

Arts Initiatives

The director of Arts Initiatives works with associate provost Philip Khoury on strategic planning, communications, development, and cross-school coordination for the arts. She directs the [Office of the Arts](#), chairs the Arts Communications and Artist-in-Residence committees, and is a member of the Creative Arts Council and the advisory boards of the Catalyst Collaborative at MIT (CC@MIT), the List Visual Arts Center (LVAC), and the MIT Museum. The 2010–2011 academic year was dominated by the organization, production, and promotion of FAST, the [Festival of Arts, Science and Technology](#) in celebration of MIT's 150th anniversary.

Accomplishments

The final draft of the white paper on the arts at MIT was reviewed by the president and provost and, at their request, presented to the Academic Council in December 2010 and to the Faculty in February 2011. The provost published the [Report on the Arts at MIT](#) in June 2011.

This is the first comprehensive assessment of the arts at MIT since the 1987 “Joskow report” (principally authored by Paul Joskow, Elizabeth and James Killian professor emeritus of economics and currently president of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation).

The report's [executive summary](#) makes three broad points about MIT's strengths in the arts and how we can capitalize upon them moving forward.

1. The arts have been a core component of the educational mission of MIT and will play an even more significant role in the future.

MIT's charter advocates “the advancement, development and practical application of science in connection with arts, agriculture, manufactures, and commerce,” and the Institute has long recognized the value of the arts for educating scientists and engineers and fostering a genuinely creative atmosphere on campus. Artistic endeavors nurture creativity, innovation, and leadership. They encourage students to work at the edge and make intuitive leaps into the unknown that lead to crucial discoveries. MIT students are well known for their devotion to creating useful things that make a difference in the world, but many of them want to make things that are beautiful, provocative, and arresting, too; such things also make a difference in the world.

During the last four years, more than three quarters of undergraduates have entered MIT with advanced skills in the arts, especially in music. These students possess a distinctive combination of artistic aptitude and proficiency in scientific, engineering, or technological domains. Some, a select few, will go on to distinguished artistic careers. Others will become entrepreneurs in the creative industries of the future, or will lead other industries with the flexible and innovative thinking learned from serious engagement with the arts. Still more will find the practice or appreciation of art a passion vital to a full and balanced life. *MIT must support a curriculum that encourages cross-disciplinary creativity as well as the new SHASS distribution requirement in the arts with state-of-the-art equipment, labs, and practice rooms.*

2. Research at the intersections of art, science and engineering—where MIT has a competitive advantage—will determine the artistic and performative languages of the 21st century.

Since the late 1960s, MIT has played a leading role in initiating collaborations among artists and scientists, whose approaches to discovery and experimentation inform one another in enlightening ways. Alumni from MIT's graduate programs in art, architecture, and media have transformed the cultural landscape, nationally and internationally. *MIT should increase support for these students, who will animate the creative industries of the future. They will need exhibition, performance and research facilities that do justice to the media-rich art forms of the future.*

3. MIT faces a strategic decision about investment in the arts and should seize the opportunity to support the creative energy that sustains the Institute's leadership in innovation.

MIT already has an outstanding public art collection and significant buildings by internationally acclaimed architects. They are emblematic of the Institute's reputation for innovation and excellence. Accomplishments in the arts at MIT have been extraordinary, even though they often have been the result of *ad hoc* circumstances or collaborations; the next step is to design programmatic change. *MIT should strategically design and coordinate arts programming throughout the Institute to more effectively communicate its excellence in the arts.*

The report argued, finally, that the performance and display of innovative and cutting-edge art increases the Institute's visibility and reputation and should be one of the most prominent elements of its outreach to the public. Just as the report was completed, FAST, the Festival of Art, Science and Technology, took place throughout the spring term as part of MIT's 150th anniversary celebration. The festival demonstrated the enormous benefit of coordinating arts programs across the Institute, along with their power to express MIT's core values to the wider community.

Festival of Art, Science and Technology

FAST (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/>) was an exceptional showcase of MIT's intellect and creativity and lit up the campus from February to May, during the 150 days of MIT's sesquicentennial celebration.

FAST revealed to the MIT community and the public that the Institute is not only a leader in science, engineering, and technology, but is a community that practices art in innovative, thought-provoking, and highly distinctive ways. According to Tod Machover, festival director and Muriel R. Cooper professor of music and media, "MIT is the quickest place for change and ideas. Departments change. Disciplines come together. One reason the arts are so lively here is that disciplinary boundaries are so weak. People are encouraged to take their ideas wherever they go." FAST celebrated this creativity and welcomed the public to witness an exciting, surprising variety of work; its programs embraced past to future, performance to debate, artworks to inflatables, and the provocative to the unclassifiable.

A total of 392 participants—76 faculty, 150 students, 39 alumni, and 127 staff—created FAST, exhibiting *mens et manus* at its best. Faculty from three schools—Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS); Architecture and Planning; and Science—contributed to the festival. A fall term competition for student projects sponsored by FAST attracted 55 entries from teams of more than 150 students from every school at the Institute and even from Harvard; 12 projects were selected for the festival and developed in a workshop held during Independent Activities Period (IAP). More than 40 students worked on these installations, and an additional 50 students worked on faculty projects that were commissioned by the festival. Still more student musicians, actors, and producers participated in concerts, performances, and the opera *Death and the Powers*, which held its US premiere during the festival. FAST was funded by the 150th Committee, the deans of the School of Architecture and Planning and SHASS, the associate provost, the Council for the Arts at MIT, and individual donors. More than 32,000 people attended festival events, which included 22 commissioned art or architectural installations, 23 panels, 12 unique performances, and four curated exhibitions.

Festival Themes

Festival events were clustered into five themes that encompassed an exceptional array of subjects and artistic genres and broadened MIT's understanding of what the arts have been in the past and how they will contribute to the future. The range of material presented was far-reaching and diverse: from perspectives on media, performance, and electronic music experiments of the 1970s to the latest research on music and health, music and language, vision and cognition, new techniques of digital fabrication, and novel ways of using sensing devices and energy-efficient lighting.

FAST Past

FAST Past (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/fast-past/>) explored MIT's distinctive contributions to media arts, electronic music, and systems theory in art and design. The first festival weekend in February opened with an exhibition at The List Visual Art Center of the work of Stan VanDerBeek, who had been a fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies in the 1970s.

Professor of the history of art Caroline Jones led a forum, *Systems, Art, Process, and the Social*, whose panelists included artists, designers, curators, and a historian of science and technology. Professor Tod Machover organized *Music | MACHINES*, a day of panels and demonstrations of the past and future of music and technology, from hyperinstruments, sensors, and interfaces to theories of musical mind and emotion. Max Matthews, the widely recognized father of



fig1: Stan VanDerBeek, *Breath Death*, 1963, film still, List Visual Arts Center exhibition, 2011, photo courtesy of the estate of Stan VanDerBeek

electronic music, gave the keynote, which became a virtual reunion of past and present pioneers of electronic music. Matthews died shortly thereafter, making his participation in the festival a significant and poignant occurrence. An amazing concert featured imaginative, technologically inflected music composed by MIT faculty from the late 1970s to the present.



fig2: Music | Machines, FAST Past, image Suzana Lisanti

FAST Thinking

FAST Thinking incorporated a series of panels, lectures, and discussions about research on music and language and on vision and neuroscience, capped by a special concert by London's famed Lontano Ensemble.

The concert featured work by MIT faculty composers, including Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and Institute Professor John Harbison, Kenan Sahin distinguished professor of music Evan Ziporyn with the Bang-on-a-Can All-Stars, and world premieres by music faculty Charles Shadle and Peter Child. A 12-hour boundary-breaking event, FAST Thinking offered conversations with researchers working on the frontiers of art and science and gave the audience a rare opportunity to hear about revolutionary advances in the field.

FAST Opera

A highlight of the festival was the US premiere of *Death and the Powers* (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/opera/>) on March 18. A musically and technologically visionary "robotic" production composed by festival director Tod Machover, developed at the MIT Media Lab, and commissioned by Association Futurum of Monaco, the opera premiered at the Monte Carlo Opera in September 2010 and sold out at the Cutler Majestic during FAST. Produced in collaboration with the American Repertory Theatre, *Death and the Powers* included animated walls, a chorus of robots, and a musical chandelier, launching a new era in opera production and expression. MIT students developed and operated many of the opera's technologies.



fig 3. FAST Thinking, image Suzana Lisanti



fig4: Tod Machover, *Death and the Powers*, FAST Opera, photo © Jonathan Williams

FAST Future

The festival looked toward its faculty and students for FAST Future (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/fast-future/>). The New Music Marathon, organized by professor Evan Ziporyn, sold out Kresge for five hours of music from the Kronos Quartet, Bang-on-a-Can, renowned pipa virtuoso Wu Man, and MIT's own Gamelan Galak Tika and Chamber Chorus, featuring hyperstrings and a MIDI gamelan. Tod Machover premiered a moving work for Noam Chomsky and the Kronos Quartet that spoke to the value of music and the arts in a world of conflict. The evening was followed the next day by an unprecedented intergenerational convening of 55 creative arts faculty, alumni, and students at the Media Lab. Panelists discussed MIT's unique environment that enables boundaries to be bridged, new fields to be founded, and world-changing entities, such as the Center for Advanced Visual Studies and the Media Lab, to be launched and flourish. FAST Future celebrated MIT's culture and engaged in future-oriented debates and demonstrations of FAST installations. Students and faculty examined current practices and laid the groundwork for the future by examining artistic and theoretical questions and exploring the most effective pedagogical, research, and production infrastructures that will assure the expansion of MIT's creative culture in the years ahead.



fig5: New Music Marathon, FAST Future, (Evan Ziporyn, curator, with Kronos Quartet, Bang on a Can All Stars, Wu Man, MIT Gamelan Galak Tika and MIT Chamber Chorus), image © Andy Ryan

FAST Light

A laboratory for experimentation in reimagining the campus, 22 FAST installations were erected throughout the spring term from the Infinite Corridor to the Charles River, from Lobby 7 to prominent stairwells, and from the Community Lounge to the sky above Killian Court. The first project to be installed was *IceWall*, an 80-foot-long sculpture of illuminated ice blocks with flower seeds frozen inside. Created for Killian Court in February, the *IceWall* melted away, planting its seeds in the lawn where the spectacular FAST finale, FAST Light (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/fast-light/>), sparkled during two warm evenings in May.



fig6: Nader Tehrani and Gediminas Urbonas, *Liquid Archive*, FAST Light, image © Andy Ryan

For FAST Light, more than 40 faculty and students created an arresting open-air exhibition of kinetic illumination throughout MIT's campus, centering on Killian Court, the waterfront and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, the Infinite Corridor, and McDermott Court. On two consecutive evenings on May 7 and 8, 18,000 people from MIT and the greater Boston community flocked to campus to see the artworks glowing along the river: Otto Piene's colossal stars floated high in the air for *Sky Event*, Nader Tehrani and Gediminas Urbonas' *Liquid Archive* was a beacon on the river, while the city-scaled *Light Bridge* by Susanne Seitingner connected Boston to MIT. Artists and architects joined technologists and scientists across MIT in committing to the principles of the ambitious MIT Energy Initiative. Sheila Kennedy's *SOFT Rockers* created smart, clean energy charging stations that continue to attract attention around the world. Meejin Yoon's *Wind Screen* harnessed the wind that blew across McDermott Court, illuminating the façade of the Green Building with turbines that activated LEDs. *aFloat*, an interactive installation, produced a quiet pool of flickering LED lights on the marble platform of the iconic MIT Chapel.

The installations surprised, delighted, and truly transformed the landscape of MIT. Students participated in all of them, either in teams selected on the basis of a competition or through studios led by faculty designers, a demonstration of MIT's educational culture, where faculty and students are co-creators in making things that make a difference in the world. Their work is a tribute to the power of inspired collaborations that spanned disciplines and media and exceeded expectations.

FAST Performances

MIT has an unusually large number of highly accomplished musicians and performers among its faculty and students. The sesquicentennial provided an opportunity for new and inspiring experimental works by MIT composers to be performed by extraordinary professional and student ensembles (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/performances/>). The music that animated the Next Century Convocation held on MIT's Charter Day, commissioned by the Council for the Arts at MIT, composed by MIT faculty, and performed by

more than 400 students, was among the highlights of the landmark event. Music was present during many festival weekends. FAST was kicked off by the concert “An Artistic Menagerie: Collaborations of Mind, Hand and Imagerie 1900–1926” in Kresge Auditorium in January. The Handel and Haydn Society helped celebrate MIT’s 150th anniversary by performing *Israel in Egypt*, preceded by a thought-provoking preconcert lecture by professor Ellen Harris. The Boston Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) hosted *Washed by Fire*, a portrait concert of music by MIT’s own Keeril Makan.

In addition to Tod Machover’s opera, FAST took to the stage with MIT Dramashop productions of *Hydriotaphia, or The Death of Dr. Brown* and *Le Ronde (Let’s get it on)*. Central Square Theater and the Catalyst Collaborative at MIT presented a play about Alan Turing, *Breaking the Code*, to sold-out audiences, with many preshow discussions led by MIT faculty and researchers. Finally, ICA and the Emerging America Festival, in collaboration with FAST, presented professor Jay Scheib’s stunning multimedia performance work *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*.

Movement and dance enlivened the festival through performance and panels. Alumna Nell Breyer ’02 produced “A Dance in Sol LeWitt’s *Bars of Color Within Squares (MIT)*,” a performance staged on LeWitt’s stunning polychrome terrazzo floor created for the atrium of MIT’s Green Center for Physics. The dance examined rule systems manifest in group and individual behaviors and revealed surprising aspects of motion, color, and depth perception. Professor Thomas DeFrantz organized “Dance Technologies and Circulations of the Social @ MIT, Version 2.0,” a conference that explored media-focused research in performance, video game technologies, motion capture experimentation, and dance for the camera.

Media Coverage

The festival was widely recognized by the local and national press (<http://arts.mit.edu/fast/pressinfo/>). Locally, the *Boston Globe* called the festival an “illumination of imagination,” and music critic Jeremy Eichler praised the *New Music Marathon* by describing it as “a viscerally exciting event whose roster of performers and eclectic sensibility made it feel like a welcome breath of fresh air.” *The Boston Herald* wrote that FAST Light “lit up MIT with flair,” while *WBUR* encouraged a visit to the “spectacle.” *New England Cable News* visited the MIT boathouse on the Charles River and reported on the “eye catching, spectacular light show...the ultimate in interactive exhibits.”

In national coverage, *Time* magazine wrote, “MIT’s campus was ablaze for FAST Light” and published a picture of Otto Piene’s *Sky Event* in its culture spread. The *PBS News Hour* covered the *MIT Mood Meter* installation, including it in exciting new technologies from the Media Lab. BBC Radio 3 visited Music | MACHINES during the festival to “discover music-making in one of America’s leading musical cities.”

The blogosphere recognized the innovation inherent in faculty and student installations. FAST Light was featured in prominent architecture websites: Archpaper.com, ArchDaily.com, and Archinect.com. Many FAST installations, particularly professor Sheila Kennedy’s *SOFT Rockers* and students Javier Hernandez and M. Ehsan Hoque’s *MIT Mood Meter*, continue to attract the attention of dozens of international publications that range from a focus upon innovative and sustainable design to cool hunting posts.

The *Tech* faithfully covered FAST, publishing many images of FAST artworks and performances throughout the spring term. *The Tech* wrote, “MIT150 did a great deal to bolster the Institute’s image in Cambridge, in the US, and in the world. Locally, the Open House and FAST Light saw a big turnout from Boston-area residents.”

The arts brought the MIT community together and brought arts into the metropolitan area. Throughout the spring term, from the official opening of the celebration at the 150 Objects Exhibition at the MIT Museum to the FAST Light weekend, the prominent role the arts play in MIT’s outreach to the public was demonstrated. Thousands of people were inspired and captivated by the dazzling lights along the Charles and the stars floating above Killian Court and no doubt saw MIT in a new light as a result.

Arts Communications

Through close collaboration with the News Office, the directors of communications in the School of Architecture and Planning and SHASS, and communications officers on the Arts Communication Committee, Arts Initiatives coordinates and facilitates internal and external promotion, raising awareness of and publicity for the arts at MIT. FAST events brought an unprecedented level of news coverage and offered a model for raising the visibility of the arts at MIT in the future. Social media played an important role (Facebook and Twitter), along with traditional press releases and outreach to blogs as well as print journalists.

Arts Portal

As mentioned in last year’s report, the creation of a new arts portal is a major component of a strategic plan for arts communication. The new portal (<http://arts.mit.edu/>) was launched in December and, even during a “quiet phase,” immediately attracted attention. With the launch of FAST in January 2011, traffic built steadily toward around 115,000 weekly page views; on the culminating afternoon of FAST Light, the map of installations, for example, received 62,000 hits.

ARTalk

Shelby Heineck ’13 succeeded Ken Haggerty ’11 as editor of the ARTalk blog (<http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/author/ARTalk>) hosted by the Admissions Office website. Several new bloggers were recruited, and they posted 11 stories during the academic year, including a two-part series on MIT’s wealth of excellent music groups. The arts continued to be prominent on MIT’s home page, which, along with the News Office website, covered FAST events extensively. The scores of new videos of FAST panels, concerts, and installations are disseminating knowledge about arts activities at MIT to a wide audience.

Current Goals

- *Continue the momentum created by FAST.* We will hold wide-ranging discussions among the arts faculty and staff during the coming academic year to determine the best approach to advancing MIT’s leadership in creative work at the nexus of art, science, and technology.

- *Maintain the prominence and visibility of the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts.* Preparations are under way for the next award ceremony, campus residency, and gala in April 2012.
- *Revitalize the artist-in-residence programs administered through the Office of the Arts.* An impressive roster of eight visiting artists will come to campus during the 2011–2012 academic year, all of whom were selected from an open call to departments, labs, and centers. This new process, implemented for the first time in spring 2011, has embedded the visiting artists program in ongoing research and collaborations with MIT faculty and generated cross-disciplinary connections among programs that had not previously been in contact; for example, the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) and the Anthropology program will cosponsor the visit of sound artist Florian Hecker, and the Office of the Arts will cosponsor a public performance by the artist with the Goethe Institute in Boston.

Administrative Initiatives

A new Artist-in-Residence Committee was formed, with the goals of maximizing the impact of the endowments administered by the Office of the Arts and enhancing the visibility of the program. Members are:

- Ute Meta Bauer, associate professor and head, Program in Art, Culture and Technology
- John Durant, director, MIT Museum
- Jane Farver, director, List Visual Arts Center (retired June 30, 2011, and will be replaced by David Freilach as acting director)
- Leila W. Kinney, executive director of Arts Initiatives, chair
- Nick Montfort, associate professor of digital media
- Meg Rotzel, producer of Artists in Residence and Public Programs
- Jay Scheib, associate professor of theater arts
- Rebecca Uchill, graduate student, History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art program
- Evan Ziporyn, Kenan Sahin distinguished professor of music

Future Plans

Aside from devising an effective means of continuing FAST, repeating the success of the Gustavo Dudamel residency and gala for the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts, and assessing the results of the revamped Artist-in-Residence Program, the most important project during the coming academic year will be to support the development of plans for celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Council for the Arts.

Personnel

Meg Rotzel, previously the ACT program coordinator, joined the Office of the Arts as producer of Artists in Residence and Public Programs in September 2010. Lynn Heinemann, senior editorial assistant, retired in December 2010. Carla Sehbani, senior administrative and financial assistant, departed in February 2011 and was succeeded by Stacy Pyron, who was previously with the Lemelson-MIT Program. Leila Kinney will be promoted to executive director of Arts Initiatives effective July 1, 2011.

Leila W. Kinney

Executive Director of Arts Initiatives