Announcements

MIT Museum To Open Freezing TIME: Edgerton and the Beauty of the Machine Age Celebrating Photography Pioneer Harold “Doc” Edgerton

January 9, 2026

Freezing Time takes a new look at Edgerton's early work, including a new look at long forgotten photographs, offering a fresh take on the MIT photographer and his groundbreaking technological advancements that changed photography forever.

MIT Museum announces *Freezing Time: Edgerton and the Beauty of the Machine Age*, exploring the legacy of Harold "Doc" Edgerton and his contributions to the field of photography as a scientist, researcher and beloved MIT professor of electrical engineering. The exhibition will include machines, as well as once famous but forgotten photographs, taking a new look at the inventions that enabled the manipulation of time and light. On view February 5, 2026 to August 2, 2026, *Freezing Time* is the third new major exhibition unveiled during MIT Museum's inaugural thematic focus on TIME.

"Doc" Edgerton, largely recognized as a pioneering figure of modern photography, is credited for plucking the stroboscope, usually found in the lab, from its obscurity and harnessing its power to capture fractions of a second in time on film, using strobes to freeze objects in motion so that they could be photographed. His innovation led to significant advancements in photography, to pioneering accomplishments in sports photography to sonar, with recognitions including winning an Oscar for a stroboscopic short film produced in partnership with MGM studios in 1940. Beginning as a graduate student at MIT where he received his master's degree in electrical engineering in 1927, Edgerton came to understand through his study of synchronous motors that an intense flash of light can make a machine appear as if it is standing still. While achieving his ScD, also from MIT in 1932, he iterated on these studies through his doctoral dissertation, using a mercury-arc stroboscope to take a photo of a motor in motion. This became a turning point in his photographic exploration of time.

In 1932, Edgerton captured his first "art image," a high-contrast photograph of water flowing from a faucet. Edgerton continued this practice, developing the ability to capture mere fractions of a second and immortalizing moments like a golfer's swing or a milk drop the moment it hits a table. In 1937, one of Edgerton's milk drop "Coronet" photographs appeared in the Museum of Modern Art's first photography exhibition, cementing his legacy in the medium. In subsequent years, Edgerton continued to manipulate light and time, and served as a professor of electrical engineering at his alma mater where he is still celebrated as integral to the institution's legacy today. *Freezing Time* takes these stories and Edgerton's tools, the stroboscope and high-speed flash, and connects them to important themes of speed, standardization, precision, efficiency and, scientific management.

> "The sensational stroboscopic photographs of Harold "Doc" Edgerton, from the famous milk splash to the bullet through the apple, are justifiably iconic, but Freezing Time is the first exhibition to really interrogate Edgerton's experimental journey in developing his innovative image-making processes, drawing on less well-known archival materials and images from the MIT Museum's rich collections relating to Edgerton, revealing a hidden dimension of this seminal figure in the history of photography."
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> **The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Director, MIT Museum, Michael John Gorman,**

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE HAROLD E. EDGERTON COLLECTION

The exhibited historic photographs have been printed from Edgerton's original negatives by Gus Kayafas (MIT Class of 1969), one of Edgerton's students and long-time photographic printer, collaborator, travelling companion, and beloved friend. Kayafas worked with Edgerton to create the famous dye-transfer portfolios held in museum collections around the world as well as the book, *Stopping Time: The Photographs of Harold Edgerton* (Abrams, 1987). Kayafas was a co-editor of *Harold Edgerton: Seeing the Unseen* (MIT Museum and Steidl, 2019). Through his studio, Palm Press, Kayafas has supported countless exhibitions of Edgerton's work over the past half-century, including several MIT Museum exhibitions.

The pieces in the exhibition are pulled from the MIT Museum's significant photography holdings, approximately 500,000 unique items. These include photographs, negatives and archival material of Harold Edgerton, Berenice Abbott, Minor White, Gyorgy Kepes and Elsa Dorfmann. In addition, it has exceptional industrial and scientific collections including Bethlehem Steel's Fore River Shipyard and the MIT Radiation Laboratory. The museum's subject and biographical files contain more than 70,000 photographs, negatives, and glass lantern slides documenting the history of MIT from its founding to the present. While distinct from photography, it should be noted that the MIT Museum also holds the largest collection of holograms in the world.

TECHNOLOGY BEHIND THE SHOT

In his work on stroboscopes and high-speed flash devices, Edgerton concentrated on the challenges of speed control, intensity, and flash duration. Highly creative, Edgerton was asked to consult on numerous projects, with his notebooks revealing the details of his approach, his conversations with plant managers, engineers and equipment operators, and ingenious customizations. These customizations and experimentations later became commercial products in the 1930s, such as the General Radio "Edgerton Stroboscope" and the Kodatron Speedlamp. Both on view as part of *Freezing Time* give context and depth to Edgerton's prolific oeuvre.

In 2009, the MIT Museum collaborated with the Edgerton Center, MIT Libraries, and MIT Video Productions to create the Edgerton Digital Collections (EDC). Accessible to the public, the site contains over 22,000 still images of Edgerton materials, 150 films and video that have been restored and are being digitized; access to approximately 8,000 pages from Doc Edgerton's hand-written laboratory notebooks which have been digitized by the MIT Libraries Department of Distinctive Collections; and hundreds of high-speed photographic images.

The sizable Edgerton Digital Collection makes up a fraction of the MIT Museum's photography collection, comprising 1.5 million pieces.

***Freezing Time: Edgerton and the Beauty of the Machine Age* is presented in the Kurtz Gallery 3.4, and is exhibited as part of the MIT Museum's inaugural thematic season, TIME.**

"Everyday we benefit from the technical innovations made by Harold "Doc" Edgerton from the flash on a camera to the beacon that warns an airplane of a high hazard. It all started because he was fascinated but frustrated by a French instrument, the Stroborama, that didn't allow him to take pictures of the electric generators he was studying. Edgerton's efforts, along with those of his students, to radically improve that technology had an immediate impact on industry. Still we might never have known about Edgerton if he hadn't applied that technology to taking incredibly beautiful and intriguing photographs, that seemed to freeze time itself. By combining theory, experiment, and artistry, Edgerton gave us tools and techniques to freeze time and help us better comprehend our world."

Deborah G. Douglas, Senior Director of Collections and Curator of Science and Technology, MIT Museum

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About the MIT Museum:

The MIT Museum welcomes all to participate in MIT's unique culture of problem-solving and playful creativity, bringing together science, technology, art, and design in surprising ways to explore potential futures.

In addition to exhibitions, programs, a maker hub and learning labs, the museum invites visitors to take part in ongoing research while demonstrating how science and innovation will shape the future of society. In October 2022, a reinvented **MIT Museum** opened in a new location in the heart of Kendall Square in Cambridge, MA.

Highlights of the Museum include freshly conceived exhibitions featuring objects from the Museum's collections of over 1.5 million objects, along with loans of art and other objects; the Lee Family Exchange event space for public dialogue and conversation; the hands-on Heide Maker Hub, where audiences can create and invent; and an expanded MIT Museum Store.

The MIT Museum is open daily 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

For more information, including accessibility and amenities, please visit **mitmuseum.mit.edu**

Address: MIT Museum, Gambrill Center, 314 Main Street (MIT Building E28), Cambridge, MA 02142.

Located next to the Kendall/MIT MBTA Red Line stop at the new Kendall Gateway to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Campus. Museum Director, Michael John Gorman; Director of Exhibitions, Ann Neumann.

MIT Museum credits:

- Michael John Gorman, The Mark R. Epstein (Class of 1963) Director, MIT Museum
- Deborah G. Douglas, Senior Director of Collections and Curator of Science and Technology, 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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