



# Programme Specification

## 1. General Information

<b>Programme title:</b>	History of Design
<b>Route:</b>	Part Time
<b>Award:</b>	Masters
<b>Qualification Framework level:</b>	Level 7
<b>School/Department or equivalent:</b>	School of Arts and Humanities
<b>Campus location(s):</b>	Kensington
<b>Total UK credits:</b>	180
<b>Date valid from/to:</b>	2025-26

## 2. Programme Philosophy

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)/Royal College of Art (RCA) MA History of Design draws on the exceptional resources and national and international networks of two world-leading centres of excellence for scholarship and creativity, the RCA and the V&A. With a base at the RCA and dedicated programme rooms and library at the V&A, since its foundation in 1983 this pioneering programme has earned a world-wide reputation as the leading MA programme in the field. Our research-led teaching and experiential methods inspire and train future leaders in the field. Alumni of the programme are today working successfully in a range of positions across universities, museums, cultural organisations, design firms and media outlets, as well as in independent practice.

We see the history of design as interdisciplinary and future-facing. We offer ground-breaking tools and approaches for studying the history and material culture of design in everyday life, across a global geography from c. 1400 to the present. Our research and teaching ranges from the early modern to the contemporary, with particular expertise in the UK/Europe, North America and Asia, and in transnational and global connections. Our programme is strongly committed to inclusivity, decoloniality and social and environmental engagement.

We combine scholarly excellence with risk-taking to forge histories of design and material culture that are public-facing, and experimental, as befits our location in the public museum and the art school. We use artefact analysis – of physical objects, digital matter, and spaces as well as services, interactions, policies, institutions and legal and technical systems – to reshape historical narratives and ask ambitious and relevant questions. We draw on our strong and distinctive track record of employing a global outlook, whether this means placing local histories in comparative context or tracing global networks through material culture.

Our wide staff expertise and the rich resources at the RCA and V&A enable you to explore, for example: fashion and textile history; histories of architecture, building and urban space; digital materialities; material histories of medicine, science and technology; the material culture of everyday life; histories and practices of making, craft and embodied knowledge; environmental history, ecologies of design and the Anthropocene; history of theatre and performance; social and political history in relation to design; decoloniality and social justice through design history

practice; and global history through material culture.

You will develop advanced knowledge, skills and approaches from the perspective of design history. Teaching is organised to support you in fostering their own self-directed intellectual journey and professional development and identity. The syllabus incorporates unique opportunities for active interactions, learning experiences and tangible outcomes across the Arts & Humanities as taught and experienced at the RCA and the V&A. In addition to more conventional historical methods, you will produce innovative understandings of the cultural, societal and economic impacts of design through engagements and exchanges with emerging practitioners from across the RCA and leading museum professionals within the V&A.

### 3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

#### **Programme aims**

V&A/RCA MA History of Design aims to provide you with advanced postgraduate knowledge, research methods and approaches in the history and material culture of design for application across a variety of professional challenges.

To this end, the programme aims:

- To develop your skills and confidence in historical research and interpretation from both primary and secondary evidence;
- To develop your ability to identify and employ relevant research methods for studying the history and material culture of design, with particular emphasis on artefact analysis;
- To enable you to identify, assess and engage critically with relevant existing research in the history and material culture of design and related areas;
- To develop your ability to identify and critically employ theoretical concepts and approaches for the analysis of practices and material cultures of design, past and present;
- To develop your skills for presenting and articulate, reasoned and compelling arguments in written and oral form, to academic and diverse audiences;
- To develop your ability to critically contribute to social equalities and environmental sustainability as a design historian.

#### **What will I be expected to achieve?**

**Upon successful completion of the programme, you will be expected to meet the requirements of both the College-wide Learning Outcomes and your programme-specific Learning Outcomes.**

#### **College-wide Learning Outcomes**

You should be able to:

- Interrogate and articulate the intentions of your work in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your field(s) of study;
- Independently plan and produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of your field(s) of study;
- Evaluate and critique the principles and methods of research in your field(s) of study, and apply these principles to your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice;
- Demonstrate originality in how you translate knowledge into practice;
- Communicate your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice to a non-specialist audience;

- Critically reflect on the likely public impact of your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice, and on your responsibilities as a practitioner;
- Define your professional ambitions and identify the challenges involved in meeting them.

Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Critically assess the relevance and rigour of current accounts, debates and bodies of research in the field of design history and material culture;
- Apply independent skills of locating, examining and evaluating different kinds of evidence for critical research into material and digital design cultures, processes and systems, using the approaches and ethics of the professional historian;
- Integrate original analysis of primary and secondary sources into a rigorous academic argument that contributes to histories of design and material culture;
- Present coherent arguments in written and oral forms, based on historical evidence, using the scholarly standards and conventions of the professional historian;
- Confidently employ the skills of interdisciplinary working and collaboration in public facing communication of history of design practices;
- Work independently with originality and self-reflexivity, to develop and deliver research;
- Articulate your own professional identity in relation to the knowledge, skills and values of the practices of design history.

**4. What will I learn?**

**Curriculum Map**

**Year 1**

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Artefacts in Context (30 credits)	Research in the History of Design and Material Culture (30 credits)	Independent Research Project (Year 1) (30 credits)

**Year 2**

Term 4	Term 5	Term 6
History as Public Practice (15 credits)	Urgency of the Arts (15 credits)	Independent Research Project (Year 2) (30 credits)
AcrossRCA (30 credits)		

Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value	Core or Elective?
<i>Artefacts in History</i>	1	30	Core

<i>Research in the History of Design and Material Culture</i>	2	30	Core
<i>Independent Research Project Block 1 (Dissertation Work-in-Progress Presentation)</i>	3	30	Core
<i>History as Public Practice</i>	4	15	Core
Urgency of the Arts (School-wide unit)	5	15	Core
AcrossRCA (College-wide unit)	4&5	30	Core
<i>Independent Research Project Block 2 (The Dissertation, Symposium &amp; Publication and Portfolio of Practice)</i>	6	30	Core

Please note, there are six **Independent Study** weeks included in your programme (one per term). During these weeks there will be no scheduled teaching or assessment, and limited access to Technical Services. Self-service will be available for inducted users, and you may independently use computing and technology zones, bench spaces, and the resources store and art shop. These weeks are intended for you to work independently, and technical supervision, fabrication support, or supervision of high-risk activities will not be available.

### **Artefacts in History**

This unit develops your fundamental skills for undertaking historical research through artefact analysis, exploring and analysing different object types using core theoretical approaches and archival/primary resources.

### **Research in the History of Design and Material Culture**

In this unit (**term 2**) you will learn about approaches and methods for writing design histories, conceive an original and viable research project and locate it in relation to existing fields. You will explore how histories are written and shared, engage with current debates and new directions in design history and material culture research, and produce your own dissertation research proposal, ready to move on to unit 3.

### **Independent Research Project**

The Independent Research Project develops and extends your independent research practice. In **term 3**, you conduct research and begin to draft a 12,000-word Dissertation, giving a work-in-progress oral presentation on one of your draft chapters. In **term 6**, you complete the Dissertation, participate in the student Symposium and Publication and a final Presentation of Practice.

### **History as Public Practice**

In **term 4** this unit increases your understanding of the wider practices and applications of design history as a public-facing practice, beyond the writing of essays. You will meet researchers and curators working on live projects in the public sphere to discuss current debates in the expanded field of design history.

### **College-wide Unit**

Across **terms 1 and 2**, you will participate in **AcrossRCA**. This unit aims to support you to meet the challenges of a complex, uncertain and changing world by bringing you together to work collaboratively in cross-programme interdisciplinary teams. In your team you will develop a self-initiated themed project, informed by expertise within and beyond the College. These projects will challenge you to collectively use your intellect and imagination to address key cultural, social, environmental and economic challenges. In doing so, you will develop and reflect on the abilities required to translate knowledge into action, and help demonstrate the contribution that creative

practices can make to our understanding and experience of the world.

### **Urgency of the Arts**

In term 2, School of Arts and Humanities Masters' students will participate in a School-wide unit called "The Urgency of the Arts." In this unit we ask how arts and humanities research and practice can engage with our current socio-political climate, and how might it shape, be necessary and essential in contemporary cultural debates.

The unit introduces you to a diverse range of perspectives, approaches and methods relevant to contemporary practice and thought in the arts and humanities. The delivery, predominantly based on workshops and featuring specialist presentations by leading artists, aims to assist you in recognizing, questioning, expanding, and reevaluating your own artistic practices and disciplinary assumptions. Through interactions with staff and students from across the School, as well as through a variety of methodological approaches, you will develop an understanding of the contemporary concerns that shape and influence artistic practice. You will be encouraged to reflect on these as a means to articulate the potential of your own work within the context of broad cultural landscapes and urgent cultural debates.

## **5. How will I learn?**

### **Seminars**

Seminars consist of group discussion of particular historical themes, provocations, practices or issues based on set readings for each session. Seminars will often include small group projects and presentations, and are often conducted in V&A galleries and stores, or in other sites across London.

### **Workshops**

Workshops offer an intensive learning experience focused on a particular topic or problem. They are concentrated in a short time, often but not exclusively in a one-week block, and will often involve experimental research and learning methods, working to a brief and group work.

### **Lectures**

As conventionally understood. Lectures ordinarily include time for questions and discussion, either as a full group or in smaller discussion sections. Lectures may include screenings or performances and may be given online as well as in face-to-face settings.

### **Tutorials**

Teaching on the MA is supported by one-to-one and group tutorials. Tutorials take the form of a focussed discussion between a student or group of students and a tutor, on a topic agreed in advance. Tutorials are used predominantly for the following purposes:

- To discuss choices for essay, dissertation, project and other independent work; to suggest areas of research focus and reading material; to provide feedback on draft material; to discuss problems encountered with students' research and project work; to provide mentoring;
- To present and discuss feedback on submitted work after assessment;
- To discuss general progress on the programme.

You are expected to prepare for each tutorial and take a proactive role in them. It is good practice to make a list of action points following each tutorial, and to check these with tutors.

### **Study Trips**

Study trips ask you to apply methods and perspectives gained in taught sessions to the analysis of

performances, spaces, buildings, historical sites, exhibitions and environments in London and elsewhere in the UK or abroad. Most study trips are organised and led by tutors, but some are organised and led by students, supported by tutors, as part of coursework. Study trips may have advance reading and often include an onsite discussion of issues generated by the reading.

### **Work-in-Progress Presentations**

You will be asked to make an oral work-in-progress presentation as part of each unit. This gives you formative tutor and peer feedback on your research and thinking towards final assessments points, and enables you to gain experience in presenting your research to an audience.

## **6. Assessment and Feedback**

### **Regulations**

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found here. Please note that College regulations are subject to annual updates and amendments.

### **Unit assessment**

#### **Essay/Dissertation:**

An essay or dissertation should be a piece of writing presenting a coherent and substantiated argument that adheres to the required word count and uses appropriate academic writing conventions. The dissertation in particular should be based on original primary and secondary research, employing relevant methods and theoretical frameworks to generate and substantiate an academically-sound argument employing skills and methods from the history of design and material culture, at postgraduate level. You will receive written feedback on essays within three weeks of submission, and on the dissertation within ten weeks of submission.

#### **Oral presentation:**

You will be asked to make assessed oral presentations as part of each unit, with oral tutor and peer feedback in the form of a Q&A. This enables you to gain experience in presenting your research process and findings to a live audience, as well as refining your research and thinking for the next assessment point (essay or dissertation).

#### **Narrated Presentation:**

As part of unit 1 and the final Presentation of Practice, you will be asked to create a PowerPoint presentation with an accompanying 5-minute recorded narration. This will capture and share your developing understanding of design history practice.

#### **Research Proposal:**

The written research proposal demonstrates your ability to design and articulate a well-structured and clearly articulated proposal for a piece of independent research in the history of design and material culture. The proposal uses a pro forma that includes discussion of aims and objectives; primary and secondary sources; research methods and questions; theoretical approach(es); key challenges; budget; timeline; ethics; public dissemination and professional practice specialisation.

#### **Presentation of Practice:**

A final oral presentation and discussion on the development and achievements of your design history practice across the MA

**Information regarding individual assessments will be included in the unit descriptors, and will be available to students at the beginning of the academic year.**

## **7. What award can I get?**

To be awarded an RCA MA degree you need to gain 180 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units. If you do not pass a unit at the first attempt, you may be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful at resit you will be awarded the credits for that unit. If you are unsuccessful, you cannot progress further in your programme.

Exit awards:

If you have gained at least 120 credits at level 7 of the FHEQ, you may be eligible for the exit award of Postgraduate Diploma. An exit award is a final award from the College and cannot be rescinded.

For more detailed information about the College's assessment, progression and awards policies see the Regulations.