

Press Advisory  
Contact Josie Patterson  
617-253-4422, [josiep@mit.edu](mailto:josiep@mit.edu)  
Leah Talatinian, [leaht@mit.edu](mailto:leaht@mit.edu)

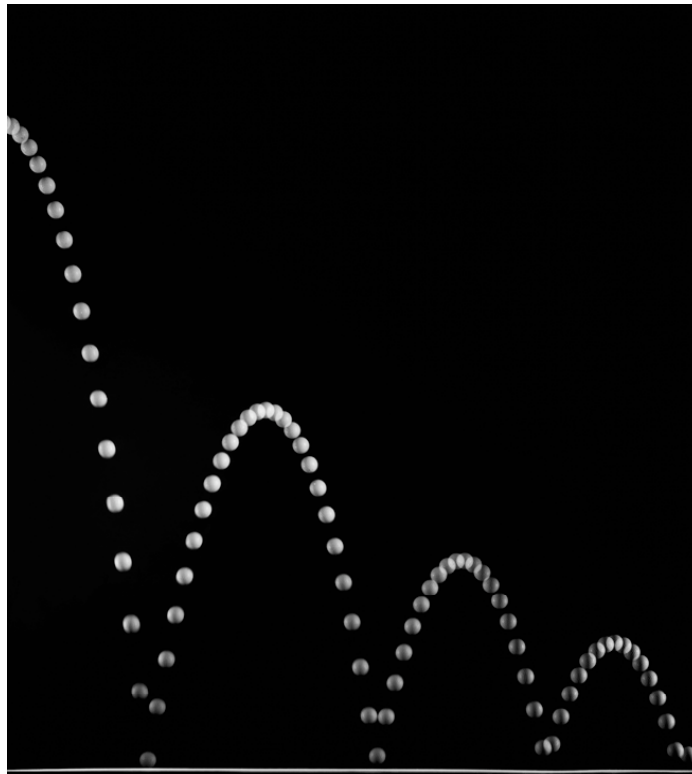
**MIT Museum Opens New Photography Gallery May 3, 2012**

Inaugural Exhibition:

*Berenice Abbott*

*Photography and Science: An Essential Unity*

May 3, 2012 – December 31, 2012, MIT Museum Kurtz Gallery for Photography



April 3, 2012, Cambridge, MA – The MIT Museum opens the new Kurtz Gallery for Photography on May 3, 2012, with an inaugural exhibition of 75 photographs by Berenice Abbott, as well as letters and other documentation, entitled *Photography and Science: An Essential Unity*. The 1650 sq. ft. Kurtz Gallery will host temporary exhibitions drawn in part from the rich legacy of work in photography at MIT by luminaries such as Minor White (1908-76), who taught at MIT during the last decade of his life; Harold Edgerton (1903-90), the strobe photography pioneer; and Berenice Abbott (1898-1991), who worked at MIT from 1958 to 1960.

The inaugural exhibition *Berenice Abbott, Photography and Science: An Essential Unity* brings to light a lesser known aspect of the work of this master of twentieth century American photography. Although best known for her documentation of changing New York in the 1930s, Abbott made important contributions to science photography throughout her career. In 1939, already fascinated by science as a subject for her work, she saw the need for photography to act as “a friendly interpreter between science and the layman.” She wrote: “There is an essential unity between photography, science’s child, and science, the parent.”

Abbott’s most important science photography came in the late 1950s. The fear that the U.S. was lagging behind in scientific achievement, and particularly in the preparedness of young people for scientific careers, led to national high school curriculum reform initiatives that culminated in the formation in 1956 of the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) at MIT. In March 1958 the PSSC hired Abbott to prepare a large series of illustrations for the flagship PSSC project, a new high school physics textbook.

Over the next two and a half years at MIT Abbott produced some of her most accomplished photographs illustrating wave motion and other physical phenomena. A selection of the MIT work was exhibited by the Smithsonian Institution as *The Image of Physics*, which toured the country for six years beginning in 1960 and gave thousands of Americans their first glimpse of bold, modernist photography. Abbott’s original prints from *The Image of Physics* are the focus of the MIT Museum exhibition, and dozens of other earlier and later science photographs by Abbott contextualize the MIT work. Also on view are captivating scrapbooks Abbott made to document her work, as well as letters, manuscripts, and publications relating to her interest in scientific subjects.

#### *Publication*

A selection of Abbott’s science photographs appears in a book published by Steidl to coincide with the exhibition. *The Image of Science* includes 99 tritone illustrations and several introductory essays on her science work. *Berenice Abbott: Documenting Science*, Edited by Ron Kurtz; Essays by Julia Van Haften and John Durant. Clothbound hardcover, \$75.00. ISBN 978-3-86930-431-1.

#### *About the Curators*

**Julia Van Haften** was the first Curator of Photographs for The New York Public Library, and recently retired as the Director of Collections for the Museum of the City of New York. A recognized Abbott specialist, and curator in 1989 of the first major retrospective of her work, Van Haften is currently completing a definitive biography of the photographer.

**Gary Van Zante** is the MIT Museum’s Curator of Architecture and Design and interim Director of Exhibitions and Gallery Planning. He has curated over fifty exhibitions ranging from Renaissance architectural graphics to contemporary

design practice and photography. His photographic exhibitions at MIT have featured the work of photographers Gabrielle Basilico, Margaret Morton, and Cervin Robinson, among others. He is the author of a recent study of nineteenth century urban photography.

#### *About the MIT Museum*

The MIT Museum's mission is to engage the wider community with MIT's science, technology and other areas of scholarship in ways that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century. The Museum features two floors filled with ongoing and changing exhibitions, currently with an emphasis on robotics, photography and holography, MIT history, and current MIT research. The Museum presents monthly programs that appeal to middle school students and older, and presents the annual Cambridge Science Festival in late April.

#### *About the Arts at MIT*

The arts at MIT connect creative minds across disciplines and encourage a lifetime of exploration and self-discovery. They are rooted in experimentation, risk-taking and imaginative problem-solving. The arts strengthen MIT's commitment to the aesthetic, human, and social dimensions of research and innovation. Artistic knowledge and creation exemplify our motto — *mens et manus*, mind and hand. The arts are essential to MIT's mission to build a better society and meet the challenges of the 21st century. [arts.mit.edu](http://arts.mit.edu)

#### *Visitor Information*

MIT Museum  
265 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
P: 617.253.5927 | [museuminfo@mit.edu](mailto:museuminfo@mit.edu) | <http://web.mit.edu/museum/>

Open Daily 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
Closed major holidays

General admission, \$8.50 for adults; Youth under 18, students, seniors: \$4

#### Free Admission:

- All MIT ID Holders
- Children under 5 (does not apply to groups)
- Sundays 10 a.m. - noon
- 2nd Friday of each month, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.
- Cambridge Public Library Card holders in July and August

#### Subway, bus and parking:

Red Line T to Central Square or Kendall Square; #1 Bus  
Parking is available at the MIT Visitor Lot on the corner of Vassar Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Paid parking on weekdays until 5, free after 5PM weekdays and weekends. Metered street parking is also available.