Office of the Arts

Council for the Arts
The academic year 2001–2002 began with the country, and much of the world, in shock after the terrorist attacks of September 11. The Council for the Arts at MIT was deeply affected, as many of our members lost colleagues and neighbors and had to cope daily with the view of a radically altered skyline as a constant reminder of the tragedy. Fortunately, none of our members or any of their immediate family members was lost.

This great tragedy, despite its resulting economic downturn, only served to strengthen the council’s commitment to its mission: to foster the arts at MIT. The council had a successful year, as fundraising continued to be strong, and programs flourished.

One of the highlights of the year was an excursion to Seattle and Vancouver from May 23 to 27, attended by approximately 40 council members, spouses and friends.

Council Standing Committees
Annual Meeting (Patricia Chute, chair). The 29th Annual Meeting of the Council for the Arts at MIT took place on October 25 and 26, 2001, and was focused on the visual arts. Council members and guests were treated to a tour of the List Visual Arts Center’s Yoko Ono retrospective exhibition, led by curator Bill Arning. Other highlights included the installation of “Reflection Loop,” an interactive sculpture featuring the eyes and beaks of 200 “furby dolls” by MIT graduate Kelly Heaton. Heaton received funds from the Grants Committee to create the piece. Council members also had a chance to visit the Glass Lab in Building 4, where they were greeted by Artist-in-Residence Peter Houk. Peter narrated a glassblowing demonstration given by MIT students. Director Ed McCluney then gave a tour of the Student Art Association in the Stratton Student Center.

The Annual Meeting dinner was held on Thursday evening, October 25, at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Isaac Julien, the British installation filmmaker, was presented with the 2001 Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts. Jane Farver, director of the List Visual Arts Center, introduced Mr. Julien, who showed some clips of his recent work.

The Friday morning business meeting began with an address by President Charles M. Vest, who spoke of the crucial role the arts played in the MIT response to the September 11 tragedies. He described the MIT Symphony’s contribution, as well as the partial scale model of the World Trade Center built by MIT architecture students as a memorial. He noted that the students immediately used the arts as a means of expression and a way to come to terms with the overwhelming series of events on that awful day.

A number of paintings and sculpture by council member Fay Chandler were on display during this portion of the meeting, and were enjoyed by all present.

Patricia Fuller of the List Visual Arts Center gave a presentation on public art at MIT, and showed us the sites of future works of art, pieces that are being commissioned as part of the MIT Percent for the Arts Program. Every new or renovated building on campus has a percent of its final cost put aside for a new work of art. With the current spate of construction going on, there will be many new pieces added to the collection, such as a Dan Graham for the new Simmons Hall dorm, a Jorge Pardo in the new graduate dorm, and possibly a Richard Serra for the Stata Center.

The Gyorgy Kepes Fellowship Prize was presented to Edward McCluney, director of the MIT Student Art Association (see Special Programs below) at the Annual Meeting luncheon on Friday, October 26 at the MIT Museum. The museum also held a brief thank-you ceremony for the donors who made the renovations to the museum’s façade possible.

Arts Scholars Committee (Brit d’Arbeloff, chair). The newest of the council’s programs is finally hitting its stride, and the students who make up the group are gradually making it their own. A highlight of the program this year was a field trip, on January 26, to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in North Adams, in the western part of the state.

Communications (Pepi Weis, chair). The Communications Committee produced three issues of the council newsletter, Council Currents, to great success. Council Currents is written by council members, for council members.

Development (Daniel Vershbow ’45, chair). As of this writing (6/24/02) the council has raised a total of $330,476 from council members, and a total of $12,105 from non-member donors.

Grants Program (Bradford M. Endicott ’49, chair). The Grants Program of the Council for the Arts at MIT awarded 51 grants this academic year, totaling $89,828. Highlights included funding to help refurbish the furnaces in the MIT Glass Lab, support for an ambitious series of concerts of American music spearheaded by Lecturer Frederick Harris, a group exhibition of work by graduate students in the Visual Arts Program, and operating support for the student dance group Movements in Time.

Membership (Bernard G. Palitz ’47, chair). As of this writing (6/24/02) council membership stands at 110, with six ex officio members and 104 regular members. The following new members have joined the ranks of the council since last July: Anne Bridge Baddour, Margaret
Anne Cullum, Jennifer Frutchy, Melvin Meisinger, Theresa Stone '76, and Peter Wender '71. Sadly, two longtime council members passed away since the last Report to the President: Gyorgy Kepes and Walter A. Rosenblith.

Special Events Committee (Catherine N. Stratton, chair). On May 23, approximately 40 council members and guests gathered in Seattle, Washington, for the “Seattle-Vancouver Arts Adventure.” The kick-off event was a cocktail reception at the studio of renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly, situated in a former boathouse. The group was treated to a glass blowing demonstration and the delightful display of the work of the Chihuly studio, as well as Mr. Chihuly’s personal collections of a variety of artifacts and memorabilia displayed at the Studio building.

After this splendid start, the assembled enjoyed a tour of the Bellevue Art Museum, a visit to the private collection of Jane and David Davis, and a tour of the Microsoft corporate art collection. The group then traveled to Vancouver, where they met with Arthur Erickson, Canada’s preeminent architect, and Martine Reid, widow of First Nations Haida artist Bill Reid. Mr. Erickson and Dr. Reid led a tour of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Interleafed with brief rests and sumptuous meals, this five-day excursion was enjoyed by all.

Affiliated Committees
List Visual Arts Center Advisory Board (Jennifer Frutchy, chair). The LVAC board continues to be a valuable group of advisors to Director Jane Farver. Longtime chairperson Kitty Glantz stepped down this year, and Jenny Frutchy was chosen as her successor.

MIT Museum Advisory Board (Harvey I. Steinberg '54, chair), Jane Pickering, who in her brief tenure as director re-focused the museum's mission and revitalized its programs, resigned in the spring of 2002. She has taken a position at the Peabody Museum at Yale. A search committee for her successor is being formed as of this writing.

Artist-in-Residence Committee (Stephen Memishian '70, chair). Organized along the lines of the MIT Museum and LVAC boards described above, this committee works with MIT Office of the Arts Director of Special Programs Maureen Costello and a panel of arts professionals, council members and artists to bring artists to the MIT campus to work throughout the Institute.

Special Programs
Since 1980, the council has underwritten MIT's enrollment in the University Membership Program offered by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This program provides free admission and discount benefits to all MIT undergraduate and graduate students, as well as ten membership cards for the daily use of MIT faculty and staff.

The free-ticket program with the Boston Symphony Orchestra continued this year. MIT students can obtain, with their student ID, free admittance to Thursday evening and Friday afternoon concerts on a day-of-show, standby basis. This year the BSO introduced a new method of ticket distribution, the BSO College Card. The council distributed over 1,500 cards to MIT undergraduate and graduate students. The number of cards and the swiftness with which they were snatched up (800 on the first day of distribution) speaks to the success of this unique program.

Similar programs have been established with other Boston-area orchestras, such as Collage New Music, the Boston Modern Orchestra Program, and the New York Collegium (which has a series of concerts at Jordan Hall).

The successful Student Performing Arts Excursions Series continued, with tickets to the following events made available at no charge to MIT students: a performance of “Othello” at the American Repertory Theater, “Shel's Shorts” (plays based on Shel Silverstein stories) at the new Market Theater in Cambridge, a performance by the Boston Philharmonic, a tribute concert to John Coltrane at Northeastern University, and a performance by the Wayne Shorter Group at the Berklee Performance Center.

The Gyorgy Kepes Fellowship Prize was presented by Angus MacDonald to Edward McCluney at the Annual Meeting luncheon on Friday, Oct. 26. At the Annual Meeting dinner at the deCordova Museum, the Eugene McDermott Award was presented by Dorothea Endicott (McDermott Award Committee chair) to Isaac Julien, an installation filmmaker based in London. Mr. Julien returned to campus in April to present a new film, and meet with several groups of students, as the residency portion of the McDermott Award.

At the Institute Awards Convocation on May 13, associate provost for the arts Alan Brody presented the Laya and Jerome B. Wiesner Student Art Awards to Nathan Fitzgerald '02 and Christopher Rakowski '02, both for achievement in music. The Louis Sudler Prize was presented to Kevin Choi '02 for his accomplishments in filmmaking.

The council established a new program, the Pilchuck Scholarship, at the request of the Glass Lab. One MIT student per year is chosen to attend a summer session at the Pilchuck Glass School outside Seattle, Washington. The council contributes half of the tuition; Pilchuck provides the balance. The first year's recipient was Helen Lee. This year, the scholarship will go to Chris Laughman.

Susan R. Cohen
Director

More information about the Council for the Arts can be found on the web at http://web.mit.edu/arts/council/.