

June 2019

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RESIDENCY

Pratt Institute's [STEAMplant](#)



**Fostering
interdisciplinary
collaborations**



"Space Within Spaces," a cosmic ray-detecting light installation, created by STEAMplant team Joseph Morris, Agnes Mocsy, and Che-Wei Wang. Photo courtesy of Joseph Morris.

Pratt Institute's [STEAMplant](#) initiative provides financial and on-campus resources to support interdisciplinary collaboration between creative and investigative disciplines. Borne from Pratt's mission to act as a living laboratory for craft and creativity, STEAMplant serves the institute and greater New York City communities by facilitating collaboration between Pratt mathematics, science, and other faculty with students and with outside professionals.

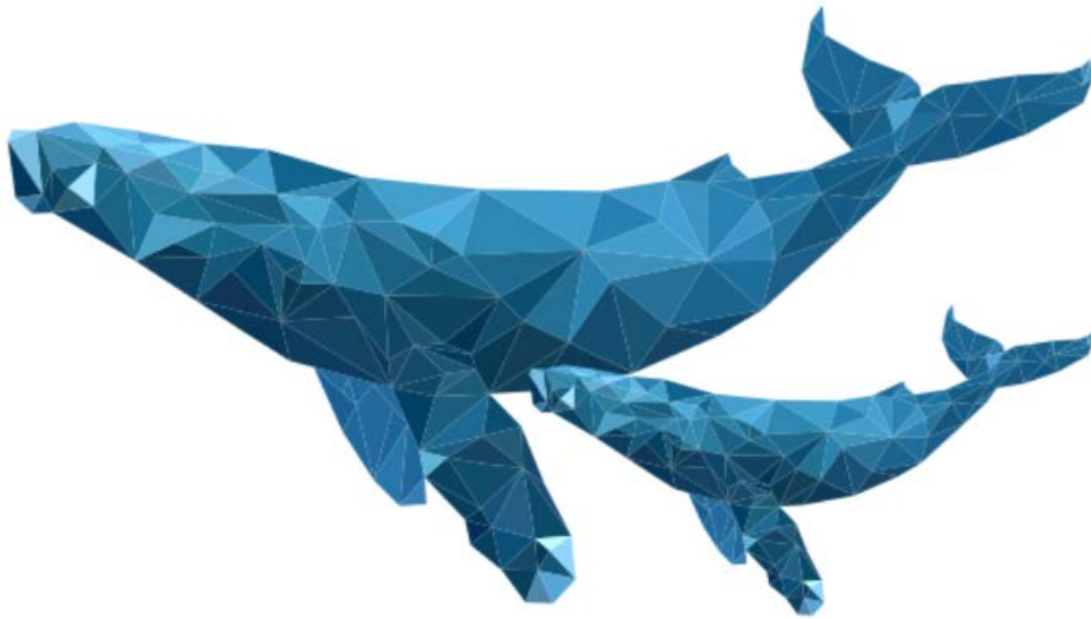
By Julia Buntaine Hoel, Editor-in-Chief

Full disclosure: I have a specific interest in STEAMplant. My passion for science-art residency programs led me to join the STEAMplant team last year. While many institutions talk about generating an interdisciplinary atmosphere by offering a class or two per semester which cross or combine disciplines, the STEAMplant initiative goes a few steps further and actively connects Pratt faculty, staff, students, and outside professionals across departments and disciplines for the purposes of interdisciplinary project creation. Spanning the media of video games, scientific publications, art installations, performance, and more, STEAMplant explores the potentials of what can happen when the arts, design, mathematics, and sciences get to collaborate in a supportive, academic, and creative environment.

With the common goal of project creation, each STEAMplant team member comes to embody the value of working across disciplines and can in turn, carry that value system forward to the rest of their academic or professional careers. That this is happening at an arts institution - with an embedded Science & Math department - is a sign of times; if Processing is the new paintbrush, artists need access and exposure to all that the sciences, mathematics, and technology have to offer in order to create work that is reflective of and relevant to our 21st century. In the

I'd like to highlight a few STEAMplant projects I think are particularly compelling for their artistic quality:

"[Song Searching](#)" asks the question "What would it feel like to be a humpback whale experiencing today's increasingly human-dominated world?" Created by Ami Cai (Pratt student), [Basem Aly](#) (Associate Director of Research and Strategic Projects & Visiting Instructor in Interactive Services), [Jennifer Telesca](#) (Assistant Professor of Social Science & Cultural Studies), and [Christopher X.J. Jensen](#) (Associate Professor of Math & Science), this project combines scientific and sociocultural research with design aesthetics and a video game platform to give its users the experience of noise pollution felt by our underwater fellow species.



STEAMplant project "Song Searching" process photos.

"Collaboration has many benefits, not least of which is the opportunity to learn how different disciplines define and solve complex problems. By bringing together people with divergent sets of skills and perspectives, we gain the benefit of approaching a problem from several angles simultaneously. Interdisciplinary collaboration also reveals the "lenses" our own discipline uses to understand and prioritize a given set of challenges. We then must explicitly demonstrate how our lenses work to our colleagues, possibly discovering a blind spot, or an area where our particular discipline's perspective may be distorted. The very act of working with others entails continual dialogue and negotiation about the relative priorities of the goals we pursue, thus sharpening our own powers of observation and explanation."

"[Metric Units for the Solar System](#)" - a project by [Sara Morawetz](#) (artist), [Joseph Morris](#) (Form Technician Lab Manager & Visiting Instructor), and [Mark Rosin](#) (Associate Professor of Math & Science) - explores our relationship with standardized units of measurement systems. If the meter is based on calculations which are Earth-specific, what is the length of a meter on Mars?



"I think this type of collaboration is now an indispensable part of a contemporary practitioner's toolkit – it offers an invaluable perspective on one's conceptual rationale and methodological process. In my work I'm constantly assessing how the theoretical drivers of art, science and philosophy intersect with each other as both complementary and oppositional forces. Consequently, conversations from outside artistic disciplines are essential, and spending time with scientists has sharpened my sense of how best to respond to scientific material."

Sara Morawetz, STEAMplant resident on "Metric Units for the Solar System" project

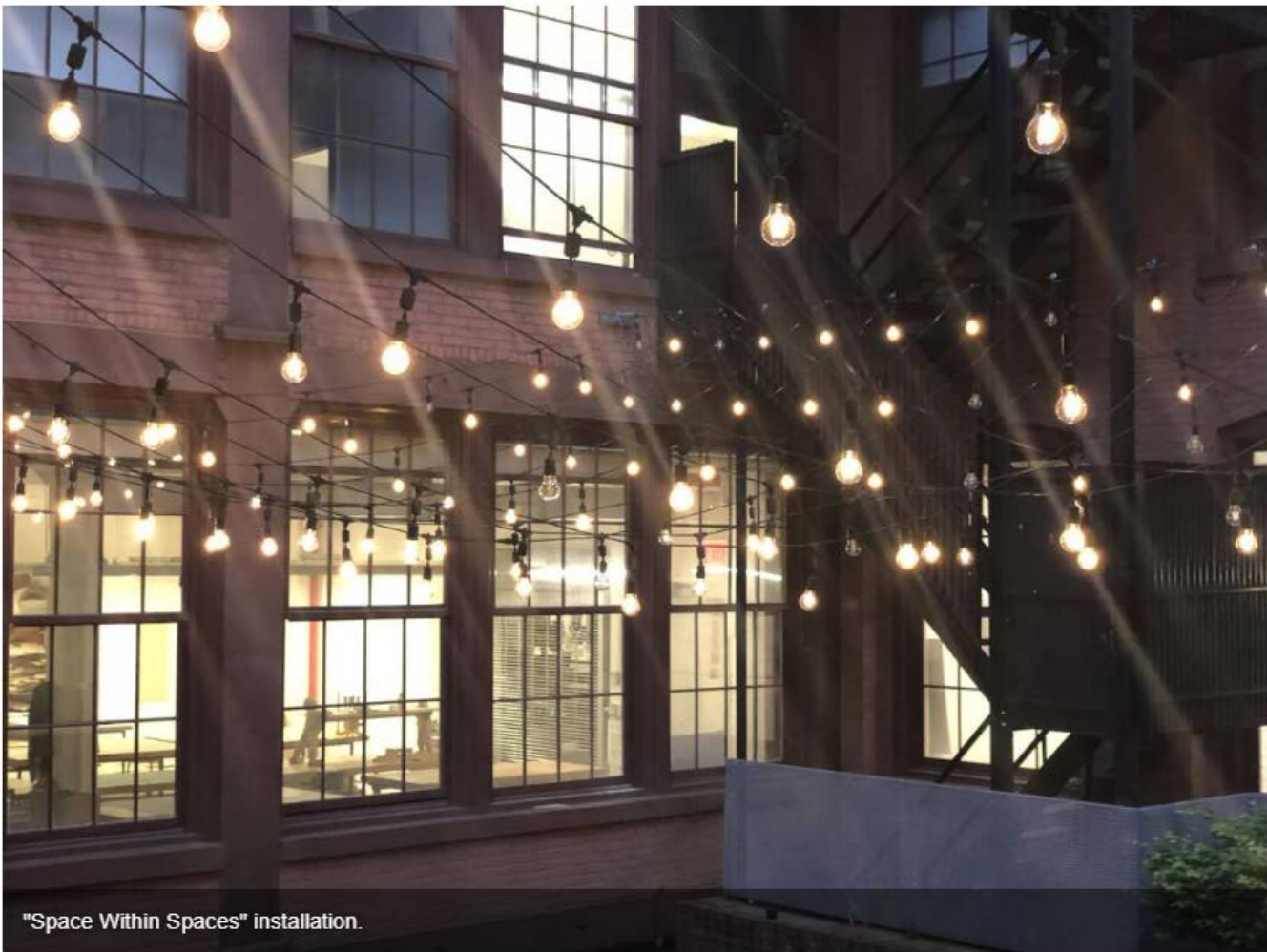
Pratt Institute (Brooklyn)
Juliana Curran Terian Design
Center Atrium

 Fostering
interdisciplinary
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*A collaborative project by Joseph Morris,
Agnes Mocsy & Che-Wei Wang*

"[Space Within Spaces](#)" is a project created by [Joseph Morris](#) (artist, and Form Technician Lab Manager & Visiting Instructor), [Agnes Mocsy](#) (Professor of Physics), and [Che-Wei Wang](#) (Adjunct Assistant Professor of Architecture). This outdoor light installation visualizes the real-time detection of cosmic rays in a series of string lights supported by custom algorithms.

"Space Within Spaces" opens to the public on June 18th - click [here](#) for more info on the opening reception.



"Space Within Spaces" installation.

"It's really a pleasure to work with professionals outside your discipline. As a hands-on artist who enjoys making things, I usually take on a lot of labor involved in producing a piece on my own, within the confines of a studio. I'm a bit of a hermit, so I love it, but I don't always get the opportunity to look over my shoulder and see what my extra-disciplinary neighbors are up to. There's a lot of passion that drives people to create, and getting the opportunity to collaborate with others outside your discipline raises your awareness of how creativity happens within and out of the art world. If you can approach the process with an open mind, it allows for new and unexpected insights and connections to occur."

Joseph Morris, STEAMplant resident & Pratt staff on "Space Within Spaces" project



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