This month highlights two key events of the Arts & The City Year. On March 2, the Penn Institute for Urban Research held a stimulating national symposium on the topic: “Can the Arts Revive our Cities and the Nation’s Economy?” We were pleased to welcome Rocco Landesman, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, whose presentation energized the attendees about their potential to advance the future of the arts in America. On the weekend of March 26, the Theater Studies department presented Tina Howe’s Museum, staged in the Arthur Ross Gallery, with appearances by Penn faculty and staff members and a visit from the playwright on March 27, including a post-performance discussion.

These events exemplify the cross-campus, cross-disciplinary, nationally significant programs that we aim to feature in our academic theme years. We are currently accepting proposals for programs for the upcoming Year of Water, toward which we will award grants up to $750. I encourage you to review the guidelines in Almanac and contact David Fox in College Houses and Academic Services with any questions. Please also contact David Fox if you have additional ideas for Year of Water initiatives or future academic theme years. As you may know, College Houses recently announced the Penn Reading Project that will begin the Year of Water at New Student Orientation in August: The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters, by Penn alumna Rose George, an exciting and accessible book that draws attention to the critical global issues of sanitation and waste disposal, from both historical and public policy perspectives.

Finally, I would like to extend congratulations to nine junior faculty members whose research has been singled out for national recognition. Profs. Ani Nenkova, Prashant Purohit, and Andrew Tsourkas of the School of Engineering and Applied Science all received Presidential Early Career Awards from the National Science Foundation. These grants provide five years of research funding to young scientists and engineers who “show exceptional potential for leadership at the frontiers of scientific knowledge during the twenty-first century.” Six Penn professors won awards from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation: Prof. Matthew Bidwell of Wharton received an Industry Studies Fellowship, and five professors received two-year, $50,000 fellowships awarded to “early career scientists and scholars of outstanding promise.” These awardees – Profs. Iwan Barankay, Justin Khoury, Elliot Lipeles, Nicole Rust, and Ben Taskar – span SAS, SEAS, and Wharton, with research that encompasses labor economics, particle physics, behavioral neuroscience, and machine learning. We are proud that these awards bring national attention to the intellectual vitality of our junior faculty.

Vincent Price
Provost