

MIT Museum

This year has been dominated by, first, continuing preparations for the opening of the new MIT Museum in Kendall Square and, second, the COVID-19 crisis, which resulted in the closure of the museum to the public on March 13, 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was already noticeable in FY2020 visitation, which had been lagging year on year since fall 2019, most likely as a result of the downturn in international tourism. Closure has been highly disruptive in terms of operations. Not only have our face-to-face public services been suspended, but also, we have been unable to engage with faculty, students, and scholars, and work on collections-related exhibition planning has slowed. Nevertheless, we have continued to work on exhibition planning and exhibition design for the new museum, and we have greatly expanded the museum's online presence, notably in a series of online engagement activities aimed at the museum's key target audiences.

Collections

With twin goals of creating a capacious collections gallery and workshop in the new museum and undertaking plans to develop a new off-site collections facility, the collections team worked to define potential opportunities for greater access to our collections, contributed to the exhibition concept design process for the new museum, completed work with Campus Planning and Schwartz/Silver Architects on a strategic plan for a new collections facility, and drafted a comprehensive plan for moving all collections in the next three years.

Our curators' efforts, as well as objects from our collections, were showcased in a series of exhibitions including *The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology* and *Drawing, Designing, Thinking: 150 Years of Teaching Architecture at MIT*, which closed in August 2019. In addition, our Berenice Abbott collection and Robotics collection were featured in four international exhibitions in England, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany. An effort by the museum and publisher Steidl resulted in the publication of *Harold Edgerton: Seeing the Unseen*, a book of photographs and essays about "Doc" Edgerton's remarkable images.

The museum accessioned 13 major gifts and made four deaccessions. Most notably, approximately 3,000 volumes from the Hart Rare Book Collection were transferred to the MIT Distinctive Collections, enabling both better conservation of and public access to this exceptional collection. Approximately 98 artifacts and digital images were lent to museums locally and around the world. Multiple collections-related programs and workshops for MIT classes (including STS.050 History of MIT) were conducted until MIT closed in March.

We made great progress on two major digitization efforts. The Project Vannevar team had captured more than 22,000 images from the museum's biographical files when access to collections was lost. Since then, working remotely, the team has completed the cataloging of 12,000 images. The digitization team also photographed 2,258 (of 8,621) individual works from the Architecture Student Thesis Drawing Collection.

Exhibitions

The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology opened in October 2019. Through art and artifacts, this unique exhibition explored various dimensions of the art-technology relationship. It featured 200 original works by 120 internationally known artists and more than 75 artifacts such as cameras and test prints from the museum's own Polaroid Collection. Special events including curatorial talks and a day of programs for the local Polaroid community were extremely well received. The exhibition saw a complete changeout of the artwork with the opening of part 2 on March 7, leaving a mere six days for our visitors to view it.



Gallery view, The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Science, MIT Museum. (Photo by Anna Olivella)

Making Digital Tangible opened in November 2019 and featured the influential work of Professor Hiroshi Ishii and the Tangible Media Group at the MIT Media Lab.



Selected objects from Making Digital Tangible, MIT Museum. (Photo by Anna Olivella)

Planning for the new museum at Kendall advanced significantly, with contract awards as follows:

- Exhibit design and contract lead: Studio Joseph, New York
- Graphic design: Pentagram, New York
- Media design: Bluecadet, New York and Philadelphia
- Lighting design: Tillotson Design Associates, New York
- Cost estimating/fabrication: Kubik Maltbie, New Jersey/Pennsylvania

A two-day museum-wide design kickoff was held in February. Following the closure of the museum, all activity moved to online, remote collaboration. The museum's exhibitions team along with the contracted design teams successfully completed the concept design phase in May, and progress on schematic development followed through the end of FY2020.

MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery

The MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery advanced its program of generating meaningful exchanges among the MIT Museum, the MIT research and education community, and the visiting public. Two courses were hosted during FY2020.

The 9.72 Vision in Art and Neuroscience course was offered by the MIT Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences for a second year, drawing students from varied areas of study. The course resulted in a public exhibition of individual student projects, rendering principles of vision neuroscience accessible to the visitor's eye.

In addition, 21A.S01 Paranormal Machines, funded by a Mellon Faculty Grant awarded by the MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology to Associate Professor Graham Jones, was offered through the MIT Anthropology Program. Combining seminar discussion and studio work, the course introduced anthropological research on paranormal beliefs in different cultures and explored art as a method for altering and extending perception. Original student works were displayed in a one-day exhibition/event.

Engagement

To allow for greater flexibility and collaboration, as well as to leverage expertise and capacity, the museum completed a restructuring of the various working groups involved in education, bringing them under the new umbrella of engagement.

The museum offered more than 100 days of programming in the Idea Hub makerspace, engaging over 4,000 participants in MIT-themed science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) learning experiences, and developed and hosted 30 public events and special programs. Highlights included Lunar Day, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing on the moon and MIT's contribution to that historic event; Girls Day, introducing young people to female scientists and engineers and career possibilities; and the annual Friday After Thanksgiving Chain Reaction held in Rockwell Cage. Together, these public programs reached over 6,000 participants.

More than 4,000 middle and high school students, teachers, and other chaperones participated in over 200 hands-on science and engineering workshops.

The museum continued its collaboration with Nord Anglia Education's international group of K–12 schools, supporting the group's science curriculum by offering challenges designed around the theme "Reveal." MIT's Jim Collins from Bioengineering, Allan Adams from the Future Oceans Lab, and Felice Frankel, researcher and science photographer from Chemical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering, were featured in the challenges. The team also prepared challenges for the coming academic year, along with teacher professional development programs.

The Cambridge Science Festival worked with more than 100 collaborators across the greater Cambridge area to support, plan, and coordinate festival events celebrating our region's rich science and technology culture. When live events planned for April 2020 were canceled, a number of online and remote initiatives were implemented. The festival's school-based Curiosity Challenge drew over 3,800 student participants from across Massachusetts, with a record number of 180 student winners.

The Science Festival Accelerator initiative, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, entered its second year of a three-year award that allowed the Science Festival Alliance (SFA) to support the development of 14 new festival organizations across North America. Seventy-five SFA member organizations provided a diverse array of community STEM celebrations that reached more than 2 million attendees in the United States and Canada.

The Science in Vivo project, funded by the Simons Foundation, supported the documentation and evaluation of community events integrating science engagement experiences into non-science public settings. The museum also began work on a \$359,000 subaward (part of a four-year National Science Foundation grant) to create The Circuit, a nationwide online system for connecting the public to science.

Members of the engagement team participated in national and international conferences and meetings including those of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of Science-Technology Centers, Maker Ed Convening, the United Kingdom Science Festival Network, and the New England Museum Association.

Administration

New MIT Museum at Kendall Square

The base construction of the new building at 314 Main Street was completed, and good progress was made on the creation of the new museum on the first three floors of the building. When construction stopped on March 19, the following work had been completed: metal stud framing rough and wood blocking, mechanical and electrical rough, and acoustical spray of the ceiling on the third floor and coordination drawings for the second floor. Work on coordination drawings for the first floor is ongoing. Construction was able to resume on June 8.

We continued our work on the financial model for the new museum with a team from the Office of the Vice President for Finance. Operations efforts also continued in collaboration with MIT Investment Management Company (MITIMCo) and the MIT team planning the new welcome center, which will be an important neighbor and collaborator.

Technology

In anticipation of the new museum in Kendall Square, we continued our work to improve our digital collections infrastructure, including the processing of 20 terabytes of digital assets. In addition, we worked with the Office of the Vice President for Finance to initiate a payment processing pilot with Chase Bank and to complete our requirements definition for systems to support customer relationship management, ticket sales, and other systems that facilitate museum operations.

We deepened our collaboration with MIT Information Systems and Technology to augment internal museum staff resources for technical support. This support was vital as the staff transitioned to its work-from-home status. The physical closing of the museum also prioritized the delivery of content through various online channels, accelerating our efforts to improve the accessibility and utility of our online collections portal and to prepare for the relaunch of our eCommerce operation.

Development

Ninety donors made new gifts and pledges totaling nearly \$5 million.

Fundraising for the new museum at Kendall Square continued, with just under \$4 million in new commitments pledged. Both a gallery and the collections workshop space were named.

Retail and Functions

Retail sales totaled \$730,205, down 38% from FY2019. Despite a decrease in museum visitation, the store realized a net profit of more than \$150,000.

Revenue of nearly \$128,000 was earned through approximately 50 event rentals before the museum closed. Repeat clients from the Sloan School of Executive Education, the School of Engineering, the Department of Chemistry, and other MIT-affiliated groups accounted for approximately 72% of event rentals. New non-MIT clients including IBM, Norwegian Energy Partners, and Nu Skin contributed to the remaining 28%.

Public Relations and Marketing

A team from Pentagram led by partner Michael Bierut was chosen to guide the museum through a re-branding exercise. A reimagined logo that more accurately reflects the essence of the museum was created, and its application across an array of uses is under way. The museum also participated in a campus-wide wayfinding project that included the design of exterior signage at the Kendall Gateway.

Our effort to better engage the museum’s digital audience has met with promising results. Recently the paused search for a digital communications coordinator resumed, confirming a commitment to our online presence.

The Polaroid Project received significant press coverage across all media, including local and national print and broadcast.

Personnel

The newly formed engagement team, comprising 14 staff from education and public programs, the Cambridge Science Festival, Science Festival Alliance, and the MIT Museum–Nord Anglia collaboration, is led by Greg DeFrancis, who was hired in July 2019 as director of engagement and the Cambridge Science Festival. We said farewell to two members last summer when Jenny Novotney, programs coordinator, and Julie Fooshee, SFA coordinator, left for new positions. Julia Sable joined the team in September, succeeding Jenny. Melisa Rojas began work in November in the new position of youth and community engagement coordinator, and Joanna MacIver was hired in January for the new position of administrative assistant.

The exhibitions team expanded in order to plan and develop the exhibitions for the new MIT Museum in Kendall Square. In September, Emily Archer was hired as project manager, Lindsay Bartholomew as exhibit content and experience developer, and Jacob Montz as exhibit developer, life sciences. Caroline Klibanoff, who had been project manager, left in August for a new position.

Anna Kelly joined the administrative team in September as administrative assistant following Katie Porter’s promotion to registrar.

Ariel Weinberg was promoted to the new position of digital archivist and collections information systems manager.

Tina McCarthy resigned as digital communications coordinator in January, and Rachael Robinson, curatorial associate for the Hart Nautical Collections and museum reference assistant, resigned in February, each to take new positions.

John Durant
Director, MIT Museum