Council for the Arts at MIT

The Council for the Arts at MIT (CAMIT) engaged in a successful self-examination during the 2011-12 academic year, by surveying the membership and holding a leadership retreat. Strategic planning and renewed attention to governance have energized the council, as it approaches its 40th anniversary of support for the arts at MIT in October 2012.

Current goals, objectives, priorities

Our goals, objectives and priorities remain the recruiting of the next generation of leaders and members, increasing the diversity of membership, and keeping our programs up to date and relevant in service to the MIT community. A celebration of the 40th anniversary planned for the annual meeting in October will offer members an opportunity to reflect upon past accomplishments and set goals for the future.

Accomplishments/ Administrative initiatives

On September 13, 2011 the council held its first leadership retreat, at which discussions of council governance, fundraising goals, and general institutional philosophy took place. Facilitated by consultant Cathy Trower, the day-long session was attended by council chair and vice-chair Brit d’Arbeloff and Jane Pappalardo, council members Ann Allen, Karen Arenson, Mel Barkan, Claude Brenner, Anna Davol, Marjory Jacobson, Karen Kaufman, Martin Rosen, Rick Stone, and Glenn Strehle, and MIT staff Susan Cohen, Philip Khoury, Leila Kinney, and Meg Rotzel.

In preparation for the retreat, a survey was sent out to the entire council membership, and the response was a remarkable 50 percent return rate. Results were overwhelmingly positive, with most respondents happy with their level of activity, existing CAMIT programs, and the amount requested from them as an annual contribution. A few answers made it clear that some CAMIT members are not totally aware of some operational procedures and funding structures, or might have misinformation about them. These misconceptions can be remedied with consistent, improved, and increased communication.

The retreat resulted in a renewed attention to governance, especially in observing term limits for committee chairs, which in turn resulted in a procedural plan of succession for the chairs. It was also decided that fundraising campaigns be more forthright, about both the necessity of 100 percent participation and the amount of the annual contribution.

The improvement of the CAMIT website continues, with a members-only, password-protected page established, and plans to implement a new system for accepting grant applications and supporting material are underway. A service called Slideroom will make it possible for applicants to edit and add material to their proposals over a proscribed time period, as well as allow the application reviewers a chance to communicate confidentially with each other about the proposals. In the future, this program will be adapted and used for the Student Art Awards, the McDermott Award Selection Committee, and Schnitzer Prize jury.
Later in September the Council travelled to Berlin for a whirlwind, art-filled, five-day trip; 33 Council members and guests, plus six MIT staff/faculty members attended. One highlight was a visit to the private collection of Brigitte and Arend Oetker, who graciously allowed us to visit their beautiful home and served a sumptuous sushi luncheon. Council member Marcel Botha ’06 hosted a cocktail party at his very chic flat in Berlin. We visited with two MIT artist-alumni who are based in Berlin: Pia Lindman ’99 and Luis Berrios-Negron ’06. A trip to Frederick the Great’s baroque palace in Potsdam, Sanssouci, was a change of pace from the cutting edge contemporary art we saw in studio visits as well as private collections in Berlin. A splendid and exhausting time was had by all. To follow up on the event, Karen Arenson ’70 wrote an in-depth travelogue, richly illustrated by the photographs submitted by the trip attendees. Heidi Erickson lent her graphic design talents to putting together the booklet, resulting in a beautiful souvenir of a great trip.

Council trips are entirely funded by council members and take place approximately every 18 months, alternating between international and North American destinations. Proposed next destinations for CAMIT trips are: Toronto, Santa Fe, and Brazil!

Annual Meeting Committee (Ann Allen, chair)

The 39th Annual Meeting of the Council for the Arts took place on Thursday and Friday, October 27 and 28, 2011. This year the structure of the meeting was “shaken up” a bit, with scheduling the business meeting as the first item on the schedule. Philip Khoury called the meeting to order, and was followed by Brit d’Arbeloff ’61, who offered an overview of the year’s accomplishments. Membership and nominating committee chair Marilyn Breslow introduced the new full council members and associate members who were in attendance. Susan Cohen offered a financial report. A report on the CAMIT retreat was next, followed by boxed lunches and breakout sessions exploring three main topics: the planning of the 40th Annual Meeting, CAMIT Goals, and the Nominating and Membership Processes.

Following lunch, the group split into three sections for studio visits with young visual arts faculty: Leah Buechley, associate professor at the Media Lab, Skylar Tibbits, lecturer in the Department of Architecture, and Azra Aksamija, assistant professor in Art, Culture and Technology. The group then reconvened in Bartos for a panel discussion, moderated by Professor Nader Tehrani, of the School of Architecture + Planning, with the faculty who led the studio visits. The topic: the future of the visual arts at MIT.

Dinner on the beautiful sixth floor of the new Media Lab was capped off by a chamber concert featuring MIT students. Shu Zheng ’12 played Franz Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody #12 in C#. Daniel Manesh ’12, piano; Albert Wu ’12, violin, and Yonatan Kahn G, horn, performed an 1868 trio by Johannes Brahms. The music was lovely; a dessert buffet followed.

The next day started with a choice: a master class led by MIT theater professor Jay Scheib, a master class from music lecturer Peter Whincop, or a tour of the List Visual Arts Center
(LVAC)’s Hans Haacke and Otto Piene exhibitions led by LVAC staff João Ribas and Mark Linga.

The group gathered again in Killian Hall for a presentation from the head of Music and Theater Arts, Professor Janet Sonenberg, and Toronto-based architect Marianne McKenna about the proposed reconfiguration of the Walker Memorial building into a performing arts facility.

For the final event of the meeting, the group traveled to the Student Center for lunch in the Mezzanine Lounge.

**Grants Committee (Martin N. Rosen ’62, chair)**

The CAMIT Grants Committee awarded 39 grants totaling $107,386 and 30 director’s grants totaling $12,518 to many exciting projects such as: a production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* staged by director of choral programs William Cutter, a trip to Senegal for the students who are members of the Senegalese drumming ensemble Rambax, and a production of MIT professor Alan Brody’s play *Operation Epsilon* at the Central Square Theater.

**Membership and Nominating Committee (Marilyn Breslow, chair)**

As of this writing Council Membership stands at 92, with six *ex officio* members. The following individuals have joined the council since the last report: William W. Harris PhD ’77 of New York City, Ina Schnell of Sarasota, Florida and New York City, and Eugene Stark ’68, of Coral Gables, Florida. Dorothea Endicott and Mary Tolikas ’92 were rotated off the membership list at the end of their respective terms. Barbara Barry ’00 resigned from the council in June 2012. Mary Jane Bezark, who joined after her husband Bud’s death in 2007, passed away just before the Annual Meeting. Two new *ex officio* members were officially welcomed: Chancellor W. Eric Grimson, and Executive Vice President and Treasurer Israel Ruiz. The Associate Members Program was successful in its first year – at least one associate member was in attendance at each grants committee meeting this year.

**Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts Selection Committee (Peter Wender ’71, chair)**

The 2012 campus visit of McDermott Award winner Robert Lepage in the early spring was a great success. For more detailed information, [click here](#)

**Student Art Awards Committee (Claude Brenner ’47, chair)**

This year’s Sudler Prize recipient was Benjamin Bloomberg, for his work in sound design and theater. The Laya and Jerome B. Wiesner Awards were presented to Leah Brunetto ’12, for arts
administration and visual art, Farré Nixon ’12, for the visual Arts, and Dylan Sherry ’12, a jazz saxophonist, for music.

The Executive Committee has proposed that the Student Art Awards, Schnitzer Prize, and Gyorgy Kepes Fellowship Prize (currently dormant) committees be combined into one awards committee.

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Schnitzer Prize in the Visual Arts Committee (Peter Athens ’52, discussion leader)

The recipients of the 2012 Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize in the Visual Arts were: Matthew Everett Lawson G, Art, Culture and Technology (ACT), first place; Elba Fabiola Alvarado Beltrán G (ACT) second, third place went to Nathan Lachenmyer G (Mechanical Engineering), and two honorable mentions were bestowed upon Elizabeth Anne Watkins G (ACT), and Emily Tow ’12 (Mechanical Engineering). The prize amounts are as follows: first $5,000, second $3,000, and third $2,000. Honorable mentions are $1,000. The opening reception at the Wiesner Student Art Gallery in the Stratton Student Center on May 25 was very well-attended.

For next year’s Schnitzer Prize, applicants will be asked to submit a short video statement of their artistic philosophy, and a description of the work they are submitting.

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Ticket/Membership Programs

Since 1980, the council has underwritten MIT’s enrollment in the University Membership Program offered by Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts. This program provides free admission and discount benefits to all MIT undergraduate and graduate students, as well as 15 day passes for use by MIT faculty and staff. 14 of the day passes are now distributed at the Hayden Library circulation desk. One pass is sent to Lincoln Laboratory for its staff. MIT is ranked in the top ten of number of admissions to the MFA, and recorded 3,929 MIT students for fiscal year 2012, 780 day pass entries, 123 people who attended as part of a group visit, and 185 who attended an MFA event.

CAMIT’s sponsorship of an institutional membership with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum has just completed its first year; attendance for this period was 725.

The ICA Boston membership was renewed, and all MIT students, staff, and faculty are granted free admission with their MIT IDs. Discounts are also granted at the gift shop and café. As of May 2012, 696 MIT ID-holders gained free admission to the ICA.

The Photographic Resource Center (PRC) at Boston University membership continued. MIT undergraduates and graduate students have free unlimited access to the PRC galleries and library and receive member discounts on admission to lectures, workshops, and other special events. They can also enter their work into the juried members’ exhibition. CAMIT underwrites MIT’s
membership at the Harvard Art Museums, allowing all MIT graduate and undergraduate students free admission.

The very successful program with the Boston Symphony Orchestra continued this year. By obtaining a free College Card underwritten by the council, MIT students can gain free admittance almost all concerts (there are a handful of blackout dates). MIT is the top user of all area universities, with 672 cards claimed between January – April 2012, with each student attending an average of 10 concerts, resulting in 6,720 tickets claimed.

The council also provides 20 free tickets for MIT students to three concerts by the Boston Chamber Music Society’s season. Similar arrangements provide 20 tickets to four of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project’s concerts at Jordan Hall, along with 15 tickets to three of its Club concerts, and 20 tickets to each of the Radius ensemble’s concerts at the Longy School of Music in Harvard Square.

The Student Performing Arts Excursions Series continued, providing tickets to augment or support the curriculum of primarily the music and theater arts section (some tickets are provided at the request of faculty from other departments, but not as frequently). A total of $13,986 was spent on tickets distributed to MIT students. Performances such as the American Repertory Theater’s Porgy and Bess, World Music/CRASH Arts’ Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and the Actor’s Shakespeare Project’s production of Twelfth Night.

Finances and funding

The council raised a total of $384,883 from 69 members, making the average gift $5,578. $5,694 was raised from 41 non-member donors. The grand total raised was $390,577. Expenses for fiscal year 2012 totaled $454,312. This figure includes $18,279 in non-recurring expenses,* and the fourth annual $30,000 special allocation to the List Visual Arts Center in support of its efforts to conserve the permanent collection.

* $10,000 consultant for retreat
  $3,000 for purchase of video camera for LVAC
  $2,779 for 40th anniversary planning
  $2,500 for Harbison 150th commission

Future plans

2012 is an important year for CAMIT – it’s our 40th anniversary. A video and timeline will be produced for the October 2012 Annual Meeting, and the production of a new CAMIT brochure is planned. With increased attention paid to governance, we can expect a more dynamic structure, as more members move up through the ranks and are encouraged to participate in different ways. In 2012, many committee chairs’ terms are ending; their successors have been chosen and will be officially announced at the Annual Meeting in October.
Personnel information

Heidi Erickson, assistant to Executive Director of Arts Initiatives, is now responsible for taking minutes at CAMIT Executive Committee meetings; she also provides graphic design support for all Council programs.

Susan Cohen
Director
More information about the Council for the Arts can be found at http://arts.mit.edu/about/council/.