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Centre in Krakow, Poland, 2015. His research on Cuba was presented at The Creative Time Summit, Biennale di Venezia, Italy, 2015. Urbonas published “Druzhba” in *The Baltic Atlas* (Daubaraitė, Jurga, et al., eds., Sternberg Press).

Azra Akšamija’s solo exhibition, *Monument in Waiting*, was presented at the Sarajevo Ramadan Festival in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She also participated in group exhibitions at the City Art Gallery in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and the Austrian Cultural Forum in Washington, DC. Her broader research project, *Resonator*, focuses on the ways in which contemporary art can inform “a new understanding of refugee camps as spaces for

transcultural exchange and production of new heritage dynamics.” Included under the Resonator umbrella are the exhibits *Memory Matrix* (part of the MIT Centennial celebrations), *Lightweaver*, *Islamobile*, and *Lace Atlas*. Lastly, she was a featured artist in residence at the Doris Duke Foundation’s Shangri-La Centre for Islamic Art and Culture in Honolulu, HI. Akšamija published *Mosque Manifesto: Propositions for Spaces of Coexistence* with Revolver Press.

Visiting Faculty

Lara Baladi took part in *Anxious to Act* and *Five Years After* at Transmediale Berlin, Germany.

Rosa Barba was a part of group shows at Fondation d’entreprise Ricard, in and at Centre Pompidou-Metz.

Liesbeth Bik and Johannes Van der Pol (AKA Bik Van der Pol) had a show entitled *Were It As If* that opened at Witte de With Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in May.

Claudia Joskowicz closed a show at the LMAK Gallery in New York, *Los Rastreadores*; the show moved on to Die Ecke Gallery in Barcelona, opening in May.

Kelly Nipper had work in three exhibitions, *All Together Now? Disincorporations of the Art Public*, Clemens University, Greenville, South Carolina; *Art—Music—Dance: Staging the Derra de Moroda*, Dance Archives at the Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; and *Performing the Grid* at the Ben Maltz Gallery at the Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.

Tobias Putrih released a dual catalog at the end of 2015, *Solar Limb/Routine Inspection*, published by Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich. He currently has a solo show at Galerie Greta Meert in Brussels and work in a group show at Haus der Kunst in Munich.

Jan St. Werner released an album titled *Felder* April 1 on Thrill Jockey Records and performed a series of sound interventions in Boston following the album’s release.

Research Affiliates

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.” The number of records in the database increased 7.9% to 19,822. As the principal in Free Agent Media, Anguera coordinated Renée Green’s solo exhibition in Lisbon’s Lumiar Cité; organized her participation in group exhibitions in France and in Minnesota and California; and facilitated film distribution, coordinated events related to the publication of *Other Planes of There*, and managed the details concerning artist residencies and lectures.

Florian Hecker was an ACT affiliate for the full year and continues to hold the position of Chancellor’s Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Over the year, Mr. Hecker performed *Formulation* in Berlin, *Formulations* at Culturegest Porto, and *Modulation* and *Reformulation* in London. The Maison de la Radio hosted *A Script for Machine Synthesis; Sound Voice Chimera* was performed in New York City; and *Hinge* was performed in Sheffield, UK.

Hecker performed *Chimerization, Modulator, and Synthetic Hinge* in Bologna, Italy, and a new sound piece was premiered in Zurich, Switzerland. In June, Hecker published a book with Künstlerhaus Graz and Sternberg Press in Berlin and started an artistic residency at the Institute for Music/Acoustic Research and Coordination in Paris.

Gabriel Kahan was a research affiliate during both terms of the academic year. His research focuses on “recombinatory narrative” and its use as a tool for civic engagement for high-school students. Kahan has been working with Professor Alexander Slocum from the Mechanical Engineering Department to develop the workshop.

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. Her work addresses the relationship between lens-based images and new media platforms such as networks and software. During the year, she published “Between Enactment and Depiction: Yajoi Kusama’s Spatialized Image Structures” and edited *Sara VanDerBeek* by Ina Blom. She was an external reviewer for 4.390 ACT Studio and 4.S33 Setting a Performative Frame, and organized the symposium After Black Mountain College: Collaboration and Community at Northeastern University in October 2015.

Nomeda Urboniene continued her research affiliation. During the year she held a research residency at Los Caminos del Café in Cuba. She installed projects as part of the Baltic Triennial in Vilnius, Lithuania; at the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland; at the Centre for Civil Education and the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius; and as part of the Baltic Pavilion at the Architecture Biennale in Venice, Italy, and at the Belgrade City Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. Urboniene continues to work on Zooetics, a series of public lectures and seminars that address the paradigm shift in science, culture, and society proposed in post-humanist research and in arguments for the Anthropocene age. She gave presentations in Lithuania, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy, and she curated *Spaces of Learning*, the SA+P faculty’s exhibition at the SA+P Dean’s Office gallery.

Fellows

Hiroharu Mori started as a Fellow with ACT in March 2016. The Japanese government’s Agency of Cultural Affairs supports him. At MIT, he is studying the visual representation in multimedia journalism and studio art practices at institutions of higher education.

Student Awards and Exhibitions

Awards

Angel Chen (SMACT ’17) won support from the Bill Mitchell ++ Fund to travel to Hong Kong and Singapore in summer 2016. Ms. Chen also won the Laya and Jerome B. Wiesner Student Art Award for her contributions to the arts at MIT.

Joshuah Jest (SMACT ’17) was the first-prize winner of the Harold and Arlen Schnitzer Prize in the Visual Arts. Jest won the award for his Star Dome project.

Exhibitions

- *Performance Art Workshop at ICA Boston*—the students enrolled in subject 4.361/2 Performance Art Workshop developed and performed a set of 10 actions as part of the ICA Boston's *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933–1957* exhibition during the fall semester.
- *The Production of Belief*—a temporary pop-up exhibition by Neil Sanzgeri (SMACT '17) featuring four new works centered on the events of the 1991 Persian Gulf War crisis.
- *The Flying Umbrella*—Alan Kwan and Björn Sparrman (both SMACT '16) presented this work in Vienna, Austria, as part of the Digital Synesthesia Research Project.
- *Infinite Footsteps*—Ron Martin (SMACT '17) organized this three-day exhibition of archival materials from the Blacks at MIT History Project, accompanied by artworks and spatial interventions along with nightly events that included readings, a panel discussion, and live dance performances.
- *An act / or / no future*—*An act or no future* was the end-of-year exhibition developed by ACT's nine first-year graduate students.
- *mangled machines, missing stars, windswept ashes and a little red trike*—ACT's graduating students produced a graduate exhibition reflecting their thesis work in May.
- *Don't Erase Till Monday*—this exhibit was an outgrowth of student engagement with the CAVSSC. The students from course 4.314/5 Advanced Workshop in Artistic Practice and Transdisciplinary Research: Experimental Publishing and Archival Research presented five different forms of publication for this exhibition at the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts' Center for Consumer Research in May.

Special Collection

ACT possesses five archival and special collections: CAVSSC, the Visual Arts Program special collection, the György Kepes Vision + Value papers, the Visible Language Workshop archive, and the ACT archive. To date, only CAVSSC has been made public.

Reference and research requests averaged 10 or more in-person research visits per month. Patron requests generated by the MIT community were the largest demographic responsible for the increase. This is primarily because of a higher level of engagement with ACT's academic coursework and collection materials.

In July, ACT submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for funding to support the design and development of a research repository for digitized content from the CAVS special collection and related materials at the MIT Museum. The NEA approved a grant of \$40,000. The funds will support the creation of a web-based repository with a virtual museum interface for users conducting research in MIT's history of work with art and technology. NODE will create the web-based platform.

In September, ACT participated in a series of collaborative meetings with the MIT Museum, former CAVS fellows, and ZKM (the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe), regarding the reconstruction of the largest CAVS collaborative kinetic sculpture, *Centerbeam*.

As part of the NODE workshop in February, attendees from across the MIT community were given access to a broad variety of CAVSSC materials in an effort to uncover a deeper understanding of how users interact with visual arts research materials. In part, the workshop was designed to provide ACT and NODE with user experience information for ACT's NEA-funded virtual museum project.

ACT and the SA+P are supporting the publication of a comprehensive history of CAVS, tentatively titled *Centerbook*. In June, ACT and the MIT Museum starting processing and scanning still images—slides and photographic prints—from the Museum's Otto Piene collection to provide more graphic materials for both *Centerbook* and the virtual museum project. The book will be published in 2017 (pending a publishing agreement).

Publishing Frontiers

In addition to individual faculty book projects and studio publications, ACT is now developing two publishing streams directly connected to the program's public programming and events. One is a biannual book series that aims to capture and expand on ACT's biannual symposia. The first of the series is *Public Space? Lost and Found*; currently in production, it has the interest of MIT Press. It is meant as a field-leading compilation of essays and project examples dealing with the contemporary role of art in the public realm and social life. This will be released in spring 2017.

In lieu of a conventional academic journal or magazine format, ACT decided to produce a small book series (two per year) that will curate and carry forward into an attractive print format selected portions of the Monday night lecture series and the ideas and debates it provokes. The first of these books will be based on the fall 2016 lecture series.

Resource Development

Funding

ACT is working with the Dean's Office, Foundation Relations, and the MIT Alumni Association to raise funds to support the CAVSSC, projects and exhibitions generated by the faculty and students, and fellowship funds.

Gift income was \$325 at the end of FY2015 and \$15,338 at the end of FY2016. In March, Assistant Professor Azra Akšamija raised \$100,380 from individual donations and various MIT departments, laboratories, and centers to support the installation of the *Memory Matrix*. ACT received gifts totaling \$4,323 for student fellowships, \$5,025 for the CAVSSC, and \$610 for ACT projects. In May, ACT was awarded \$40,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts for the development of an online interface for the CAVSSC. CAMIT continued its support of ACT with a grant of \$15,000 in June.

Communications

ACT has continued to develop its social media presence and communications strategy. In AY2016, ACT sent 43 emails related to its lecture series, exhibition activities, fundraising, and community activities to its mailing list. These emails reached more than 2,200 people. ACT's average "open rate" is 33%, higher than open rates for arts organizations (15.65%), higher education (18.73%), and other nonprofits (21.25%).

Over the course of the year, ACT's Facebook "likes" grew 35% and the number of its Instagram followers grew 280%, from 197 as of June 30, 2015, to 749 on June 30, 2016. Total Twitter followers increased 18% in the fourth quarter and the number of Storifies increased from four in FY2015 to 11 in FY2016.

Facilities

The number of square feet allocated to ACT has declined steadily as ACT's need for studios, offices, and production facilities has continued to increase. In AY2016, half of the common space in the Venus Lab (E14-140) and three of the faculty studios were transferred to the OpenAgricultureInitiative of the Media Lab. As a result, ACT's use of the Venus Lab was reduced to two faculty studios.

There were seven SMACT students in AY2015 and 13 in AY2016, which is consistent with ACT's goal of expanding the graduate program. To meet this growth, ACT fully used all of the Cube spaces for student studios and classrooms and production and presentation facilities. Administrative and faculty offices were shared to accommodate the increase in staff and faculty. The need for more space will expand with the growth in graduate students and the addition of tenure-track faculty. These concerns were addressed in Gediminas Urbonas's Mission + Vision statement for ACT, submitted to the SA+P dean in December 2015. The dean was also approached about providing additional space to accommodate ACT's project for a Future Learning Environment (called the MIT Island through AY2016).

Personnel

Andrew Barosy resigned as financial assistant in October and was replaced with a part-time temporary worker, former MIT employee Nadia Ustariz. Amanda Moore resigned as the communications and public programming assistant in February to join the Dean's communications staff. Two temporary workers filled this position; a permanent replacement is being sought. Jessica Anderson resigned in June as the academic assistant to join the Sam Tak Lee Center. Lucas Freeman joined ACT as writer in residence in October to help produce *Public Space? Lost and Found* and to help develop ACT's publishing initiatives going forward. Allison James joined ACT in January as the producer for the Centennial projects and Laura Knott started working with ACT in June to develop programming for the 50th anniversary of CAVS.

Gediminas Urbonas

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