MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) is an academic department and research center that facilitates artist-thinkers’ exploration of art’s broad, complex, global history and conjunction with culture, science, technology, and design via rigorous critical artistic practice and practice-driven theory.

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 seven students enrolled in the graduate program at the beginning of the academic year and four were graduated in June. Three students will enter their second year of study in the fall of 2014. Six of the 64 applicants to the graduate program for AY2015 were accepted and five were waitlisted. ACT ultimately offered admission to four of the candidates on the waitlist and four of the ten individuals offered admission accepted the offer.

ACT hosted its third Open House for prospective applicants in November. Over 100 people registered for the event and 43 attended, an increase of 43% over the prior year. The Open House included faculty research presentations, an overview of the application process, a financial aid presentation by Student Financial Services, a tour of the ACT facilities, a presentation by the List Visual Arts Center, a reception, and an invitation to attend the Monday night lecture featuring visiting artists John Akomfrah, OBE and Lina Gopaul.

Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment

In addition to its core graduate program, ACT offers electives for Master of Architecture (MArch) students and graduate students from other disciplines.

On the undergraduate level, ACT offers a HASS concentration and minor. In AY2014, 24 students were ACT HASS concentrators and three students were ACT HASS minors. Among senior concentrators, the single major most represented was Course 6 (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, EECS), and among junior concentrators it was Course 2, Mechanical Engineering.

Of the 186 students enrolled in ACT subjects in AY2014, 74 (40%) were graduate students and 112 (60%) were undergraduates; 46% of students taking ACT subjects were majors within SA+P. Outside of SA+P, the single major most represented in ACT classes was Mechanical Engineering (Course 2), at 17%,
International travel was an integral component of the Seminar in Public Art (4.368/4.369). The class traveled to Doha, Qatar and Kuwait City, Kuwait. The SA+P Dean’s Office provided support for the trip. The introductory and advanced photography classes took field trips to New York City, funded by ACT.

ACT offered a special one-time course for graduates and undergraduates: 4.373/4.374, Sound Installations and Sonic Interventions. Students enrolled in the class worked with visiting sound artists Stephen Vitiello and Robin Rimbaud and with Professor Keeril Makan’s class 21M.351, Music Composition Seminar.

As part of the two-year Visiting Artist residency with John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul, ACT offered the course Cinematic Migrations under permanent course numbers 4.356 and 4.357.

Research

The final two residencies by international filmmaker John Akomfrah, OBE, and producer Lina Gopaul (Smoking Dogs) took place during the second year of Renée Green’s Cinematic Migrations research project. Migration and shifting notions of the cinematic in spatial forms, performance, dance, theater, essay films, and emerging technologies were the means for exploring a broad range of themes including time, movement, attention, memory, diaspora, history, and forms of knowledge.

Azra Akšamija continued her research investigating the “cultural aspects of genocide in Bosnia” over the last decade. She is also working to document her work launching CULTURESHUTDOWN, an international initiative to protest the financial and political crisis affecting the National Museum and six other Bosnian cultural institutions. In addition, she has realized three new art projects: the Mashrabiya, a calligraphic installation made of textile, The Museum Solidarity Lobby, sound sculptures, and The Future Heritage Collection, a video installation with a collection of stories that explore heritage.

Fellows, Affiliates, and Visiting Students

During AY2014 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.” With a database of more than 16,000 records, the Index’s focus includes art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and social science. The index has been featured in library guides at the Art Institute of Chicago, Cornell University, and Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte among others.

Research affiliate Howard Chen published IRL, a “mood board wrapper with an interview inside” that takes the form of a portable document publication. Chen also curated the exhibit The Poplar Tree and Mirror at the international studio & curatorial program (iscp) in New York in April and the exhibition New Humans for the New York gallery, Bureau. Among the participating artists were Prof. Green as well as ACT guests Charles Atlas and Mika Tajima.
Florian Hecker was a research affiliate during the fall semester. Over the year, Mr. Hecker had a variety of exhibitions and performances. His work was presented at Soundings, the New York Museum of Modern Art’s first exhibition dedicated to sound art, and in group shows in Vienna and Denmark. Mr. Hecker was commissioned by Performa 13 to produce a new opera that was presented at the Peter T. Lewis Theater at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. He also had a solo exhibition in Lisbon (Luminar Cité). Hecker produced a full-length album entitled Articulação, participated in four presentations of his work in Europe, and gave three sound performances in Mexico and Europe.

Neil Leonard was a research affiliate during the spring. He worked closely with Professor Urbonas on the development and execution of the Sound Installations and Sonic Interventions class. The class culminated in the presentation of Resonating MIT, five student sound installations.

Peter Schmitt was a research affiliate for the academic year and worked closely with Prof. Akšamija on four projects that are in development: 1). Islamobile, a vehicle designed to facilitate intercultural understanding; 2). Acculturator, a grant for a traveling vehicle that “demonstrates cultural exchanges in different locations;” 3). Culturunners, a project designed to create cross-cultural empathy; and 4). Empathy Suits.

Gloria Sutton was appointed as a research affiliate for the academic year. She is an Assistant Professor at Northeastern University, a curator, and an art historian. She was an active participant in the reviews of student work and organized a visit by critic and historian Suzanne Hudson to help the students contextualize their work. She published four texts, was named web editor for Art Journal, and did a public talk on the work of William Kentridge at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Nomeda Urbonas participated in the creation of the exhibitions Public Space? Lost & Found (MIT, Cambridge), Pro-Test Lab Archive (SALT Beyoglu, Turkey and Casetello di Rivoli, Italy), Družba (European Capital of Culture, Latvia), Ambassador’s Song (Nord-Pas de Calais, France) and Vegetation as a political agent (Parco Arte Vivente, Italy). Ms. Urbonas was also a part of the Levanger-Kino and Frontiers in Retreat research projects, taught three courses, delivered two presentations, and authored texts in three collections.

Visiting Student Fabio Ciaravella was in residence from October through April. He is a Ph.D. student at Università della Basilicata in Unibas, Italy and explored the relationship between contemporary art and architecture under the supervision of Professor Gediminas Urbonas. His piece, Augmented Reality, was installed at RISO, the Contemporary Art Museum of Sicily in Palermo.

CAVS Special Collection (CAVSSC)

Jeremy Grubman, the CAVSSC Project Archivist, has worked diligently to identify funding, process the materials in the collection, create a finding aid to make the items as accessible as possible, and digitize a number of collection pieces.
In July, ACT submitted a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The total budget was $215,853 of which $117,295 was requested from the NEH. The funds would be used to re-house collection materials, prevent deterioration and damage, digitize collection materials in order to facilitate wider access, and develop a digital service model to allow constant, free public access via a web portal. In April, ACT learned that it had not been approved for funding, but received final reviewer evaluations that were either “very good” or “excellent.”

In the last year, the concept of the web interface has moved from the model of a repository that can be accessed via the web to the development of a virtual collection interface for the repository. Creating visual connections between multiple digital object types is key to facilitating virtual research in the CAVS Special Collection. The breadth of CAVS history requires “connection-making” among materials pertaining to people, places, projects and technologies. A virtual collection that clarifies and assists in making these connections would provide for an innovative model for future digital collection arrangement, description, access, presentation, and research. This is the model for which grant funding is being sought.

**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 AY2013 and AY2014, it was 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* was 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 artist and filmmaker Charles Atlas; multi-media artist duo John Lovett and Alessandro Codagnone; media anthropologist, film curator, and Assistant Professor of Media and Culture, San Francisco State University, Tarek Elhaik; and ACT professor emerita, Joan Jonas. In the spring, speakers included Kazue Kobata, Professor, Department of Intermedia Art, Tokyo University of the Arts; Yvonne Rainer, dancer, choreographer and filmmaker; and art critic, historian, and Associate Professor, University of Rennes (France), Elvan Zabunyan.

- *Center for Art, Science and Technology (CAST)* – The Program in Art, Culture and Technology collaborated with CAST on three residency programs:
- **Cinematic Migrations.** As part of the Cinematic Migrations research project and in cooperation with the Center for Art, Science and Technology’s Visiting Artists Program, John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul visited MIT for a week each semester for two years. During their residencies, they participated in public programs, seminars, and workshops and collaborated with MIT faculty, researchers, and students on a March symposium that concluded their residency. Their visit in November included both the United States premiere of their 2013 documentary *The Stuart Hall Project* and a student workshop that was the basis for the creation of the short, *The Memory Album*, a collaborative essay film with the visiting artists, Prof. Green, research affiliate Javier Anguera, and ACT, MIT, and Harvard Students enrolled in the Cinematic Migrations course, 4.356/4.357. The film was presented at the Cinematic Migrations Symposium, which concluded the residency. The symposium featured Mr. Akomfrah and Ms. Gopaul as well as cinematographer and producer Arthur Jafa, Manthia Diawara, Professor of Comparative Literature, New York University; Laura Marks, Dena Wosk University Professor, Simon Fraser University; Fred Moten, philosopher, poet, and Professor of English, University of California, Riverside; and Gloria Sutton, Assistant Professor of Art History, Northeastern University. As a result of ACT’s invitation and mediation, the Harvard Film Archives organized a March film series dedicated to their filmic work, *John Akomfrah: A Poet in the Archives*

- **Visiting Artists Robin Rimbaud (aka Scanner) and Stephan Vitiello.** Sound artists Robin Rimbaud (Scanner) and Stephen Vitiello were in residence at ACT during the spring semester. As part of their residency, they participated in Prof. Urbonas’s class 4.373/4.374 Sound Installations and Sonic Interventions. The class was a collaborative effort with MIT professor Keeril Makan’s Music Composition Seminar and the visiting artists participating in Makan’s class, the “avant garde” ensemble, Either/Or. On May 13 and 15, the students presented their work in an event entitled *Resonating MIT*. Student installations and performances were in five locations on the MIT campus. The locations were provided via a mobile-ready web site that was developed in conjunction with the course. Scanner and Vitiello presented their individual and collaborative work to the general public during their visit in February. In March and April they worked with students to develop sonic installations around the MIT campus, and in May they held a public concert, *Sonic Bodies*, that featured Scanner and Stephen Vitiello along with David Shively (percussion) and Jennifer Choi (violin) of Either/Or and digital visualizations by ACT’s Media Associate, Madeleine Gallagher.

- **Public Space? Lost & Found.** Prof. Urbonas organized a symposium and exhibition to honor the work of Professor of the Practice Antoni Muntadas who retired after the completion of the 2013-2014 academic year. The symposium was April 18 and 19 and included five panels and 31 speakers. Panelists were thought leaders who explored the definition of public space, questions of culture and identity in relation to public space, surveillance and control, alternatives for contemporary public space, and the future of public space. Speakers also acknowledged the contributions of
Muntadas as an artist concerned about the nature of public and private space and the role of art in this context. Approximately 300 people attended the symposium.

The symposium also marked the opening of the *Public Space? Lost & Found* exhibition in the Maki Lobby. Ten billboards presenting the cities visited and documenting the work done by Muntadas and his students over the years were on display, representing the work of 41 former students.

- **Rob La Frenais.** Mr. La Frenais is a critic and curator with the Arts Catalyst in the UK. While in Cambridge he spoke about the “Future of Transport/Transport of the Future.”

- **Chimerization, Florian Hecker Book Launch.** ACT hosted a book launch in the Cube for Florian Hecker's book *Chimerization*. Hecker has been a visiting artist and lecturer, and was a fall 2013 research affiliate.

**Faculty Accomplishments**

**Awards**

In September, the Islamic Cemetery in Altach, Austria, designed by Bernardo Bader, was conferred the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. ACT professor Azra Akšamija designed the Qibla wall-curtain and rugs for the prayer room and was part of the team that received the award. The cemetery also received “Special Mention” at the Eighth Award of the European Prize for Urban Public Space in April 2014.

**Exhibitions, Performances, and Commissions**

Renée Green participated in the following group exhibitions: *Blues for Smoke* (Wexner Center for the Arts, OH), *New Humans* (Bureau, NY), *Empire State: New York Art Now* (Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, France), *Alumni Show II* (Wesleyan University, CT), *Words as Doors* (Künstlerhaus, Gaus, Austria), *Some Issues of History* (Agathenburg Castle, Germany), and *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology* (Hammer Museum, CA).

Gediminas Urbonas had multiple group exhibitions including *Public Space? Lost & Found* (MIT, MA), *Nouvelle Génération* (FRAC - Nord-Pas de Calais, France), *Vegetation as a political agent* (Parco Arte Vivente, Italy), *(re)Construction of Friendship* (European Capital of Culture, Latvia), *Disobedience Archive (The Park)* (SALT Beyoğlu, Turkey), *Disobedience Republic* (Castello di Rivoli, Italy), *Espaces in/civils* (Parallel Program of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey), *The Moving Image City Festival* (Museu Picasso, Spain), and *Part of a Larger Whole. Lithuanian Contemporary Art* (Contemporary Art Centre (CAC), Vilnius).

Azra Akšamija had a solo exhibition at MIT: *Solidarity Works: Politics of Cultural Memory* (Wolk Gallery, MA) and a presentation of her work, *Wearable Mosques*, at the Venus Window (ACT, MA). She also participated in the group exhibitions *Frontier Vest* (Museum of Arte Útil, Netherlands), *Museum Solidarity Lobby* (Make Art With Purpose Festival, TX), *ZOOM Sarajevo*.
(Sta ima? – Literature, Art and Culture from Sarajevo and the former Yugoslavia Festival, Cultural Research Center, Germany), and Imaginary Archive (Visual Culture Research Center, Ukraine).

Joan Jonas was selected as the United States representative at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, “the world’s most prestigious contemporary art event.” A professor emerita, Jonas’s work will be presented by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. During the 2013-2014 academic year, she performed and exhibited at multiple sites around the world, among them Theatrical Fields (Bildmuseet, Sweden) and Reanimation (multiple venues).

Antoni Muntadas had solo exhibitions in Venezuela, Spain, and Canada (The Construction of Fear, Periferico Caracas/ Arte Contemporaneo, Venezuela; Protocoli Veneziani, Galeria Joan Prats, Spain; and Muntadas: Entre/Between, Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada).

Gabriel Kahan was a lecturer during the spring semester. He became a part of the working group of the national mobile learning initiative in Mexico, gave a seminar at the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics in Mexico, and lectured at Virtual Educa in Lima, Peru. Kahan also gave a presentation on his practice at the MIT Center for Civic Media, May 2014.

Lecturer Jesal Kapadia had a screening of her film Notes for a Non-Capitalist Cinema: Sikkim at the Anthology Film Archives in New York. Kapadia’s work was presented at Working In and Out of the Archive, Gallery TPW, Toronto.

Mathew Mazzotta was a lecturer during the spring semester. During this time he participated in three group exhibitions, gave nine lectures nationally and in Europe, and received four art and architecture awards for his Open House project.

Angel Nevarez was a lecturer during the fall semester. He exhibited and performed throughout New York and in Luxembourg.

Lectures and Symposia
Faculty lectured widely in Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United States.

Publications
Renée Green’s essay Loss and Transmutation was published in Geneve: Haute école d’art et de design, Programme Master de recherché CCC.

Gediminas Urbonas published essays on curation, archives, and his Hearsay House project in publications from Siemens Stiftung, NTNU Press, Torpedo Press, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig.

Monos Digital Books published *For a Project Methodology* by Antoni Muntadas in September.

**Student Awards, Exhibitions, and Publications**

ACT provided funding for student exhibitions as part of the continuation its pilot grant program. Ryan Kuo’s *Party*, Sooyoung Kwon’s *Himalaya and Elephant*, and Floor van de Velde’s *Score Line Intervals* were shown in the Venus Window gallery space over the course of the year. ACT also supported graduate students’ final exhibition *Massachusetts Institute of Act-ion*.

Graduate student Floor van de Velde’s *Score for a Color Field* was shown at 17 Cox, an alternative gallery in Beverly, Massachusetts in November and December. Leigh Christie’s work, *Local Warming*, was exhibited as part of the *Elements of Architecture* display at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale.

ACT graduate student Anne Macmillan won first place and Floor van de Velde was the third place honoree for the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize for the Visual Arts in spring 2014. Ms. van de Velde also won the Laya and Jerome B. Wiesner Awards for Achievement in, and Contributions to, the Arts at MIT.

**Resource Development**

The Dean’s Office sponsored an *Evening with the Dean* in October as a cultivation event for donors.

In June, the Dean’s Office and ACT convened a gathering of a core group of CAVS Fellows to discuss fundraising for the CAVS Special Collection.

**Facilities**

The Committee for the Review of Space Planning (CRSP) authorized $100,000 for the renovation of the audio-visual equipment in the Bartos Theatre. The work was completed in January by MIT Audio Visual Services. The sound system was upgraded, A/V controls were streamlined and updated, and the space was re-painted and re-carpeted.

The Cube is one of ACT’s primary classroom, presentation, and workspaces. In March there was a flood in another area of the building that impacted the Cube. As a result, the electric races located under the floor had to be replaced. In addition, ACT proceeded with a digital media upgrade for the space that led to the installation of new scaler/receivers, transmitters, interconnect cabling, a 10” touch panel, surround-sound processor, and Blu-Ray player.

Computers in the Interform Editing Lab were replaced at the beginning of the academic year.

Student studios were moved from the Venus Lab at the end of the academic year. ACT is considering how to re-purpose the Venus studios in a manner consistent with its research agenda.
**Personnel**

Renée Green was promoted to full professor, effective July 1.

Ute Meta Bauer resigned to become Director of the Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore, Nanyang Technological University; her resignation was effective January 16.

Azra Akšamija went on research leave during the spring. During Prof. Akšamija’s leave, Oliver Lutz (SMVisS ’06) taught her classes. He taught two sections of Introduction to Visual Arts: one section for architecture majors and the second section for non-majors.

Angel Nevarez resigned during the spring semester. As a consequence, Gabriel Kahan and Matthew Mazzotta (SMVisS ’09) joined ACT to teach, respectively, Advanced Video and Introduction to Visual Arts.

A new faculty search was launched during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Seth Avecilla started as the Media Assistant/Fabrication Associate in August, replacing Martin Seymour; Andrew Barosy became the Financial Assistant in March, replacing Michael Enos; and from February 3rd to May 31st Lucas Spivey worked with ACT as the producer associated with the CAST-sponsored events that were a part of the Cinematic Migrations, Scanner/Vitiello, and Public Space projects.

**Renée Green**

*Director, Program in Art, Culture and Technology*

*Professor of Architecture*