



MIT MUSEUM PRESS RELEASE

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DURANT APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF MIT MUSEUM

Looks to boost MIT profile and public understanding of science and technology

Cambridge, MA (April 2005) — MIT announced today that John Durant, a museum director and academic researcher with extensive experience at some of England's leading science museums, has been selected as the new director of the MIT Museum.

Currently the head of At-Bristol, a science and natural history center in Bristol, England, Durant has focused much of his career on promoting public engagement with science and technology. He served as the world's first Professor of Public Understanding of Science while at Imperial College, London.

"John Durant's appointment represents a major development for the MIT Museum," said Alan Brody, Associate Provost for the Arts. "John has a vision that will bring a vibrant new focus and energy to the museum and make it a centerpiece of a much larger program in the Public Engagement with Science."

Durant will assume his new responsibilities on July 1, 2005. He will also have an appointment as adjunct professor in the MIT Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS).

"I am excited about working with my colleagues at the MIT Museum and in STS," said Durant. "Ideas and innovations produced out of MIT will have a huge impact on the way we and our children live in the 21st century, and I hope to explore some ground-breaking ways of making MIT research more accessible to the wider community."

Durant's appointment represents a significant step in the evolution of the MIT Museum, which was founded in 1971 with the mission of showcasing the creativity and achievements of MIT's faculty, students, and staff to the broader community. Located at 265 Massachusetts Ave. in Cambridge, the museum presents changing and ongoing exhibitions and public programs and is home to renowned collections in science and technology, holography, architecture and design, and the history of nautical engineering.

Durant's stated goals include "a radically re-conceived" museum that will help facilitate informed public debate about the place of scientific and technological innovation in the wider culture: "The MIT Museum should be a living place where the public not only enjoys exhibitions but also engages with scientists and technologists doing cutting-edge work in the here-and-now," Durant said.

Durant hopes to give the museum a higher public profile and a greater community presence in Cambridge and Boston; to create smaller, faster and more flexible ways of exhibiting; and to develop museum programming within the larger context of contemporary issues. And unlike most science museums that cater largely to families with young children, Durant aims to focus much of his efforts on programs that will appeal to audiences of all ages.

Durant's academic appointment within STS will provide opportunities for ongoing interactions with MIT faculty and research projects. "We anticipate that John's new museum and faculty appointments will help create a robust network of activities at MIT involving public engagement in science and technology," said Rosalind Williams, the Metcalfe Professor of Writing and Director of the STS Program.

Durant, a native of Norwich, England, received the MA degree in Natural Science in 1972 and the PhD degree in History and Philosophy of Science in 1977, from Queens' College at the University of Cambridge.

From 1989 to 2000, he was Director of Science Communications at the Science Museum in London, one of the oldest and largest museums of science and technology in the world. Appointed in 1989 by Imperial College, London, to the first professorship of Public Understanding of Science, he devoted the next 11 years to galvanizing the new field nationally and internationally, and also founded the first peer reviewed international academic journal devoted to research in the public dimensions of science and technology.

Most recently, as chief executive officer of At-Bristol, he helped establish the independent, not-for-profit science and natural history center as the largest science-based visitor attraction in the UK outside London. At-Bristol has won 12 national awards and was selected as England's "Family Attraction of the Year" in 2002.

As a member of the House of Lords Select Committee of Science and Technology from 1999-2000, Durant assisted in the drafting and editing of one of the most influential and widely cited policy documents on science and society in Europe. He has held several government consulting posts, and is a frequent lecturer and public speaker.

Durant is replacing previous museum director Jane Pickering, who left MIT in 2002 to become assistant director for public programs at the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University.

"Science and technology have never been more important for everyday life than they are today," said Philip S. Khoury, Dean of the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. "We are most fortunate to be able to attract Durant to our shores and we look forward to developing new programs designed to bridge the gap between science and the public."