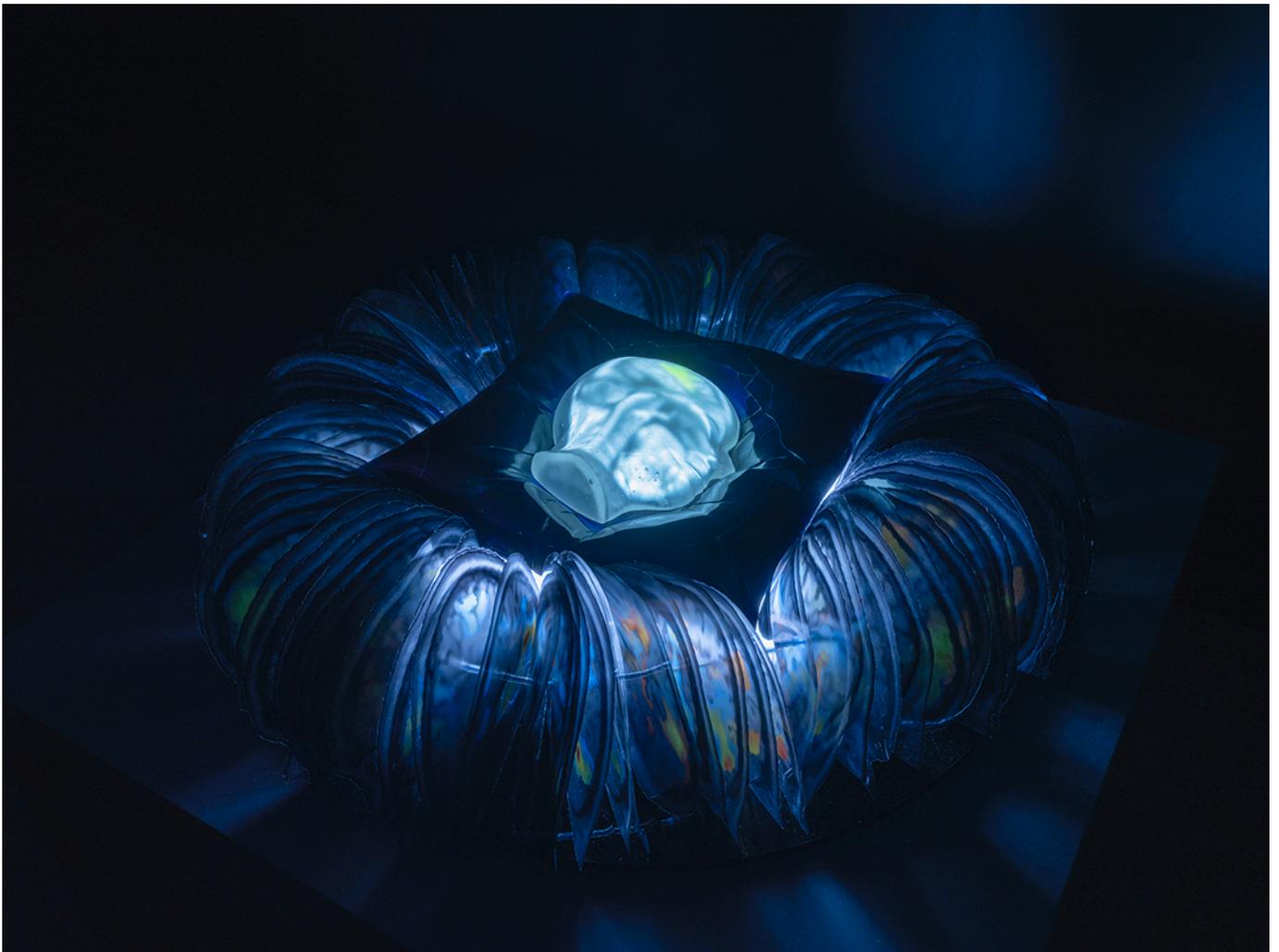


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MIT Museum Announces **Lighten Up! On Biology and Time**, an Exhibition that Considers the Rhythms of Life

October 6, 2025

Lighten Up! explores the connection of living organisms with the natural cycle of light and dark and features work by Carsten Höller, James Carpenter, Liliane Lijn, Helga Schmid, and more.



Sweet Solar Dreams by Liliane Lijn; Julien Gremaud for EPFL Pavilion

The MIT Museum announces ***Lighten Up! On Biology and Time***, an exhibition exploring the intimate connection between living organisms and the natural cycle of night and day. It reminds us not only of the passage of the sun across the sky, but the necessity of regular light exposure for a healthy life. On view from October 28, 2025 to August 16, 2026, *Lighten Up!* features fifteen artists with eighteen immersive artworks, installations, and experiential environments either specifically conceived or newly adapted for the exhibition. *Lighten Up!* is the second exhibition unveiled during MIT Museum's inaugural **thematic season of TIME**.

Biology and time intersect in circadian rhythms, the internal clock within living beings that responds to time-based patterns of light and dark. Circadian rhythms in turn influence sleep, alertness, immunity, and mood. Light serves as the brain's primary signal in sensing time of day, with the transitions at dawn and dusk being natural cues to synchronize biological rhythms. *Lighten Up!* reveals the beauty of these rhythms and the vital role that exposure to daylight plays in our overall well-being.

Lighten Up! invites visitors to discover the secrets of biological clocks, explore alternative representations of time, and to probe the deep connection we have to the endless cycle of night and day.

“How does the rhythm of day and night affect our bodies and those of other living creatures? Why do we sleep? Why do we dream? Like the rising and falling tides, circadian rhythms punctuate our lives and the lives of all living organisms, profoundly influencing our behavior and health. By considering the nature of biological time, the exhibition *Lighten Up!* brings artists, architects and chronobiologists together to explore the nature of circadian rhythms in a series of artistic experiments and installations posing fundamental questions about the rhythms that define our lives. We are thrilled to partner with the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland on showing this major exhibition *Lighten Up!* at the MIT Museum.”

Michael John Gorman, The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Director, MIT Museum

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

Hotel Room #2: Communal Dreams

Carsten Höller, Adam Haar & Seth Riskin

2025

Hotel Room #2: Communal Dreams is an art installation and science experiment that invites people to sleep inside a sculpture where pulses of light, sound, and motion carry into the mind as it dreams. Created by artist Carsten Höller with scientist Adam Haar and artist Seth Riskin of the MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery, the work draws on new MIT and Harvard research showing that dreams can be shaped in real time. Structured for three sleepers together, the sculpture steers dreams toward common ground, producing shared elements of a single, collective dream. Hotel Room #2: Communal Dreams stems from Höller's 2020-2021 Visiting Artist Residency at MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST), as well as dream research and engineering from the Fluid Interfaces research group at the MIT Media Lab. The MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery acted as an incubator for this collaboration and for the development of the work.

“Sleep has always been imagined as private, but brain science is showing us otherwise. We don't dream alone. Light, sound, the smallest motions of the others around us — they all come with us into sleep. The work is about making that porousness visible and alive. The museum has always been a place of collectivity, but usually in the sense of strangers standing shoulder to shoulder in front of a painting. Here, collectivity is literal — you sleep together, bodies breathing in sync, affecting each other yet each spinning off into its own oneiric reel, only to find strange overlaps when morning comes.”

Adam Haar, Dream Scientist

“We’re interested in the complexity of the museum environment, people from all over passing through and exchanging. In this learning space, we wanted to create an opening to the realm of dreams. Dreaming and art are similar. They both make images that connect to waking reality experiences while stretching meaning associations. They are tools for accessing and learning from new states of mind, and we wanted to combine them in this piece.”

Seth Riskin, Founding Manager of the MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery



Circadian Rhythm by Kirell Benzi; Julien Gremaud for EPFL Pavillion

Circadian Rhythms

Kirell Benzi

2022

Kirell Benzi *Circadian Rhythms* reveals the circadian rhythms of three individuals: a pilot with an irregular sleep schedule, a young agriculturalist working outdoors, and an office employee. A 24-hour clock with two opposing color palettes highlight sleep patterns and daytime

activities. The length of each small individual shape is defined by heart rate. Lighter colors during nighttime highlight moments of wakefulness, while darker colors indicate peaks of daytime activity, like a workout. Here, Benzi visually represents different lifestyles by illustrating the complexity of circadian rhythms and their unique position to each individual.

“Circadian Rhythm transforms millions of data points from smart watches into a meditation on the cycles of day and night. The piece reveals how activity, rest, and recovery are woven together by our internal clocks. Exhibiting it at the MIT Museum is deeply meaningful: this is a place where art, science, and innovation meet, and TIME is explored in all its dimensions. My hope is that audiences will not just see data, but experience it as something poetic, universal, and profoundly human. ”

Kirell Benzi, Artist

Circa Diem 2.0

Marilyne Andersen *et al.*

2025

Circa Diem 2.0 is an immersive installation that invites visitors to meander through a maze of monoliths evocative of an urban environment and highlights the impact city architecture can have on our circadian rhythms. Insufficient exposure to natural light during the day, combined

with excessive exposure to artificial brightness at night, is a common experience in urban environments. And this can have detrimental effects on our health and well-being. Within the exhibit, lenses generate images of clouds of light that slowly transform into images of urban scenes, then evaporate again as the sun continues its course in the sky. By controlling contrast with extreme precision, the lenses mimic the role that urban environments play in controlling our access to daylight, to the point of disconnecting us from the natural cycle under which we evolved.

Marilyne Andersen, Professor EPFL, Head of Laboratory of Integrated Performance in Design (LIPID), Director General of GESDA, said: “*Circa Diem 2.0* aims to evoke through an immersion into a dim, oppressive abstraction of a dense city in which one slowly experiences four phases of the day while following a sunpath, enriched by the magical yet ephemeral appearance of refraction-generated imagery. Having spent 6 wonderful years at MIT as a faculty member where my research on the physiological effects of light actually started, it is an honor and joy for me to be back for an exhibition celebrating the importance of light in our perception of time, that I had the privilege to co-curate for EPFL Pavilions and will be featured at the MIT Museum.”

Circa Diem was first showcased as part of the original *Lighten Up! On Biology and Time* exhibition at EPFL Pavilions (2023). The current *Circa Diem 2.0* draws on the original concept as an entirely new embodiment of the work, inaugurated for the Solar Biennale 2 at the Museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts (mudac) in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Lighten Up! is presented in the Henri A. Termeer Gallery and is exhibited as part of the MIT Museum’s TIME thematic season. The exhibition is presented in collaboration with École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and curated by Anna Wirz-Justice, Marilyne Andersen, Sarah Kenderdine, and Giulia Bini.

Lighten Up! at the MIT Museum is supported by generous donors to the 2025 McDermott Award Gala, hosted by the Council for the Arts at MIT.

Highlighted Affiliated Programs:

Lighten Up! Panel Discussion and Opening Reception

Lighten Up! Panel Discussion and Opening Reception

Date: Tuesday, October 28

Time: 6:30pm - 8:30pm

Join us at the MIT Museum for an evening exploring the connection between living organisms and the natural cycle of light and dark at the opening of *Lighten Up! On Biology and Time*.

The evening will feature a panel discussion with Marilynne Andersen, artist Alan Bogana, and Harvard Professor of Neurobiology Elizabeth Klerman, moderated by MIT Museum Director Michael John Gorman, followed by a reception where visitors can explore the exhibition. This reception is presented in collaboration with **Swissnex**, the science and technology consulate of Switzerland in Boston.

Swissnex Lighten Up Symposium

Partners: Swissnex | École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

Date: Wednesday, October 29, 2025

Time: 10am - 4pm

Location: The Exchange, MIT Museum, Cambridge, MA

To mark the U.S. premiere of *Lighten Up!* – a traveling exhibition originally shown at the EPFL Pavilions in Lausanne, Switzerland that explores circadian rhythms through artistic and scientific lenses – Swissnex, in collaboration with the MIT Museum, is holding one day interdisciplinary symposium, bringing together artists, scientists, and the wider community to explore themes of light, rhythm, time, sleep, and perception.

Framed by the metaphor of a prism – breaking light into its constituent colors – the day is structured into thematic segments that pair artists and scientists in dialogue, performance, or experiment. The prism can refract light into a spectrum, symbolizing how one event, idea or reality can be seen in multiple ways, depending on the angle or context. Like a rainbow appearing out of storm and light, multiplicity reveals itself in layers of color – each hue a different voice, a different view.

Departing from the classical symposium format, the event will be enriched with artistic interventions that shift the sensory and conceptual register throughout the day, along with slow lighting transitions, rhythm-based exercises, dreamwriting stations, and guided moments of reflection. These elements invite participants to not only talk about circadian rhythms, but to inhabit them.

To see full program details and register, visit **Swissnex.org**.

After Dark: Sleep, Dream, Wake

Thursday, November 13, 6pm - 9pm

Discover how sleep, dreams, and light collide at the MIT Museum. After a talk by Dr. Charles Czeisler exploring how light shapes the way we sleep, wake, and feel, head to our galleries for a live demonstration of *Hotel Room #2: Communal Dreams*, an immersive installation by Carsten Höller, Adam Haar, and Seth Riskin that uses light and sound to encourage thematic dreaming. Test your circadian smarts in a playful game that shows how signals from light can help you beat jet lag or wake up refreshed. Then, get hands-on with cyanotype-making,

experimenting with light and shadow in a creative, playful way.

Circadian Rhythms Day / Summer Solstice

On June 21, 2026, the MIT Museum will be celebrating the summer solstice with a day of programming on circadian rhythms and biological time. Come explore the interaction of light with life and learn how to tune into your own internal clock.

About the MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery

A satellite of the MIT Museum located at the heart of campus; the MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery feature a studio workspace and adjoining glass-front gallery. The program has established itself as a feature in the cultural and educational landscape of MIT, using experimental exhibition as a learning vehicle in original courses and projects. Perception is a core interest of the Studio community, bridging art and science.

About the team behind Hotel Room #2: Communal Dreams

CAST Visiting Artist Carsten Höller, dream scientist Adam Haar, and light artist Seth Riskin each work in their own way to reveal new realities normally hidden behind waking life. Höller uses art as an instrument for human experience as both the medium and the outcome of art. In his work at the MIT Media Lab's Fluid Interfaces group and as co-founder of DUST Dream Sciences, Haar Horowitz focuses on improving dreamer control of dreams as part of our well-being. Riskin serves as Director of the MIT Museum Studio and Compton Gallery, which explores the intersections of perception and cognition. The Studio acted as an incubator for this collaboration and for the development of the work.

About EPFL

The École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) is a leading public research university in Switzerland, with a mission in education, research, and innovation. As Europe's most cosmopolitan technical university, EPFL brings together a diverse community of over 120 nationalities to address key societal challenges through a broad range of scientific and technological disciplines.

Credits:

Credits:

Credits:

Lighten Up was organized and first presented by EPFL Pavilions in Lausanne, Switzerland. The exhibition at the MIT Museum is organized and co-curated by the curatorial team at EPFL and MIT Museum.

EPFL Credits:

- **Curators:**

- Anna Wirz-Justice, Professor Emeritus, Centre for Chronobiology, Psychiatric Hospital of the University of Basel
- Marilynne Andersen, Professor EPFL, Head of Laboratory of Integrated Performance in Design (LIPID), Director General of GESDA
- Sarah Kenderdine, Professor EPFL, Head of Laboratory for Experimental Museology (eM+),
- Giulia Bini, Head of Arts at CERN

MIT Museum Credits:

- Michael John Gorman, The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Director, MIT Museum
- Ann Neumann, Director of Galleries and Exhibitions, MIT Museum
- Lindsay Bartholomew, Exhibit Content and Experience Developer, MIT Museum
- Emily Cheeseman, Exhibitions Project Manager, MIT Museum
- Rob Gainfort, Manager of Exhibitions, MIT Museum
- Tyler Derryberry, MIT Museum Preparator, Media Integrator

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