

RCA Podcast: Transcript

RCA2024 Dean's Download with Professor Paul Anderson, Dean of the School of Design

Recorded on 19 July 2024.

00:00:00:10 - 00:00:20:15

Professor Paul Anderson

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00:00:20:17 - 00:00:40:06

Etan Kinsella McLennan

Hello, I'm Etan and welcome to the third episode of our mini series for RCA2024. These are our Dean's Downloads where I'm catching up with the Deans of our four schools at the RCA, finding out about what they have planned for RCA2024. If you have not listened to the others, please do. And after this, there will be one more episode.

00:00:40:06 - 00:00:59:19

Etan

But basically we are finding out about the RCA 2024 series of exhibitions events and activities, which is basically bringing together all of the amazing work that our students have been working on for the past year and and showing it off to the public and this is happening across the summer from the 20th of June to the 4th of August.

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Etan

So as you'll be aware, we are already partway through the exhibition, but it's not over yet. There's still lots to come, so please be sure to join us. For this chat, I was really pleased to be able to head to RCA's Battersea Campus and meet the wonderful Professor Paul Anderson, who is Dean of the School of Design. I checked out his office in the Battersea Campus, which also happens to be where our next set of exhibitions will be taking place from the School of Design.

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Etan

This School's sharing is actually happening across two weeks this year, so there's two chances to go and check out their work. On week one, which is taking place from Friday the 12th to Sunday the 14th of July, we'll see a really eclectic mix of work from students on our amazing Service Design and textiles and Intelligent Mobility.

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Etan

And then also they'll be exhibiting alongside a new programme for this year, which is our MDes Design Futures. So we're really excited to see what they come up with because we haven't seen work from them yet before. And then on week two, which is taking place from Friday the 19th to Sunday the 21st of July, we will see work from our MA Design Products, our MA Fashion, as well as from our MA/MSc's in Global Innovation Design and in Innovation Design Engineering.

00:02:15:04 - 00:02:39:08

Etan

The exhibition will be open from 12 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Friday and 12 to 6 p.m. on weekends, and last entry is 30 minutes before closing time. So please make sure you get in early so you do not miss any part of the exhibition. We want you to have the opportunity to see everything, which is also something that Paul will speak a little bit about in our chat today.

00:02:39:08 - 00:02:41:11

Etan

So let's get on with it.

00:02:41:13 - 00:02:48:17

Paul

Hi, I'm Paul Anderson. I'm Professor and Dean of the School of Design here at the Royal College of Art.

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Etan

Fantastic. Thank you so much for meeting with me, Paul. We are currently sitting in your office in the Battersea Campus, where soon we will have an exhibition of work from all the programmes in the School of Design. And I wonder if you could tell us about how preparation is going.

00:03:08:13 - 00:03:34:13

Paul

Well, we're at a very exciting time. I think the preparations are going really, really well and there's a lot of creative tension and creativity in the air, which is very exciting to be around and to be a part of. We're looking forward very much to the moment when our students start to showcase the work to a much wider audience, and that's a very special event.

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Etan

Brilliant. And could you tell us a bit about what we should be expecting from the sharing from the school?

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Paul

Well, I think you will see a very, very wide range of very creative ideas, thinking, philosophy, new questions that challenge what design is all about, big questions about the future,

environment, human race, safety, resilience, creativity...and these themes in various ways cut across all our programmes in the School of Design. So what I'm very excited about and very pleased to see in all the programmes that the students are engaging with really difficult and challenging agendas and questions, and the answers they are developing and the outputs are just outstanding.

00:04:29:08 - 00:04:41:03

Paul

They have that, they have rigour, they have a lot of good research behind it, and I think it's a very, very exciting time to showcase very cutting edge thinking.

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Etan

What sort of disciplines are exhibiting at the exhibition?

00:04:45:19 - 00:05:18:11

Paul

Well, we have a whole range of disciplines. We've got Service Design, we've got Design Futures, Textiles, we've got Global Innovation Design, Innovation Design Engineering, and these are our main disciplines. But of course there's a lot of cross-cutting and collaborative projects as well across the programmes. But these disciplines are very, very wide ranging. You just take the range of Service Design all the way through to Fashion or Design Products, Innovations Design Engineering.

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Paul

It covers so many multiple domains.

00:05:21:23 - 00:05:38:20

Etan

Absolutely, it's eh. The outputs are so broad and the variety is so large in the School of Design's work, isn't it. Are there going to be any kind of interactive elements or kind of digital components or things like that?

00:05:38:22 - 00:06:16:06

Paul

Yes, certainly in the School of Design, I mean, that happens every year. So absolutely, there will be interactive elements. There'll be a lot of digital outputs in context to look at, whether that's emergent futures or being human or digital human, digital ecologies, sensory landscapes. There are many, many different things that impact that sort of digital arena, but it also includes sustainable systems, societal impact, interaction design. Through to things like and augmented caring.

00:06:16:08 - 00:06:27:04

Paul

I mean, it's a very broad range. It depends on the programme and the discipline and individual students and their approach and context that they have created.

00:06:27:06 - 00:06:34:15

Etan

How do you think a visitor should interact with or experience or navigate the exhibition?

00:06:34:17 - 00:07:11:13

Paul

I think I think I think the students would enjoy when the visitors arrive, that they don't just walk around and look but they engage. They pick up things, they ask questions and challenge and look at assumptions. So I hope that it's an interactive experience, not just an exhibition you walk around. Actually, it's an opportunity to dialog with students, find out where their ideas are going, why they've created and developed answers that are now physically there to be seen.

00:07:11:13 - 00:07:42:06

Paul

So I hope the students will have an opportunity to engage with the general public and also with private views and friends and family, but also with business, with industry, with government. And we are very successful as a school in interfacing with industry and business, but also strategically with government. We've got some very, very big questions to answer about the future, and I hope the School of Design clearly illustrates that through its student work.

00:07:42:08 - 00:07:54:07

Etan

We were speaking before about how much, you know, the context that the students are working in influences the work. Is that something that you see in the exhibitions from year to year?

00:07:54:09 - 00:08:15:24

Paul

Yes, I would say we are living in very, very interesting times. We are all living in interesting times as a human race. I have noticed a great change even in the last three, four or five years. The questions we were asking five years ago are not the questions we're asking now. The questions we're asking now are much more immediate.

00:08:16:01 - 00:08:32:15

Paul

They are more relevant, that surround human behaviour. It's around ethics. It's around design for safety and it's also around new forms of creativity which are far more meaningful and deeper, if we are creating a real sense of value for people.

00:08:32:17 - 00:08:49:22

Etan

And also the students in the School, it's a very international cohort. Are these students, kind of, bringing that consideration into their work? Are they creating designs that are based on, you know, things from their home countries?

00:08:49:24 - 00:09:16:20

Paul

Yes, absolutely. And I think that's what's really fascinating. And we celebrate diversity. I think that's really, really important. So we've got very talented students coming from all corners of the world to the RCA. And the time to spend with this is really, really interesting. They bring a lot to the table, they contribute a lot, and of course they learn a great deal whilst being here, not just from the staff, but also from each other.

00:09:16:22 - 00:09:38:01

Paul

And the valuable thing is this: yes, we have an exhibition in celebration, if you like, of their outputs. But what we're going to do next is even more exciting, is when they leave and go back not just to their home countries, but perhaps to other countries. We really are sending designers to all points of the world, all around the world.

00:09:38:01 - 00:09:54:22

Paul

And I think that's a very, very exciting impact and output. So when they arrive and interact with organisations of various types and skills and cultures, their contribution will be seen in a global context. That will be seen as valuable.

00:09:54:24 - 00:10:00:01

Etan

What is it that you want the students to really get out of the experience of exhibiting?

00:10:00:03 - 00:10:28:00

Paul

I think there are many, many, many things. I think the students will gain a great deal in coming to a point in their work, and particularly in their individual research, to present to a public audience. I think that's very, very important to do so and to have the rigour to do that, to articulate ideas clearly and carefully, to present thoughts and questions and outputs which people can engage with.

00:10:28:02 - 00:11:06:02

Paul

And so one thing that's celebratory - it marks the point being the one you programme, but it's also a major stepping stone. And that stepping stone for me is the opportunity to celebrate with students and put them in a position where they can interface with industry, business and fellow students at that point where new relationships are formed and almost a commitment to each other to go off and either from in business or work for an organisation and so on and so forth. So it's an important juncture with which to celebrate, reflect, but also launch forward.

00:11:06:04 - 00:11:19:12

Etan

Are there any graduates who have come through the RCA and during their final presentation of work, that piece of work has gone on to kind of lead on to the next step in their career in a very clear way?

00:11:19:14 - 00:11:45:00

Paul

Oh yes. Yeah. I mean, that's that happens on multiple occasions across all the programmes in the School of Design. I can think of many different types of individual projects that happened and all the programmes where either the ideas have been picked up by industry, there and then and taken forward, and there's been offers of employment or engagement or consultancy, there's the start up of new business.

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Paul

There's also an opportunity to continue from studying at PhD level, to become involved in research that we're currently conducting in the School of Design, and also to go into InnovationRCA, which is a very, very important component. It is a unique component of the Royal College of Art, because it's the opportunity to have incubation, to take ideas and grow the scale and level of ambition safely and launch successfully.

00:12:12:19 - 00:12:34:22

Paul

And the RCA has an amazing track record in all of that. But I think there's other things as well. If I take Service Design as a good example. Service Design has an amazing impact with government, with local government, with community and some councils as well as obviously the bank, the banking sector and the construction industry and so on, so forth.

00:12:34:24 - 00:12:58:14

Paul

So there are many, many different types of outcomes. It's almost very challenging to pick up one or two, but I certainly think the creation of new businesses, which have been student developed and led and they've been very, very successful, I think Tyre Collective is a very, very good example where some students a few years ago formed the Tyre Collective.

00:12:58:14 - 00:13:29:00

Paul

It's a clean tech company with a vision to reduce our impact on the environment. They were awarded the Environmental Award at the Mayor's Entrepreneur Competition 2020, and they were national winners of the James Dyson Award in 2020. So there's a very clear example of success and a route to success. So it doesn't just stop, it continues and grows and develops and grows at scale and that's incredibly exciting.

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Etan

There's also kind of aspects like the the fashion programme where the output is very different perhaps to the design products programme. What can we expect from fashion this year?

00:13:41:23 - 00:14:06:21

Paul

I don't want to give too much away, actually, because I think fashion is one of the very dynamic programmes in the School of Design that you really must come and see and be

challenged by what's been proposed and in front of you. So you will see everything from you know, digital all the way through to very well made and very well designed garments at various levels.

00:14:06:21 - 00:14:35:20

Paul

But I am thrilled to bits about the questions that are asking around society of sustainability, different types of positive and negative impacts on the fashion industry. But I also think it's more than that. It's around identity and what it's like to be human or what it's like to be a digital human. And so I would encourage everyone to come along and look at fashion equally along Service Design and all the other programmes.

00:14:35:20 - 00:14:55:17

Paul

But I think it's a diversity and range and ideas. It's the questions they're asking. I believe RCA is very good at asking the difficult questions, not the easy ones or the creative, not just the creative ones, but the challenging ones that make people stop and think. The other thing is it's to do with the makeup of our staff.

00:14:55:19 - 00:15:23:16

Paul

It's also to do with the makeup and pool of ideas from different students who've come here to study from around the world. And I think our plan going forward is to make sure we're ensuring and diversifying the ideas and diversifying the student body and also the outputs, because we need that rich mix of creativity and ideas and solutions.

00:15:23:18 - 00:15:28:03

Etan

What are you most excited about for RCA2024, yourself?

00:15:28:05 - 00:15:57:04

Paul

Well, I think one of the most exciting points is the ability to just walk around firsthand. For me personally as Dean it's to look at the interactions and see members of the public or business or industry having conversations with the students. And I think it's an interesting moment of reflection, but it's also a fantastic opportunity to see people launch into new directions of travel.

00:15:57:06 - 00:16:01:12

Etan

Brilliant. Thank you so much for chatting to me and I can't wait to see the show.

00:16:01:14 - 00:16:03:03

Paul

Thank you very much.

00:16:03:05 - 00:16:32:07

Etan

You've been listening to the RCA 2024 Dean's Downloads and mini series as part of the Royal College of Art podcast. RCA 2024 runs from the 20th of June to the 4th of August across a selection of London locations. Find other episodes in the series as well as details of RCA 2024 in the show notes. Learn more about our programmes at [RCA.ac.uk](https://www.rca.ac.uk), as well as finding news and events relating to the college and our application portal if you're interested in studying at the RCA.