

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION
(Taught Postgraduate)**



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| 1 | Awarding Institution | Newcastle University |
| 2 | Teaching Institution | Newcastle University |
| 3 | Final Award | MA |
| 4 | Programme Title | Contemporary Art History and Curating |
| 5 | Programme Code | 4184F/P |
| 6 | Programme Accreditation | None |
| 7 | QAA Subject Benchmark(s) | <u>Subject Benchmark Statement: History of Art, Architecture and Design (qaa.ac.uk)</u> |
| 8 | FHEQ Level | 7 |
| 9 | Last updated | 19/06/2025 |

10 Programme Aims

MA Contemporary Art History and Curating is founded on the core principle that art history should be taught as a living, breathing discipline. The programme offers a truly contemporary art-historical education in an art school setting, incorporating practical curatorial and collaborative elements designed to equip graduates with a versatile set of skills applicable across a variety of roles within the contemporary art sector. Students gain a deep understanding of art historical principles and methodologies, allowing them to critically analyse and interpret art practices within their cultural, social, and historical contexts. By exploring diverse perspectives and engaging with a range of artistic practices, students learn to navigate the complexities of the contemporary art world with confidence and insight.

Central to the programme is the cultivation of a networked graduate cohort that recognises the importance of building sustainable relationships within the contemporary art ecosystem. Students are encouraged to actively engage with artists, curators, scholars, and audiences, fostering connections that extend beyond the classroom and into the professional realm. Through collaborative projects, studio and gallery visits students learn the value of collaboration, communication, and community-building in contemporary art practice. This is augmented by students' participation within the flourishing Fine Art community, which hosts exhibitions, events, performances and other activities designed to provide a sense of sociality and networked learning in the department.

The programme exposes learners to leading-edge research and practice in contemporary art and art history, with a particular focus on addressing the urgent issues facing global society. By engaging with innovative scholarship and artistic practices, students develop the critical thinking skills and analytical tools necessary to grapple with the complexities of our contemporary moment. Through interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration, the programme empowers students to become active agents of change in a rapidly evolving contemporary art ecosystem.

In brief, the programme aims to:

1. Develop graduates capable of applying art historical skills to a variety of roles within the contemporary art sector.
2. Build a networked graduate cohort that comprehends the necessity of establishing sustainable relationships while collaborating with artists, curators, and audiences in contemporary art practice.

3. Expose learners to leading-edge research and practice in contemporary art and art history, particularly addressing the urgent issues facing global society.
4. Deliver a curriculum that focuses on creative, critical, self-reflexive practice, and research within an art school context.

11 Learning Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes in the following areas.

Knowledge and Understanding

On completing the programme students will have an advanced critical knowledge and understanding of:

- A1. The key ideas and methods underpinning contemporary art history and curating and how they can be used to inform the study of creative practice across the cultural sectors.
- A2. The complex landscape of contemporary art and their potential roles and pathways within it.
- A3. The challenges and opportunities facing the contemporary art sector and the creative and cultural industries, particularly concerning ecology, authorship and ethics, and be ideally placed to navigate these.
- A4. An independent and focussed area of expertise within the fields of contemporary art history and curating.

11. Teaching and Learning Methods

The Learning and Teaching Strategy (LTAS) for this programme is based around facilitating creativity, collaboration and communication. This is achieved through a diverse set of learning and teaching methods across the programme's modules, designed to suit individual modules' learning outcomes. They have also been designed holistically across the programme both to produce a clear learning journey through the programme, and to ensure a varied, exciting and enriching intercultural learning experience for students. The LTAS for the programme foregrounds two key principles: discussion and diversity; and learning through practice.

Discussion and Diversity: The programme's design recognises and capitalises on the diversity of the student cohort, as well as the close interaction between this programme and neighbouring MAs in Fine Art and Curating Art, both of which share several modules with MA Contemporary Art History and Theory. The LTAS has been designed to amplify opportunities for intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue and discussion, giving students agency and confidence to forge an increasingly independent learning journey over the course of the programme, culminating in the dissertation project. Modules are overwhelmingly team-taught, often drawing on staff expertise from across SACS disciplines. They prioritise small-group teaching ensuring students feel empowered to share their own perspectives and forge individual identities in the classroom. These will sit alongside face-to-face and online methods designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.

Learning through Practice: Experiential and problem-based learning is at the forefront of the programme. Students are encouraged to consider theoretical issues in real-world contexts, through case study and practice driven small-group teaching as well as in-person

exposure to art and curatorial practice through studio and gallery visits, as well as teaching delivery led by practitioners. Students also have considerable opportunity to put their learning into practice, through the design of workshops and exhibitions. This encourages collaboration and interpersonal development and advances key attributes that are translatable into future careers in the arts. The city and region, and its rich cultural resources, will be fully utilised to situate study in a living contemporary art ecosystem.

Learning and teaching methods designed to further knowledge and understanding include:

1. A variety of classroom-based, online and hands-on experiential learning methods designed to provide an understanding of the key tenets of art history and curating in which theory and practice are intertwined. These include lectures, seminars and workshops, as well as practical curatorial tasks designed to foster learning through practice. (A1; A2)
2. Small-group learning built around real-life scenarios and case studies, encouraging understanding of challenges and opportunities through experiential and problem-based learning. (A2; A3)
3. Engagement with art and curatorial practice through studio and gallery visits, as well as input from professionals, building an understanding of the contemporary art landscape through the real-life example of Newcastle and the North East. Practical exercises in writing and curating introduce students to the breadth of roles and open to them upon graduation. (A2; A3)
4. A learning journey through the programme, which gradually diminishes the prominence of the lecture form as students work towards their final project. This gives students an initial grounding in fundamentals, giving way to increased opportunities for independent curiosity-driven research, facilitated through one-to-one supervision and collaborative work. (A4)

11.b Assessment Strategy

The assessment strategy for the programme has been designed to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of the fields of contemporary art history and curating and to reward self-reflective, independent and innovative approaches to the urgent issues facing these fields. Assessment takes a wide array of forms across the programme, tailored to the specific aims and learning outcomes of each module. The assessment strategy encourages collaboration and group-work alongside rigorous independent academic study.

Assessments are, where possible, designed to authentically reflect real-life scenarios, projects and tasks encountered in the sector. Assessments encourage creativity across a variety of forms to foster versatility and to accommodate a breadth of learners and proficiencies. The assessment reflects this, focussing on the depth of knowledge, critical analysis, creativity, interdisciplinary understanding, collaborative skills, ethical awareness, and communication capabilities demonstrated by the learners in their respective assessments.

Assessments go beyond mere tests of knowledge and form a crucial part of the learning process for students. Formative assessments are prominent to encourage development through each module, and to foster between students and faculty through formative feedback exercises. Regular constructive feedback will be provided to learners on their assessments. Feedback will emphasise strengths and areas of improvement to encourage continuous learning and development throughout the programme.

Assessment methods designed to evaluate and further knowledge and understanding include:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written reports and essays which both evaluate knowledge and understanding and allow students to demonstrate independence using their own case studies. (A1; A2; A4) 2. Reflective blogs and reports, encouraging students to critically think through their own position within the field of contemporary art. (A2; A3) 3. Creative methods, from essays to collaborative presentations, allowing students to demonstrate versatility, collectivity and exchange of ideas (A2; A4) 4. A final research project, in which the student will pursue a topic of their own choosing, informed by the breadth of knowledge, understanding and experience students will have gained across the programme (A2; A4) |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Intellectual Skills</p> <p>On completing the programme students will have the ability to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> B1. Employ future-focussed critical thinking to navigate the complexities of contemporary art and society. B2. Think and work across disciplines and creative sectors with confidence and agility. B3. Apply the principles and methodologies of art history to the urgent issues facing the contemporary art sector and the wider creative and cultural sectors. B4. Demonstrate independence, curiosity and creativity through research and practice. |
| <p>Teaching and Learning Methods</p> <p>A broader discussion of the LTAS for the programme can be found in 11a. Learning and teaching methods designed to develop intellectual skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lectures and problem-driven small group teaching that encourage the acquisition of the tools with which to think critically, and the application of these in concrete contexts. (B1; B2; B3; B4) 2. A multidisciplinary teaching team and student cohort who are encouraged to share disciplinary experience and expertise through small group teaching that facilitates dialogue, and problem-based learning activities that demand that students employ the wealth of disciplinary knowledge they will be exposed to in considered and practicable ways. (B2; B3) 3. Seminars and workshops built around real-world examples, in which students can consider how theory and practice might interplay. (B3) 4. Guided independent study, supported with one-to-one supervision and access to an array of staff across SACS through office hours, drop-in surgeries and other opportunities for informal discussion led by the student's interests. (B2; B4) |
| <p>Assessment Strategy</p> <p>In addition to the overall assessment strategy detailed in 11b, assessment methods designed to evaluate and further intellectual skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written essays and reports that encourage students to think critically about real-world case studies of their own choosing. (B1; B3; B4) |

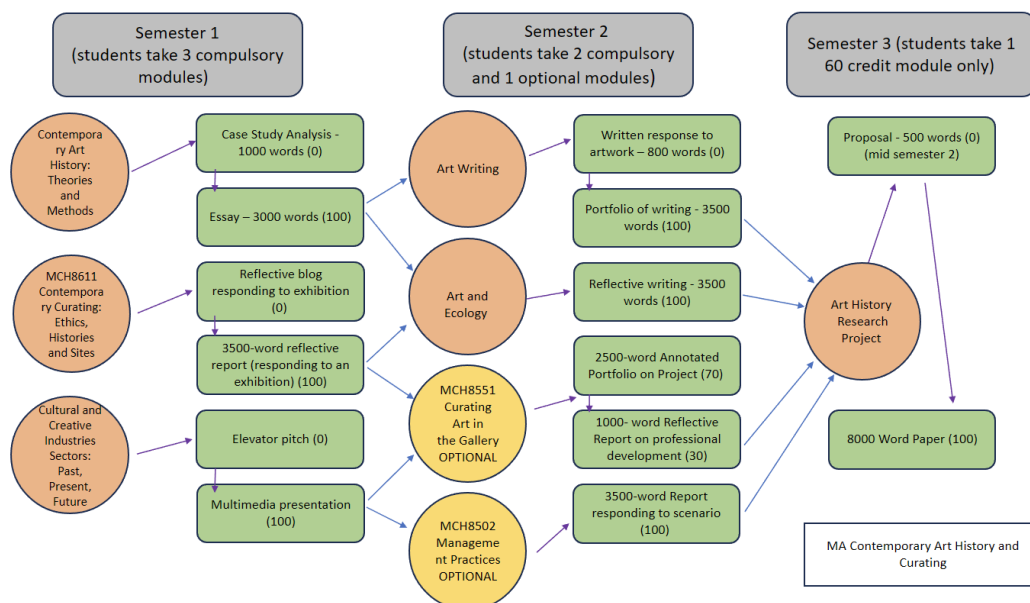
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Reflective reports and blogs, which require students to draw on an interdisciplinary pool of knowledge to respond to the brief. (B2) 3. Creative and experimental written and verbal assessments, including portfolios of writing which reward innovation and independence. (B2; B4) 4. A final research project led by students and born of their own areas of interest. (B4) |
| Practical Skills |
| <p>On completing the programme students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> C1. Advocate for art and articulate its role within a variety of sites and contexts in contemporary society. C2. Have confidence in their ability to work with art, artists, and collections. C3. Be sensitive and adept in communication across cultures and practice social responsibility in their work and life. C4. Communicate effectively about art and curating both orally and in a variety of written forms. |
| Teaching and Learning Methods |
| <p>A broader discussion of the LTAS for the programme can be found in 11a Learning and teaching methods designed to develop practical skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lectures introducing students to key case studies and concepts, particularly around urgent issues such as ecology and sustainability, to give students examples of best practice. (C1; C2) 2. Discussion-based small-group teaching, in which students will be encouraged to communicate and listen to peers in a supportive environment. (C1; C3; C4) 3. Practical exercises in curating and writing across a variety of forms. These will foster practical skills through experience, with guidance from professionals in the field. (C2) 4. Workshops to develop aspects of writing and curatorial practice, led by experts in the field, and in which students are supported to experiment with different forms of communication and presentation. (C2; C3; C4) |
| Assessment Strategy |
| <p>In addition to the overall assessment strategy detailed in 11b, assessment methods designed to evaluate and further practical skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portfolios of writing, in which students will present a breadth of written work on art in a variety of forms and styles. (C1; C4) 2. The production, design and management of an exhibition, drawing on students' curatorial skills, as well as their ability to work collaboratively. (C2; C3; C4) 3. Elevator pitches and other short-form formative tasks which give students the chance to develop skills in the kinds of agile and concise communication that is often required in the sector. (C3; C4) |

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| 4. Reflective exercises encouraging consideration of strengths and weakness and giving opportunities to reflect on development across the programme (C2) |
| Transferable/Key Skills |
| <p>On completing the programme students will be able to:</p> <p>D1. Write confidently for a range of audiences, demonstrating technical proficiency and digital capability</p> <p>D2. Communicate and collaborate effectively, and be able to mediate between stakeholders</p> <p>D3. Programme and manage events, projects and exhibitions, and perform administration and management with confidence</p> <p>D4. Source and utilise expert knowledge from a range of disciplinary backgrounds</p> |
| Teaching and Learning Methods |
| <p>A broader discussion of the LTAS for the programme can be found in 11a. Learning and teaching methods designed to develop transferable/key skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lectures, seminars and workshops through which students are introduced to a variety of forms of writing around art, and which give the opportunity for students to put into practice this knowledge and understanding. (D1; D2) 2. Practical exercises in which students must work together to produce exhibitions and presentations, and that encourage collaboration and communication amongst students and with relevant third parties. (D2; D3) 3. Hands-on sessions in which students are guided through specific aspects of programming and arts management by experts from the field. (D3) 4. Workshops developing key research skills and aptitude in finding and accessing relevant academic work as well as policy and reports. (D4) |
| Assessment Strategy |
| <p>In addition to the overall assessment strategy detailed in 11b, assessment methods designed to evaluate and further transferable/key skills include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written assessments responding to a variety of briefs mimicking common tasks in the sector, promoting confidence and versatility in writing both around art, and more broadly. (D1; D2; D4) 2. Real-life exercises in curating events and exhibitions, requiring communication and teamwork, as well as practical expertise. (D2; D3) 3. The writing of reports responding to practical scenarios one might encounter in the field. These allow students to learn from others and develop a better understanding of how they might approach a given situation. (D3) 4. A final research project rooted in a rigorous research practice. (D4) |
| 12 Programme Curriculum, Structure and Features |
| Basic structure of the programme |
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MA Contemporary Art History and Curating offers a contemporary education in art history and curating practice, incorporating theoretical and practical learning that equips graduates with a versatile set of skills applicable to the creative sectors.

- Semester 1 focuses on advancing knowledge and understanding and intellectual skills in three key areas: Contemporary Art History; Contemporary Curating; and the Cultural and Creative Industries. Across three compulsory modules, students develop their knowledge of key debates, issues and methods in these fields.
- Semester 2 introduces a more practical focus. In the two compulsory modules – Art Writing, and Art and Ecology – they develop their art-historical skills in more experimental, interdisciplinary and applied contexts. Alongside this, students have the option of taking one of two more curatorial modules. Curating Art in the Gallery offers the chance to engage in the practicalities of curating through the design and production of an exhibition in the Hatton Gallery. Management Practices in Museums, Galleries and Heritage Studies gives students practical and transferrable skills in the behind-the-scenes workings of the cultural sector. In Semester 2, students also begin to map out their own plans for their final research project.
- In Semester 3 students undertake a rigorous research project of their students, consolidating the knowledge, understanding and skills developed over the year, and directing it towards an independent project of their own choosing.

Basic course structure and assessment journey



Key features of the programme (including what makes the programme distinctive)

This programme offers a **forward-thinking postgraduate art history education** to students who wish to apply their art historical knowledge, understanding and skills within the contemporary art sector. It builds on the **unique position of Art History at Newcastle, located within an art school setting which is celebrating its centenary**. This works with the **curatorial expertise** offered by Newcastle University's Media, Culture and Heritage department. The programme draws together these specialisms, **combining a rigorous art history education with the practical curatorial skills** required to work in the sector.

The Fine Art department successfully creates a strong **sense of belonging** and a meaningful learning environment, reflected in a high level of **student satisfaction** and NSS results (National Student Survey). The MA Fine Art programme responds also to societal challenges

through a wide range of **extra-curricular activities** and opportunities: [For more information please see the Fine Art Community Board](#). New initiatives including the **Art and Ecology** public research seminar series offer a platform for engagement with research in Art History at a time when the discipline is under-going change in response to issues of urgent significance, including intergenerational justice, colonial legacies, and environmental breakdown.

The Fine Art department celebrates **FINE ART 100**, the four-year-long centenary of the creation in 1923 of the very first BA Fine Art in Britain, at Newcastle University. Our activities between 2023 and 2027 will celebrate the past, look at the present, and question what the next 100 years of Fine Art education and creative research might be.

The programme is taught by an interdisciplinary team drawn from across the School of Arts and Cultures and encourages **collaboration through shared learning with students studying programmes in Fine Art and Curating Art**. This produces enviable opportunities for student collaboration and community across traditional boundaries of theory and practice.

The programme's title emphasises the term 'contemporary'. This is meant in two senses. Firstly, it denotes that one of the primary focuses of the programme is contemporary art. Secondly, it signals that this is a programme which **produces truly contemporary art historians**, adept at working alongside artists, armed with curatorial skills, and with a versatile writing practice. The programme also foregrounds the most **urgent issues facing the contemporary art sector**, including **ecological questions** and the **impact of AI** and other new technologies on art production and reception.

The city of Newcastle and its vibrant contemporary art ecosystem provides a living case study for students to engage with, learn from and contribute to. Gallery and studio visits embed students in this ecosystem and students are able to put on their own exhibition in the University's Hatton Gallery.

At the heart of the programme is a curriculum that **centres creative, critical, self-reflexive practice and research**. Students are encouraged to explore their own creative interests and research questions, guided by **a diverse staff made up of practicing art historians, artists and curators**. Through workshops, lectures, group work and independent study projects, **students develop their own voice and vision** as curators, historians, and cultural producers. By emphasizing experimentation, risk-taking, and reflective practice, **the** programme fosters a culture of **innovation and inquiry**, preparing students to make meaningful contributions to the field of contemporary art history and curating.

Programme regulations (link to on-line version)

[Programme Regulations 2025-26](#)

13 Support for Student Learning

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

14 Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

Accreditation reports: N/A

Additional mechanisms

15 Regulation of assessment

Generic information regarding University provision is available at the following link.

[Generic Information](#)

In addition, information relating to the programme is provided in:

The University Prospectus: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/>

Degree Programme and University Regulations: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/>

Please note. This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if she/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities provided.

Mapping of Intended Learning Outcomes onto Curriculum/Modules

| | | Intended Learning Outcomes | | | |
|---|-------------|----------------------------|------------|----------|----------|
| Module (20 credits unless otherwise stated) | Type | A | B | C | D |
| FIN8012 Contemporary Art History: Theories and Methods | Comp | 1, 3 | 1, 2 | 2, 3, 4 | 1, 4 |
| MCH8611 Contemporary Curating | Comp | 1, 2, 3 | 1, 3, | 2, 3, 4 | 1, 4 |
| SAC8001 Cultural and Creative Industries Sectors: Past, Present, Future. | Comp | 1, 2, 3 | 1, 3 | 3, 4. | 2, 1, 4 |
| FIN8017 Art and Ecology | Comp | 1, 2, 3 | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 2, 3, 4 | 4, 2 |
| FIN8016 Art Writing | Comp | 2, 4 | 1, 2, 4 | 1, 2, 4 | 2, 3 |
| MCH8551 Curating Art in the Gallery | Opt | 1, 2 | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 1, 2, 3 | 2, 3 |
| MCH8502 Management Practices | Opt | 2, 3 | 1, 4 | 2 | 2, 3 |
| FIN8018 Art History Research Project (60 credits) | Comp | 4, 1 | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 1, 4 | 1, 4 |