

MIT List Visual Arts Center

## Press Release

MIT List Visual Arts Center unveils *Northwest Passage* (2018), a newly commissioned Percent-for-Art work created by Olafur Eliasson for MIT.nano, (Building 12), MIT's state of the art nanotechnology research center.

Olafur Eliasson presents an artist talk about this latest project on February 26, 6 PM, Ray and Maria Stata Center, Bldg., 32, Rm 123, 32 Vassar St., Cambridge, MA



**Cambridge, MA. January 31, 2019**—The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to unveil *Northwest Passage* (2018), a newly commissioned Percent-for-Art work by Olafur Eliasson for MIT.nano (Building 12), MIT's new state of the art production and research complex devoted to nanoscience and nanotechnology. Eliasson will present an artist talk about this project on February 26, 6 PM, Ray and Maria Stat Center, Bldg., 32, Rm. 123, 32 Vasser St., Cambridge MA.

[\*Northwest Passage\*](#), spanning 90 feet, is comprised of 30 polished stainless-steel panels, each of a different size and abstract shape, installed on the breezeway ceiling of the space, floating above visitors to MIT.nano (Building 12). These mirrored forms base their silhouette and configuration on the pattern of free-floating ice, the product of thinning ice coverage, found in the Northwest Passage between North America and the Arctic Circle. Seven semi-circular rings,

each lined with an LED light and diffuser, are reflected in the mirror panels, creating the appearance of complete circles of light. This optical illusion elicits further inspection from the viewer, inviting them to enter the passageway and the connected university buildings.

This project draws inspiration from the dramatic thinning of the ice coverage in the Parry Channel of the Northwest Passage—a historically impassable frozen route through the Arctic Ocean linking the Pacific to the Atlantic. As of the summer of 2007, the effects of climate change have allowed vessels to sail the passage without requiring an icebreaker, an event that scientists predict will become more and more common with the continued effects of global warming.

Olafur Eliasson was selected for the commission by Percent-for-Art committee members including: Arne Abramson, Director, Capital Projects, MIT; Jesús del Alamo, Director of the Microsystems Technology Laboratories, Donner Professor, and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, MIT; Richard Amster, Director, MIT Campus Construction; Vladimir Bulović, MIT.nano Faculty Lead, Associate Dean of Innovation, Professor of Engineering, Fariborz Maseeh (1990) Chair in Emerging Technology, MIT; Pam Delpinich, Director, MIT Office of Campus Planning; Thayer Donham, Senior Project Manager, MIT Office of Campus Planning; Paul C. Ha, Director, MIT List Visual Arts Center; Samir Srouji, Principal, Wilson Architects Inc.; and Travis Wanat, Senior Project Manager, Capital Projects, MIT.

*Northwest Passage* was commissioned with MIT Percent-for-Art Funds and generous gifts from Robert Sanders ('64) & Sara-Ann Sanders, Fotene Demoulas & Tom Coté, The David Bermant Foundation, Donors to the 2014 McDermott Award Gala, and the Council for the Arts at MIT.

### **About the Artist**

Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967, Copenhagen, Denmark) lives and works in Copenhagen and Berlin. Eliasson's work in sculpture, painting, photography, film, and installation have been exhibited widely throughout the world. In addition to creating works for museum and gallery settings, his practice engages the broader public sphere through architectural projects and interventions in civic space. In 1995 Eliasson founded Studio Olafur Eliasson, a Berlin-based think tank, to expand and leverage multi-disciplinary conceptualization and planning for future projects. Members in the studio include craftsmen, specialized technicians, architects, archivists, administrators, programmers, art historians, and cooks. In 2014 Eliasson was awarded MIT's [Eugene McDermott Award for the Arts](#), in recognition of his influential artistic practice. In conjunction with the award Eliasson led a residency project that focused on his art and social business enterprise *Little Sun*, a portable, solar powered lamp which he calls "a work of art that works in life." The artist's activities on MIT's campus centered around discussions of sustainable development, community engagement, design, product engineering, and social entrepreneurship in developing economies. The artist residency was sponsored by the [Council for the Arts at MIT \(CAMIT\)](#).



### **About Public Art at MIT**

MIT maintains one of the most active Percent-for-Art programs in the country. The program allots funds to commission or purchase art for each new major renovation or building project on campus. Formally instituted in 1968, the Percent-for-Art programs continues to expand MIT's public art collection through new commissions by important and critically acclaimed contemporary artists, including Cai Guo Qiang, Anish Kapoor, Sol Le Witt, Nick Mauss, Matthew Ritchie, Sarah Sze, and Leo Villareal, among others. The Percent-for-Art program is administered by the List Visual Art Center, the contemporary art museum at MIT, which also presents exhibitions and public programming in the Wiesner Building (E15) at 20 Ames Street in Kendall Square.

### **About the MIT List Visual Arts Center**

The List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with space to experiment and push boundaries, creating a context for understanding how the contemporary visual arts reflect and express the complex social and cultural issues in a changing world. The dynamic annual program of six to nine gallery exhibitions includes a program of work by emerging artists, known as List Projects, as well as a broad range of educational programs, events, and scholarly publications. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List Center also maintains and adds to MIT's permanent collection; commissions new works through the MIT Percent-for-Art program; and oversees a program that lends approximately 600 works of art annually to MIT students.

Image credit:

Olafur Eliasson, *Northwest Passage*, 2018  
stainless steel, LED lights, diffusers

An MIT Percent-for-Art Commission for MIT.nano Photo: Anton Grassl

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