

MA Contemporary Art Theory

Programme Specification

Awarding Institution:

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

Teaching Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London

Name of Final Award and Programme Title: MA Contemporary Art Theory

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: December 2020

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 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

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 may be evident in candidates who do not have the above requirements, and, depending upon assessment 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. Applications are welcomed from EU students (full-time or part-time) and overseas students (full-time only). Non-English language speakers are required to have passed the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with at least 6.5 overall.

Aims of the programme

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

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 (90 CATS) will have completed the Compulsory Modules and two Special Subjects. They will demonstrate:

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 and active (practice-based) approaches to research and learning	Transforming Critical Practices, Geographies, Dissonant Images

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 as the carrier of certain meanings and values	All modules

Transferable skills

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	Transforming Critical Practices, Geographies, Dissonant Images
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

In addition to the above learning outcomes and modules, students who exit the programme at Postgraduate Diploma stage (120 CATS) will have completed the MA symposium and will demonstrate:

Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	focused knowledge of a particular problematic within the field of contemporary art theory and visual cultural studies, which they will have researched for the oral presentation	MA Symposium

Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Students, who exit the programme at PG Dip level will acquire the same cognitive and thinking skills, but will have developed them further through the preparation of an oral presentation	MA Symposium

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	the ability to present and defend their research orally in the context of a symposium according to the conventions of the academic conference paper, supporting it with relevant visual, audio-visual and/or other documentation	MA Symposium

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	the ability to analyse theoretical argument and critically assess the value and significance of objects and practices	MA Symposium

The MA (180 CATS) is awarded on the further successful completion of a 12-15 000 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 cultural studies, drawing, as appropriate, upon the discourses of art history, performance studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, queer theory, post-colonial studies, and museology	Dissertation

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 12-15,000 word dissertation	Dissertation

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 12-15,000 word dissertation	Dissertation

Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	work speculatively and in an exploratory manner	Dissertation
D2	design, develop and deliver a substantial individual research project	Dissertation

How you will learn

In relation to the learning outcomes of ‘knowledge and understanding’: The MA Contemporary Art Theory provides a choice of Common Compulsory Modules, with supplementary ‘theory’ reading groups. These modules introduce critical, theoretical and historical debates around art and aural-visual culture. Since this element of the programme is an introductory module for all MA students in the department, students are here exposed to a wide and diverse knowledge base, which includes those knowledges that students have brought to the programme themselves. In addition, the student-led Reading Groups associated with the Compulsory Module 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.

Two Special Subjects enable students to study particular aspects of contemporary art theory in depth. In most of the Special Subjects this is predominantly, but not necessarily

solely, via lectures, seminars and tutorials. In some modules such as Transforming Critical Practices and Spatial Biopolitics, this is via a mix of lectures and collaborative group research work. Further, students undertake a Dissertation, prefaced by an Oral Presentation (MA Symposium), which enables them to develop this in- depth knowledge independently, in particularised ways.

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 feedback on essays, projects, and the oral presentation. (not applicable to PG Cert).

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 aural 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 essays - including an initial diagnostic essay (formative assessment) associated with the Compulsory Modules, which 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. 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 listed above is supported throughout the whole programme in terms of the content of individual modules, as well as through individual guidance on essays, projects, the oral presentation (not applicable to PG Cert) and the dissertation (not applicable to PG Cert and PG Dip). The design and development of individual research projects is particularly focused upon within the oral presentation and

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 particular 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 Special Subjects are assessed either by 1 x 8000 word essay or a combination of essay and individual or group project, while Transforming Critical Practices is assessed by collaborative group research project that is presented and discussed at the end of the module. The MA Symposium (not applicable to PG Cert) is assessed by 1x 20 min oral presentation followed by a group discussion. The final assessed component of the MA is 1 x 12,000-15,000 words dissertation (not applicable to PG Cert and PG Dip). 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 oral presentation and dissertation. Here, students are encouraged to consider carefully how they will cause content (choice and use of sources) and form/format (structure; presentation; use of language; etc) to interrelate in order to achieve specific intellectual ends.

The Symposium assessment tests not only students' knowledge and understanding of the topic they intend to pursue at length in their Dissertations, but also their capacity to present their findings vividly, succinctly and effectively, according to the conventions of the academic conference paper.

All modes of assessment will allow for the examination of intellectually speculative but rigorous work. The oral presentation will allow for the assessment of these skills by means of a spoken presentation; the special subject essay and dissertation by means of extended writing projects; and the Lab project by means of an exploratory text, image, sound, performance, web-based, or other relevant form of presentation. The Lab project, in particular, will examine student achievement in critically practicing theory — their abilities in experimenting with critical and hermeneutic form.

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

Marking criteria

Mark	Descriptor	Specific Marking Criteria
80-100%	Distinction (Outstanding/ Exceptional)	This represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to an exceptional level. Potentially publishable work, showing extensive research, and originality / independence of thought. Such work will be highly articulate and ambitious and will demonstrate an exceptional critical sophistication and complexity. It will be well-handled and professionally delivered. It may show some successful experimentation with modes of critical address, depending upon their pertinence to the critical focus of the project at hand. The work will make potentially original gestures towards the advancement of knowledge in its field.
70-79%	Distinction	This represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to an excellent level. It will consist of an original and ambitious project which has achieved its goals convincingly and coherently. It will demonstrate an excellent grasp of appropriate theoretical sources and be able to communicate clearly its aims and ambitions, as well as being able to contextualise these in relation to relevant fields of academic enquiry. Work in this category may also evince a successful experimental/speculative approach to its subject, which may entail a self-conscious utilisation of its writerly modes, and the ways in which these might be understood in relation to visual/audio components of the work, as well as to the research materials consulted.
60-69%	Merit	Represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to a good level. Work is well-structured, consistently rigorous and shows thorough understanding of the subject. Work with a well developed sense of critical independence,

Mark	Descriptor	Specific Marking Criteria
		able to critically comment on its sources without slavishly reproducing the wisdom found therein. There should be a high level of competence and resolution, but the work may not always evince a complete fusion of intention and execution.
50-59%	Pass	Represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to a threshold level. Work demonstrates overall competence and understanding of its subject. It will show knowledge of the subject but the solutions may be posed in a less exploratory manner or show limited independence of thought. Work may show some signs of confusion or lack of sufficient resolution of its ideas.
30-49%	Fail	Represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to an insufficient level. Work is substantially deficient in technical realisation or shows a serious lack of understanding of critical or visual cultural practice. There may be little evidence of appropriate contextual knowledge.
10-29%	Bad fail	Represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to a very insufficient level. Inadequate knowledge to tackle the question; serious weaknesses in approach; tendency to jot down a few unanalysed facts and impressions. Very poor knowledge of the objects of study (even as discussed on the module), and no apprehension of further critical and theoretical issues.
1-9%	Very bad fail	Represents the overall achievement of the detailed learning outcomes to a completely insufficient level. Scribbled notes indicating little or no research, understanding of the question or attempt to consider theoretical issues.
0%	Non submission or plagiarised	Non submission or plagiarised submission.

How the programme is structured

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 lectures and workshops in May and June. It offers a framework to help you focus and develop your own understanding of this field. Engagement with the diverse critical, theoretical and methodological approaches on offer will enable you to identify and prepare the area of independent research you will carry out in your final project.

All students take three taught modules (Common Compulsory Module [choosing 2 out of 4 annual strands), two Special Subjects) and undertake an Oral Presentation and Dissertation. In addition there is the public programme that takes place on Thursday evenings, and occasional workshops, which focus on specific themes and problems in the broad field, as well as the theory reading group which runs for the first five weeks of the programme.

Common Compulsory Module: This is called ‘common’ because it is undertaken by all MA students in the department. The Common Compulsory Module is split into four strands. These are semi-autonomous components. Part-time students take Compulsory A or C for the first five weeks of year 1, which prepares them for their first Special Subject. Compulsory B or D is then undertaken the first five weeks of year 2, preparing them for their second Special Subject. Full-time students undertake Compulsory A/C and B/D concurrently in the first five weeks of study. Both full-time and part-time students undertake a non-examined Diagnostic Essay that is submitted in week 6 (of year 1 part-time students). Examination of the Common Compulsory Module is thus not summative, but formative, being effectively examined within the other assessed elements of the programme.

Special Subjects, Oral Presentation, and Dissertation: these comprise the elements of assessment. The Special Subjects (including the MA Lab) run from weeks 6-20 and the Oral Presentation (not applicable to PG Cert) and Dissertation (not applicable to PG Cert and PG Dip) from week 21 to final submission in September. Part-time students begin work on their dissertation in the summer term of year 1 and complete in the summer term of year 2.

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Status	Term
Common Compulsory Module A or C and MA Special Subject 1	-	45	7	Compulsory	1-2
Common Compulsory Module B or D And MA Special Subject 2	-	45	7	Compulsory	1-2
MA Symposium	HT71101B	30	7	Compulsory	3
MA Dissertation	HT71100A	60	7	Compulsory	3

Academic support

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

All students are allocated a Personal Tutor (one in each department for joint programmes) who has overall responsibility for their individual progress and welfare. Personal Tutors

meet with their student at least twice a year either face-to-face, as part of a group and/or electronically. The first meeting normally takes place within the first few weeks of the autumn term. Personal Tutors are also available to students throughout the year of study. These meetings aim to discuss progress on modules, discussion of the academic discipline and reports from previous years if available (for continuing students). 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.

All students are also allocated a Senior Tutor to enable them to speak to an experienced academic member of staff about any issues which are negatively impacting their academic study and which are beyond the normal scope of issues handled by Programme Convenors and Personal Tutors.

Students are provided with information about learning resources, the [Library](#) and information available on [Learn.gold \(VLE\)](#) so that they have access to department/programme handbooks, programme information and support related information and guidance.

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 some form of feedback to ensure that students' work is on the right track. It may come in a variety of forms ranging from written comments on a marked essay to oral and written feedback on developing projects and practice as they attend workshops.

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 induction/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 [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 [Academic Skills Centre](#) 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.

Links with employers, placement opportunities and career prospects

MA students graduating from the Visual Cultures department go on each year 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 – again both here and internationally – in the spheres of arts administration, curating, teaching, arts journalism, community arts projects and other museums 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, the department’s MA provisions provide for pathways into many institutions of contemporary art and culture at various different levels.

The requirements of a Goldsmiths degree

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.

Award of the degree

In order to graduate, students must successfully complete all modules specified for the programme, as set out within the section “How the programme is structured” above.

Classification

Final degree classification is calculated on the basis of a student’s mean average mark (based on credit value) across all modules on the programme.

Masters degrees are awarded with the following classifications:

- Distinction – 70%+
- Merit – 60-69%
- Pass – 50-59%

More detail on the [calculation of the final classification](#) is on our website.

Interim exit awards

Some programmes incorporate interim exit points of Postgraduate Certificate and/or Postgraduate Diploma, which may be awarded on the successful completion of modules to the minimum value of 60 credits or 120 credits respectively. The awards are made without classification.

When these awards are incorporated within the programme, the relevant learning outcomes and module requirements will be set out within the “What you will be expected to achieve” section above.

The above information is intended as a guide, with more detailed information available in the [Goldsmiths Academic Manual](#).

Programme-specific rules and facts

General programme costs

In addition to your tuition fees, you will be responsible for meeting standard costs associated with your study. Find out more information at gold.ac.uk/programme-costs.

Specific programme costs

Not applicable.

How teaching quality will be monitored

Goldsmiths employs a number of methods to ensure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching on its programmes.

Programmes and modules are formally approved against national standards and are monitored throughout the year, such as in departmental committees, a variety of student feedback mechanisms and through the completion of module evaluation questionnaires. Every programme has at least one External Examiner who reviews comments annually on the standards of awards and student achievement. External Examiner(s) attend Boards of Examiners meetings and submit an annual written report.

Modules, programmes and/or departments are also subject to annual and periodic review internally, as well as periodic external scrutiny.

Quality assurance processes aim to ensure Goldsmiths' academic provision remains current, that the procedures to maintain the standards of the awards are working effectively and the quality of the learning opportunities and information provided to students and applicants is appropriate.

Detailed information on all these procedures are published on the [Quality Office web pages](#).