MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology

The MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) is an academic program and research center in the Department of Architecture, within the School of Architecture + Planning. ACT explores art, in its broad, complex and global history and in its contemporary forms, in conjunction with its relations to culture, science, technology, and design. This investigation occurs in ACT’s academic offerings and public programs and is buttressed by the research of faculty, fellows, and guests. Research manifests itself in individual and collaborative forms and includes work that investigates, creates and bridges practices involving time, movement and space: cinema, video, sound, performance, photography, experimental media and new genres, conceptual and spatial experiments with architecture and design, and writings and publications. Critical thinking, knowledge mining, and creative engagement, along with explorations of changing public and private spheres are of particular relevance. Bridges between MIT discipline groups and departments are an important facet of these encounters. “Art on a civic scale,” is understood as encompassing many subjectivities and forms of migratory thinking and action to engage a critically transformative view of the world.

Academic Program

ACT is one of the five discipline groups in the Department of Architecture; Architecture oversees the graduate program and faculty appointments and promotions.

Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology offers a highly selective, two-year Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology (SMACT) degree. There were eleven students enrolled in the graduate program at the beginning of the academic year, two withdrew in the fall, and five graduated in June; four students will enter their second year of study in the fall of 2013. Five of the 56 applicants to the graduate program for AY2014 were accepted and one was waitlisted. ACT ultimately offered admission to the candidate on the waitlist; three of the six individuals offered admission accepted the offer.

In October 2012 ACT hosted an Open House for prospective SMACT degree applicants. Approximately 23 people attended. The event included a tour of the facility, faculty presentations, and the first seminar series talk of the semester by new lecturer Jesal Kapadia.

Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment

The program offers electives for Master of Architecture (MArch) students and graduate students from other disciplines.

On the undergraduate level, the program offers a discipline stream for Bachelor of Science in Architecture (BSA) majors and supports the General Institute Requirements, providing subjects
that fulfill the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) requirement as well as a HASS concentration and minor. In AY2013, eleven students were ACT HASS concentrators and two students were ACT HASS minors.

Of the 227 students enrolled in ACT subjects in AY2013, 87 (38%) were graduate students and 138 (62%) were undergraduates; 41% of students taking ACT subjects were majors within SA+P.

International travel was an integral component of two subjects. Studio Seminar in Public Art/Public Sphere – Spatial Cultural Identity (4.367/4.368) traveled to Beijing, and Networked Cultures and Participatory Media – Sustainable Communities, Radical Gardens and Techno-Ecologies (4.332/4.333) collaborated with students at the Finnish Academy of Arts in Helsinki. Both trips occurred in the spring. The SA+P Dean’s Office, the Department of Architecture, the Council for the Arts at MIT, and ACT provided support for the travel. The introductory and advanced photography classes also took field trips to New York City, funded by ACT.

ACT expanded its offerings to include a new subject for graduates and undergraduates: 4.312/4.313 New Models and Modeling as Practice. Students enrolled in this class are working with students at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences and Arts to explore the concept of modeling across art, science, and architecture as a form of knowledge production.

As part of the two-year Visiting Artist residency with John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul, ACT offered the course Cinematic Migrations under the Advanced Workshop in Artistic Practice and Transdisciplinary Research course numbers, 4.314/4.315. It was confirmed for the following academic year as 4.356/4.357 and approved for HASS-Arts (HASS-A) and HASS-Exploration (HASS-E) status.

4.320/4.321 Introduction to Sound Creations received HASS-A and HASS-E status in spring 2013.

ACT piloted a grant program to support the exhibition activities of faculty and students during both the fall and spring semesters. In its inaugural year, seven grants were provided and six were activated.

Research

Two residencies by international filmmaker John Akomfrah, OBE, and producer Lina Gopaul (Smoking Dogs) took place during the first year of Renée Green’s Cinematic Migrations research project. Migration and the present pragmatics of cinematic production and distribution were among the themes explored with lectures, screenings, and seminars during their first two residencies. ACT’s Monday night lecture series is also part of this project, and was enriched by the ten speakers who visited the department over the course of AY2013. Visitor presentations are discussed in the Lecture Series and Public Events section of this report.

Prof. Urbonas established collaborations with a number of institutions. He started working with the Helsinki International Art Program in Finland (HIAP) using artistic practices to understand
the consequences of global ecological changes and their local impact on European natural environments; he is working with Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom to address the environmental ecology and cultures of rivers; and he investigated the use of democratic games and their relationship to citizenship and participation in urban development in the Kista-Rinkeby area in Stockholm.

When Bosnia-Herzegovina’s National Museum closed in October 2012, Azra Akšamija responded by launching CULTURESHUTDOWN, an international initiative to protest the financial and political crisis affecting the National Museum and six other national cultural institutions. On March 4, 2013, over 275 museums and galleries expressed solidarity with threatened Bosnian institutions by symbolically “closing” exhibited objects with barricade tape. This project is ongoing, exploring Museum Solidarity as a novel form of cultural production that rests on the global, local, and multidisciplinary collaboration of individuals drawn by sympathy and empathy to cultural heritage and institutions, while offering a critical perspective on the role of culture in state-building processes. This campaign grew from Aksamija's work advocating for the museum as a site to produce public good, while simultaneously providing infrastructure for creation and display of new forms of cultural production that involve actors from different disciplines with no fixed roles.

In collaboration with Leila Kinney of Arts at MIT and Nasser Rabbat of the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture, Akšamija is one of fifteen shortlisted candidates for a $200,000 “Building Bridges: Campus Community Engagement Program” grant from the Association of Performing Arts Presenters for expanding awareness and understanding about Muslim societies with a forthcoming project, Islamobile.

**Kepes Fellowship**

In 2011, ACT was awarded $60,000 by the Erste Stiftung Foundation to fund the György Kepes Fellowship for Advanced Studies and Transdisciplinary Research in Art to sponsor two fellows from Eastern Europe, each having a residency at MIT of four to five months. Tadej Pogačar was the second Kepes fellow and was in residence from September 2012 until February 2013. While here, Tadej conducted research on the political and cultural context surrounding the project that CAVS founder György Kepes planned for the São Paolo Biennale. His research subsequently expanded to include the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and Brazil and its impact on artistic production.

**Fellows, Affiliates, and Visiting Scholars**

During AY2013 Research Affiliate Javier Anguera continued the development of the Contemporary Culture Index (ccindex.info), “an online, open-access bibliographical database indexing international journals and periodicals.” The project was awarded a grant by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago. The Index’s focus includes art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and social science. Almost 1,000 records were added to the database. In addition, as a librarian, Mr. Anguera introduced Jeremy Grubman to ACT as a means to instigate professional library science stewardship for CAVS materials.
Nomeda Urbonas participated in the creation of the exhibitions *School Politics* (Rotch Library), *Pro-Test Lab Archive* (National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania), and *Karaoke* at Transmedia 2013 in Berlin, Germany.

Florian Hecker was a Research Affiliate during the fall and a Visiting Scholar and Lecturer in the spring. Over the year, Mr. Hecker had three solo exhibitions, participated in six group exhibitions, produced the book *Chimerizations*, lectured at MoMA PS1 and Berklee College of Music, and gave five sound performances in the United States and Europe.

CAVS Fellow Elizabeth Goldring continued to work on the video *Sketching the Blurr*, a book of poetry, and *Centerbook*, a history of the CAVS Fellows program. Ms. Goldring donated her papers, video, seeing machines, and retina prints to the MIT Museum.

During Zenovia Toloudi’s appointment in Fall 2012, she assisted Prof. Gediminas Urbonas with his class 4.312/4.313, Advanced Studio in the Production of Space: New Models, Modeling as Practice. She also presented at the MIT Media Lab and MIT Museum.

Affiliate and former ACT lecturer Andrea Frank worked with the Center for Bits and Atoms during the spring semester to create a large wall installation of 2,000 laser-cut taxidermied bees for the *Personal Structures* exhibition at Palazzo Bembo.

Sonia Matos, Ph.D., continued her research project, “Designing Food Cultures”, while in residence as a Visiting Scholar in April. In addition to her research, Dr. Matos lectured in MIT’s Anthropology program and in ACT’s course 4.332/4.333, Networked Cultures and Participatory Media: Sustainable Communities, Radical Gardens and Techno-Ecologies.

**CAVS Special Collection**

The Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection (CAVSSC) contains collaborative and time-based productions generated by or related to the tenure of nearly 130 internationally recognized artist-fellows who were affiliated with the Center for Advanced Visual Studies between 1967 and 2009. ACT is responsible for ensuring the sustained professional care and preservation of these materials, while granting access to scholars and facilitating generative uses by MIT faculty and students. In July ACT hired Jeremy Grubman as archivist and librarian to assess the collection’s preservation and digitization needs, create a finding aid, and identify and write grants for the development of a web-based digital repository. Over the course of the year, Mr. Grubman inventoried and assessed 70 boxes of documents, 3,000 photographs and slides, 250 posters, over 500 video tapes, 36 film reels, and eight portfolios with 256 sides of information. He processed a gift of 53 CAVS posters and 50 CD’s from the widow of noted electronic music composer, MIT faculty member, and CAVS Fellow, Paul Earls; prepared two letters of interest to foundations, identified a dozen potential funding sources, met experts from the MIT Libraries in the areas of copyright, archives, digitization, and preservation and conservation, and responded to four to five reference requests a week.
ACT Lecture Series and Public Events

The Monday night lecture series continued for its eighth year, attracting a broad range of speakers and sizable audiences. During AY13 and AY14, it is part of the Cinematic Migrations research project. ACT faculty and students also hosted several other events examining the intersection of art, culture, and technology as part of faculty research and the program’s academic offerings.

• **Experiments in Thinking, Action & Form: Cinematic Migrations** is a two-year collaborative research project initiated by Renée Green (Free Agent Media) and co-hosted by the MIT Visiting Artists Program and ACT. John Akomfrah, OBE, and producer Lina Gopaul are the founders of Smoking Dogs Films and founding members of the seminal UK-based Black Audio Film Collective. Their work is one of the focal points of investigation for the Cinematic Migrations research project.

Fall semester speakers were Jesal Kapadia, Lecturer, ACT; Chip Lord, Professor Emeritus, Film & Digital Media, UC Santa Cruz; Ros Gray, Lecturer, Critical Studies, Goldsmiths University of London; and Krista Lynes, Assistant Professor, Communication Studies Department, Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. In the spring, speakers included Nora Alter, Chair and Professor of Film and Media Arts at Temple University, and artists and filmmakers Arthur Jafa, Karim Aïnouz, Knut Åsdam, and Simin Farkhondeh participated in the series.

• **Visiting Artist Program.** As part of the Cinematic Migrations research project and in cooperation with the Visiting Artists Program, John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul visit MIT for a week each semester for two years. During their residencies, they participate in public programs, seminars, and workshops and collaborate with MIT faculty, researchers, and students on a symposium that will conclude their residency in the spring of 2014. Their first visit in October/November of 2012 included both a lecture series event examining their 1986 documentary *Handsworth Songs* and a screening of their feature film *The Nine Muses*. The screenings were followed with lectures and a conversation between Mr. Akomfrah, Ms. Gopaul, and Prof. Green. During their second weeklong visit in March, excerpts from their films *The Stuart Hall Project* and *The Unfinished Conversation* were shown as part of the lecture series and compared and contrasted as they shared themes of identity and migration. Additional programming associated with their residency included discussion of their works *Peripeteia*, *The Call of Mists*, *The Genome Chronicles*, and *Memory Room 451*, as well as explorations of themes related to migration and the present pragmatics of cinematic production and distribution.

• **Making Space, a conversation and potluck.** ACT student Anne Callahan organized a panel to discuss the creation of shared creative spaces. The panel included Houston-based Visiting Artist Rick Lowe, Alec Resnick, founder of the Somerville hackerspace Sprout & co., Susan Fleischmann, director of Cambridge Community Television, and Phil Walsh, Director of the Campus Activities Complex at MIT.

• **Art and Common Space.** Prof. Urbonas hosted a public lecture by Professor Maaretta Jaukkuri of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in October.
She discussed pedagogy and public space.

- **Kepes Fellow Lecture.** Tadej Pogačar, the György Kepes Fellow in fall 2012, presented his research on Kepes’s aborted 1969 São Paulo Biennale project and its relationship to the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Institute, a non-profit cultural institution he founded in 1998 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He also discussed his recent publication CODE:RED. ACT professor Gediminas Urbonas introduced the presentation.

- **Working Title, A Phill Niblock Book Launch.** ACT and the List Visual Arts Center co-hosted this program, which included a performance by Berklee College of Music group Two Lips, videos of Mr. Niblock’s work, a presentation, book signing, and reception. ACT Lecturer Florian Hecker introduced the program.

- **Sonic Practice, Discourse and Auditory Experimentation.** As part of the ACT class 4.320/4.321 Introduction to Sound Creations, three public sound performances with lectures were presented in April and May with the financial support of the Council for the Arts at MIT. The featured speakers and performers were Cambridge-based musician Keith Fullerton Whitman, whose work focuses on electronic and acoustic music; Glasgow-based artist, filmmaker, and musician Luke Fowler; philosopher Guerino Mazzola, a professor of collaborative arts and music theory at the School of Music, University of Minnesota; and Reza Negarestani, an Iranian philosopher and writer.

- **Currency ~ Revolution: Spatial Strategies of Resistance** was a panel discussion on the overlapping content of the spring 2013 issues of Thresholds and Scapegoat, two art and architectural journals. MIT PhD candidate Rebecca Uchill moderated the discussion between editors from each publication, and the program was introduced by ACT professor Gediminas Urbonas and professor of the practice Antoni Muntadas.

- **Cambridge Open Archives.** As part of Cambridge Archives’ Spaces: Sacred and Profane Open Archives tour, archivist and librarian Jeremy Grubman provided an overview of the CAVS Special Collection to three groups in June.

**Faculty Accomplishments**

**Awards**

In November, the Islamic Cemetery in Altach, Austria, designed by Bernardo Bader, was awarded the International 2012 Piranesi Award. ACT professor Azra Akšamija designed the Qibla wall-curtain and rugs for the prayer room. Prof. Akšamija was also awarded MIT’s Class of ‘22 Career Development Professorship for AY2014.

Prof. Urbonas was appointed as a member of the advisory board of Media Art History’s International Conference Series on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology.
ACT Professor Renée Green was awarded a grant from the New York art organization Art Matters in support of her film *Returning Kaleidoscopic Migration Constellations*. Green was also nominated for the Anonymous Was A Woman award.

**Exhibitions, Performances, and Commissions**

Renée Green’s *Media Bichos*, a commission by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and part of Green’s design of the MoMA Media Lounge, were unveiled in October 2012. In addition, she participated in the following group exhibitions: *NYC 1993* (The New Museum, New York, NY), *Blues for Smoke* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY), *Make An Effort To Remember. Or, Failing That, Invent* (Bétonsalon, Paris, France) and *The Book Machine: The Imaginary Library Collection* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France); Green was also commissioned to produce a new work for the group exhibition *Empire State* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy).

Gediminas Urbonas had multiple presentations including *Karaoke* (Transmediale 2013, Berlin, Germany), *Pro-Test Lab Archive In Exhibition The Crowds* (National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania), and *School Politics* (Rotch Library, Cambridge, MA).

Azra Akšamija organized CULTURESHUTDOWN, an international appeal that involved over 275 museums, galleries, and libraries in more than 20 countries protesting the closing of major cultural institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She also participated in the group exhibitions *Cube or Dome* (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Berlin), *Cross-Currents: Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Art of the Islamic World* (IDEA, Colorado Springs), and *Treten Sie ein! Treten Sie aus! Warum Menschen ihre Religion wechseln* (Jewish Museum of Hohenems, Austria).

Joan Jonas performed and exhibited at multiple sites around the world: *Joan Jonas En Conversation avec Joan Simon* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, France), *Tate Live* (Tate Modern, London, England), *They Come To Us Without A Word* (Kitakyushu, Japan), and *Parallel Practices: Joan Jonas and Gina Pane* (Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX). Her works *Reanimation*, *Draw Without Looking*, and *Masks, Dolls and Baskets* were presented in various venues.

Antoni Muntadas had solo exhibitions in Italy and Canada (*Protocolii Veneziani I*, Venezia, Italy and *About Academia*, Vancouver, Canada); and group exhibitions in France and Poland (*Le Pont*, Marseilles, France; *Economics On Art*, Cracovia, Poland; and *Stadium*, Bordeaux, France).

Lecturer Florian Hecker had solo exhibitions in London, Lisbon, and Berlin and participated in group exhibitions in Tokyo, New York, Berlin, Nottingham, and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Lecturer Angel Nevarez launched the record label Textual Records.

**Lectures and Symposia**

Faculty lectured widely in Austria, China, Canada, England, Finland, Germany, Kuwait, Lithuania, South Korea, Switzerland, and the United States.
Publications

Renée Green’s essay Close Up, In Your Ear, and From a Distance: Musings on “Our” Music via ECM was published in ECM – A Cultural Archaeology. The publication was edited by Okwui Enwezor and Markus Müller in 2012 and published by Prestel.

Gediminas Urbonas published essays on curation, archives, and his Hearsay House and Disobedience Archive projects in books from NTNU Press, Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig, Torpedo Press, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig, as well as the journal Thresholds 41: Revolution.

Chimerizations by Florian Hecker, with a libretto by Reza Negarestani, an essay by MIT professor of Anthropology Stefan Helmreich, and introduction by Catherine Wood, a Tate Modern curator, was published in May 2013 by Primary Information.

Jesal Kapadia contributed essays to Shifter Magazine and Tidal Magazine.

Student Awards, Exhibitions, and Publications

In February, ACT graduate student YaeJin Shin’s (Class of 2013) film, The Mutes, was screened as part of the College Art Association’s Media Lounge.

From May 25 to June 10, ACT graduate students held a group exhibition, Something Very Specific, off campus in a MIT-owned property.

ACT graduate student Floor van de Velde was the third place honoree for the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize for the Visual Arts in spring 2013.

In June, ACT graduate student Anne Callahan helped prepare the exhibition Beginnings: Drawing Early Architecture at the Department of Architecture’s Keller Gallery.

Personnel

Ute Meta Bauer was on leave during the academic year to serve as Dean of the School of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art in London.

Jesal Kapadia joined MIT and ACT as a lecturer in September. She taught the introductory and advanced photography classes. Howard Chen co-taught the Cinematic Migrations class with Renée Green during the spring semester.

Jeremy Grubman was hired as the archivist/librarian for the CAVS Special Collection in July; Madeleine Gallagher started as the Media Assistant in August, replacing Chris Clepper; and Valerie Grimm became the Academic Assistant in September, replacing Lisa Hickler who took a position with Foreign Languages and Literature in August.
Strategic Planning

The Director met with the faculty in two facilitated sessions to explore ACT’s mission and curriculum and the requirements for the faculty search scheduled to begin in September 2013. In addition, the tenured and tenure-track faculty met with the Associate Dean of the School to discuss ACT’s role, and the role of the core faculty, in the School of Architecture and Planning.

Renée Green
Director
Professor of Architecture