

## Inside the Sponge

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The Canadian Centre for Architecture in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) SENSEable City Laboratory presents the exhibition Inside the Sponge in the Octagonal Gallery. Simmons Hall is an award-winning university dormitory designed by architect Steven Holl on the MIT campus in Cambridge. Inspired by the sea sponge and the concept of porosity, the building is radical in structure and ambitious in its program to encourage social interaction. Inside the Sponge is an investigation of Simmons Hall from the perspective of its residents, giving voice to MIT's student body to draw a unique description of the building's life. It proposes a dialogue between architectural intentions and the process by which a community appropriates space.

The exhibition features original materials and research by Simmons Hall residents, including videos, t-shirts, photographs, comics, and entries from the popular student design competition to modify the building, "How to Drill a Hole in Simmons Hall." New technologies were deployed by the students to analyse the demographics and patterns of activity of the building's community, including the mapping of wireless Internet usage, and the use of time-bracketed photography to suggest the evolving quality of the site over time. Presented in complement to the students' work are original watercolours, drawings, and a model from Steven Holl Architects which describe the concept and development of the building. [Click here for the exhibition credit list.](#)

Inside the Sponge is curated by Carlo Ratti. Educated as an architect and engineer, Carlo Ratti teaches at MIT where he is director of the SENSEable City Laboratory, a new research initiative exploring how technology is transforming urban design and living. He is founding partner and director of the architectural firm Carlorattiasociati, established in Turin, Italy, in 2002. In 2004 the work of Carlorattiasociati was selected for exhibition at the Venice Biennale as one of the top emerging Italian practices. Mr. Ratti holds degrees from Politecnico di Torino, Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, and the University of Cambridge. He has co-authored four patents and over 40 scientific publications, and is a contributor to Domus, Casabella, and Abitare. Talia Dorsey, researcher at the MIT SENSEable City Laboratory, is the associate curator of the exhibition.

Steven Holl founded Steven Holl Architects in New York in 1976. The firm has been recognized internationally with numerous awards, publications and exhibitions for quality and excellence in design. In July 2001 Time Magazine named Steven Holl as America's Best Architect for "buildings that satisfy the spirit as well as the eye." Most recently he was honored by the Smithsonian Institution with the 2002 Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture. He is a tenured faculty member at Columbia University where he has taught since 1981.

Simmons Hall, completed in 2002, is host to a community of students, scholars, and faculty members. Conceived as a vertical slice of the urban fabric, the building is ten stories tall and 116 metres long, comprising 350 student rooms, a 125-seat theatre, a night café, and street level dining. The "sponge" concept transforms the building through a series of large-scale openings which correspond to entrances, views, and outdoor terraces, and almost 6,000 smallscale openings that act as windows. Immense and irregular void spaces cut through the interior, forming unexpected public areas and student rooms of varying and unusual shape. Simmons Hall received the National American Institute of Architects (AIA) Design Award in 2003, as well as the 2002 New York AIA Design Award, and the 2000 Progressive Architecture Award.

Inside the Sponge marks the first in a series of CCA projects in association with universities, and forms part of the CCA's mandate as an international research centre to initiate partnerships with academic and cultural institutions worldwide.