Section I: Mural Policy

It is MIT policy that painted murals, or anything that is placed on the walls of any building on the MIT campus, must not contain harassing material which includes images or language that reasonable persons would find offensive or which would reasonably interfere with other residents’ or guests’ enjoyment of the facilities. This policy applies to murals in public spaces. Murals must comply with the MIT Mind and Handbook, individual dorm policies and MIT policies and procedures, including MIT’s Non-Discrimination Policy, Policy against Racist Behavior and Harassment Policy. Examples of murals that would violate this policy include, but are not necessarily limited to, those that include images or language that are derogatory on the basis of race, color, sex, gender, national origin, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. While the Division of Student Life encourages MIT residential communities to engage in conversation over whether a proposed mural is appropriate for their respective communities, the Dean for Student Life, or the appropriate MIT-designated Title IX coordinator in consultation with relevant art expert is the final arbiter on whether a mural or part of a mural is in violation of MIT’s Mural Policy, and may not be put up, or must be removed if already in existence.
Section II: Creating New Murals

When a resident(s) wants to create a new mural, the following two steps must be taken:

Section II, Subsection I: Gaining Community Approval

Each dorm or community should develop a precise process for community approval. An outline of a sufficient process is:

1. All residents in the area/floor of a dorm where a mural is to be painted must be notified of a proposed mural, provided with a description of the mural and given sufficient time to consider the mural as well as an opportunity to raise any concerns or objections.

2. The Housemaster must also be notified of any proposed mural and provided with a description of the mural.

   If a GRT, RLAD, Housemaster, or House Manager requests that a mural not be painted, they must provide a written explanation citing relevant policy to the artist that describes the objection to the mural.

3. If any resident, GRT, RLAD, or Housemaster/House Manager objects to a proposed mural, the dorm community should attempt to come up with a suggested modification that is acceptable to both the artist(s) and objector(s). If the parties are not able to reach an agreement after meeting, the matter must be referred to the Dean of Student Life who, in consultation with relevant art experts, will make a decision on whether the mural should be allowed.

Section II, Subsection II: Painting the Mural

Once community approval is gained, the mural can be painted according to dorm policies. Residents must follow appropriate procedures regarding mediums (e.g. is painting on walls allowed? on canvas? what types of paints are allowed? etc.). The House Manager can be consulted about these policies in each individual dorm.

Additionally, each dorm may create supplementary practices, such as requiring a deposit to paint a mural, or pooling resources for appropriate painting supplies. Each dorm is responsible for educating their residents about any such practices.
Section III: Existing Murals

Section III, Subsection I: Requesting Modification or Removal of Existing Murals

Part A: If a community member objects to an existing mural on the grounds of harassing or discriminatory content in violation of the MIT Mind and Handbook, or relevant State and Federal civil rights law, the appropriate MIT-designated Title IX coordinator should be called upon within one business day to evaluate the content of the mural. Material that is deemed by that officer to be harassing or discriminatory must be removed per State and Federal Law as quickly as possible.

Part B: If a community member objects to an existing mural on the grounds that it otherwise has content in violation of the MIT Mind and Handbook or relevant State law (e.g. regarding hazing or underage consumption of alcohol), the matter must be initially addressed, in a timely manner, by residents of the community. If unresolved the situation would be forward to the Housemaster and finally if the complaint remains unresolved the Dean of Student office, in consultation with art experts, will make a decision on whether the mural should be allowed.

Part C: If a community member objects to an existing mural as a matter of taste, and not based on criteria described in Parts A and B immediately above, the situation should be handled in the same way that any other dorm conflict would be resolved within that community. Each dorm is responsible for maintaining, and informing residents of their relevant policy. An example of such a process is outlined below:

- Consult the GRT in that area/floor, who could lead a community conversation about the mural in question.
- If it is not resolved on the floor level, the GRT could engage the Housemaster and/or House Government, who could engage the house and/or make an official ruling.
- In the rare case that no conclusion can be drawn within the dorm community, the dorm can engage appropriate parties within Division of Student Life.

If a complaint is made -- by either a resident or nonresident -- to DSL, a Housemaster, or another person or group outside of the floor/community responsible for the mural, it is strongly recommended that the complaint be referred back to the community housing the mural. This allows the community to engage in steps such as those outlined above and report the conclusion back to the person/group receiving the complaint.

Additionally, it is recommended that a mural brought into question as a matter of taste be covered by a temporary cover (e.g. a piece of paper) until a conclusion is reached. As decided by each dorm, the House Manager and/or Housemaster, RLAD and GRT should be made aware of such a situation.
Section III, Subsection II: Mural Upkeep

Each dorm is responsible for maintaining a policy that addresses the following questions:

- Who is responsible for the upkeep of murals? If a mural is defaced/vandalized, who should take steps to restore the mural?
- If a mural must be removed for any reason, who is responsible for doing so?
- If public art supplies are available, who is responsible for maintaining them?
- What happens if a mural is painted in violation of the dorm’s procedures?

Additionally, if MIT Housing has to do any planned renovation work that would disrupt or remove a mural; they should when possible provide at least two weeks notice to the floor so that the community has an opportunity to preserve the mural in some way.

Section IV: Background

Many undergraduate dormitories (“dorms”) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) allow student artwork in the form of murals. The purpose of this document is to clarify the practices and policies surrounding painted murals, and to affirm their importance to the MIT dorm community.

Murals are an integral part of student culture in many of MIT’s dorms. As a few examples, the ability to paint murals in dorms:

- Allows for the creative self-expression of students
- Creates a greater sense of comfort, “home”-ness, and connection to the dorm by giving students the opportunity to modify and contribute to their living space
- Fosters camaraderie and bolsters support networks by allowing students to collaborate in defining and designing their living space
- Contributes to MIT’s broader image of creativity and innovation
- Helps sustain lasting culture that may survive longer than any student’s time at MIT

Some examples of murals in MIT dorms are included in the appendix of this document.

However, this aspect of student life necessitates steps to ensure that the murals are mindful of MIT policies, all relevant State and Federal law, and community standards. The preceding mural policy is in place to ensure that MIT maintains a welcoming and comfortable dorm environment for all of its residents, staff and visitors.