

Voices of Olin

Every unfinished thing carries a story.

Olin is a place defined by making. Prototypes are rarely finished, ideas are constantly evolving, and learning happens through experimentation and iteration. Like the Phoenix—the symbol of Olin—people, projects, and the institution itself are always in the process of becoming.

Voices of Olin invites members of the Olin community to share an unfinished prototype, artifact, sketch, or object and the story it carries. Through a three-part experience spanning the weeks leading up to the inauguration and the ceremony itself, these unfinished things become a collective portrait of Olin—one that celebrates creativity, experimentation, and the people behind the work.

Rather than documenting finished achievements, the installation celebrates the process of making itself. Every unfinished thing carries a story: why it was made, what it taught, why it remains unfinished, and what it might become.

Act I — Gathering the Stories

The project begins with a simple one- or two-day community workshop.

Members of the Olin community are invited to bring an unfinished prototype, artifact, sketch, or object that represents a meaningful part of their experience at Olin. Alumni and families who cannot attend in person may also contribute by shipping an object to campus.

Participants may also choose to create a new object during the workshop through a short design challenge centered on Olin's future, engineering, or its relationship with the Needham community.

Each participant records a short audio reflection that becomes attached to their object.

Rather than describing the object itself, participants are invited to reflect on the making process through prompts such as:

- *Why did you make it?*
- *What did you learn while making it?*
- *Why is it still unfinished?*
- *What do you hope it becomes?*

By the end of the workshop, each unfinished object carries not only a physical history, but also the story of the people who made it.

Act II — Listening to the Community

The collected artifacts are displayed in a central campus location where students, faculty, staff, and visitors naturally pass throughout the day.

The installation consists of a curated collection of unfinished objects displayed on shelves and tables, together with several interactive listening pedestals.

Visitors are invited to select an object from the exhibition and place it onto one of the listening pedestals. Using RFID identification and spatial audio, the selected object is temporarily activated.

As people approach or move through the space, the object begins sharing the story attached to it, creating the impression that the unfinished things themselves are speaking.

Because only a few objects can be active at any given time, visitors continually decide which stories are heard. Throughout the exhibition, certain objects naturally emerge as the **Voices of Olin**—artifacts that the community repeatedly chooses to revisit, share, and place on the listening pedestals.

The installation also extends ongoing research in Spatial Interaction Design by transforming listening into a spatial experience shaped by movement, proximity, orientation, and object manipulation.

Act III — Bringing the Voices to the Inauguration

As the exhibition concludes, a small number of community-selected artifacts are invited to accompany President May during the inauguration ceremony.

Displayed around the stage, these **Voices of Olin** serve as quiet reminders of the creativity, experimentation, and aspirations shared by the Olin community during the weeks leading up to the inauguration. They remain silent throughout the ceremony, allowing the focus to remain on the inauguration itself while symbolically representing the voices that have already been shared.

During her remarks, President May may reference these objects as reminders that Olin has always been shaped by unfinished ideas, continual experimentation, and the people who bring them to life.

As an optional closing gesture, President May picks up one of the selected artifacts and invites several students to join her. Together, they carry the **Voices of Olin** back to the exhibition space, where the objects are returned to the listening pedestals.

As each artifact is placed back into the installation, its voice becomes audible once again.

Guests are then invited to continue exploring the exhibition, listening to the stories behind the unfinished objects, and joining the ongoing conversation that extends beyond the inauguration itself.

Rather than concluding with a final speech, the ceremony concludes by returning the community's voices to the community—symbolizing that Olin's next chapter begins not with a single person, but with the collective imagination and creativity of everyone who shapes it.