

MA Contemporary Art Theory

Programme Specification

Awarding Institution:

University of London (Interim Exit Awards made by Goldsmiths' College)

Teaching Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London

Final Award: MA Contemporary Art Theory

Programme Name: MA Contemporary Art Theory

Total credit value for programme: 180

Name of Interim Exit Award(s):

Postgraduate Certificate in Contemporary Art Theory

Postgraduate Diploma in Contemporary Art Theory

Duration of Programme: 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time

UCAS Code(s): Not applicable

HECoS Code(s): (100306) History of Art

QAA Benchmark Group: Not applicable

FHEQ Level of Award: Level 7

Programme accredited by: Not applicable

Date Programme Specification last updated/approved: August 2023

Home Department: Visual Cultures

Department(s) which will also be involved in teaching part of the programme: Not applicable

Programme overview

The MA Contemporary Art Theory is for those with a special interest in contemporary art and an aptitude for theoretical work in the subject.

You don't necessarily need a formal academic qualification in art history: we welcome applications from prospective students who do not meet the standard entrance requirements but can demonstrate appropriate knowledge and experience from outside academia in the world of work.

The programme offers a challenging and advanced scheme of study. It explores a range of theoretical perspectives that shape attitudes towards art and visual culture in the late 20th/early 21st centuries.

Invigorated by current research, the programme encourages you to explore conceptually and creatively the ways in which contemporary artistic practice (broadly understood) and critical theory interrelate. It aims to expand your knowledge of contemporary artistic developments as well as to deepen your understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of academic discourses on visual culture.

The programme draws variously upon the fields of performance studies, art history, philosophy, museology, queer theory, post-colonial studies and cultural studies in addressing the critical challenges with which contemporary art and art theory are engaged.

Programme entry requirements

The standard requirement is of an upper second-class BA or equivalent degree in Fine Art, History of Art and Design, Visual Culture, Cultural Studies, Philosophy, Film Studies, or in a related discipline such as Literature or Music. Above all, students should be able to demonstrate an aptitude for theoretical enquiry in the field of contemporary art and critical studies, and/or in the humanities more broadly. This must also be evident in candidates who do not have the above academic qualifications, and, depending upon assessment of requested writing samples and/or at interview, it may be possible for them to be admitted with lesser grades or with knowledges and competences developed outside of academia in the world of work. If such knowledges and competences are deemed insufficient, however, candidates may be advised to take a preparatory year of study on the Visual Cultures department's Graduate Diploma in Contemporary Art History. Non-native English language speakers are required to have passed the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with at least 6.5 overall.

Programme learning outcomes

This programme is for students who have a special interest in contemporary art, including those without a formal academic qualification in art history. It offers a challenging, flexible, and advanced scheme of study which explores a range of theoretical perspectives that shape attitudes towards visual art in the late 20th/early 21st century. Invigorated by current research, the programme encourages students to engage in an exploratory interrogation of the relationships between critical theory and artistic practice. The programme aims to:

1. Expand students' knowledge of contemporary artistic developments and critical discourse.
2. Deepen understanding of the inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary nature of contemporary academic discourses on visual art/visual culture.
3. Enhance independent critical and analytical skills.
4. Develop students' abilities to think speculatively and creatively about developments in some of the following fields as they might pertain to contemporary art practice: art

criticism, curating, art history, visual culture, performance studies, cultural studies, and philosophy.

5. Encourage students' self-development into professionally organised and interactive individuals by practicing skills of research, evaluation, and communication in written, oral, and visual domains,
6. Facilitate a learning environment that offers an appropriate foundation for further scholarly research in visual culture, art history, cultural studies, and related humanities fields.
7. This programme also offers students unique opportunities to understand and develop crucial skills in the area of collaborative, practice-based group research and presentation.

What you will be expected to achieve

Students who exit the programme at the Postgraduate Certificate stage (60 CATS) will have completed the compulsory Core Module (60 CATS).

Students who exit the programme at the Postgraduate Diploma stage (120 CATS) will have completed The Core Module (60 CATS) and two Special Subjects (2x30 CATS)

PGCert and PGDip

Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma graduates will demonstrate the following, the Postgraduate Diploma graduates to a greater degree of range and intensity since they will have completed 2 x Special Subjects:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	A significant understanding of the inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary nature of contemporary academic discourse on art/visual culture.	All modules.
A2	A working understanding of the relations between theoretical discourse and artistic practice.	All modules.
A3	A good knowledge of current debates in the discourses of professional practitioners: from artists to critics, curators and theorists of the visual.	All modules.
A4	An understanding of the techniques, challenges and benefits of collaborative	The Core Module and at least one Special Subject.

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
	and active (practice-based) approaches to research and learning.	

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	The ability to work speculatively and creatively within the field of contemporary artistic discourses.	All modules.
B2	The ability to develop an independent argument that is informed by, but not wholly dependent on, authorities in the field of art theory.	All modules.
B3	The ability to critically utilise ideas and debates from a range of theoretical sources and disciplines beyond the framework of art criticism and art history more narrowly defined.	All modules.
B4	The ability to be inventive in thinking theoretically about the novel affects, experiences and representations afforded by contemporary art.	All modules.
B5	The ability to respond to the challenges that contemporary art practices present to extant structures of knowledge and value: of aesthetics, politics, philosophy, etc.	All modules.

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	The ability to theorise different aspects of art and visual culture and set the latter within appropriate intellectual and theoretical contexts.	All modules.
C2	The ability to reflect upon contemporary art in a theoretically informed manner and to think critically about existing art discourse.	All modules.
C3	The ability to understand the role of art, and visual culture more generally, as an important aspect of contemporary life and	All modules.

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
	as the carrier of certain meanings and values.	
C4	The ability to analyse theoretical arguments and critically assess the value and significance of objects and practices.	All modules.

Transferable skills (Elements)

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Bring evidence or ideas of different sorts, or from different sources, together in a productive way.	All modules.
D2	Produce structured narratives and arguments supported by relevant evidence.	All modules.
D3	Identify the merits of unfamiliar arguments or cultural artefacts and the merits and shortcomings of familiar ones.	All modules.
D4	Design and develop individual research projects.	All modules.
D5	Work creatively and collaboratively on group projects.	The Core Module and at least one Special Subject.
D6	Work diligently, to fulfil briefs and deadlines, and to take responsibility for one's own work.	All modules.
D7	Critically understand the functioning of institutions of culture, and to acquire professional skills in negotiating the world of work.	All modules.

MA

The MA (180 CATS) is awarded on the further successful completion of a 12,000-15,000-word dissertation. In addition to the above learning outcomes, students who complete the MA will demonstrate:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	In-depth knowledge of a particular problematic within the field of contemporary art theory and visual	Dissertation , which includes a formative MA Symposium component.

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
	cultural studies, drawing, as appropriate, upon the discourses of art history, performance studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, queer theory, post-colonial studies, and museology.	

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Students, who complete the MA will acquire the same cognitive and thinking skills but will have developed them to an advanced level in the context of researching and writing a 12,000-15,000-word dissertation.	Dissertation, which includes a formative MA Symposium component.

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	The ability to pursue a major research project culminating in a 12,000-15,000-word dissertation.	Dissertation, which includes a formative MA Symposium component.

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Work speculatively and in an exploratory manner.	Dissertation, which includes a formative MA Symposium component.
D2	Design, develop and deliver a substantial individual research project.	Dissertation, which includes a formative MA Symposium component.

How you will learn

In relation to the learning outcomes of 'knowledge and understanding':

The MA Contemporary Art Theory's compulsory Core Module, supported by supplementary student-led 'theory' reading groups and a formative 'diagnostic' essay, introduce critical, theoretical, and historical debates relevant to the study of contemporary art, art theory and visual cultures. Since this element of the programme is introductory, students are exposed to a wide and diverse knowledge base, which includes those knowledges that students have

brought to the programme themselves. In addition, the supplementary student-led Reading Groups induct students into a learning environment in which they are expected, right from the beginning, to take personal responsibility for their learning, develop independence of questioning and response to module materials, and build supportive peer learning relationships. MA Contemporary Art Theory students who are not native English speakers – or who have been out of academia for a while – are offered weekly Academic Writing group sessions during the Autumn Term. These are delivered by Goldsmiths' Centre for Academic Language and Learning.

Two Special Subjects enable students to study aspects of contemporary art theory in depth. In most of the Special Subjects this is predominantly, but not necessarily solely, via lectures, seminars, tutorials and a formative essay. In some modules, teaching is via a mix of lectures and collaborative group research work.

In the Summer term, students undertake a Dissertation which enables them to develop in-depth knowledge independently, and in particularised ways. The Dissertation is supported by a formative MA Symposium in May/June, which enables students to present to tutors and peers on their dissertation research-in-progress and to give and receive oral feedback. The MA Symposium, which focuses on the oral (or in some cases the pre-recorded) presentation of student work in small group contexts, also helps develop students capacities both to listen and to speak in public. It helps build their capacity to present their findings vividly, succinctly, and effectively, according to the conventions of the academic conference paper.

All parts of the programme are concerned with the relationships between art and theory, and the cultural and social politics of everyday life, and much pedagogical attention is paid to these issues within formative and summative feedback on essays, projects, and other modes of presentation, including the formative MA Symposium (the latter is not applicable to PG Cert or PG Dip).

Knowledge of current professional practice, and wider perspectives on state-of-the-art research in the broad, interdisciplinary field of Visual Culture are provided by the themed Public Programme lectures and events and via occasional, thematically focused workshops whose aim is to concentrate debate on contemporary issues. These are compulsory for all MA students in the department.

In relation to the learning outcomes of 'thinking and cognitive' and 'subject specific' skills':

The programme aims to create an intellectually stimulating environment, which embraces intellectual diversity, and encourages and supports the independence, inventiveness, and confidence of students. Students are encouraged by a range of means to develop an independent argument that is informed by authorities in the field of contemporary art and visual cultures and to think speculatively and creatively within the field of contemporary art

theoretical discourse, from discussion in seminars, and individual tutorials, to feedback on formative and summative essays.

The MA Contemporary Art Theory is designed to support students on their personal intellectual and professional journeys. Therefore, the formative diagnostic essay in the Autumn Term plays an important role in familiarising students with the intellectual ambitions and requirements of the programme and gives them the opportunity to experiment and take certain calculated risks in terms of developing new approaches to critical writing. The taught portion of the programme enables students to advance and test their knowledge and often to develop new and unexpected areas of interest which they may wish to develop in their Dissertation projects.

A unique aspect of the MA programme is the opportunity to engage in participatory, collaborative research and presentation work of a highly exploratory nature.

Many of the learning outcomes above are in part demonstrated to students by example, as members of staff are encouraged to present work in progress which foregrounds the experimental and developmental nature of their research into contemporary art. Students are encouraged to process information: to think about how theory might be 'put to work' rather than merely assimilating it as a body of information.

Encouragement to develop the transferable skills:

This is supported throughout the taught part of programme in terms of the content of individual modules, as well as through individual guidance on essays, projects, and on formative oral presentations during the MA Symposium (the latter not applicable to PG Cert and PG Dip levels).

As indicated, the design and development of individual research projects are developed formatively via oral presentation and specifically in the dissertation, whilst the ability to work collaboratively is also developed where group projects are agreed. The fulfilment of briefs and deadlines is encouraged throughout by ensuring students know of their responsibilities through announcements and through the availability of personal tutors to discuss any problems that might arise. These skills are repeatedly tested throughout, from the (non-examined) diagnostic compulsory module essay through to the formally assessed pieces of written and oral work.

How you will be assessed

The 60 CAT Core Module is summatively assessed either by:

- 2 x 6000-word essays, OR

- 2 x 3,000-word essays plus related Research Files or Creative Projects (which may in some cases consist of collaborative group work), OR
- 1 x, 6,000-word essay and 1 x 3,000-word essay plus related Research File or Creative Project (which may in some cases consist of collaborative group work).

The 30 CAT Special Subjects are assessed summatively either by:

- 1 x 6000-word essay, OR
- 1 x 3,000-word essays plus related Research Files or Creative Project (which may in some cases consist of collaborative group work), OR
- 1 x, 3,000-word essay and 1 x 1,500, word essay plus related Research File or Creative Project (which may in some cases consist of collaborative group work).

The purpose of the Special Subject essays/projects is to enable the student to undertake a relatively in-depth study of a particular area, preparing the ground for the formative oral presentation (MA Symposium) and Dissertation. Here, students are encouraged to consider carefully how they will enable content (choice and use of sources) and form/format (structure; presentation; use of language; etc.) to interrelate in order to achieve specific intellectual ends.

All modes of assessment will allow for the examination of intellectually speculative but rigorous work.

Each component piece of examined work is assessed by the following criteria:

1. The ability of students to establish a manageable research brief and to undertake appropriate and sufficient research; the ability to frame the subject of their enquiry inventively and contextually; the ability of students to identify new fields of enquiry and to draw upon appropriate sources and methodologies in doing so.
2. Conceptual and critical abilities; the ability to present a rigorous argument and demonstrate a clear grasp of ideas; the facility to work imaginatively with complex ideas; to identify pertinent issues with precision; ability to explore challenging ideas.
3. Creativity and facility with the form of presentation; ability of student to work critically and assuredly with written, oral, and other forms where appropriate; the presentation of legible and clear forms of critical enquiry.
4. Ambition and independence of the student's project; student's abilities in 'thinking outside the box'; ability to establish independence of student thought in relation to authoritative sources.

Programme Structure

The Programme is available in full-time (12 months) and part-time (24 months) modes.

The taught part of the programme runs from the end of September to the end of March, with additional tutorials, lectures and workshops in May and June. It offers a framework to help students focus and develop their own understanding of this field. Engagement with the diverse critical, theoretical, and methodological approaches on offer will enable students to identify and prepare the area of independent research they will carry out in their final Dissertation project.

All students take three taught modules, a 60 CAT Core Module in the Autumn Term supported by student-led theory reading groups, and two 30 CAT Special Subjects in the Spring Term. Students then undertake a 12-15,000 (60 CAT) Dissertation in the Summer term supported by individual tutorials, workshops, and a formative MA Symposium in which each student delivers a 20 mins presentation on their dissertation-in-progress.

In addition, students attend the compulsory (non-assessed) Visual Cultures Public Programme that takes place on Thursday evenings, and they may attend other occasional, optional workshops offered by the School or College, which focus on specific themes and problems in the broad field of visual cultures and beyond.

Students should be aware that each 30 CAT module requires 300 nominal learning hours – a mixture of formal learning and teaching events such as lectures, seminars, and tutorials, as well as a significant amount of independent study in terms of weekly reading and lecture/seminar preparation, and research and writing towards formative and summative assessment.

Full-time mode

Module Name	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Type	Term
Core Module (Strands A/B and C/D)		60	7	Compulsory	1
MA Special Subject 1		30	7	Compulsory	2
MA Special Subject 2		30	7	Compulsory	2
MA Dissertation		60	7	Compulsory	3

Part-time mode

Academic year of study 1

Module Name	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Type	Term
Core Module (Strand A/B)		30	7	Compulsory	1
MA Special Subject 1		30	7	Compulsory	2

Academic year of study 2

Module Name	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Type	Term
Core Module (Strand C/D)		30	7	Compulsory	1
MA Special Subject 2		30	7	Compulsory	2
MA Dissertation		60	7	Compulsory	3

Academic support

Support for learning and wellbeing is provided in a number of ways and College support services work collaboratively to ensure students get the right help to reach their best potential both academically and personally.

The MA is led a Programme Convenor who may be approached with Programme Level queries. Module tutors may be approached with module-specific queries.

All students are allocated a Personal Tutor who will have overall responsibility for guiding their individual progress and welfare. Personal Tutors meet with their student at least twice a year either face-to-face or online. The first meeting normally takes place within the first few weeks of the autumn term and personal tutors' grade and provide feedback on the Autumn Term Diagnostic Essays. Personal Tutors are also available to students throughout the year(s) of study. Personal Tutorials enable students to discuss overall progress on the programme, to discuss academic discipline and (for continuing part-time students) reports from previous years if available. This provides an opportunity for progress, attendance, and assessment marks to be reviewed and an informed discussion to take place about how to strengthen individual learning and success.

Should issues arise which negatively impact a student's academic study and which are beyond the normal scope of issues handled by Programme Convenors and Personal Tutors, all students have access to a Senior Tutor who has been trained to address and advise on such matters.

Students may be referred to specialist student services by department staff or they may access support services independently. Information about support services is provided on the Goldsmiths website and for new students through new starter information and at induction sessions during Welcome Week. Any support recommendations that are made are agreed with the student and communicated to the department so that adjustments to learning and teaching are able to be implemented at a department level and students can be reassured that arrangements are in place. Opportunities are provided for students to review their support arrangements should their circumstances change. The Disability and Wellbeing Services maintain caseloads of students and provide on-going support.

The MA Programme itself and each MA Module is supported by a virtual learning environment (Learn.gold) onto which all students are enrolled. These provide access to programme and module handbooks and other information and documentation and provide access to required reading materials and other learning resources. The Learn.gold sties also connect students to the Goldsmiths Library, its catalogues and links to extensive electronic resources and databases, as well as specialist librarian support. Goldsmiths' students are also encouraged to become members of the University of London's central Senate House Library.

Taught sessions and lectures provide overviews of themes, which students are encouraged to complement with intensive reading for presentation and discussion with peers at seminars. Assessments build on lectures and seminars, so students are expected to attend all taught sessions to build knowledge and their own understanding of their chosen discipline.

All assessed work is accompanied by feedback to support student learning and academic development. Feedback may come in the form of written comments on a marked essay, research file, creative project or presentation (as in the formative MA Symposium or in workshops).

The Careers Service provides central support for skills enhancement, running The Gold Award scheme and other co-curricular activities that are accredited via the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

The Centre for Academic Language and Literacies works with academic departments offering bespoke academic literacy sessions. It also provides a programme of academic skills workshops and one-to-one provision for students throughout the year. As indicated, MA Contemporary Art Theory students who are not native English speakers – or who have been out of academia for a while – are offered weekly group sessions during the Autumn Term.

Placement opportunities

Not applicable.

Employability and potential career opportunities

Students graduating from the MA Contemporary Art Theory programme often go on to undertake research degrees in art history, visual culture, cultural studies, performance studies, philosophy and related subjects both in the UK and abroad. Others find employment – in the UK and internationally – in the spheres of arts administration, curating, teaching, arts journalism, community arts projects, and other forms of museum and galleries work. Many have gone on to set up their own independent arts agency or gallery. Some

students opt to do a PGCE and go on to teach art / art history in schools and further education colleges. In this way, learning and teaching on the MA Contemporary Art Theory programme provide pathways into diverse institutions of contemporary art and culture at various levels.

Programme-specific requirements

All taught postgraduate degrees have a minimum total value of 180 credits and involve one calendar year of full-time study. Some programmes may extend over more than one calendar year and, when this is the case, they have a higher total credit value. Programmes are composed of individual modules, each of which has its own credit value. Part-time students normally take modules to the value of 90 credits each year. If a programme has a part-time pathway, the structure will be set out in the section “How the programme is structured” above. Normally, all modules are at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

More detailed information about the structure and requirements of a Goldsmiths degree is provided in the Goldsmiths Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Modules

Modules are defined as:

- “Optional” – which can be chosen from a group of modules.
- “Compulsory” – which must be taken as part of the degree.

Progression

Some programmes may require students to pass specific modules prior to completion of the dissertation/major project (or equivalent). Additionally, where a programme of study extends beyond one calendar year, students may be required to pass specific modules in their first year of study before progressing to the second year. Where this is the case, these requirements will be set out in this Programme Specification.

Tuition fee costs

Information on tuition fee costs is available at: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/students/fee-support/>.

Specific programme costs

Not applicable.